

EDITORIAL

Islam Hadhari

A Christian Reflection

Islam Hadhari. We read it in the papers, hear it on the news. The term has become increasingly popular ever since our fifth Prime Minister took the helm of the nation. But how many of us actually know its contents, much less talk about it? We may think it does not concern us, since we are not adherents of Islam, but it is crucial for Malaysian Christians to grasp the concept. *Islam Hadhari* is a new paradigm – it signals a new partnership and resurrects an old paradox.

A New Paradigm

What is *Islam Hadhari*? In a phrase, it is 'progressive Islam'. As the Prime Minister said, it is not a new sect, new religion or new ideology. It is just a new approach to Islam that seeks to balance man's responsibility in the here and the hereafter (this life and the next). Work is seen as a calling, and emphasis is placed on diligence and mastery of knowledge.

As always, this new approach is a response to a 'problem' – the so-called backwardness of the Malays in general. It is hoped that, through this approach, the Malays will be propelled, over time, to share equally in our nation's expanding economic pie. It is also hoped that Malaysia will rise as a model Islamic nation that will then lead other Islamic nations to become competitive global players. The glorious Islamic civilisation of the past serves as a reference point for this endeavour.

Naturally, *Islam Hadhari* also focuses on a just and trustworthy government, protection of the rights of minority

groups and women, and working together with non-Muslims. Peace and harmony in a multi-racial and multi-religious context is another grand vision for our nation on the path towards 'excellence, glory and distinction' (Barisan Nasional 2004 election tagline).

A little comparison will serve to clarify the concept further. The Protestant work ethic, propounded during the Reformation, is a parallel idea in the Christian context. Work was a service to God and society, and all jobs were accorded equal spiritual dignity. According to Max Weber who coined the phrase (Protestant work ethic), encouragement of high productivity and



paradigm shift for the Malays in Malaysia today, reminding them to practise their faith in their work and the marketplace.

A New Partnership

Racial polarisation has plagued our nation

“We speak of creating a Bangsa Malaysia, but this can never happen until the majority race is willing to open up and work alongside the others. Islam Hadhari is a big step in this direction.”

discouragement of lavish spending led to massive reinvestment of profits. The rise of capitalism was then attributed not to greed but to thrift (the opposite).

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col. 3:23–24)

The Protestant work ethic represented a paradigm shift for Europe in those days. Likewise, *Islam Hadhari* could lead to a

for a long time. The government has time and again introduced racial integration schemes and nation-building plans, such as the Vision School project, only to find them stalled on the ground.

We speak of creating a *Bangsa Malaysia*, but this can never happen until the majority race is willing to open up and work alongside the others. *Islam Hadhari* is a big step in this direction.

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Clothed With Compassion

On Jan 11, our Prime Minister launched the ~~five year~~ *Courtesy and Noble Values Campaign* aimed at transforming Malaysia into a more caring, responsible and moral society.

Crash courses on positive values will be conducted for all government servants.

For some time now there has been public apathy. For example, newspapers carried reports recently that a pregnant woman and her unborn twins died after her husband tried unsuccessfully for 20 minutes to flag down a motorist to take them to the hospital after they were

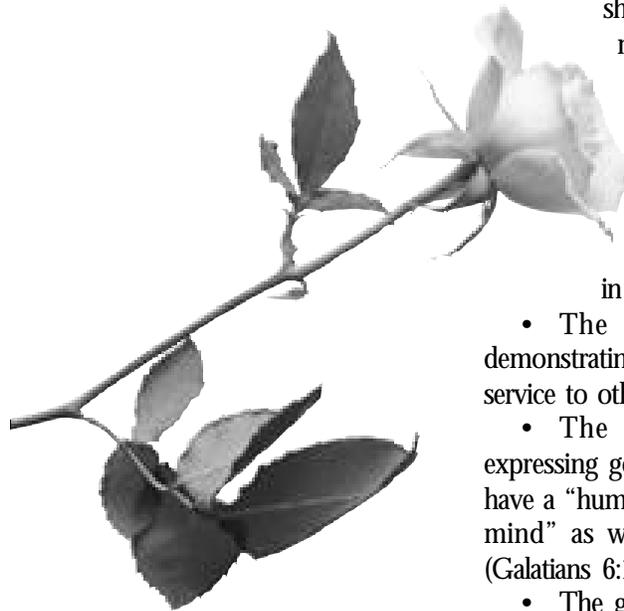
By
Rev. Datuk
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patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Colossians 3: 12-14).

The command to "clothe" or "put on" indicates that believers must willfully choose to live according to this "code of conduct" or manner of life. Believers must put on:

- The garment of mercy and compassion, demonstrating concern and tender heartedness. Just as God has shown us mercy, this mercy must be seen and demonstrated to others (Isaiah 58:7, Luke 6:35-36);
- The garment of kindness, shown by a willingness to help those in need (1 Thess. 5:15);
- The garment of humility, demonstrating a servant attitude in our service to others (Philippians 2:3);
- The garment of meekness, expressing gentleness which means to have a "humble and yet strong state of mind" as we seek to be a blessing (Galatians 6:1);
- The garment of patience which is longsuffering (1 Thessalonians 5:14);
- The garment of forbearance (Romans 15:1, Ephesians 4:1-2, Galatians 6:2);
- The garment of forgiveness (Mark 11:25, Ephesians 4:32); and
- The garment of love – "the bond of perfection" which binds all these qualities together. It is a fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) and fulfills or completes us in Christ (Mark 12:29-31, 1 Corinthians 13:13).

May the Lord help us to be model citizens so that we may lead others to become citizens of His Heavenly Kingdom!



knocked off the motorcycle by an irresponsible driver. Someone finally stopped to help but it was too late.

The call of the Prime Minister for a caring and compassionate society is one that we can be thankful for and support.

The Bible teaches that we as believers should be clothed with compassion. In so doing, we will not only please our Father in Heaven but also be a witness in our society.

Paul says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and

Insurance Scheme To Aid Ministers

No medical check-up required

NECF FOUNDATION has adopted an insurance scheme to enhance its ministry in improving the welfare of full-time workers. Provided by Great Eastern Life Insurance (GE), the scheme provides coverage on injuries or death due to accidents, and medical ailments.

It is offered to NECF members (churches and organisations) and associate members (individuals). Besides the staff workers of NECF members, Christians worshipping at NECF member-churches are also eligible to the scheme.

Under the scheme, called the Group Multiple Benefits scheme, members are given an automatic lump-sum payout should they suffer injuries, or death, resulting from an accident or an illness specified in the scheme.

At a premium of RM50 per month, the insured member is covered by benefits including natural death and permanent disability. (See inset for details.) If no claim is made at the retirement age of 65 years, the company will refund the aggregated amount of contribution made plus interest.

The Foundation's Welfare Committee Chairman, Steven Wong, said the scheme would provide valuable benefits to

pastors and full-time workers.

"We have studied several schemes from various insurance companies and this is the best plan. No other plans could match it. The snag is that we need a minimum number of 500 people for the scheme to take off. As such we encourage individual Christians to sign up as a way to help full-time workers," he urged.

He added that GE has a policy of returning a two percent rebate of all premiums to the proposer – in this case, NECF Foundation. The Foundation has agreed to plough back the rebates to help full-time workers who cannot afford to pay the premium.

NECF will be sending the plan and forms to its members. Those who wish to participate are to directly contact GE, who is prepared to set up booth at the church premises to facilitate their applications.

Medical Panel

Meanwhile the Foundation is establishing medical panels comprising doctors and specialists who will give special rates to full-time workers to lessen their

financial burden. The Foundation plans to set up the panel in all major towns throughout Malaysia and is now seeking Christian doctors to participate in this ministry.

