

EDITORIAL

After the FALL, What?

It was St. Paul who wrote: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” (1 Tim. 1:15) If Jesus came to save sinners, we who model our ministry on His must do the same. We are to “save” sinners.

Here is where the Church has been found wanting, especially with regards to leaders who fall. In the last editorial, we looked at accountability and the avoidance of pitfalls. Here, we examine the appropriate response when a leader falls despite every precaution taken.

FORGIVENESS

The basic issue is forgiveness. What is forgiveness and what does it entail? The theological underpinning comes from 1 Jn. 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our

sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” While confession and repentance does not negate the consequences of sin, a person who confesses is nevertheless purified in a spiritual sense from all impurities and unrighteousness.

The sinner who has confessed and repented must ideally come to such a place where he knows for sure he has been forgiven by God, accepts himself and is accepted by the same community where the sin was committed and found out.

The sinner does not have to hide away. The stigma should not stick to the person forever. Often, when a leader falls, the church’s first reaction is damage control. While the well-being of the sheep and the reputation of the church must be protected, the welfare of the fallen leader is worthy of equal concern.

The ultimate aim is not to punish but to restore the fallen person. The following are a number of practical steps towards restoration.

We assume an auton-

omous local church setting but the basic principles apply to more complex or denominational settings.

Accusation & Thorough Investigation

This is properly the first step because so often, there is no repentance until the sin is discovered.

When an accusation is brought against a leader, an inquiry should be set up to investigate the matter thoroughly. The leader should be convicted only if there is sufficient proof of wrongdoing.

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A leader who has fallen should not be left alone to deal with his sin(s). The church should come alongside to help restore him to wholeness.

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Jously Buaya

EDITORIAL

Editor

Rev. Wong Kim Kong, J.M.N.

Assistant Editor & Writer

Ong Juat Heng

ADDRESS

32, Jalan SS2/103,

47300 Petaling Jaya

Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 603-7727 8227

Fax: 603-7729 1139

E-mail: editor@necf.org.my

It's time to invest

By Rev. Eu Hong Seng
Chairman, NECF Malaysia

AS I write, we are witnessing a flurry of activity on international stock markets as investors seek to 'take profits' after steady gains over the last few months. I am always amazed at the urgency and diligence with which stock-holders monitor their investments, acting swiftly to prevent losses or capitalise on gains.

And as we rapidly approach the last days, I am reminded about God's call for us to be urgent and diligent in tasks pertaining to the advancement of His kingdom – particularly that of **investing in the next generation.**

The problem is, an often repeated truth becomes an empty slogan – its repetition slowly inoculates us into a mode of inaction, apathy and complacency!

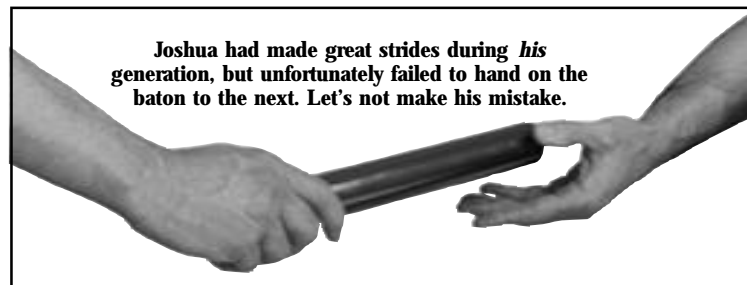
At some point we mentally assented to the statement's validity, and at the same

Joshua had made great strides during *his* generation but unfortunately failed to hand on the baton to the next. The result – many years of leadership instability and spiritual demise.

My constant prayer is for spiritual fathers to rise and invest in the next generation. And please, no more mere "amens!" Nike has a lot to teach us – "Just do it!"

Like Joshua, we are in severe danger of succeeding in this generation but having no spiritual legacy in the next. We are not going to live forever...but there is still [just!] time, I believe, to determine whether we are going to leave behind a Joshua or a Judges generation.

At NECF, as we embark on a nation-building policy, we must not neglect to focus on the group who will be *the pillars to sustain the current move of God* in our land. The Joshua generation will be people with the energy to "take" the new territories that God is calling the churches



Joshua had made great strides during *his* generation, but unfortunately failed to hand on the baton to the next. Let's not make his mistake.

time figured that we had taken it 'on board'. But as time goes by, the initial urgency diminishes and we are left with a slogan.

