

E D I T O R I A L

Hearts That Stay Christians in Malaysia

The children of Israel had just only taken possession of the land of Canaan. Assembling all the tribes at Shechem, Joshua recounted how the Lord had fought their battles and urged the people to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. He added: "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..." (Josh. 24:15)

Likewise, the Al Qur'an also acknowledges the individual's freedom of religion: "Let there be no compulsion in religion. The truth is evident to all." (2:256) The problem arises when truth, as we know it, isn't quite so "evident" to some people. What do we do? On the one hand, we desire to grant people the freedom to choose their religion. On the other hand, we are tempted to "help them" because it is "good for them".

CHRISTENDOM'S DARK STAINS

There were several shocking scenes in the recent popular historical (non-legendary) film *King Arthur* where Arthur and his knights were sent on a final mission by Bishop Germanius of Rome to rescue the Pope's godson and his (the godson's) parents from the invading Saxons. They had to ride north through Woad territory and upon arriving at the fortress, Arthur discovered that many atrocities had been committed in the name of religion. A number of Woads were chained up and starved to death because they were "pagans". Arthur was told that it would be good to torture their bodies so that their spirits might be saved. "You are of Rome. You should understand..."

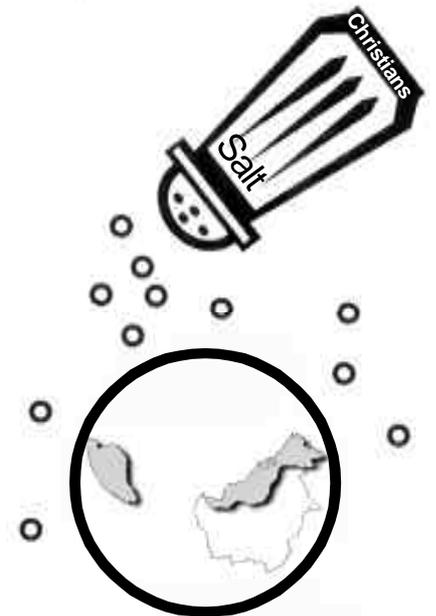
Such tragedies were repeated over and over throughout the Christian centuries, and were not perpetrated solely by the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformed (Protestant) John Calvin imposed many "spiritual controls" in the theocratic city of Geneva. He even had spiritual policemen doing their rounds in the early mornings to make sure folks did their devotions! And in 1563, Calvin had Michael Servetus burned to death at the stake for heresy.

At the other extreme were Christian groups that largely retreated from the world into their little enclaves. These groups consisted primarily of Christian minorities in non-Christian countries, as well as Christian sects among the more established denominations, such as the Pietists in Germany and the Pentecostals in the early days. These groups were inward looking and rarely sought to engage, influence or contribute to society at large.

SIGNIFICANT MINORITY

The latest census a few years back number Christians at 9.1 per cent of the total Malaysian population. The actual figure was and is likely to be higher. We are still a minority, but a substantial minority. What is our role? What shall we contribute in nation building? Shall we attempt to steer our nation according to biblical principles of justice and morality? Shall we attempt to win over non-believers? How far can we go?

The Bible is clear. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) We also



believe the Bible offers sufficient guidance as to the elements of true social justice – a justice based not on strict equality but equity. This calls for a society in which individual creativity and differences are allowed, and in which work is valued and given its due reward, a society that takes care of its weaker members. However, three principles must define our approach:

1. The Principle of Empathy

In dealing with the perceived injustices perpetrated by the Muslim authorities in matters of religion, Christians must begin by understanding where they are coming from. They are struggling where Christians have struggled. They, too, wish to grant all citizens (including Muslims) the freedom of religion. But they, too, have their own concepts of right and

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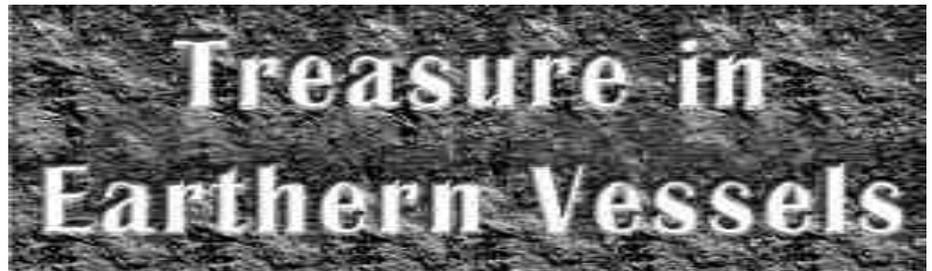
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Christmas Day is approaching when Christians throughout the world will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. When exactly was Jesus born? Probably not on Dec 25 A.D. 1 as some may believe. The birth date of Jesus was unrecorded. It is estimated that He was born about 3-6 B.C. And his birth probably took place in summer and not winter as popularly believed.

When exactly was Jesus crucified? This date is also uncertain and estimated to fall sometime in the period between A.D. 30 and 33.

What about Jesus' life? Outside of the Bible, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is only very briefly mentioned in the contemporary literature of that time. And except for a brief disputed passage written by Josephus, other records are generally ambiguous about Jesus' true nature.

Jesus was born to ordinary parents. To the world, He was just another member of an oppressed race living in a corner of a vast empire. Yes, He was a prophet and was reputed to have done unusual things. But there were many prophets in Israel at that time. Even His cruel death was in itself not uncommon. The Romans crucified thousands of Jews. Yes, there was a time when He was very popular. But all He did was quickly forgotten ... by the masses.

But note what the Bible says. Jesus was born "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). All human history had been preparing for and had been pointing to His coming. Jesus was the Messiah awaited by all mankind. When Jesus died, He declared, "It is finished". His death changed the destiny of mankind forever. He had overcome the power of sin and death. And for the past two thousand years, Jesus transformed countless of lives who believe and trust Him as their Lord and Savior.

Yes, He had obscure and humble beginnings. We often look to people of greatness and power and fame to accomplish big things but God chose to work through the weak, humble and common (Philippians 2:8). The Bible says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Isaiah. 55:8).

Isn't it the same today? The world gravitates to the successful, the powerful and the beautiful. They get featured in influential magazines. They appear on TV. They write books on how to succeed. They conduct motivational seminars and people flock to listen to them.

"We often look to people of greatness and power and fame to accomplish big things but God chose to work through the weak, humble and common."

But who pays attention to the weak and insignificant? This Christmas let us consider our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith in many countries around the world today. They are poor, they are bruised, and they are hurting. They have little to show to indicate any level of success in life. Who cares about them? Some Christians even think they are in that condition because they lack faith!

But God sees their "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). Their faithfulness in the midst of persecution has more power over the ultimate resolution of human history than all our petty successes put together. And one day, their true significance will be revealed.

What has this to do with us or Christmas? Remember, a seemingly ordinary Child was born to a persecuted people on the very first Christmas. He lived a life of obedience to the Father and His faithfulness even unto death, has changed human history.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us praise the Lord for who we are and what we have and remember those who do not share our blessings. They are precious to our Lord.

Insurance Help for our Ministers

THE NECF Foundation is negotiating with an insurance company to provide insurance coverage to ministers at a significantly lower premium as part of the foundation's ongoing initiative to enhance ministers' welfare. (Ministers refer to pastors, full-time workers and missionaries.)

The scheme will include a retirement plan besides the usual insurance coverage of hospitalisation and medical expenses, accidents and permanent disability.