Steven: "...we encourage Christians to sign up as a way to help full-time workers."



Benefits and Payouts

Natural Death	: RM 50,000
Critical Illness* (36 illnesses specified)	: RM 50,000
Total Permanent Disability (due to illness)	: RM 50,000
Personal Accident (death)	: RM 100,000
Total Permanent Disability (due to accident)	: RM 100,000
Bereavement	: RM 5,000
Maturity Benefit	: Accumulated Fund

*Under the Critical Illness provision, the insured member diagnosed with any of the 36 critical illnesses after the purchase of the insurance cover shall be paid RM50,000.00 plus Accumulated Fund (if any) subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (i) 60 days waiting period from the date of the coverage being in-force
- (ii) exclusion of all pre-existing conditions

• FROM FRONT COVER: ISLAM HADHARI

We welcome this new partnership. We also welcome the new sharing of wealth that will accompany it. We want to see the Malays rise to the level of the other races without depending on government assistance. We believe they can do it given time and the right motivation.

An Old Paradox

What then is the paradox? The paradox is that 'political favour' may lead to complacency and cause us to forget Jesus' Great Commission command. Indeed, the Bible teaches us to be good citizens (Rom. 13:1-7, etc.), to live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18, Heb. 12:14), and to partake in nation building. At the same

time, the Bible teaches that *salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved* (Rom. 4:12). Jesus' Last Commission is still our First Concern.

Of course, we must respect other religions. We must never force the Gospel down people's throat, but trying to please men often makes us forget to please God. This has happened over and over in history, when Christians were no longer persecuted. Someone said, "Persecute the Christians, and they grow. Leave them alone, and they die."

Of course, we can shine for Christ in our good works. However, we have to go beyond good deeds – we need to balance our good works (social work) with preaching the Gospel (evangelism).

Conclusion

Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Eph. 5:15-17)

Let us endorse the noble principle of work as a calling, embrace all Malaysians as we work towards the common good, and continue to evangelise the lost world for God's glory.



When Right Is Wrong

Why churches split and how to prevent it. Or minimise the effects.

Conflicts between Christians are nothing new. But today, the problem appears to have escalated, resulting in numerous church splits and other unhappy events. Here are some guidelines from the Word of God to help us prevent or resolve these conflicts. The conflicts can be divided into three categories.

DOCTRINAL CONFLICTS

Christians down the centuries have placed strong emphasis on correct doctrine. Even though modern Christians are more open-minded and tolerant, serious doctrinal issues still surface from time to time.

What to do

Determine whether the issue is a primary one (dealing with salvation, etc.) on which the overall biblical testimony is very clear, or a secondary one to which no clear-cut answer is given. If an issue is secondary, it may not be worth arguing and splitting over it.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.
(Rom. 14:1)

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. (Titus 3:9)

If a secondary issue involves one party holding to a “stricter” standard than another party (Paul calls them “the weak” and “the strong” respectively), Paul (surprisingly) asks the strong to make adjustments for the sake of the weak. After all, even the strong cannot claim to possess complete knowledge. On the issue of food sacrificed to idols, for example, Paul goes on to highlight the subtle dangers involved in eating such food.

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for

whom Christ died. (Rom. 14:15)
Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.
(1 Cor. 8:9–11)

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. (1 Cor. 8:1–2)

Allow for differences of opinion; do not judge each other.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make dear to you. (Phil. 3:15)

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.
(Rom. 14:3)

PERSONAL WRONGS

Christians are still sinners and they do wrong from time to time, even to fellow Christians.

What to do

If one party feels strongly that he/she has been seriously wronged, he may seek redress through the mediation of other Christians. Taking the matter to court is strongly discouraged as this would dishonour Christ.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen

even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matt. 18:15–17)
If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? . . . Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another – and this in front of unbelievers! (1 Cor. 6:1–6)

If the conflict remains unresolved, the wronged party should learn to put matters to rest and leave things to God.

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? (1 Cor. 7b)
Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. (Rom. 12:19)

Jesus also has a word for the party who does wrong. How harmonious church life would be if more Christians obey this command!

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23–24)

PERSONALITY CLASHES

Christians are also human beings who have their own preferences and ways of doing things. Such differences can lead to conflicts.

What to do

Recognise that more often than not, it is the “I” in us that is the culprit.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? (James. 4:1)

Submit to each other. The “subordinate”

Sifting the Speaker



When charges against Brother Yun was raised, NECF had to weigh his tainted reputation against the comments from reputable world evangelical leaders. The supportive comments, plus the time NECF staff spent with him travelling on the road while he was in Malaysia recently, helped NECF with its assessment of his character.

One of NECF Malaysia's main objectives is to equip local churches for renewal and revival. To help fulfil this objective, NECF often organises seminars and conferences that meet the needs for the season of the Church. As a national body with strong international affiliation, NECF often has access to a wide network of international speakers, including renown, sought-after figures that a local church may find difficult to engage.

There have also been many occasions when foreign ministers, who are new to the Malaysian Church and trying to establish their ministries here, approach NECF for speaking engagement opportunities. How does NECF select its speakers, bearing in mind that its membership cuts across denominations with varied inclination?

NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong shares some of the general guidelines NECF uses when considering foreign speakers.

Firstly, he/she must be an evangelical who is well known as a credible minister within the international evangelical circle.

Secondly, he/she must possess a unique and significant ministry. This means that the ministry has a focussed vision, and has contributed to the spiritual growth of its desired group.

Thirdly, he/she is not unreasonable in his/her requirements of the host. Examples of unreasonable demands are exorbitant fees or honorariums, first-class air passages, or six-star hotel accommodation.

What happens when the potential speaker is a controversial figure or whose reputation is riddled with rumours?

"Firstly, we will ascertain whether the rumours have any basis, bearing in mind that in our contemporary context, e-mails and other forms of media have been abused by unscrupulous people out to cause mischief and malign others," Rev. Wong pointed out.

"Character assassination can be due to many reasons, such as differences in personality, doctrines and ministries; ministry rivalry; envy; or just plain

mischief. We Christians are as prone to these carnal temptations as anyone else, so it's important to consider whether there's any of these going on between the accusers and the accused," he cautioned.

The information or accusations against the person concerned must be verified with various sources here and abroad, and not just one source, to ensure a fair hearing. "We will also weigh the general consensus here and abroad towards the person. For example in the case of Brother Yun (of *The Heavenly Man*), he is highly regarded by David Pawson and Dennis Balcombe, both who are respected evangelical leaders worldwide.

"Furthermore, his story in *The Heavenly Man* was written by Paul Hattaway, a renowned evangelical missionary who has a good reputation as a thorough and balanced researcher," Rev. Wong explained. (For more of the Brother Yun controversy, see *Berita NECF January-February 2005*.)

Rev. Wong added that further examination would be conducted on the person's doctrine and his/her organisation's and personal financial accountability.

He revealed that NECF had once turned down a foreign minister's offer to speak here because he rejected the Trinity doctrine. The US minister had authored several books and one of them was circulating well in Malaysia.

"We were considering organising a seminar for him to speak until we heard that he rejected the Trinity doctrine. After checking with several credible sources, we found the rumour to be true, that he only baptised in the name of Jesus, Jesus and Jesus. We decided to drop the seminar," Rev. Wong said.

Another incident involved a pastors fellowship which asked NECF to support a conference they were planning for a certain foreign speaker, who claimed to pastor a congregation of 3,000 in the US. "We discerned falsehood and upon checking, found that he was a fraud. The conference was called off," he added.