Israel was blessed to have a leader like Moses, who took the trouble to groom a godly successor in Joshua.

However, *every* generation must adopt the same mindset. We must intentionally set about identifying, training and grooming the next generation because as we see at the beginning of the book of Judges, there was *no one* to carry on Joshua's good work and build on the 'gains' that he had made.

of Malaysia into.

No doubt, as older men, we should have accumulated wisdom, experience and connections, but like Moses we also need the energy, strength and "push" of the younger men to bring God's work to completion.

In my recent travels to Europe, I noted sadly that more than 80 percent of the churches there have congregations where the number of young people is less than 10 percent of the membership.

My concern for the nations, as for

• SEE NEXT PAGE

However, not every accusation ought to be entertained. 1 Tim. 5:19 says: “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.” That’s the starting point.

Confession & Repentance

If found guilty of the alleged sin, the leader should resign from the position held. He is also expected to confess and repent. He confesses in word and repents/turns from the sin in deed.

The sin has hurt the entire Body and the confession must be public, for example in a special service for church members only. The fallen leader asks for forgiveness from the church and his family. The church in return pledges to extend forgiveness.

Restoration to Fellowship

The fallen leader is then restored to the fellowship of believers. He may be required to stay away for a period of time for reflection and intensive counselling, but he remains very much a part of the church.

Restoration to Ministry

In principle, no sin should forever preclude restoration to ministry, whether in the same church or elsewhere. If the fallen leader intends to be restored to ministry, a way should be made for him.

The following is a typical process of restoration to the ministry. A special restoration committee is formed consisting of leadership inside and outside the church. This committee counsels the fallen leader over a specified period of time, depending on the severity of the sin committed, and makes periodic reports to the church’s main leadership.

When the requirements of counselling and repentance have been fulfilled, another special congregational meeting should be held to formally accept the full recovery of the fallen leader. This meeting ought to be conducted at the church where the sin was committed and discovered, and not at another church whose members did not bear the pain



of view this cannot be verified and a negative decision could have been made earlier. So there is practically no way for the person to return to ministry (at least in the same place).

The tragedy of King Saul should be a warning for all of us not to take things for granted. An unwillingness to repent at the earliest opportunity may not only

“While the well-being of the sheep and the reputation of the church must be protected, the welfare of the fallen leader is worthy of equal concern. The ultimate aim is not to punish but to restore the fallen person.”

of the leader’s fall. Of course, once this is done, the leader may serve in another church at a later time.

It is essential that the counselling process balances sternness and grace. Too many hurdles or red tape discourages the sincere person who wants to go through the process. In the end, rules cannot help anyone. The wisdom and discretion of the restoration committee are what count.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

In some real cases, a leader who had fallen from grace was not allowed to return to the ministry. This could be due to the extraordinary nature of the sin, or the attitude shown by the leader when the sin was being uncovered.

In a recent much-publicised case, the overseers decided on permanent dismissal based on the second reason. The lesson for all leaders is that trust, once broken, is very difficult restore.

While from a divine point of view the fallen leader may later meet the criteria of total repentance, from a human point

bar the door to future ministry, it may also cause our own hearts to harden.

There is a larger issue. How do we select our leaders? Is it based on the characteristics mentioned in 1 Tim. 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9, or based on personal charisma? Sometimes churches are so eager to rush their wounded leaders back to the frontline when there are so many faithful believers in the pews who are qualified to take on the leadership. We don’t want to “shoot the wounded” but we really ought to require high moral standards in the leadership.

Having said the above, however, it must be reiterated that no sin should in principle bar a leader from ever returning to ministry. In fact, after a genuine and painful process of repentance, the once-fallen leader may become even more effective.

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (Jn. 13:35) This is what community is all about. The ultimate test of all our talk is our walk in love.

In conclusion, let us keep ourselves from sin, encourage others (especially our leaders) towards holiness and be kind to those who fall. Who knows, someday we may need that grace too. ■

ours, is for the vitality and health of the Church of Jesus Christ in the generations to come.

It’s time to be practical. Let’s begin to “just do it.” Believe in our youths,

encourage them, sponsor them and make room for them.