Although the scheme was originally designed for ministers, it will also be offered to Christians attending churches which are members of NECF, and NECF's Associate Members.

"We are extending to Christians

because the insurance company has proposed a sizeable discount on the premium if we have a larger number of participants," said NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong. "But we aim to help our ministers who wish to participate in the scheme by providing them subsidies on the premium," he added.

Rev. Wong stressed the importance of adequate insurance coverage to meet the material needs arising from unexpected events such as death and permanent disability. He has witnessed cases where pastors unexpectedly passed away, leaving their wives and children without any financial support.

"Ideally, the church should take over

More Ministers Get Help

THE NECF Foundation continues to help needy ministers, this time giving out aid to three pastors – one each in Kluang, Batu Pahat and Kota Kinabalu.

The Kluang pastor, who is suffering from severe asthma, will receive help for his medical expenses. The Batu Pahat pastor is on regular haemodialysis treatment and will also receive cash aid for the treatments. Meanwhile, the Foundation is offering a RM20,000 interest-free loan to help the Kota Kinabalu pastor to finance his daughter's tertiary education.

the care of the bereaved family members but sometimes, this is not possible," he said. NECF has identified the scheme and will be presenting it to the NECF Council for discussion and approval. It hopes to introduce the scheme within the first quarter of next year.

• FROM FRONT COVER: HEARTS THAT STAY

wrong, and of the true religion.

The present tension between the constitutionally-guaranteed freedom to profess, practise and propagate any religion, and the frowning upon of all activities that threaten the Islamic position is an unfortunate result of this reality.

This is not to say that Christians should drop their exclusive claims. But putting ourselves in the shoes of our Muslim friends builds empathy and makes resolution more likely to achieve. History has shown that Christians have often been unkind when in power.

If Christians were in power in Malaysia today, would we be so quick to grant permits to build mosques or temples or allow others to hold public activities that will encourage their religions' growth?

2. The Principle of Democracy

Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those that have been tried." We are thankful for the peaceful democratic processes in our nation that provide us an effective platform to make known our views on various important issues. Christians should not shun politics and leave this important arena of public policy making

to others. Compared to New Testament days, universal suffrage (the right to vote) has given a voice to every ordinary man and woman. Christians should be encouraged to vote and to stand for elections. We can make a difference.

3. The Principle of Authority

This is the most important principle that should govern all our approaches in "influencing" other people. In fact, sins of commission and omission mentioned above would have been avoided had this principle been grasped.

There is a distinction between power and authority. A Christian leader put it very well: "If you have power, you can force someone to do something. If you have authority, you don't need to." Jesus, as a man, had neither political nor economic power. But He had authority. The Pharisees and scribes had power, but no authority. Authority derives from giving and serving. It arises from a godly life that reflects Christ.

If we depend on power, we tend to become oppressors when placed in a majority position, and retreat into our world when we are a minority. If we operate from authority, we are not dictated by our small number. We simply influence people and win them over by our lives. Are Christians getting their way through power or authority?

This does not mean we are to avoid having any form of power. Power can be a blessing from God too. Christians can have power in the democratic process through their number, for example. And we are called upon to exercise this power at the polls. But does our authority at least match up to the power we have? Are we operating mainly from power or from authority? Do other people resent it when we have our way? Or are they glad to follow our lead? Only if we have moral authority can we say we have truly influenced and changed others for their ultimate good.

CHILDREN OF THE LAND

In a moving scene in *King Arthur*, Guinevere tried to persuade Arthur to stay back in Britain to help unite and lead the nation after the Romans abandoned the outpost. Arthur was finally persuaded when Guinevere said the very iron that went into his sword (Excalibur) was taken from the soil of Britain. He was a son of the land. He should stay and build the nation. It is the same for most of us. We are the children of Malaysia. We grew up here. Let our hearts stay here as we seek to enthrone Christ in this land. The tasks are challenging and we are relatively small in number, but we can be a great influence by the grace of God and the authority He has given us. Amen.

NECF to launch 'Ministers Appreciation Month'

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."
- 1 Tim. 5:17

NECF Malaysia has designated October "Ministers Appreciation Month" for Malaysian churches to 'doubly' honour (see 1 Tim 5:17) their ministers - pastors, elders, full-time workers and missionaries - as a follow-through to the Pastors Prayer Shield Campaign. The campaign was launched in February 2001 by the NECF Prayer Commission to mobilise Christians to support pastors and full-time workers by regularly praying for them.

From the campaign came the Appreciation Day programme, launched in 2002, to encourage congregations to appreciate their ministers in practical ways, such as holding special Sunday services to honour their pastors and church workers.

The aim of holding the Ministers Appreciation Month (MAM) is to remind churches that supporting, praying for and appreciating their workers are to be an ongoing exercise and not just a once-

off affair, according to NECF Prayer Executive Ann Low.

"Pastors and full-time workers, and those labouring in the fields away from home need our affirmation. So too our elders. Even the toughest person is a human being and they all need our appreciation and love," she said.

On why NECF chose October to hold the MAM, she explained that this was to give NECF enough time to publicise the programme throughout the nation and also enlist churches' participation. But whether churches choose to hold their appreciation programmes for their ministers on October or any other months is purely their initiative, Ann quickly added.

"The important thing is that our ministers are given their due honour," she stressed.

MAM will be officially launched on Sept 29 in Ipoh in partnership with churches there.

Sandakan Churches Launch Shield



'SHEEP' praying over their 'shepherds' at the launching of the NECF Malaysia Pastors Prayer Shield for Sandakan pastors and full-time workers.

Some 400 Christians from various churches in Sandakan attended the meeting in August organised by NECF and Sandakan Pastors Fellowship. As a follow-up to the launching, the participating churches will be mobilising prayer partners and organising appreciation meetings for their pastors and workers.

Bringing Cheer To Suffering Children

NECF helping Mercy mobilise Christian teachers to train Sudanese pre-school teachers



WITH LOVE TO THE DARFUR CHILDREN FROM MALAYSIAN EVANGELICALS... *The Star* Deputy Group Editor-in Chief Datuk Wong Chun Wai (right) receiving the mock cheque from NECF Council members (from left): Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong, Treasurer Sam Ang, Vice-Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng and Chairman Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam. Photo courtesy of *The Star*.

THE Malaysian evangelical community recently donated RM100,000 to the suffering children caught in the war in Darfur, Sudan. The money was presented by NECF Malaysia to *The Star's* Darfur Children's Fund, set up by the newspaper to raise funds for Mercy Malaysia's humanitarian aid programme in West Darfur.

The sum was part of the total amount raised at last year's 40-day Prayer and Fast Charity Campaign organised by NECF, which is an annual project held in conjunction with Merdeka Day. Some 70,000 Christians participated in the campaign and donated the money they saved from fasting.

Following the donation to Mercy, NECF received a request from Mercy to help mobilise Christians who have pre-school teaching experience to participate in its pre-school project in West Darfur. Those selected for the project will supervise and train the Sudanese teachers for at least three weeks. Mercy will sponsor their flight tickets and expenses (food and boarding); however, volunteers will have to pay for the required vaccinations.

Besides the West Darfur children, the poor and needy in Malaysia will also benefit from the campaign. In November, NECF will present cheques totalling RM360,000 to 51 local charitable homes and organisations. The balance from the 2003 charity funds has been set aside to meet urgent social and humanitarian needs as and when they arise.

The Micah Challenge

Christians campaign to halve world poverty

A global campaign to mobilise millions of Christians in 100 countries to press their governments to halve poverty by 2015 was launched at the United Nations in October by the Archbishop of Cape Town, The Most Reverend Njongonkulu Ndungane.