Then there was the case involving another pastors fellowship which had invited a renowned US TV evangelist to speak at their evangelistic and healing meetings. The meetings were finally cancelled because the speaker wanted one night's offerings to be given to him, besides other requirements.

"There are dubious characters around, people with impure motives for personal monetary gains or self-promotion, so we need to be careful," Rev. Wong cautioned.

But allowances should be given to foreign ministers who hold different theological leanings or interpretations that are not crucial to our fundamental beliefs. Take for example the rapture theories. Some ministers subscribe to the pre-tribulation interpretation, some push for post-tribulation while others take the middle road.

"We've had speakers shoving down the pre-tribulation theory with such passion at our conferences that it peeved those participants who were post- and mid-tribblers. That does not mean we endorse the speakers' beliefs. But we allow this because it is within our perimeter. It is tolerable. It is not crucial to our doctrine of salvation," explained Rev. Wong.

"In the end, don't be taken in by people who come in with all sorts of claims. If in doubt and you sense something amiss, check with reputable sources here and abroad. But do allow for differences that are not critical to our fundamental doctrines," he concluded.

Schools to Benefit from Charity Fund

NECF MALAYSIA has identified 25 needy schools to benefit from the 2004 Charity Fund, a spin-off project from the National 40-day Fast and Prayer where participants donate monies saved from fasting.

To date, over half a million ringgit has been collected, and this will be given to schools in Kedah (3 schools), Penang (2), Perak (3), Selangor (6), Negri Sembilan (2), Melaka (1), Johor (1), Pahang (4), Kelantan (1), and Sabah (2). Of these, six are Chinese schools, seven Tamil, four Kebangsaan and eight missions schools.

The money will be used mostly for renovation and repair work and NECF hopes that this will help to improve the



To date, over RM520,000 has been collected from last year's National Fast and Prayer. Churches and individual Christians are still sending in their donations.

teaching environment for the teachers and the students.

Meanwhile the Tsunami Fund has a balance of RM188,000 after giving about RM140,000 to victims in north Peninsular Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri

Lanka.

The NECF Council has agreed that the balance would be reserved for reconstruction efforts in Aceh. NECF will partner international relief agency World Relief by providing personnel and materials for its rebuilding project there.

In addition, NECF collected over RM180,000 (nett) at Brother Yun's January meetings in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Melaka and Johor Baru. NECF will channel RM100,000 to the Back to Jerusalem organisation, which is fully supporting Brother Yun and his family.

The balance will be set aside for NECF's assignments relating to renewal and revival.

• FROM PAGE 4: WHEN RIGHT IS WRONG



is to obey his/her overseer. The overseer is to give room for individual expression to members of his flock so that they too can develop their talents and grow in the ministry.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:21)

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. (Heb. 13:17a)

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:2-3)

If two parties have genuine disagreements over method or strategy, they may part way amicably. By God's grace, the ministry can also grow in this way.

Foundation Seeks Help

"As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." – Galatians 6:10

By Daniel Ebinesen

TRUE to these words, we through the NECF Foundation want to be a blessing to the Christian community, especially pastors and full-time workers who are in need and have no other avenue of assistance available to them.

The Foundation, which was launched in a memorable ceremony at the J.W. Marriott Hotel in Kuala Lumpur a year ago, has been able to bless eight such individuals. This was given through outright gifts and study loans to fund their children's tertiary education.

Through the generous giving of concerned Christians, we have so far raised about RM450,000, out of which about RM75,000 has been disbursed or committed. We hope to raise at least another RM550,000 by the end of 2005 to bring the total funds available for distribution to RM1 million.

God has blessed many Malaysian Christians abundantly, so helping us reach our RM1 million target is not an impossible task. To help us achieve this, we invite you to make a financial

contribution to the Foundation by using the attached response slip. We are also organising our first anniversary lunch in Malacca on May 7. So if you are in the vicinity, please keep the date free and support the function.

While we raise more funds for the Foundation, we would like to see these funds distributed to needy cases in accordance with our objectives. You may be able to help us in this area by publicising the Foundation and recommending suitable candidates for the programme. Please also invite us to your church or your organisation so that we can personally introduce the Foundation.

Our pastors and Christian workers are worthy of double honour and should not suffer poverty, lest we be accused of "muzzling the ox".



Daniel Ebinesen is a boardmember of the NECF Foundation. He is also Chairman of Malaysian CARE.



Reaching out for Dad's Hand

By Goh Poh Gaik

Have you ever had an experience when you saw something, or heard something, and you let it pass as something of no consequence? Only to have it come up in your mind again and again? It's as if the Lord does not want you to forget what you had seen or heard! Finally He gets your attention, and you sit and are quiet; you listen, and you discover that what you had brushed off as insignificant actually carried messages of some portent.

19 DECEMBER 2004

I came back from church.

For some inexplicable reason, I kept recalling *three things* I had seen in church that day. The incidents had somehow caught my attention that morning and yes, there had been a momentary sparkle. But I had thought nothing more of them. So I was surprised that the scenes were somehow etched in my memory and in the days that followed they insistently surfaced. I finally decided I had to take time to listen. Had I missed something? YES, I was to discover, they were not entirely insignificant.

SCENE 1

What I Saw

Esther, 17 years, came forward to sit in the first row, next to Philip, her dad. (why did she do that that particular morning?) Worship was in progress. Esther reached for her father's hand and they raised their hands together in praise and worship. It was a good sight for the eyes, daughter and father standing side by side, holding hands and worshipping the Lord together.

*A teenage girl reaches out for her father's hand.
So why was that significant?*

Because teenage girls in our churches and our nation are reaching out for their father's hands. Whatever outward teenage bravado and sophistication she may parade externally, every teenage girl needs a father. Many, so many are reaching out for that parental hand for fatherly love, guidance, correction and instruction. Teenage daughters and sons are reaching out for their fathers and finding only empty space. Fathers, where are

you? Will your daughter/son find your hand when she/he reaches out for it? Is your hand, are you, there to help them navigate the turbulent seas of adolescence?

"In contemporary society," writes Richard Forster in *Celebration of Discipline*, "our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness,' he will rest satisfied." This warning is, of course, for all of us. We are all caught up in noise, hurry, crowds; we are aggressive competitors in the contest for 'muchness' and 'manyness.' How urgently the call rings out for us to pray for fathers in our churches and our nations.

Repent

- for fathers who are not there for their children
- for fathers whose hands are raised to harm and hurt their children
- for the sin of incest and rape in our nation.

Pray

- for fathers to be there when their children reach out for their hands
- for fathers whose hands will provide for and protect their daughters and sons.
- for Christian fathers to model godly living

SCENE 2

What I Saw

It is time to pray for the children before they go downstairs to their classes. The children walk/run up to the front. This morning my eyes are on Bryan as he leads his daughter, five-year-old Casandrea, by the hand and then releases her to join the other children on stage.

*A father leads his little daughter up for prayer.
So why was that significant?*

Because every young child (a daughter or a son) needs a father to take her by the hand and lead her to faith in the Lord and His word. We are not unaware of this reality in most of

our churches: mothers are more concerned or at least seem to show more interest and concern in the area of spiritual matters.

BUT little girls and boys need fathers who have a robust faith in the Lord and demonstrate it to their young children. David Pawson observes about Christianity, “At the domestic level, wives are frequently more religious than their husbands, and mothers rather than fathers pass it on to their children.” We cannot and must not leave this matter unaddressed. Fathers, your children need you to read the Bible to them, to pray for them, to guide them in the things of God. We should be crying, “Woe!” when fathers abscond and leave the mothers to handle the spiritual nurturing of the children.