Without doubt, unlike the current stock market situation, it is time to “buy, buy, buy” as we seek to “buy into” and invest in tomorrow’s successors, today. ■

Toxic Leaders: How Not to Lead

Nobody starts out to be toxic. Neither does anyone aspire to be a toxic leader. Toxicity, like a wild gangrene, grows in us. It is a built-up trait. It thrives on chaotic environment.

It surrounds itself with other toxic loyalists and kills off those who don't follow their rules.

In other words, toxic leaders can create hell on earth! In this first part of a two-part article, **JOHN NG** explores how one becomes a toxic leader.

"The spirit of an organisation is created at the top." ~ Peter Drucker ¹

*"We're worshipful of top executives who seem charismatic, visionary and tough. So long as they're lifting profits and stock prices, we're willing to overlook that they can also be callous, conning, manipulative, deceitful, verbally and psychologically abusive, remorseless, exploitative, self-delusional, irresponsible and megalomaniacal. So we collude in the elevation of leaders who are sadly insensitive to hurting others and society at large."
~ Alan Deutschman ²*

Popularity and power have an intoxicating effect

Unfettered power and undeniable popularity can condition a leader to believe in his own publicity. The road to hell is paved with many good intentions. Most toxic leaders start off wanting to make the world better. And they did so, at least initially. However, success and fame eventually get into their heads. They become more powerful as their followers, having tasted victory, entrust them with more and more power. Very soon, their popularity turns into grandiose delusions and fame into infamy.

Self-centered Arrogance: Believing that we can do no wrong

Peter Drucker warns, "The leader who basically focuses on himself or herself is going to mislead. The three most charismatic leaders in this century inflicted more suffering on the human race than almost any trio in history: Hitler, Stalin and Mao."³

Pride is essentially self-centeredness

paraded on the stage with a spotlight shining on the "special one." The others in the team pale into insignificance or at most, serve as a supporting cast. Toxic leaders believe that they are the "special ones" and therefore untouchable.

"The psychopath has no allegiance to the company at all, just to self. A psychopath is playing a short-term parasitic game," reports Paul Babiak, an industrial psychologist.

They live on their followers and the followers on them. It becomes an incestuous co-dependency. This leads to the belief by their followers that they can do no wrong. Or even if they do, their mistakes and misdemeanors are covered up or justified. "Anyway, who can be perfect?" is the mantra for their coterie of hangers-on.

Crises serve and reinforce self-belief and position

Crises often offer positive opportunities for toxic leaders to thrive because they can crystallise the agenda to achieve focus for accomplishing tasks. Bureaucratic obstacles can be bypassed in the name of "survival." Often leaders like to keep their organisations in constant crisis mode so that they can perpetuate their powers, philosophy and policies.

In a cover story, "Is Your Boss A Psychopath?" Alan Deutschman, a senior writer for *FastCompany*, writes, "There's evidence that the business climate has become more hospitable to psychopaths in recent years." And "...the New Economy, with its rule-breaking and roller-coaster results, is just dandy for folks with psychopathic traits."⁵



Severe downsizing, restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, fueled by an uncertain economy allow toxic leaders to thrive as they have no difficulty dealing with the consequences of rapid change like chopping off people, cooking the books, and displaying

uncouth behaviors.

Paul Babiak asserts, "Organisational chaos provides both the necessary stimulation for psychopathic thrill-seeking and sufficient cover for psychopathic manipulation and abusive behavior."

Unchecked weakness – Blind loyalty is rewarded

Although character flaws begin to surface and loom large, this is often left unchecked. In fact, their weakness is covered up by their strengths. Alan Deutschman reports that psychopathic bosses are typically likeable.

They make us believe that they reciprocate loyalty and friendship. They have developed an actor's expertise in evoking our empathy which makes it easier for them to "play" us.⁶

According to Michael Maccoby, a psychotherapist, "They have an element of emotional intelligence, of being able to see our emotions very clearly and manipulate them."⁷ When we realise that they were conning us all along, we feel betrayed.

With their consolidated power and unchallenged authority, whistle blowers are very few in between. Loyalists are recognised and championed.

. . .

Hope in Malaysia

THE Celebration of Hope Malaysia (COHM) is an initiative of the Malaysian Church together with BGEA to reach out to the community with the love of Jesus.