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong was present at the launching in his capacity as the vice-chairman of World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) which is spearheading the campaign. (WEA represents 335 million Christians of three million local churches in 121 countries, and a network of 260 Christian relief and development agencies. NECF is a member of WEA.) Named Micah Challenge, the campaign will mobilise Christians to lobby, campaign and pray for governments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (see box).

Already, national Micah Challenge campaigns are being formed in the UK, Peru, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India and Zambia. As a first step, Christians around the world are being asked to sign an on-line commitment & petition at www.micahchallenge.org

When launching the campaign, Archbishop Ndungane described Micah Challenge as a significant new movement through which global leaders could be

challenged to play their part in 'securing a more just and merciful world.'

His comments were echoed by Salil Shetty, campaign director of the Millennium Campaign at the United Nations, who said that no one was better placed to achieve this than the churches. Churches had the moral authority and the following of many people to make a significant difference.

Katherine Marshall, advisor to the President of the World Bank, told the church leaders at the launch that without the kind of caring and passion typical of churches, the Millennium Development Goals would not be realised.

Stephen Bradbury, Chair of Micah Network which is partnering WEA in spearheading the Micah Challenge, concluded: "Every person on this planet is made in the image of God. Our Creator values and loves each one of us equally. Therefore injustice is a violation of God's own being.

"The Millennium Development Goals are in harmony with the Christian mandate to give justice to the weak and the orphan, maintain the rights of the destitute, rescue the weak and needy... we in the Micah Challenge will be doing all we can to encourage the world's governments to deliver on their promises."

Partners of the Suffering Church

EVERY November, Christians throughout the world are urged to observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) by setting aside one Sunday during the month to specially pray for the persecuted Christians.

In Malaysia, NECF Malaysia together with Open Doors Malaysia are advocating the whole

of November to pray for our persecuted brethren.

In our civilised world of the 21st century, the persecution of Christians is at an all-time high. But how do we motivate Christians to get down on their knees to pray for their suffering brothers and sisters?

To help answer this question, perhaps we need to re-look at the emphasis on the sufferers' "plight". Is suffering for our Lord a plight or a privilege?

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Archbishop of Cape Town The Most Reverend Njongonkulu (kneeling) demonstrates Micah Challenge's commitment to cutting poverty by half, with representatives from Christian evangelical organisations and Christian social organisations. - Photo courtesy of Micah Challenge photographer Jim Loring.

WHAT IS MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

IN September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders agreed to a set of timebound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

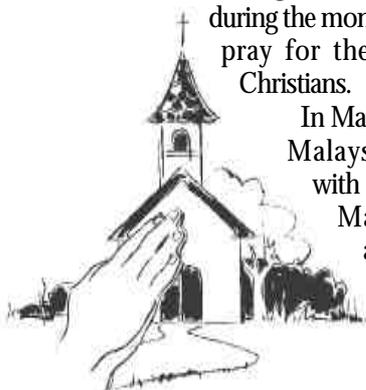
Placed at the heart of the global agenda, they are now called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Summit's Millennium Declaration also outlined a wide range of commitments in human rights, good governance and democracy.

The UN Millennium Declaration, ratified by 189 UN members, calls for sustained political and economic reform by developing countries.

This reform must be matched by direct support from the developed world in the form of renewed aid commitments, fair access to wealthy markets and modern technologies, debt relief and investment.

Broadly, the goals are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Improve maternal health
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development



Talk to Communicate

BY DR THERESA CHAI

Our God Himself is the Great Communicator. He reveals Himself to human beings. He told His name to Moses, that is, Yahweh, the Great "I am" (Exo. 3:14). In a more dramatic way God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, His Ultimate revelation of Himself. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, so that He can identify totally with human beings. Christ in turn has commissioned the Church to carry His mission to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

The primary task of Christian communication is thus to restore communication between God and human beings.

However, "What is so Christian about Christian communication?" Christian communication has several distinctions that set it apart from communications in general. The primary characteristic, as mentioned in the beginning, is that God communicates to human beings. He has mandated that we communicate Him to other human beings who do not yet know Him. These are some observations about our God who communicates:

God Makes Himself Known

God has made Himself known to man in many and varied ways. In the Old Testament, He revealed Himself through creation and through personal appearance or intervention as in the incidents at Mount Sinai and the Red Sea. In the New Testament, His ultimate mean of communication is through Christ; the Incarnation is the ultimate act of communication. God also reveals Himself to His children through the Holy Spirit.

On Mars Hill, while walking among the many gods of the Athenians, the Apostle Paul stopped at the marker titled "To the Unknown God". It was here that he began to expound about this Unknown God that He is none other than the One and Only True God, the Creator of heaven and earth. The Unknown God can be known! It appears as if God has placed keys in different cultures in order to reveal Himself to the peoples of the world.



God Wants a Relationship

God seeks a relationship with us and He wants us to seek a relationship with those we want to share the gospel with. Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. The lines of relationship run vertically to God and horizontally to our fellow human beings.

God seeks an interactive relationship of commitment that involves a commitment to Him, to each other as believers, and to people of the world at large. A passive response is not possible in God's Kingdom but true Christians are compelled by the love of God to communicate His love to all.

“The primary task of Christian communication is thus to restore communication between God and human beings.”

God Wants to be Understood Correctly

God wants to be understood correctly so that the appropriate response can be obtained. There may be an incorrect understanding of God if the Bible is not studied properly. Instead of God making human beings in His own image, human beings try to make God in their own image to suit their mistaken perception. Through the Word and the Spirit, the true God can be known in an exact way. Our mission in this world is to know God and to make Him known.

THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

In a multi-racial and -religious country like Malaysia, there is intercultural communication sensitivity that must be cultivated. Culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (Hofstede in his book "Culture's Consequences").

Intercultural communication occurs when people of different cultures come together. However, the coming together is only the beginning. People from different cultures must be willing to talk with each other. Likewise, Christians must be willing to dialogue with those from other religions.

Dialogue in Malaysia

Dialogue is the pathway to understanding other cultures and religions. In his opening address at the plenary Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches held in August in Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Badawi said:

“... I believe it is important for the citizens of this country to realise that tolerance of other religions goes beyond mere



An Undivided Heart

BY KOH SOO CHOON

KOH SOO CHOON (Intercare Partner) has travelled far and lived in many parts of the world. She has worked in cross-cultural missions for many years. Soo Choon is an irrepressible optimist and possesses a huge capacity for life and laughter. She is also a storehouse of tales and testimonies of the love of her Heavenly Father. Read on and get to know her. Some of these responses were in reply to earlier questions asked her by Lim Siew Foong (NECF Malaysia Research Executive) via a survey form. Others are more recent responses. Soo Choon is currently back in Malaysia on home assignment. – GOH POH GAIK

On singleness

I have always lived from day to day, regarding each day as a gift. So what I am this season of my life is just that – what I am. Father has not specifically told me that I will be single so life is open-ended, similar to everything else. In a nutshell, singleness is just another part of the equation for my life in this particular place at this particular time.

The difficulties and the challenges

At the workplace I am more accepted as a professional by my non-Christian colleagues than my evangelical brothers. In some cultures it is not acceptable for a woman to be travelling alone and of course, I have to do everything myself but that goes for the single man too.