Priceless indeed are the lingering memories of having heard Daddy read the Bible and having clasped hands with Daddy and Mummy in prayer before the Lord. It’s worth *everything* to be there to pass the faith on to the next generation. It’s worth a smaller pay packet if it means freeing Dad to have time to lead family devotions and to come to church to worship as a family.

Repent and Pray

- for fathers who have forgotten and overlooked the spiritual needs of their families
- for fathers to take responsibility, together with mothers, for the spiritual instruction and nurturing of their children.

SCENE 3

What I Saw

I was talking to Edna after the service when Jimmy came up to ask if there are maps in the devotional study Bible we were introducing to our members. Jimmy was carrying 2-year-old Clarisse, younger daughter of Bryan and Elaine.

*Uncle Jimmy with little Clarisse.
So why was that significant?*

Because ‘uncles’ and men who are trusted by young girls and women must return trust with trust and not return trust with treachery and brutality. Our papers have been reporting tragic incidents of young girls (remember the Chinese girl in Singapore?) and women who have been abused and killed by men. A few of these men were known and trusted ‘friends’. Brothers, uncles, neighbours and colleagues are to be protectors of girls and women who trust them. They are to protect and not to take advantage of their trust, to harm and hurt.

Repent and Pray

- for the sins men commit against women
- for godly uncles and brothers in our churches who will protect the children and women who trust them
- for God-fearing men in our nation who will be protectors and not predators.

Take time to thank and praise the Lord for the godly men in your lives. Pray that their tribe will increase. And express your appreciation in appropriate ways.

Breakthrough at S

We Must Rise to Protect this Battered Younger C

By Pastor Susan Tang

YOUNG people today are growing up in a different environment from the one we older people grew up in. In the past, we were encouraged to study well and get good results but today, in this age of super technology and globalisation, the young are challenged not only to study, but also ‘to explore new ways and new things, to be creative and innovative and to achieve not only excellence but also greatness.’ They are challenged to “break the norm” and to possess a passion to compete relentlessly so that they can be “better than the rest.”

What do you think will happen to all these youths when they are pushed and challenged to such limits, especially when they lack spiritual fortitude and a sound value system? How can our young people achieve the best when they are not taught to honour God and to value human dignity but only to “break the norm” so that they can achieve greatness and be one cut above the others?

It is no wonder that pandemonium reigns and their minds break down! The New Straits Times (NST 18 September, 2004) carried this disturbing headline: “MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG TEENAGERS ON THE RISE.” The newspaper reported, “*One in five Malaysian teenagers suffers from some form of mental illness and the figure is rising. If these children and adolescents don’t get help, we are going to be burdened with a generation suffering from serious mental health problems.*”

This is truly frightening... is anyone listening out there? What a terrible prophecy of doom over this nation. On top of this, we are told that there are two new drug addicts **every hour**. There are now more than half a million drug addicts in the country with **47 new addicts added daily**. Multiply this by 365 days! This is why senior citizens must rise to pray and break this curse over our young people. They are truly a ‘battered’ generation.

Another headline in *The New Straits Times* (Oct 12, 2004) reads: “THIRTY MILLION YOUTHS IN CHINA SUFFER FROM MENTAL ILLNESS.” The article says: “*At least 30 million Chinese youths under 17 years of age are suffering from mental or behavioural problems and the trend is set to rise.*”

The advent of globalisation (with its demonic global trends) has exposed young and impressionable minds today to not only all sorts of abnormal temptations and filth from the media but also **to direct attacks from demons**. Filth and smut flow too freely through the media. The call for young people to be innovative and creative or the call for them to “venture into uncharted waters and test the unknown” is too great a temptation to resist.

Only the worst, not the best can happen when youths who have no fear of God or a sound value system are told, “There is no limit, no boundaries, just go ahead and be creative: be innovative and break the norm! Strive to beat down everyone else so that you can be the best.” This constant pressure for them to perform, to compete, to be ‘one cut above the rest’ will be heeded because young people do not want to be irrelevant. They will cave in to the call of the secular world, to peer pressure and try to catch up with the maddening

Inset

eration



crowd.

Young people today are indeed living not only under mental stress; they are also experiencing direct assaults from evil spirits. They desperately need the prayers of their families, especially their parents, grandparents or elderly mentors. Many behave irresponsibly and are incorrigible in their repugnant behaviour because they are under bondage. Added to all their problems are the negative reactions of the older generation, who often judge, criticise, complain, scold, call them names and even curse them. But they do not pray for them.

What then should their elders (be they parents, mentors, grandparents) do? Shouldn't they seek God on their behalf? Shouldn't they, the elderly or the aged, who have plenty of time on their hands, pray for them? If we have not prayed, blessed nor ministered to them, then surely we have no right to criticise and judge them.

Unfortunately, we are living in days when most elderly people also do not know how to pray and do not want to pray. They can attend church, seminars, symposiums, go for mission trips, etc but they just do not want to pray. One hour of prevailing in God's presence is like being in a torture chamber. – they sigh, they fidget, they look around, and they fall asleep! How to be pitied indeed is this generation of young people. They have parents and grandparents who are able to give them everything and anything but do not pray for them, do not set them free from invaded minds and do not impart to them the knowledge of God.

O that God will bring back the elderly Isaacs who will lay hands on their sons to bless them, the aged Jacobs who will rise up and prophesy over them and the ageing Davids who will charge their sons to remain faithful to their God.

God will not work deeper into the lives of our children, our grandchildren when we do not minister to them. We minister to them by prayers, by prophecy, by direct counseling, by charging them to keep God's Word and by spending time with them. As a pastor, an itinerant minister, a writer and an administrator and teacher of SOL, I definitely do not have the time for all the young people in my church. However, I do find time to pray for the youths in my nation and to impact into the lives of the few whom I discern bear the call of God upon their lives.

But what about you? If you are retired, do not just spend your time in golfing, rearing birds, swimming, going on vacation after vacation, gardening, watching TV, going for tea two or three times a day and just sitting and talking and murmuring. Spend time to do things that have eternal worth.

Do not allow the spirit of prayerlessness to bind you – it will, if you allow it to. There is nothing sadder that to see an aged man or woman who does not know how to connect with God. Learn to sit quietly in His presence with uplifted hands and a spirit of gratitude for an hour, at least twice a day.– *Taken from Breakthrough at Sunset by Susan Tang Used with permission.*

Where Does a Teacher Go to Find Her Heart?

Why Anne Moses believes that those she couldn't teach taught her everything.



Based on an interview with Anne Moses, an English Literature teacher at Taylor's College.

What's really important in life? And, just as importantly, who are you becoming as a result of your answer to that question?

FOURTEEN years ago, Anne Moses would have replied, "Getting more As from my students". It was the kind of answer that made her school happy, but it didn't satisfy Anne. In fact it made her miserable. There had to be a better way to be a teacher but she didn't know what it was. And so, there came a day when she finally taught her last lesson, and embarked on a quest that took her all the way from her classroom of high achievers to a group of intellectually disabled adults at L'Arche Lambeth in London.

And as this is as much a story of God's loving guidance as it is of Anne's quest, you need to know that Anne never intended to work at L'Arche. She was in England for quite another reason. But one day she happened to stop by a charity shop and, idly scanning the noticeboard, noticed that L'Arche Canterbury needed volunteers.

The foreign-sounding name was instantly familiar. Back in Kuala Terengganu, Anne had read about Henri Nouwen's writings that had stirred her dissatisfaction with her life as an efficient producer of As.