This 10-month project, which will culminate during Christmas season, is based on the biblical model of “Friends of Matthew”, where Matthew invited his friends to his house for a meal while listening to Jesus.

Numerous churches under various denominations throughout Malaysia are participating in the project that will train, equip and mobilise individual Christians to capitalise on the Christmas season to share Christ’s love.

The COHM office is located at 16A, Jalan SS2/72, Petaling Jaya.

The contacts are: 7710 3721 (tel.); and 7710 3750 (fax). ■

As a result, the toxic leaders’ growing weaknesses and corrupt schemes are left unimpeded. ■



John Ng, Ph.D, is the president of Meta HR & Communication, a ministry of Eagles Communications Singapore. This article first appeared in the March 2006 issue of MetaTrends, the organisation’s leadership publication. Printed with permission.

Next issue: Check your toxicity level with these seven questions

Endnotes

1 Drucker, P. & Maciariello, 2004. J.A. The Daily Drucker. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. New York, NY. USA.

2 Deutschman, A. Is Your Boss A Psychopath? Fast Company, July 2005 pp 46–51.

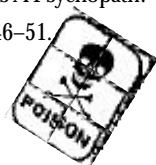
3 Drucker, P. & Maciariello, 2004. J.A. The Daily Drucker. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. New York, NY. USA.

4 Deutschman, A. Is Your Boss A Psychopath? Fast Company, July 2005 pp 46–51.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid



The Right to Profess

By Lim Heng Seng

When we talk about freedom of religion, we usually think about the right to profess and practice religion.

That is right, but freedom of religion goes beyond that – it includes the right **not** to have a religion.

Just like a person cannot be subjected against his wish or will to profess or to belong in any religion, he cannot be compelled to profess a religion.

However, this freedom (to have or not to have a religion) applies only to those of the majority age (18 years and above).

Those below the majority age come under the charge of their parents or guardians and are required by law to be subject to their guardians’ choice of religion.

The right to profess a religion includes the right to: believe or have faith in a religion according to one’s conscience, declare openly and affirm by words or deeds one’s faith and allegiance to the religion of one’s choice.

Furthermore, the individual has the right to wear some apparel – for example a “tudung” (headscarf) or a symbol (a cross as a mark) – to show that he is an adherent and a follower of that particular religion.

Other aspects of “profession of religion” include:

- Adopting a religion where the individual had no previous religious convictions;
- Adopting another religion or changing one’s religion or converting to another religion of one’s conviction; and
- Assuming a new name which may have religious significance, or abandoning and renouncing a former name which also has such significance.

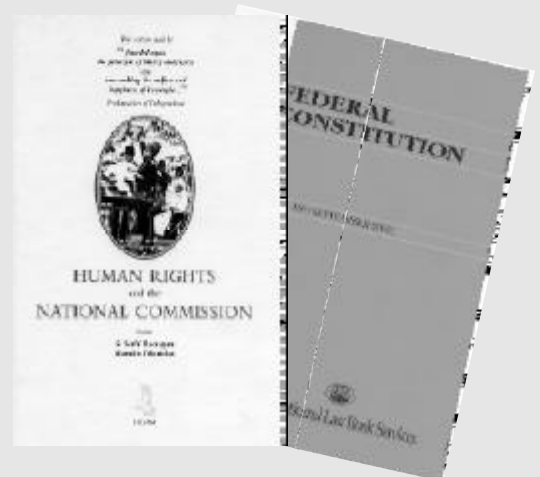
Article 3 of the Federal Constitution, which guarantees citizens the freedom to practise their religion, has two aspects.

Firstly, everyone is to practise his religion peaceably and harmoniously; and secondly, everyone must be permitted to practise his religion in peace and harmony, that is, without unconstitutional compulsion or interference.

The right to practise one’s religion constitutes the active and participatory aspects of the freedom of religion, which includes the right to take part in various forms of worship, prayer, observances, rites, ceremonies and rituals.

Other elements of this right are:

- The right to assemble and associate for religious purposes;



- The right to free and fair access to the principal scriptures, as well as other religious literature, is fundamental to the practice of religion; and

- The right to own, publish and disseminate these literatures and the use of modern media of communication is an integral part of this right.