The advantages

Flexibility! Singles have opportunities to try all kinds of things. We cope with less financial issues. We are able to spend huge chunks of uninterrupted time with God. Compare what we have with a mother who has young children and you get the picture. When the single person arrives in the adopted country, she is able to be a fulltime student in learning a new language and culture.

On the definition of 'a beautiful woman'

I would prefer to use the term 'a beautiful person' – someone who loves Father with all his/her heart, mind and

soul and his/her neighbour as himself/herself. It may sound cryptic but I am discovering more and more that it is very true because we are interconnected beings and we live in community.

Words of encouragement to single women who are struggling through singlehood

Struggles

There will be struggles, especially when we live in a society that regards couples as the norm. We have to recognize that we are sexual beings (but that does not make us sinful). One dear 85-year-old single sister told me that we will have sexual desires until the day we die! In times of loneliness we imagine how great it would be to be married. The grass is always greener on the other side but ask any married sister and she will tell you her struggles in this area.

Consider each day as a gift and live it with open hands. Be willing to experiment and try new things. There are definitely seasons in life, and our struggles will vary in nature and in intensity. Ask God for the gift of a soulmate with whom you can be vulnerable and honest so you can be real even as you pray.

We are special

Women are very special. We have been made in God's image with special characteristics. Father dreamed of each one of us before we were formed. Think about this – I am unique. There



Soo Choon getting a haircut Soviet style.

is no one else on earth like me.

Be real

Be completely transparent with the Lord. Express your anger, disappointments, et cetera. 'Father, teach me to be unifocal and to walk hand in hand with You to discover the me in me and the me in You.'

On contentment and fulfillment

Contentment is enjoying God and bringing Him alongside me as I discover what the gift of each day will bring, be it pain, frustration or exuberance.

The sense of fulfillment varies in each new season of my life. At the moment, it is to work with Father to see the potential of each person He has brought to my path and to become like Him wholistically.

On the most memorable/favourite part of the world stayed in

It is so difficult to pinpoint any one particular country. It is the beauty of the land and the people that has remained vividly in my memory.

To give you an idea... imagine being in the jungles of Papua New Guinea on a moonlit night, sitting

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across the river and seeing the whole place illumined only by moonlight. Come along with me to a muddy patch that led to the home of blind Bibi. My Afghan coworker had gone to help her as she was due for a hospital visit. I stood at the car and could not believe what I saw: my colleague was piggybacking Bibi and struggling through that muddy patch. And then catch the joy on Bibi's face when she recovered her sight after the cataracts were removed.

And...round a steep curve and suddenly before me there were rolling hills of gorgeous hues of purple, pink and yellow. God the Master painter was at work! Wild horses were galloping amidst the spring flowers. What a feast for my eyes as I crossed the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan!

On coming back to Malaysia

I have been feted, loved and provided for. I am catching up on my reading. I value the freedom and the mobility. I am enjoying times of quiet and beauty – the lush tropical flora and fauna is a balm for the soul. Initially it was difficult to refrain from comparing what we have here with what people are experiencing in other countries and I could have come across as being somewhat critical. Lifestyle differences are still a big issue with me. I find that people in Malaysia spend a lot of time majoring on the minors of life.

Some of the biggest lessons learnt on the mission field

- i) In a cluster, here they are:
- I discover who I really am – warts and all
 - I have far more inner resources than I could have imagined: these were revealed when I was stretched. Yet in the same breath, I realise I am

so small, weak and helpless.

- I have come to view things differently;
- I have become detached from some things I had once thought were essential for living.
- I have learnt 'God is love' is not a glib expression. I have seen His love expressed in sweeping movements and in minute, personal details.
- The need to be flexible and have a great sense of humour.
- Our God is a BIG God and He is no man's debtor
- The importance of a balanced life
- God wants to share so much of Himself; it is up to me to make myself available.
- It is essential to block out times for solitude and meditation

ii) The reason I was born as a Malaysian is that the Malaysian passport has enabled me to enter many countries, especially difficult-to-access ones.

iii) The gift of each new day. Having lived in war-torn zones where there was no guarantee that when I slept I would still be alive the next day.

On ministry to singles and their pressing needs

Singles need a place where they can be themselves and be comfortable. There must be an atmosphere of trust and time is needed to build trust. If the church is a community then the ministry should cover all aspects of life and not just the spiritual.

I believe in mentoring. We have so much to give one another and so much to receive from one another. Singles need to recognise that we have different seasons in our lives so there will be different needs depending on the age group. Single women value friendship. Important areas include the sense of identity and worth, the sense of belonging, of being loved, accepted and appreciated. Then there is always the reality of loneliness and the need for meaningful involvements.

On specially meaningful passages of Scriptures

My mission statement 'To have an undivided heart (Ps 86:11) and be like Jesus Christ in word and deed.'

• **Psalm 5: 3, 7** (*The Message*)

Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on your altar and watch for fire to descend. And here I am, your invited guest – it's incredible! I enter your house; here I am, prostrate in your inner sanctum.

• **Luke 7:36-50**

The anointing of Jesus. This is so profound in the context of the male dominated cultures that I have worked in and is beyond my imagination. It is truly inspirational!

• **Psalm 84:5-7**

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. (*I have seen wars and devastation and lots of spring and autumn rains to value the significance*). They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

• **2 Chron. 20:12b**

Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon You.



Children of Central Asia.



Empowering Women For Leadership

The DEBORAH Principle

BY CHAN TEAN YIN

(Continued from last issue)

CHALLENGES

The example of Deborah poses a number of challenging questions.

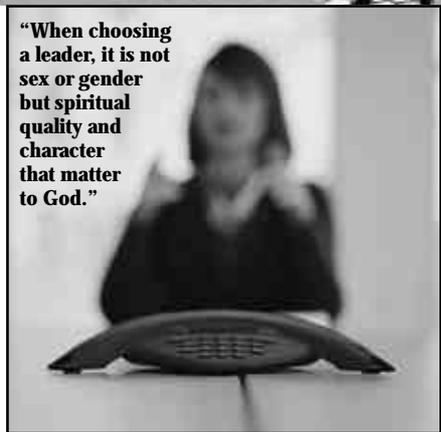
- Does God still raise up women to leadership roles?
- Where are the Deborahs of today?
- Are women today, divinely endowed with gifting for leadership like Deborah, given a chance to lead ?

The story of Deborah is very encouraging and challenging to 21st century women. Deborah's case illustrates an important truth. *Even in a man-oriented society, women with exceptional*

personal and spiritual qualities can rise to leadership. Women were not generally leaders in patriarchal Israel. But her sex did not disqualify Deborah, whose spiritual gifts were acknowledged by God's people.

The important truth is *God is no discriminator of sex.* It is not correct for anyone to proclaim that leadership is male. Meanwhile, we must recognise the sovereignty of God in choosing whom He wishes, irrespective of sex. When choosing a leader, it is not sex or gender but spiritual quality and character that matter to God. I believe in God's eyes, women stand an equal chance of

"When choosing a leader, it is not sex or gender but spiritual quality and character that matter to God."



being chosen as leaders if they have the right character and spiritual qualities.

Where are the Deborahs of today?

I believe they are seated amongst us in the pews. Women today should be challenged to emulate the qualities of Deborah.

• GO TO NEXT PAGE



BY DEBORAH LOH

Serving with Operation Mobilisation on the Logos Hope Project

GOD has opened a door to an opportunity so suited to my interests. An Operation Mobilisation Malaysia board member invited me to take up a journalism stint with OM. I am excited that God is allowing me to use my love for writing and reporting directly for His Kingdom's sake!