L'Arche, French for 'The Ark', is an international family of 126 communities in 30 countries in which people with learning disabilities and their assistants live and work together in a home setting. Freed from the terrors of institutionalised care, the intellectually disabled at L'Arche are key members of small, loving communities.

Today, it is easy to forget that L'Arche only exists because one man decided to obey God's call to live with the mentally handicapped. In 1964, a philosophy lecturer called Jean Vanier turned his back on academia and invited two mentally and physically disabled men to live with him.

“We did everything together. We cooked, we worked in the garden together, we fought together, we prayed together, we forgave each other. I began by thinking that I could do good to them, but then, as the days and months moved on, I began to discover, little by little, what they were doing for me – transforming me, changing me. I thought I was going to teach them something and suddenly I was discovering that they were teaching me quite a bit.”

Anne’s involvement with L’Arche began as a part-time volunteer at L’Arche Canterbury. Noticing how much she enjoyed her time with them, the leader of L’Arche Canterbury invited Anne to apply for a full-time position with L’Arche Lambeth. Two searching interviews later, and Anne found herself with the ‘Relaxing Group’ – a small group of intellectually disabled older adults.

This is her story.

“While the younger members worked at making candles, weaving and producing fruit and vegetables for sale, the members of the Relaxing Group did light craft work, mainly as a form of occupational therapy.

There was Doreen, who was already quite ill and weak. She made cards and found that very therapeutic.

Doris made wonderful shawls. Her colour coordination was fantastic. Some of her shawls were sent to the Queen and the Queen Mother, and she received thank you notes from them.

Primrose enjoyed cross-stitching, and her colours blended beautifully.

Philip, who had Downs, was fortunate because his parents had taught him to read and write. He could even produce his own newsletter. Philip just loved people, and we began our friendship with a big hug from him.

John was crazy about trains. He also loved keeping the compound absolutely free from leaves. He didn’t like me at first, and used to walk out of the room when I entered. I was their first ‘coloured’ assistant and I think he found it difficult to adjust to that. I told myself not to take it personally – to let him be himself – and our relationship gradually improved.

The wonderful thing about them was that they accepted themselves as they were – defects and all. There was no mask. There was no denial. There was no shame.

Andrea, our leader, said that when some of them first arrived at L’Arche they had been very angry about the time they had spent in mental institutions. Britain, and many other countries, used to place the intellectually handicapped with psychiatric cases. All of them were terrified of hospitals, nurses, and medicine. If you even mentioned the word ‘hospital’ they become very agitated: ‘Don’t say that!’

Once a week we had devotions that began with a reading, followed by sharing from the members. Most of the time, I didn’t understand what they were saying, but I knew from their tone that they had a very sincere relationship with God. When it came to the hymns, they would join in and sing their own hymn to their own tune. ‘Yes,’ I thought, ‘we aren’t singing like a choir but so what? All this actually makes our worship beautiful.’

It was a liberating experience.

Open and Vulnerable

The things they felt strongly about were never hidden. Their joys and longings were out in the open. They were not ashamed.

Primrose loved babies and her room was full of baby photos. She desperately wanted kids. Sometimes she would get very depressed about this.

When her feet were swollen, I would take her round the block in a wheelchair. There was a kindergarten nearby, and she used to make me stop there. If the children happened to be playing outside, she would be radiant.

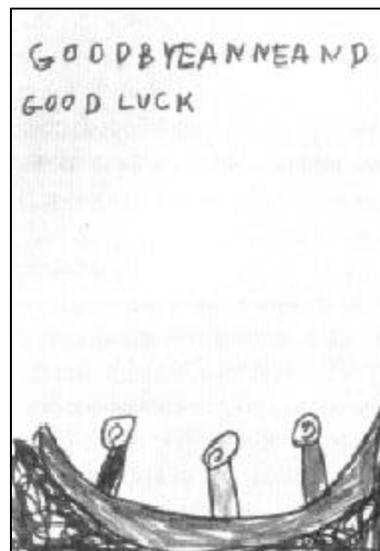
And the slow learner was I.

Once a week, Andrew (the other assistant), Andrea (our leader) and I would meet to share what we had learned during the week. We had to reflect on our relationship with the members. It wasn’t just about being with the members and doing physical stuff for them.

At L’Arche I finally learned to accept myself. The people there were so open, so comfortable with themselves. They weren’t afraid to be judged.

I think we all struggle with the feeling that we are not good enough. That we’re never going to be good enough.

When it was time to leave, Philip made a little red card for me which they all signed.



The picture he drew looks rather like three candles in a boat – or that’s what some people have said. But it’s actually the L’Arche logo of three people in a boat, journeying together through dangerous waters to a new beginning and a rainbow. Philip wasn’t wrong about the candles, though. L’Arche did light something within me. It gave me a sense of what it means to be fully human.

As a teacher once again, I allow my students to say what comes into their minds. They can be who they are. I am very aware of them as individuals, and much more sensitive to their facial expressions. I am enjoying their individuality.

L’Arche has helped me a lot, especially as a teacher of literature. Literature isn’t just about head knowledge; the heart has to be engaged too.

Academic success isn’t the only way to be fulfilled. There are many other ways. And, while I continue to work with my students for the best possible results, I believe we are all benefiting from the lessons my teachers at L’Arche taught me all those years ago.”

Will Asian Christianity Blossom or Wither?

By Dr Tan Kang San

Asia is undergoing tremendous challenges: the challenge of economic and social challenge of religious resurgence among Asian traditional religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Chinese and Japanese religions; the growth of Islam and its Islamisation process in South-East Asia; the challenge of increasing restrictions for missionary entry; and the challenge of the maturing churches in Indonesia, China, Korea and the Philippines.

Surely Asia's diversity and vastness defies any sweeping generalisations. And there are no easy answers to the challenges facing evangelical missions. This paper is merely one attempt to reflect on the challenges facing evangelical missiology. I will begin by first surveying the history of Christian expansion that gave rise to Asian missionary movements. I will then discuss some missiological issues facing Asian missionary movements by way of asking the following questions: Is Asian Christianity capable of taking on the baton of mission leadership? If Asian churches are to be mature and be effective instruments of mission, what are some of the key missiological issues that must be addressed today?

History of Christian Expansion

Professor Andrew Walls of the University of Edinburgh, in his recent publication, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (2002) concluded that the 20th Century has probably been the most remarkable century of church history since the first. Certainly the demographic shape of the Church has changed more completely, more radically, in the 20th Century than it has ever in any previous century.

Walls observed that both Islam and Christianity expanded globally to become world religions but Islam is more successful in retaining its converts over a period of time. He studied the growth of Christianity in the non-Western world and commented that Islam expands progressively while Christianity expands serially. Saudi Arabia, as the heartland of



Islam, had remained Muslim since its inception.

In contrast, consider how countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Tajikistan used to be Christian heartlands. They are no longer Christian nations today. In each case, the lampstand was removed. But in none of these cases did the dimming or withering of Christian witness in one of its major centres lead to the end of Christian witness in the world. The very reverse took place. By the time the Jerusalem church was scattered in the wind, as happened in the very first Christian century, there were churches of ex-pagan Greek Christians right across this Mediterranean area and beyond it. As the churches in Iraq declined, the churches in Iran increased. As the great Christian centres of Egypt, and Syria and North Africa passed under Muslim rule, the Barbarians of northern and western Europe were gradually coming to appropriate the Christian faith.