However, all these are subject to Article 11(5) which limits the exercise of religious freedom on three grounds: public order, public health and morality. ■

(Lim Heng Seng is the former chairman of the Industrial Court and now a senior partner at a legal firm. He is also a member of the NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Commission.)

Onward, children intercessors

Children are sensitive to God's voice and He will use them to be His agents of transformation in their homes, communities and the nation. That's why He is actively raising them for the ministries of intercession, praise and worship, healing and prophecy.

And because they have the same Holy Spirit that resides in adults, they have the same potential to do great exploits for God. Participants shared this conviction at the recent Children In Prayer National Consultation in Johor Baru after hearing the reports from various ministries targeted at children, such as Viva Network, Esther Network and Grace Manna House.

About 90 people involved in ministries to children attended the consultation organised by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission. They concurred that both the Church and parents have a crucial role in efforts to raise "praying and worshipping children".

And to help the Church and parents in their efforts, they agreed to form a National Children's Prayer Network under NECF., and led by its Executive Secretary (Prayer), Ann Low, as National Coordinator.

Regional heads were also appointed. They are: Pr Mei Soon (North); Lei Wah

(Central); Elder Lim and Priscilla Ng (East Coast); Carol Perumal (South); Mei Chan (Sabah); and Pat Wong (Sarawak).

The network set several objectives, some of which are:

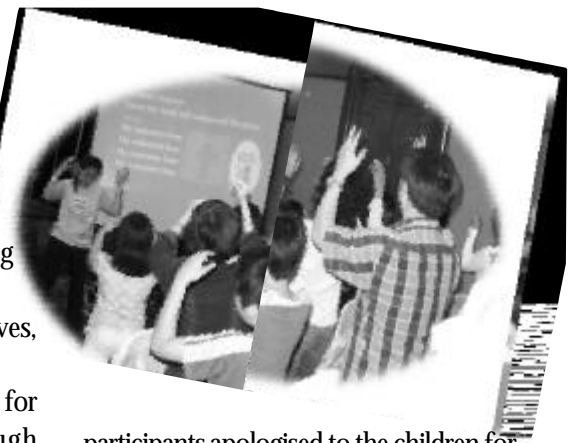
- To bring awareness and passion for raising children in prayer through equipping and mentoring; and
- To identify and link with existing organisations/ministries that work with children.

At the start of the consultation, Ann shared the need to raise awareness and passion on the role of children in intercession.

Speaker Pr Sam Phun then spoke about the importance of knowing our children well enough to be able to reach out to them. "What is required is work, mentoring, prayer and uncompromising faithfulness to God's call in raising a new generation for His end-time purposes," he said.

The consultation closed with a time of commissioning and anointing for all participants as they sought God for direction in the task ahead – to inspire, develop and mobilise children to pray.

Some children were present at the consultation and there was a meaningful time of repentance as the adult



participants apologised to the children for neglecting them and failing to follow through their calling. The children responded by apologising for being disobedient and not recognising the love that God had given in their lives. There was hardly a dry eye during this time of renewal.

Commenting on the consultation, one participant said it was an eye-opener to learn that children are a big part of the Church and members of the Body of Christ; they have the same Holy Spirit and gifts that adults have. Another delegate who found the consultation an eye-opener is Tan Phaik Hoon from Viva Network, who was amazed at the way God is moving to raise children as powerful partners in His work.

Perhaps the best comment came from Carmen Chew, 12, who said, "I wish there was more time to learn about God. The time you gave us to learn is too little because this is such a useful and interesting meeting." ■

Central Region Prayer Consultation

Third Prayer Network Formed

AMID the troubles in this land, God's people have been entrusted with the responsibility to gather to share, consult, pray and strategise. And as the country faces increasing internal and external threats, there is now great urgency to pray for the nation.

"God is interested in nations and He has changed the course of nations as history has shown. I believe our nation too can change," said Rev. Andy Chi.

The chairman of the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission was speaking at the first Central Region Prayer Consultation

in February, attended by 51 delegates from 34 churches in the central region (Selangor, Wilayah and Perak).

He shared NECF's vision, which is to unite the Body of Christ for a transformed nation. The consultation, organised by the commission, aims to mobilise churches to network and pray to achieve the vision.

Keynote speaker NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong talked about the national challenges, particularly religious activism, and pointed to the book of Esther to show how Christians

should engage themselves in the nation's affairs.