On Nov 18, I will leave Malaysia for Europe to join OM's ship ministry, known as OM Ships. I will work as a journalist for the Logos Hope Project, writing articles to raise funds and public awareness for the vessel *Logos Hope* which is expected to sail on her maiden voyage in mid-2005.

Logos Hope is going to replace *Logos II*, which has been in service since 1988.

Ministry needs have grown so vastly that in April this year, the *Logos Hope* was purchased to continue OM's mission to bring hope and God's love to the nations through its famous 'floating bookshop' and evangelism outreach.

Logos Hope is now undergoing re-design and renovation before she sails next year. During this pre-

voyage period, funds and public awareness must be raised, and this is where I come in.

My term of service is for four to six months, depending on visa conditions.

I will serve as Project Worker, based mainly in the OM Ships Head Office in Mosbach, Germany, with travels to the United Kingdom and Denmark. My employers have granted me no-pay leave for this period.



Editor's Note: Debbie is the elder daughter of Rev & Mrs Loh Soon Choy. The family worships at the Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church. Pray for Debbie as she uses her training and gifts for the glory of God. Pray for her

- to perform her tasks with humility, love and in a spirit of servanthood.
- for continual protection and provision.

VISIT the Logos Hope website:
www.LogosHope.org

A Time to Go and A Time to Stay (Judges 4)

BY GOH POH GAIK

Women to Women closes the year with a call to women of the Lord to shed timidity and trepidation and to walk into the new year with courage and confidence in the Lord. In this issue, Koh Soo Choon inspires with her steadfast faith and contagious joy in the Lord; Debbie Loh encourages as she steps out in faith. We conclude Chan Thean Yin's article on Deborah – a woman upon whom God placed the mantle to lead.

There is a time to go and a time to stay. When the command of the Lord came for Barak to lead the way to Tabor, Barak looked to Deborah for company and strength: 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.'

Deborah did go with him but the way he went about the matter did not please God. The Lord purposed that the honour of the victory would not go to him but to a woman. *Barak almost did not go.*

I get a jolt each time I read about the part played by Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jael displayed a bold single-mindedness in tackling a difficult task. Many women would squirm and stall, but Jael went into swift, decisive action. She discerned the time – and it was not a time to be squeamish. She knew what had to be done and she was purposeful in deed. *She went.*

There is a time to go and a time to stay. When the command of the Lord comes to rise and do a new work, we dare not bargain, 'If ...'

What new step of faith and obedience will God call you to in the new year?

What will He call me to? Will we, like Jael, be courageous in His strength, and exult in victory even in our tents? Or will we draw back and be voiceless in triumphant song, not because we couldn't do it but because we dared not? Victory did not depend on the strength or capability of Jael for the Lord had already purposed that He would hand Sisera over to a woman.

There is a time to go and a time to stay. Reuben did not go with Barak in the battle against Jabin the Canaanite king. He decided to stay among the campfires to hear the whistling for the flocks. The safe and the familiar can be a snare when it's time to go.

He was not alone in staying behind. Gilead stayed. Dan lingered by the ships and Asher remained and stayed in his coves. All these chose to stay and missed out on the rapturous joy of the victory. *They stayed when they should have gone.*

There is a time to go and a time to stay. When the command of the Lord comes to go – to a new ministry, deeper waters, to take captives captive – may we

be found in the company of those who came from Ephraim, Benjamin, Makir, Issachar. Together with the people of Zebulun who risked their very lives, as did Naphtali on the heights of the field they heeded the call. *They went.*

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: THE DEBORAH PRINCIPLE

She should seek to cultivate a horizontal relationship with the people she leads and also more importantly, a vital vertical relationship with God. Her source of strength and power to lead does not come from her human abilities but from a Divine source.

We may not all lead or rule like Deborah but we can all seek to "arise a mother" to the people God has given into our care.

We need to embrace all people with God's love for this is a very powerful principle of leadership. In addition, the Deborahs of today should seek to inspire and encourage faith and hope in the Living God.

In a world where there's so much gloom and doom, the Deborahs of today should seek to inspire faith and incite vision of victory through having faith in our Victor who has conquered the world.

Are women divinely endowed like Deborah given a chance at leadership?

Well, the answer to this question varies from church situation to church situation.

In the more liberated, charismatic church setting, women are recognised as co-heirs with the males in Christ and they are regarded as equal members of the priesthood of God. So, there is no problem in allowing women to take up leadership roles. However, today there are still many churches which are wary of accepting women into the leadership. .

Women today need not feel intimidated or despair at the lack of opportunities. We may not all rise up to the stature of Deborah, in the sense of obtaining official title or recognition.

But we can emulate her qualities. We may use our giftings to bless others. We can speak words of encouragement to instill faith and lift up the spirit of others. We may share our vision with those who are in leadership.

Best of all, women today will certainly impact the world by expressing their "mother spirit" in practical and obvious ways. Love is the greatest of all the gifts and this is what made Deborah's leadership so distinctive.

Mrs Chan Tean Yin is a member of the NECF Women's Concern Commission

WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gaik

Women to women, a project of the NECF Commission on Women's Concerns, is a bimonthly supplement to Berita NECF.

It has the broad objectives of:

- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
- stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
- encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord's Kingdom

Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to: The Co-ordinator, WOMEN TO WOMEN
NECF, 32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

The views expressed in this supplement do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the NECF.

Gila for God

The Heavenly Man

Books on persecution are not my favourite bedside read. In fact, I avoid them as far as possible for I find torture accounts disturbing and consuming.

But *The Heavenly Man* has to be read and publicised because the author, Brother Yun – whose life has been one of intense physical torment, miraculous near-misses, thrills and spills – is coming to Malaysia next January through the sponsorship of NECF Malaysia (see page 15 for more details).

So, in the cool comfort of my air-conditioned office in Petaling Jaya, I thumbed through the book. And cringed. The book tells in graphic details Brother Yun's story of over two decades of persecution from the time he became a Christian at the hopeful age of 16.

When reading autobiographies, the reader normally tends to compare his/her life with the subject. I couldn't help juxtaposing my life with Brother Yun's, and as his harsh experiences spilled from the pages, I tried to recall if there was any physical hardship I might have endured in my 30 years of following Christ. The only ones I could settle on were related to filthy public toilets. And they had nothing to do with carrying the Cross.

How blessed I am to live in Malaysia, I thought. Or am I? As I turned the last page of the book, I have to confess that I yearned for a slice of the action Brother Yun has experienced in his walk with God – a life wholly dedicated to Him, a life of intimacy where you can hear His soft voice in the midst of a crowded airport, where prison doors open to let you escape, where legs that have been smashed to uselessness buckle up instantly and carry you past 'blinded' prison guards, where your body can sustain you for 70 plus days without food and water.