In the 20th Century, Walls observed that two things happened simultaneously. One was the greatest recession that the Christian faith has known since the rise of Islam, and that recession was centred in the West. The second was a huge accession to the Christian faith, again probably the largest that has ever been known. There were only about 10 million professing Christians in the whole of the African continent when the 20th Century began. No one knows how many there are now, but an educated guess would be in the region of 350 million – just in the course of a century. Korea had a tiny, tiny church when the century began. Now it sends over 10,000 missionaries all over the world.

Over the past century Christian advance and Christian recession have

gone on simultaneously, recession in the West, advance in Africa, Asia and Latin America; withering at the centre, blossoming at the edges. Christian advance in the world is serial and, in the providence of God, it is the Christians of Africa, Asia and Latin America who are next in the series. Walls noted that the great event, the great surprise for Christianity over the past hundred years, has been this shift in the centre of gravity of the Church. This radical change in its demographic and cultural composition, by all present indications, appears to be continuing. It means that the Christians of the southern continent are now the representative Christians, the people by whom the quality of the 21st and 22nd Century Christianity will be judged, the people who will set the norms, the standard Christians. And the quality of 21st Century Christianity will depend on them.

How do we explain the growth and withering of Christianity in salvation history? Walls proposed that Christianity lives by crossing cultural frontiers. The first believers in Jesus were Jewish by race. Everything about Jesus made sense in Jewish terms, and for a long time the leaders were very anxious that all other Jews should know about Jesus, but rarely mentioned Him to people who were not Jews. From Acts 13, the church at Antioch launched the cross-cultural enterprise in mission. Without this cross-cultural process the church could wither and die.

So, in the coming century, the new representative Christians of Asia, Africa and Latin America will be required to cross cultural boundaries, possibly even western cultural boundaries, in order to share their faith. But the church in Asia can only cross cultures if they have strong and contextual missiology that does not export a foreign gospel but seeks to decontextualise the gospel from South Korea into Vietnam, from Latin America into Mozambique, and from Batak peoples to the Malays of Sumatra. As we see emerging churches from Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines cross cultures, we

Pastors Reveal Feelings

CHRISTIANS generally believe that relationship is important in any Christian ministry. Even so, conflicts within the church (between the clergy and laity) remain a major issue. NECF Malaysia recently conducted a survey to uncover the dynamics of the pastor-congregation emotional relationship. The “Emotional Connection between Pastors and Congregation Survey” intends to measure the emotional connection between pastors and their congregations from the pastors’ perspective based on the following two hypotheses:

1) Christians put their pastors on a spiritual pedestal, while at the same time, pastors put up a front to meet members’ expectation.

2) In view of the nature of the pastoral ministry, a pastor may consciously or unconsciously feel the need to meet people’s expectation and ability to handle any situation in order to feel adequate. He must be in control of the church’s direction, its administration, the congregation’s welfare, as well as his personal life. In other words, he must portray the image of the man who’s got it all together. And to achieve this, he may unintentionally build walls around himself and his world to protect that image. Consequently, he appears to be stronger than he really is.

Altogether, 192 pastors responded to the survey, which was conducted last year from March to December by the NECF Research Department. The respondents graded statements

according to a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

Among the responses are:

- 96% agree that congregations have high expectation from their pastors (57% strongly agree, less than 3% neutral)
- 87% agree that the ability to handle any situation is important (9.5% neutral)
- 83% think that a good pastor is someone who is able to show his congregation how to bring their lives under control (13% neutral)
- 76% say they are satisfied with their relationship with their congregations (17% neutral).
- 66% agree that the lack of recognition and appreciation is one of the greatest discouragements in pastoral ministry
- 65% agree irreconcilable differences are a common reason for people to discontinue the services of their pastors
- 64% agree that disagreement with leadership is often a cause for a pastor to leave the church
- 54% feel responsible if there is a high turnover in their respective churches
- 38% think that people leave the church because they feel the pastor does not care enough for them.
- 80% say they would still choose to be a pastor, given a choice
- 80% feel that they would rather be transparent with their congregations rather than build walls.

The complete survey result and analysis will be made available on the NECF website.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: WILL ASIAN CHRISTIANITY BLOSSOM OR WITHER?

need to form an Asian theology of mission that addresses issues of cross-cultural communication, training, indigenous church multiplication, discipleship in context, mission support and a theology of the suffering.

The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity

I would like now to turn to another major book recently published by Philip Jenkins entitled *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Jenkins, who is a professor at Penn State University, argues that the present global trends of Christianity will have an impact on the world similar to major religious movements such as the Reformation.

For Jenkins, the 21st Century will be seen as a time in history when religion replaces the importance once occupied by ideology. Christianity will have a major impact on all of the world’s belief and ideological systems. Jenkins points to Christianity as growing with phenomenal speed in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In Africa, according to the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, the present net increase of Christians on the continent is an astounding 8.4 million a year, or 23,000 persons a day. For example, there are 10 million African Christians in 1900; in 2000 there were 360 million. Jenkins notes: “By 2025, 50 percent of the Christian populations will be in Africa and Latin America, and another 17 percent in Asia.”

In other words, the centre of gravity of the Christian world will be deep in the Southern hemisphere, creating new pockets of influence and power. Before too long, the phrase “a white Christian” may be something of an oxymoron. Taking South Korea as an example, Jenkins notes that there were only about 300,000 Christians in the whole of Korea in 1920, but that today there are 10 to 12 million.

I cannot forget the thrill of visiting Christian villages in East Malaysia (formerly Borneo islands) and listening to revival stories of the 1960 and 1970s. Village after village experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Less than 40

years ago, Sabah and Sarawak had less than one percent Christians. Today, a conservative estimate puts the Christians population at around 35 percent. When missionaries left China, demographers estimated the Christian population at less than one million. Today, the estimate ranges from 80 to 100 million!

The growth of Christianity in Asia and Africa is not only seen numerically, but it is also demonstrable in the spiritual vitality of Korean prayer meetings, dynamism of African evangelists and growth of cross-cultural missionary movements from Latin America.

What distinguishes these southern Christianity exponents from their northern counterparts is their belief in the Bible as authoritative, their proclamation of Christ as the only way for salvation, and their reliance of the power of the Holy Spirit to bring renewal.

This article is an extract and was first published in *Mission Round Table*, a publication of OMF Mission Research of which the writer is the director. Used with permission. To read the entire article, e-mail ihq-research@omf.net

Integrity of Heart

“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than he who is crooked though he be rich.” – Proverbs 28.6

WRITING about the integration of business and ministry brings us to a related word: integrity.

The English word integrity is based on the word “integer” which means a whole number or a complete unit. Integrity means wholeness and the absence of dichotomy or a double standard. A person with integrity is a whole person, an undivided person. This is someone who is the same person at the office and in church; someone who is the same person in private as well as in public.

Jesus the Messiah was a Man with integrity. He was not two-faced or fragmented while representing both earthly humanity and His heavenly Father. When Jesus said, “Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” (Matt. 5:48) the Greek word used for perfect, *teleios*, referred to the goal of completeness or wholeness demonstrated by God Himself. It is also interesting that the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, comes from another root word that means “*completeness*”.

One other way to view “integrity” is to consider the way a civil engineer would when speaking of a building with “structural integrity”. This kind of integrity keeps the building strong and safe. Flaws in structural integrity are revealed under pressure or unusual stress. A few years ago there was a major earthquake in Taiwan. Many people were killed and injured when the quake caused hundreds of reinforced concrete buildings to suddenly collapse. The shattered buildings revealed that some had been built with large, empty metal cans inserted into columns and beams where there should have been solid concrete. Structural integrity had been sacrificed for profit. How many of our lives have empty spaces where there should be something solid and strong?