Engaging the government is a necessary part of our Christian responsibility, he stressed. Sadly, most Christians are apathetic towards politics because they consider it dirty.

He also cautioned intercessors not to be "triumphalistic" but to get "down to earth". In his conclusion, he exhorted, "Powerful movements begin with people, small groups of men and women, who are willing to tithe their time and abilities outside their own scope of ministry."

Joni to Join Celebration in Malaysia

Joni Eareckson Tada, the plucky lady who has inspired millions all over the world with her life and books, will be coming to Malaysia in July to grace NECF Malaysia's 25th anniversary.

Renowned throughout the world as the indomitable quadriplegic who paints by holding a brush in her mouth, Joni is founder and CEO of *Joni and Friends*, an organisation aimed at accelerating Christian ministry in the disabled community.

She has written over 35 books, some of which are *Tell Me The Truth*, *A Victory Through Suffering Heaven... Your Real Home*, and *Life and Death Dilemma*, and her international best-selling autobiography, *Joni*. She also co-authored *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty* (co-authored by Steve Estes), a book that systematically examines the mystery of suffering.

Joni's life as a quadriplegic started in 1967 after a diving accident. During her two years of rehabilitation, she spent long months learning how to paint with a brush between her teeth. Her fine art paintings and prints are sought after and collected. After the two-year rehabilitation, Joni re-entered the community with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations.

Joni's work has mainly focused on influencing the church on disability-related issues. However, her impact is felt beyond the Christian community. Her role as a disability advocate led



to a presidential appointment to the National Council on Disability for three and a half years, during which time the Americans with Disabilities Act became law. In 2005, Joni Eareckson Tada was appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department.

Joni has received numerous awards, including *The American Academy of Achievement's Golden Plate Award* and *Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award* by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. She is also the first woman to be honoured by the National Association of Evangelicals as their "Layperson of the Year."

Joni is married to Ken Tada, who in 2001 received the Family Life Ministries' *Robertson McQuilken Award* honouring "The Courageous Love of a Marriage Covenant Keeper."

Joni will be speaking at the following meetings organised by NECF:

- NECF anniversary banquet on July 30 (Monday) night at Dewan PGRM, Kuala Lumpur;
- National Pastors and Leaders Consultation on July 31 (Tuesday); and
- NECF public meeting on July 31 night.

Our barometer of success before the Lord is when local churches gather to pray and members tithe to this cause. This will not be an individual success but a corporate success, and the favour of God will be on His people."

During the consultation, representatives from various towns in the states shared the challenges their towns are facing. They then broke into small groups for intercession. They also prayed for locations which do not have any church or whose churches have less than 20 Christians (listing compiled from the Department of Statistics).

At the end of the consultation, the

delegates agreed to form a central prayer network aimed at building relationships and mobilising prayer in the region.

State coordinators were appointed, being Dr Chan Geok Oon for Perak; Jeremiah Gun (assisted by Leong Dai May) for Selangor; and Pr Looi Kok Khim (assisted by Pr Rennie Tan and Pr Josephine Lu) for Wilayah.

This is the third regional prayer consultation, the first two being the northern and southern peninsular regions.

The commission is currently planning the fourth consultation for East Coast churches and hopes to establish a national prayer network by year end. ■



BLOWN AWAY... Ling Bek Sing, senior pastor of High Praise Ipoh and Church of Sitiawan, was blown away by the surprise birthday celebration the delegates gave him at the consultation. Strengthening relationship is a high priority for the prayer leaders and intercessors.

Current Concerns for your prayers

No need for consent of non-Muslim spouse

A Muslim convert can make an application to the syariah court to convert his/her underage children without the consent of the non-Muslim spouse (*NST, Mar 14*). In a landmark ruling on the case of R. Subashini, the Court of Appeal also held that a non-Muslim married to a person who has converted to Islam has to seek remedy in the syariah court over family matters.

However, the three Court of Appeal judges were divided in their opinions, with Datuk Gopal Sri Ram taking the dissenting view. Judges Datuk Suriyadi Halim Omar and Datuk Hasan Lah dismissed with costs the appeal of Subashini, 28, a company secretary, who wanted an injunction to restrain her husband, Muhammad Shafi Saravanan Abdullah, 30, a businessman, from: i) converting their two children, Dharvin Joshua, 3, and one-year-old Sharvind to Islam; and ii) commencing any proceeding in any syariah court with regard to their civil marriage.