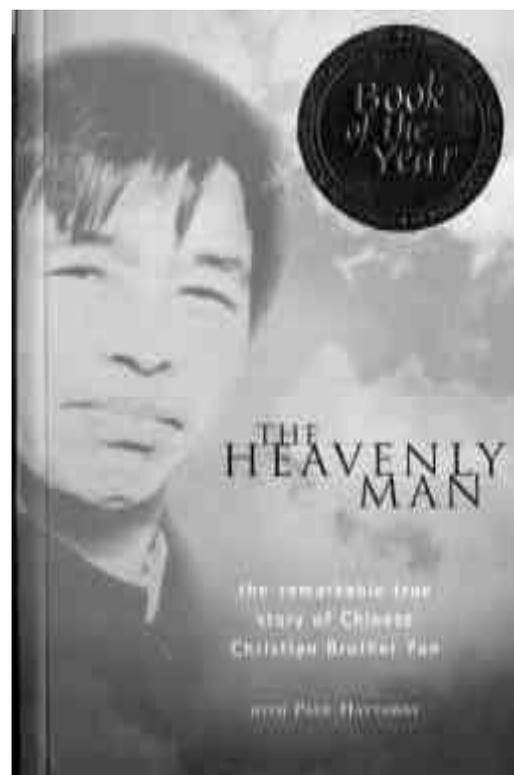
But can I experience all these without the pain and suffering? That's like asking whether we can meet God intimately and experience His mighty power and enabling without the brokenness.

Book reviewer Cam Martin wrote after reading *The Heavenly Man*, "You'll understand why the freedoms and protections we take for granted are a treasure. But you will also see how dangerous peace, safety and material prosperity can be to your spiritual health and to your commitment to serving the causes of Christ."

Like many others in China, Brother Yun has endured much for the sake of the gospel but he has seen the necessity of the suffering as God's way of moulding him to be the perfect vessel, well-equipped to do His work. We often view persecution as evil, but with eyes of faith and hope, Brother Yun said in the book:

"The past fifty years of suffering, persecution, and torture of the house churches in China were all part of God's training for us. He has used the government for his own purposes, molding and shaping his children as he sees fit. That is why I correct Western Christians who tell me: 'I've been praying for years that the Communist government in China will collapse, so Christians can live in freedom.' This is not what we pray!... Instead of focusing our prayers against any political system, we pray that regardless of what happens to us, we will be pleasing to God. Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power. This is true freedom!"

"Don't pray for the persecution to stop!" is his charge to those of us who are comfortably snug in our secure little zones. It seems a challenge to pray that, for our human nature cries out against anything that hurts. But I suppose Brother Yun has died to the old man within and can now confidently declare James' exhortation, "When all kinds of trials crowd into your lives, don't resent them as intruders but welcome them as friends. Realise that they come to test your faith



and produce in you the quality of endurance." (James 1:2-3, Philips version)

You can read *The Heavenly Man* for various reasons – to, in the words of book reviewer Richard Wasserfall who wrote in *Christian Monitor*, seek some "holy roller excitement" in a "plot of a modern day Acts wrapped up in a John Grisham-like suspense materials"; or to check out what kinds of miracles God is working in China; or to be "inspired" by the remarkable life of a suffering saint.

Brother Yun's story will surely grip your heart, but you will come to realise by the time you close the back cover that the book is not so much about his life as about the One who powers Him – his awesome God and what He can do with and through a life that is totally surrendered to and dependent on Him.

What God can do through Brother Yun, He can do through any one of us, if we will place our lives in His hands. The question is: Are we willing to?

I passed the book to my 12-year-old Joshua and he devoured it for several days. (It's an easy book to read.) The torture accounts disturbed him, so much so that he felt uncomfortable sleeping alone and moved into the next room with his two younger brothers, something he had considered a 'babyish' thing to do in the past. (He's still sleeping in their room,

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

Thinking About Thinking

BY SANDY TAN

A Christian leader once said: "We Christians think too much. We ought to put our brains on a rocket and shoot them into outer space!" Remarks, such as the above, are rather popular, but totally wrong. We don't think too much. We think not enough.

Thinking, nowadays, is out of fashion. Experience and feelings are in vogue. Disappointed with the misplaced rationalism of the Enlightenment, people – including Christians – have sought refuge in the castle of personal experience. But Christians must think. Here are three good reasons:

1) We think, that we may reflect the image of God

Yes, we think because God thinks! God has created us with the capacity for much thinking. What is it that differentiates us from other mammals, our closer cousins in the animal kingdom? The neocortex, that is the section of the brain in control of rational thought, is much larger (proportionately) in humans compared with other mammals, whereas the limbic section in control of emotions has roughly the same size.

An overarching theme of the Bible is that God has a plan. Even before Creation and the Fall, God has planned out in detail the course of salvation history. This is thinking! In comparison, many Christians live as though there is no tomorrow. There is no long-term planning to maximise the return on God's investment in them.

"Sooner or later, we all encounter storms that shake the foundations of our faith. We will survive and come out even stronger only if we possess the ability to think through the issues."

2) We think, that we may love God

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with *all your mind* and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30) Many of us have neglected loving God with our mind. It is said that a very important thing a person must do is to think correctly about God. How can we truly love God with our mind if we do not think correctly about Him and His Word?

Or if we do not think at all?

Some fear that thinking and studying put us at risk of losing our faith. Is our faith a myth that cannot stand up to rigorous scrutiny? No, because God is the smartest Being in the universe (or rather, He is beyond the created universe, to think precisely)! More Christians lose their faith by not thinking than by thinking. Sooner or later, we all encounter storms that shake the foundations of our faith. We will survive and come out even stronger only if we possess the ability to think through the issues.

3) We think, that we may witness for God

A pastor was urging his congregation to witness: "You don't have to cough in Hebrew and sneeze in Greek before you can go out to share the Gospel!" True, but this is no excuse for laziness.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to *everyone* who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Pet. 3:15) How can we give an answer to everyone if we are armed with only our personal testimony and a little knowledge of the Bible? In some situations, hard thinking and much study are necessary.

We often find Paul arguing with the Jewish gurus on the basis of the Old Testament and "proving that Jesus (was) the Christ" (Acts 9:22).

Consider the situation in our nation. I have heard that at this very moment, there are more than 100 Malaysian Islamic scholars pursuing doctoral degrees in the UK alone.* Include those in undergraduate programmes and those studying in the US or the Middle East. Now, compare this with the Christian figure. How many Christians are doing likewise? How is the Church to face this looming intellectual challenge? Aren't these enough reasons to don our thinking cap? What do you THINK?

*This figure comes by word of mouth and has not been confirmed against the official statistics.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: *GILA FOR GOD*

claiming that he's gotten used to their company.)

I asked him what he thought of the book when he was done with it, and he blurted out, "He is *gila*." (Interpretation: Brother Yun is insane)". After a pause, he added, "*Gila* for God." I want to pray that he too will be seized by this same 'insanity' and go *gila* for God, but I hesitate because it will mean inviting severe hardship into his life. Meanwhile, he, oblivious to my struggle over him, is patiently awaiting January to meet Brother Yun. Perhaps after the meeting, he, on his own accord, will make that godly decision to follow Christ at all cost. This, I am praying. – **By ONG JUAT HENG**

The Heavenly Man is available at Gladsounds, Pustaka SUFES, Canaanland, Salvation Book Centre and the NECF office at a special price of RM22 each for a three-month period beginning November.

Calling for Streetfighters

“God has established the authorities that exist...Rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong..For he (the ruler) is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’ servant, an agent of wrath, to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” (Rom. 13:1a, 3a, 4).

I wonder why the Government takes so long to do right? Is it because they lack the political will or they think that some issues have priority over others?

Why do people, who have suffered loss and endured the pain of injuries and even death, have to wait so long for justice to roll before the Government acts to rid the scourge of snatch thieves?

Several years back, a friend’s mother had her handbag snatched and she was seriously injured. With the increasing incidence of victims, my wife and I started to escort her mother to the bank and to her doctor in one of the hottest snatch-theft prone areas in Petaling Jaya, even though the clinic was a few feet away. My son also reported that two of his schoolmates were waylaid just outside their school recently.