When we speak the Word of God, are we building a house of faith that will

stand up under stress? Believers are people of truth. We should never fear that speaking the truth in love will cause us to fail. The opposite is true. I have found that while we often do need wisdom regarding how and when to speak the truth, God will never forsake the righteous in heart. He is a shield of protection for the one whose life is committed to the Word of God.

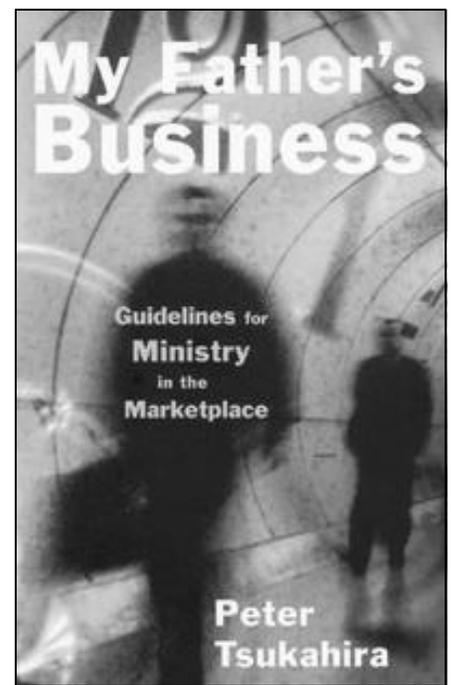
Integrity, however, is more than simple

“In our inward, personal life with the Lord that is carried forward by trusting in Him, we learn to stand before God and man in honesty.”

honesty in business. It is more than “doing the thing right”. Integrity means keeping our commitments, whether it is a matter between us and God (such as tithing) or in relationships with our fellow human beings. This extends from the contracts we sign to returning telephone calls and being on time for our appointments.

Integrity entails a lifestyle of worship and prayer that undergirds business and ministry activities. Worshiping God draws us into a place of intimacy with Him. Through genuine worship in God’s Spirit, we are transformed into His image and our own flawed character is healed. In our inward, personal life with the Lord that is carried forward by trusting in Him, we learn to stand before God and man in honesty.

He sends us forth from the holy meeting place of prayer ready for whatever kind of work our calling entails. Through prayer and the Word of God, we receive wisdom, grace and moral understanding to deal with tough



decisions, to navigate through human complexities, and to avoid moral compromise.

Through prayer and the wholeness of integrity, we receive courage from the Spirit to act on what God has shown us to be the right path for our lives. – *Extracted from “My Father’s Business” by Peter Tsukahira, who will speak at this year’s NECF National Prayer Conference for the English-speaking churches (see page 14).*

Noble Values Campaign

NECF Malaysia is launching a campaign similar to the government’s five-year *Courtesy and Noble Values Campaign* that was recently launched by the Prime Minister in the government’s attempt to transform Malaysia into a more caring, responsible and moral society. In short, the campaign aims to instil good moral values in Malaysians.

The NECF campaign, to be spearheaded jointly by the NECF Prayer and Research departments, will mobilise churches and Christians to take the lead in being exemplary citizens, as ‘salt and light’ to our society.

To achieve its aim, the campaign will heavily rely on the media through posters, car stickers, booklets, and the website.

National Prayer Conference

CHINESE



REV. DR WAN XIAO YUN is a pastor at Taiwan's largest congregation, Bread of Life. He heads the church-planting ministry and is also the dean at his church-run seminary. Rev. Wan will speak at the live-in conference at the EMPRESS HOTEL, SEPANG (near the Kuala Lumpur International Airport) from AUG 23 to 25. He will share on the theme "Turn to our Father in Heaven". The conference is organised by the NECF Chinese Commission. More details in the next issue of *Berita NECF*.

ENGLISH



PETER TSUKAHIRA is an interesting figure – he has an Asian face, an American voice and an Israeli passport, which came about through his Japanese parentage, American upbringing and Jewish wife, Rita. In 1987, he and Rita moved to Haifa, Israel, as immigrants from Tokyo where Peter had been pastoring an international fellowship. Peter is the founder of Asia Centre, which serves Asian Christians by imparting a prophetic view of Israel and its connection to revival in Asia. He also writes and speaks on the integration of business and ministry.

DJOHAN HANDOJO, a musician by training, is the chairman of Transform World Indonesia 2005. He is also the president of a music recording company in Indonesia. A

New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as **Ordinary Members:**

- **Messiah Revival Assembly, Senai**, pastored by *Joshua Selvam*
- **Hosanna Centre, Johor**, pastored by *Edinburgh a/l Savirimuthu*
- **Petra Praise Assembly, Penang**, represented by *Elder Chiam Chew Siang*
- **Christian Praise Centre, Kota Baru**, pastored by *Henderson Wee Chong Choo*
- **Bethany Church, Kuching**, pastored by *Epafras Djohan Handojo*
- **Bethany Church, Ipoh**, pastored by *Epafras Djohan Handojo*
- **Raphah Ministries/Life Rebuilders (M) Sdn Bhd, Selangor**, represented by *Mrs Linda Tang*

We also welcome six people as **Associate Members:** Mr Yong Chee Seng, Rev. Colgen Anthony Francis, Mr Felix Loh Whey Siong, Rev. Leong Ah Yoke, Pr James a/l Savistian, Pr Murugesh a/l Sandanam Adaickan.

composer and singer, he has released a solo album, "Doa Pagi, Jiwaku MerindukanMu."

Peter and Djohan will speak at the annual conference, held in conjunction with Merdeka Day, from AUG 25 to 27 at PJEFC, Petaling Jaya.

BAHASA



REV. RACHMATT. MANULLANG is the vice-coordinator of the National Prayer Network in Indonesia, and senior pastor of Tabernacle David Church, Bogor. He also serves as chairman of Yayasan Berkati Indonesia, a foundation for disaster, relief and refugees. He will speak at the conference from AUG 29 to 31. Look out for more details in the next *Berita NECF* issue.

BM Leaders Conference

THE NECF BM Commission is kicking off its long-term leadership development programme for local BM churches with a conference themed "Pemimpin, Karakter, Wawasan dan Pengurusan" (Leadership, Character, Vision and Management). The programme aims to ultimately build strong BM churches that will greatly impact the community.

The three-day conference is also for pastors and leaders from Orang Asli churches. It begins APRIL 21 at FULL GOSPEL ASSEMBLY KUALA LUMPUR with speakers Rev. Dr Nus Reimas, who is Secretary-General of the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship, and NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong.

The speakers will share principles on competent leadership, focusing on godly character, vision and leadership style. In addition, they will talk about time and human resource management. The commission encourages all BM and OA pastors and leaders to attend the conference. Registration fee is RM75 before April 14 and RM85 thereafter. It covers meals and conference materials.



Rev. Wong Kim Kong (left) and Rev. Dr Nur Reimas (right).



2nd National Prayer Consultation

SOME 100 senior pastors and prayer leaders from all 14 states will meet from MAY 9 to 11 at SWISS GARDEN HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR. They will discuss a five-year plan for a strategic prayer movement for the Great Commission across the nation, and further develop the prayer networks at the state, regional and national level.



Neighbour Focus

THE NECF Prayer Commission will in October host the third annual South-east Asia Prayer Consultation, which will be attended by prayer representatives from 11 countries. To prepare the participants for the consultation, the NECF Research Department is helping to provide country reports – one report for each month beginning January – to the prayer networks across the 11 countries.

The country report focuses on urgent issues facing the country and gives prayer tips. In cooperation with the initiative, *Berita NECF* will run summaries of the reports from this issue until the consultation. We hope this will help to raise awareness of our neighbours and the urgent issues facing them, and may the increased knowledge enhance our prayers for them. This issue, our prayer focus is on Burma and Vietnam (shaded black left and right respectively on map).