Subashini is appealing to the Federal Court against the Court of Appeal's decision.

Suriyadi said from the Islamic point of view, the marriage between Shafi and Subshini had ended upon his conversion and the next step was a formal dissolution of the marriage.

Hasan said the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 gave Subshini the right to apply to the High Court but the civil court could not issue a stay order (under the Specific Relief Act 1950) on matters involving the syariah court. "The wife is therefore in a catch-22 situation. But she has a recourse under a provision in the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) Act," he said, adding that Subashini could apply

to the Syariah Appeal Court to exercise its supervisory and revisionary powers to make a ruling on the legality of the husband's application on grounds that the syariah court lacked jurisdiction and that she was a non-Muslim.

Sri Ram said the syariah courts only have jurisdiction over persons professing the Islamic faith and added that the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984 conferred jurisdiction on the syariah court over matrimonial matters only where all parties to the proceedings were Muslims.

"It would therefore appear that in the present case the syariah court has no jurisdiction as the husband (Shafi) is a Muslim while the wife, a Hindu."

He said the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 gave the High Court the jurisdiction to hear a wife's petition despite the husband converting to Islam. The injunction sought by Subaashini was only against the husband and not the syariah court, and as such, the High Court had erred in law in not giving Subshini the relief she had sought.

The judges' varied opinions once again highlight the urgent need to clarify the laws. Pray for justice for those who are caught in cases such as this, and for the authorities, particularly the Attorney-General, to act quickly and decisively to solve the many issues arising from our dual legal system. (Read also statement on page 12 for further information.) ■

Corruption watch

Police are investigating two top leaders for corruption after allegations against them were posted on the Internet.

ACA director-general Datuk Seri Zulkipli Mat Noor is accused of being involved in immoral and criminal activities, but police are probing whether he declared his assets. Deputy Internal Security Minister Datuk Mohd Johari Baharum is being investigated over allegations that he had received more than

RM5 million for releasing three Emergency Ordinance detainees.

Commenting on the latter case, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan said, "We cannot say the allegation is baseless until the probe is completed. There has been a lot of finger-pointing which has led to some confusion." (*NST, Mar 5*)

On the ACA chief's case, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said, "Under our judiciary system, a man is innocent until proven guilty and he's not found guilty by the newspapers but by the courts of law." (*The Star, Mar 2*)

The most assuring comments came from the Prime Minister who, when commenting on the two cases, said, "...people and we (the top leaders) want a clean, good and corruption-free Government and an administration that provides high quality and excellent services."

Pray for transparency, integrity, courage and fairness on the part of the police as they investigate these two cases (and all other cases). The authorities will live up to the words of Datuk Seri Nazri, "The law should apply equally to everyone, regardless of his position." (*The Star, Mar 2*) ■

Education system overhaul

The National Education Blueprint that was unveiled in January is another effort to overhaul our national education system – something that has been recognised, and presumably admitted, by many to be one of our major challenges in the 21st century.

We know what needs to be fixed, the question now is whether there is enough desire to push through and implement this "blueprint of collective wisdom", as Zainul Arrifin said in his column in *The New Straits Times* on Jan 24.

He raised the question: Will there be

Current Concerns for your prayers

enough people – and may we add, the political will - who would be willing to compromise racial, religious and political interests for the greater good?

Let's pray earnestly for our leaders to have the political will and the courage to push through the necessary changes that will help towards building future citizens who are respectful of each other's differences, and who are ready to face a globalised world. As Zainul cautioned, "The generations ahead will reap, or suffer, by our deeds." ■

Sports and youths

Sports is probably the best remedy to counter drug abuse and social ills among youths, according to Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Azalina Othman Said.

Statistics show there are over 12,000 new drug addicts in 2005, of which over 8,500 are Malays.

Meanwhile a UKM survey on 887 troubled schoolgirls has found all but one of them have had sex. The three-month High Risk Female Youth Profile Study, which ended last December, took 20 problem schoolgirls aged between 15 and 16 from each school in a state.

A local daily reported that it is believed the study was initiated by the Selangor state government who wanted to formulate a special training module to promote high moral values among the girls based on the study.