One church member was robbed at knifepoint while entering the church premises while another member’s mother was robbed just outside their home. Sad stories of snatch theft victims who died or had gone into coma abound. And the list of victims is growing.

“*Perkara biasa*” is what you will hear from the police station personnel. Sometimes they would even scold you for letting your aged family member go out alone to the shops.

Police authorities have said they do not have the manpower to do crime prevention rounds. It is assumed that they have been asking the Government for increased funding but this appeal for more funds to do good police work seems

to have fallen on deaf ears.

Perhaps they will now get more funds with the rising tide of moral outrage against snatch thieves and motorbike robbers. We hear that there will be increased deployment of police personnel such as the FRU and GOF (formerly PFF) units in hot-spot areas.

Some people have become so frustrated with the whole situation that they are going beyond voicing their anger at the Government’s inaction. There have been public demonstrations on this issue. Some have resorted to vigilante action and this may mean that they may face charges of assault, grievous hurt and even murder.

Manuals on effecting citizen arrest are being disseminated. Awareness is being heightened and ‘good Samaritans’ helping victims are being highlighted in our newspapers.

What about us, ordinary citizens? What can we do to fight the menace? Here are some suggestions:

- Write to your MP about this outrage so that the issue is aired and addressed in Parliament.

- Call for the use of security alternatives such as CCTVs in areas prone to snatch thieves.

- Support the Government in re-writing laws with sentences that befit the seriousness of the crime.

- Call the police if and when you see suspicious people loitering in your area.

- Be alert of motorcycles and cars coming from behind you.

- Start self-defence classes for church members and the community.

- Organise personal safety and security classes.

- Above all, pray, and do not cease praying.

We must not allow the petty criminals to get off easily. By focusing on their eradication, these petty criminals (whose crimes are nevertheless mammoth because of the potential serious harm on their victims) will not be able to go on to bigger and more serious criminal activity.

We must seriously desire to rid our streets of this menace. New York’s crime rate fell when its mayor changed the way New Yorkers looked at petty crimes. By bringing the petty criminals to book, major crimes fell as well.

We need a Government established by God to take up the issue of doing right. The Government is an institution given the authority to do right for its people. We need a Government to deliver justice to those who have been victimised by snatch thieves and robbers.

Let not the deaths of snatch theft victims be in vain. We owe it to their loved ones and to their memories to do the right thing. Rouse us then, O Lord, from our stupor. – **BY TAN KONG BENG**

Tan Kong Beng is Dean of English Department at Malaysia Bible Seminary. He is also a member of the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.

He grew up in Petaling Jaya and now lives in Subang Jaya. He was mugged at knifepoint when he was 18. This article was first published in the iComment column of the Graduates Christian Fellowship newsletter dated June 22.

• FROM PAGE 4: PARTNERS OF THE SUFFERING CHURCH

In some parts of the world, a Christian’s standing is not measured by his academic qualifications or the positions he hold. Rather, it is determined by the number of times he has been thrown into prison. In 2 Corinthians, Paul boasted about his persecutions, which included prison flogging, beating and stoning. Modern day also has many stories

of Christians who revel in their persecution.

If it is a privilege to suffer for Christ, it is also a privilege to share in this suffering by praying for those who are suffering. This is a partnership that benefits both parties: our prayers strengthen them; in return, their testimonies strengthen us.

IDOP was initiated by the Religious Liberty Commission of the World

Evangelical Fellowship (now World Evangelical Alliance) and is now supported by at least eight Christian organisations including Open Doors.

While we have dedicated November to pray for our suffering brethren, let us continually pray for them at all times as their partners.

In conjunction with the IDOP, Berita NECF has devoted this issue’s back page to praying for our persecuted brethren.

NECF MALAYSIA 2005 CALENDAR

January

- 15 Revival meeting with speaker Brother Yun (of "The Heavenly Man") at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya
- 16 Evangelistic banquet with speaker Brother Yun in Kuala Lumpur
- 17 Revival cum evangelistic meeting with speaker Brother Yun in Penang
- 19 Revival cum evangelistic meeting with speaker Brother Yun in Ipoh
- 20 BM Consultation on Pulpit Ministry at the NECF office in Petaling Jaya
- 21 Revival cum evangelistic meeting with speaker Brother Yun in Malacca
- 22 Revival meeting with speaker Brother Yun in Johor Baru
- 23 Evangelistic Banquet with speaker Brother Yun in Johor Baru

April 21–23 BM Leadership Conference

May 1–3 2nd National Prayer Consultation in Kuala Lumpur

June 21–July 21 Launching of Merdeka 40-day Prayer & Fast

July 22–Aug 30 Merdeka 40-day Fast & Prayer & Charity Campaign

August 12 *Mid-way prayer gathering with Rev Kim Sam Whan

"Light up our Nation" Conference and Prayer Rally

- 24–26 Chinese Conference in Kuala Lumpur
- 25–27 English Conference in Kuala Lumpur
- 28–29 Merdeka prayer rallies nationwide
- 29–30 BM Konferensi "Terangilah Bangsa Kita" in Petaling Jaya
- 31 Merdeka community events nationwide

Sept 23–25 Youth Workers Consultation
29 Launch of Ministers Appreciation Month in Ipoh

October Ministers Appreciation Month

November 17–20 Month of Praying for the Persecuted Church
 BM Church Planting Conference

December 3 Annual Thanksgiving Tea organised by
 NECF Prayer and Research Commissions

* To be confirmed

• FROM PAGE 6: TALK TO COMMUNICATE

coexistence. It also means engaging with one another, creating and sustaining an open dialogue and building a permanent bridge of cooperation through mutual participation. I come here not just as the Prime Minister of the host country, but as a Muslim who wants to initiate a dialogue with his Christian friends. So that we are able to talk in a world in which it seems increasingly difficult to do so."

Later during the conference, Council of Churches of Malaysia general secretary Herman Shastri commented, "Thus far, Malaysian society has been able to tread a moderate path and celebrate its diversity on the basis of understanding, compromise and shared responsibility. We have chosen non-confrontational dialogue. Sensitivity on this issue is underscored by patience and understanding of the forces of conservatism and moderation within the Islamic fold."

CONCLUSION

As God communicates, the Church must also follow suit. However, in our communication approach, the receptor must be respected and understood at all times.

Our methods are not manipulation, coercion, or deception, but rather speaking the truth in love, seeking for the person's best interest, and hoping that through this, some may be won over to Christ. Opening for dialogue is a non-defensive approach for Christians to allow those who are seeking the truth and fear God, to ask questions, and for us to ask questions of them.

This excerpt is contributed by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. The full article is included in the Watchmen's Forum IV, available from the NECF office.

Blessed Christmas & A Happy New Year

From the Council & Staff of NECF Malaysia

'Heavenly Man' Visiting Malaysia

Visit to Encompass Evangelism, Revival and Missions

BROTHER Yun, whose real name is Liu Zhenying, now resides in Germany. He will be in Malaysia from Jan 15 to 23 next year to speak at revival and evangelistic meetings, and also to meet up with pastors and leaders to share the "Back to Jerusalem" (BTJ) vision. NECF Malaysia is sponsoring and arranging his trip here.

What is BTJ?

BTJ is a movement initiated by the Church of China to preach the gospel and establish fellowships in all the countries, cities, towns, and ethnic groups between China and Jerusalem. This is no small task for within these regions lie the world's three largest religions.