BURMA / MYANMAR

Population: 42,720,196

Ethnic groups: Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5% (Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Naga, Rohingya, etc)

Religions (estimated): Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Muslim 4%, Animist 1%, Others 2%

(Statistics: CIA Factbook, Dec 16, 2004)

BURMA is best known for Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the only opposition party, National League for Democracy (NLD). But, because of the government's tight grip on the media, not much is known about the appalling human right abuses by the military regime against the ethnic minorities.

A 1998 interim report by Jubilee Campaign described the country as a "vast concentration camp". The ongoing attacks by the Burmese army against the ethnic minorities have been characterised by mass relocation, forced labour, and destruction of villages. Rape against ethnic women is prevalent. Many hiding in the jungle are in dreadful conditions without proper food, shelter and medical care. The Asian Human Rights Commission circulated a hunger alert in response to the military's burning of rice fields in the Karen state (Dec 29, 2004). Two other human rights groups – the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust and Christian Solidarity Worldwide – issued a report last December accusing the government of gross violation of human rights and said its actions against the ethnic groups amounted to genocide.

Burma, world's second largest producer of illicit opium, has been ruled by successive military regime since General Ne Win seized power in a coup in 1962. The latest military government, now called the State Peace and Development Council, has ruled the country without a constitution or legislature since 1988. The country was then renamed Myanmar, but it was not approved by any sitting legislature in Burma, nor recognised by the US Government. Despite the landslide victory of NLD in the multi-party elections in 1990, the ruling junta refused to hand over power.

While there is tendency to view religious freedom as a threat to national unity, the successive governments and military have to date associated themselves with Theravada Buddhism. Buddhist doctrine remains part of the curriculum in all elementary schools (International Religious Freedom Report 2004). Yet, meetings and activities of Buddhist monks are controlled and restricted.

The Rohingya Muslims in Arakan State, who are denied citizenship status, have been experiencing systematic legal, economic, and social discrimination. Christians are periodically coerced to convert to Buddhism with the intention of 'burmanising' them. All publications, religious and secular, are subject to control and censorship. Bibles in indigenous languages cannot be imported legally, but can be printed locally with government permission, which is difficult to obtain.

PRAY FOR: A righteous government that exercises justice, loves mercy

and cares for the ethnic minorities and religious freedom; **Courage**, strength and comfort for suffering Christians and they may be empowered to show love and bring hope to the oppressed; **God's** deliverance of the children who are forced to be soldiers, orphaned by the fightings, and those kidnapped and sold into prostitution or forced into labour by the military regime; **The** spiritual and physical needs of over two million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) be met; **Fair** trials for those who have been unjustly imprisoned; **Protection** for the ethnic women from rape and forced labour and murder; and **Emotional** healing for the many millions of Burmese, especially children, who have been traumatised by the brutality of the military government.

VIETNAM

Population: 82,689,518

Ethnic groups: 54 ethnic groups. Vietnamese 85%, Chinese (1.6%), Hmong/Mien (1.6%), Thai (4.8%), Khmer (4.1%), Cham, and mountain groups [*Operation World 2001*]

Religions (estimated): Buddhists (50%), Roman Catholic (8–10%), Cao Dai (1.5–3%), Hoa Hao (1.5–4%), Protestants (1.5–2%) percent of the population), and Muslims (0.1%).

VIETNAM, a country recently known for its battle against a worsening bird flu epidemic, is condemned by several international groups in its reluctance to improve civil and political rights.

Vietnam is a one-party state, ruled and

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: NEIGHBOUR FOCUS

controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). However, 'obedience' to ideological orthodoxy has become less important than economic development as a national priority in recent years. The CPV has gradually reduced its formal involvement in government operations and allowed the government to exercise discretion in implementing policy. The constitution, however, does not provide the right for citizens to peacefully change and freely choose their government.

The National Assembly is the highest representative body of the people and the only organisation with legislative powers. It has become more vocal and assertive in exercising its authority over lawmaking in recent years, but remains subject to CPV direction. About 80 percent of the deputies in the National Assembly are CPV party members. The government's human rights record remains poor to date, and its officials continue to commit serious abuses.

The February International Human Rights Reports recount the widespread longstanding societal discrimination against ethnic minorities and the continuous harassment of some highland minorities – particularly the Hmong in the northwest provinces and several ethnic groups in the Central Highlands – for practising their Protestant religion without official approval. Several credible sources report disappearances of persons and incidents of absolute detention of citizens for peaceful expression of political and religious views.

The Government significantly restricts freedom of speech, press, assembly, and freedom of association. The lack of judicial independence contributes to constant denial of fair public trial. The CPV practically controls the courts closely at all levels, selecting judges for their political reliability.

The Government does not favour a particular religion. Although citizens are allowed to practice individual worship in the religion of their choice, it is tolerated

within the context of state-regulated religious groups. The Ordinance on Belief and Religion, which took effect last November, restates citizens' right to freedom of belief, religion, and freedom not to follow a religion and that violation of these freedoms is prohibited. It advises, however, that abuse of such freedoms to threaten the country's unity, harmony and independence is illegal and warns that religious activities will be suspended if cultural traditions are negatively affected.

The ordinance also restates the principle of government control and oversight of religious organisations, specifying that religious groups must be recognised by the Government and must seek approval from authorities for activities, including the training of clergy, construction of religious facilities, preaching outside a recognised facility, and evangelising.

National security and national solidarity override guarantees of religious freedom. Protestant evangelical churches (found mainly among ethnic minorities) and other unregulated groups are actively suppressed on the charge of threatening national security and unity. Many of them are pressured, tortured and imprisoned in efforts to get them to recant their faith.

Bureaucracy and corruption are two special features in the Communist administration that lead to monopoly of power. As a result, the economy is underdeveloped and weakened despite the increased number of foreign investment.

PRAY: **That** the government at all levels, from central to local, will recognise God's sovereignty and will give up their prejudices towards the ethnic minorities and the Church and stop all forms of persecution and hindrances to the Church; **for** God to raise up reformists and just leaders, and that religious freedom may be realised; **for** Christians who are suffering for their faith in prisons and those who are risking life and liberty to meet for worship and fellowship.

IRAQ

THE Jan 30 election was an historical breakthrough in Iraq in democratic progress, despite serious flaws as charged by critics. The Shiite Muslims won, followed by pro-American Kurds. However, a coalition would have to be established, which would mean a power-sharing government. Concern has been expressed that the election has understated the diverse ethnic/religious groups in the country. The Sunni Muslims abstained from voting while Christians claimed they were prevented from voting. Analysts have also warned that writing a constitution may tear the country apart, as the leading Shiites have strongly pushed for an Islamic constitution. It was reported that some 800,000 Christians were marginalised and many had fled the country.

Pray for hope, comfort and faith for our brethren; for God's divine intervention in the forming of a new government and Constitution that favours religious freedom; and for Christian representation in the new government.

GEORGIA

Perhaps the most tragic cases of Christian persecution are when Christians persecute their fellow believers, as has been happening in Georgia where some Orthodox Christians have been causing great difficulties for non-Orthodox, especially Baptists. This has included burning Bibles and Christian books, beating church leaders and destroying church buildings. But reconciliation started last year when a Baptist leader had to testify in court against nine Orthodox Christians who were being tried for what they had done to him. He asked the judge to release them. The court could not believe it, but eventually accepted the decision, to great rejoicing from all in court. Pray that those who call themselves Christians will live in peace together, however great their differences may be.