The movement has already begun with the departure of the first team of 39 Chinese missionaries in March 2000 for a neighbouring Buddhist country. In

the book "Back to Jerusalem", author Paul Hattaway described the 39 as "the small trickle signalling a great flood to come". This first mission trip may seem an insignificant event to the world but "on that day China once again became an active participant in worldwide mission," he observed.

Today, there are hundreds of Chinese missionaries working all over the world, according to the book. Brother Yun is considered one of the leading figures in the BTJ movement. The book carries his thoughts about the vision in which he said, "The Back to Jerusalem missionary movement is not an army with guns or human weapons. It is not a group of well-dressed, slick professionals. It is an army of broken-hearted Chinese men and women whom God has cleansed with a mighty fire, and who have already been

through years of hardship and deprivation for the sake of the gospel."

Brother Yun's visit to Malaysia will be a combination of evangelism, revival and missions. From Kuala Lumpur, he will travel to Ipoh and Penang, then move south to Malacca and Johor Baru.



SHARING RESOURCES

Doing the Right Thing

Published by: Kairos Research Centre



CHRISTIAN leaders in Malaysia have often experienced anxiety over the legality of some church practices, some of which may be subject to the nation's laws and regulations. This anxiety usually stem from their lack of knowledge and understanding of the relevant laws and legal processes in the country.

Examples: Is it legal to use shoplots or residential premises as

church buildings for worship or church activities? Is it an offence to distribute Christian literature and audio-visual materials in the Malay language? Must we print the phrase 'For non-Muslims' only on all Christian literature? Can a church allow illegal immigrants to worship and/or take part in its activities?

These and other questions are answered in *Doing the Right Thing: A Practical Guide on Legal Matters for Churches in Malaysia*. The handbook aims to provide the Christian community with a basic understanding of relevant laws, and give Christians the peace of mind to profess, practise and share their faith – a right that is entrenched in the Federal Constitution. The publisher

Thanksgiving Tea

The NECF Malaysia Prayer and Research commissions are jointly organising the tea to review God's goodness during the year.

Date: Dec 4, 2004 (Saturday)

Time: 2pm – 6pm

Venue: Level 4, Wisma FGA, Kuala Lumpur

All are welcome to celebrate God's faithfulness. The organiser appreciates a love gift of RM5 per person to cover cost.



however cautioned that the book served only to equip Christians with a basic knowledge of the law and is not intended to replace specific legal advice.

Written with the help of several Christian lawyers, the book is designed for easy reference. It addresses nine subject matters, including church organisation, church building, ownership and management of church property, propagation, police investigation and public meetings. Matters of interest not included in the nine topics are put together at the end of the book under the chapter 'Miscellaneous'.

As laws sometimes change in response to changing situations, Kairos hopes to update the handbook from time to time to make it relevant to Church. The book is available at RM10 each from Kairos (tel. 03-7726 5420, e-mail enquiries@kairos-malaysia.org) and Christian bookshops.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT ZONES

CHRISTIANS caught in religious conflicts are generally located at the edge of the Muslim world in places where Islam is expanding. The conflicts often take on the status of ethnic conflicts and are usually reported as such. In other situations such as Chechnya and Iraq, the jihad does not descend or advance on a Christian people, but rather wells up from within a Muslim nation. The battle is for a classic Islamic state under Sharia (Islamic) Law, and all who oppose this outcome finish up as victims. The most significant zones of religious conflict that affect Christians today are:

•**Chechnya in Southern Russia, and Iraq** where hardline Islamists are struggling to create an Islamic state under Sharia Law.

•**Central Sudan, Central Nigeria and Central Ivory Coast** where Arab and Fulani Muslims are pushing southward to impose Islamic domination and eventually Sharia Law upon the Christian, animist and secular Africans.

•**Eastern Indonesia** (Central Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua) where Javanese Arab-influenced Muslims are advancing eastward to spread Islamic hegemony and ultimately Sharia Law among Christian and tribal peoples. Papua is probably the world's most serious hot-spot for jihad. Papuan church leaders fear that genocide might be imminent.

•**Southern Philippines** where Moro, Arab-influenced Muslims, are fighting the predominantly Catholic government for an independent Islamic State under Sharia Law.

As in any war, religious war brings immense suffering and grief. Women are widowed, children are orphaned, and in some places captives are enslaved. Survivors, including the frail and elderly, are left homeless, while many are disfigured, disabled, debilitated and traumatised. Pray for our suffering brethren in these places that God will enable them to joyfully bear their trials. James 1:2-4). Pray too that the suffering will draw the churches together grow in unity and faith. Pray for the Church

worldwide to respond by providing help, such as the orphanage run by Voice of the Martyrs in Nigeria for orphaned children of Christians killed in Kaduna, Central Nigeria.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

THE conflict in this tiny strip of land is more than just a fight to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation. The battle is not against flesh and blood but against evil principalities that seek to destroy both Jewish and Palestinian believers by pitting one against the other through hatred, fear and anger. It is also trying to destroy the unity of the International Body of Christ when Christians begin to take sides in this conflict.

There are no sides to take here. Instead, we need to stand with both Messianic Jewish believers as they face harassment from the ultra-orthodox groups and also for Palestinian Christians who are suffering from the conflict. For the Palestinians, the conflict has not only taken countless lives but has also caused severe hardship for the living. The unemployment rate is now 70% and rising. When life is hard, many families are fleeing to the West. The result is the Palestinian Church is dying.

Pray for the Messianic believers to withstand the harassment of the ultra-orthodox Jewish groups and that they will continue to boldly share their faith. Pray for the Palestinian Church to be anointed with courage and power from the Holy Spirit, so it may be salt and light to the Palestinians. Pray too for God to open the way at the border so that food and medical aid will quickly reach the suffering Palestinians. Pray for groups that are in the reconciliation ministry, such as Musalaha, which seeks to reconcile Messianic believers and Palestinian believers.

COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

SINCE Christianity cannot be eradicated, the best option is to control it. This is what Cuba, China, Vietnam and Belarus are doing, through state-sanctioned and Communist-controlled 'official churches' that adhere to the Communist Party's

rules. All worship and witness outside the government-designated churches is illegal. The governments of Laos and North Korea are committed to eliminating Christianity. In Laos, the government is using extreme hardship, imprisonment and torture to force Christians to renounce their faith. In North Korea, collective punishment (the incarceration of three generations of the offender's family) is used to eradicate political dissent, including Christianity.

Pray for an end to the violent Communist oppression of Christianity; that the Church in these countries will continue to do good and be a blessing to their communities despite being perceived by their governments to be a threat to national security; for healing, courage and grace for all our suffering brethren. Pray too for the Church of North Korea, which exists primarily in horrendous prison and underground, that the cruelly abused believers will be preserved and strengthened in their faith and hope.

ERITREA

ERITREA is an example of a nation where Christians are being actively persecuted for reasons of jealousy and political expediency. More than 400 evangelicals are imprisoned for their faith. Most of them are kept in metal shipping containers that have been brought from the ports to accommodate the overflow of prisoners. The containers are hot, overcrowded and unventilated.

Pray that our persecuted brethren will experience God's divine presence in their boxed prison and that though they are confined, their spirits will soar in worship. One source of persecution is jealousy from the Eritrean Orthodox Church, of which about 40% of all Eritreans are members of, giving it a significant political influence. During the 1990s, this Church experienced a revival but frustrated by resistance from the leadership, the renewed evangelicals left to plant churches which have grown and multiplied. Pray for a great sweeping revival in the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Pray that the government will restore full religious freedom.