Apart from sex, the study also showed that most of the respondents took drugs, indulged in pornography, and were involved in secret societies, vandalism and truancy.

Most of them were poor in their academic achievements, communication skills, had low self-esteem and lacked problem-solving skills.

Pray firstly that our Christian youths will be a good role model to society. Pray for churches and Christian parents to exercise their responsibilities in nurturing godly youths. ■

Temperatures rising

Our highlands are warming up, with temperatures there rising between 2°C and 3°C in the last 25 years due to the clearing of forests and over-development (*The Star*, 26 Feb). Global Environment Centre (GEC) director Faizal Parish said the clearing of trees had resulted in a "microclimate change", which means a climate change within that area. Faizal said trees cooled the air around them and added that one big tree is the equivalent to 10 air conditioners.

"While 1°C or 2°C does not sound like much, these small changes can cause major changes in the rainfall and weather patterns, which in turn can affect crops," he said.

Another report said that Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Baru and Putrajaya are 5°C hotter than other cities in the country (*The Star*, Mar 6).

This is due to the rapid development and the lack of trees. The nights are also hotter due to the concrete surfaces and grounds covered with tar and tiles which trap heat during the day and release it during the night.

Drainage and Irrigation Department deputy director-general (I) Ahmad Fuad Embi said that low-maintenance plants such as palms, instead of trees that provide more shade, do not help to cool temperatures.

The temperature of the "concrete" cities can hit 40°C, a contributing factor to global warming that brings about heavy rain and flash floods.

Climate change has caused environmental disasters that have struck the world over. Malaysia has not been spared, as the recent devastating floods in Johore have proven. Pray that our leaders will look seriously into the ill effects of haphazard development and take stern measures to guard the environment.

Ahmad Fuad has also recommended

that Malaysia follows the guidelines provided by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives to reduce damage to the environment. The guidelines include six "cooling" policies that will help bring down temperatures in the cities. Pray for the authorities to heed the warning and recommendations of the experts.

Meanwhile, Asean has finally come up with a tangible plan to fight the region's annual haze problem after 11 years of countless meetings (*The Star*, Mar 5). Singapore and Malaysia will help Indonesia in, among other things, executing methods of land clearing without burning and managing different types of land.

Praise God for this as the yearly haze has caused much distress for many, especially those in the Klang Valley. Pray for an increased awareness on the need to care for our environment. ■

Traffic police

Motorcyclists form the majority of those who died in road accidents, according to Federal traffic chief Senior Asst Comm (II) Datuk Nooryah Md Anvar. To check this problem, she has directed her staff to conduct frequent roadblocks to nab offenders.

She also issued a directive to her officers to seize motorcycles without road tax and insurance and if the riders do not have licences. The efforts has begun to pay off as deaths of motorcyclists have been halved from a daily average of 10.

Traffic police also conducted a massive roadblock exercise on Feb 24 midnight and within 24 hours, they rounded up 5,000 motorcyclists in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Terengganu and Selangor.

Pray for the traffic police, especially for their chief Nooryah, as they work diligently to keep public roads safe. Pray also that firm action will be taken against corrupt traffic police. ■

? The Rev. Howard Peskett, former Dean of the Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, discussed the epidemic search for doctorates in America.¹ Peskett also mentioned a proposal that combined the appetite for degrees with the search for equality: to award doctorates to everyone at birth!

The above sentiments are not entirely frivolous as theological educators and students are all too aware that many theological courses need to be improved, re-written and re-packaged. Such a crisis has in turn produced an epidemic search for credentials and degrees, if not for 'paper qualifications', or some form of training that is relevant and immediately useful to a pragmatically purpose-driven church.

prays and walks with God" and "a personal experiential knowledge of God and His Word" – to the bad press and negative images that these two terms have acquired in modern times in too many circles. It is sufficient to know that, as in all disciplines and professions, we can seek to "reclaim theology from the theologians" by our integrity and passion for God and the truth, and for our present context.

What has been happening in Afghanistan, the Middle East and elsewhere since the infamous Sept 11 bombing seems to have further hardened the perception that - whether in Christendom or in Islam – "theologians" (especially of the fundamentalist variety) are dangerous or irrelevant.

In actual fact, such events could be used to demonstrate the opposite claim: the very *failure* to critically reflect and

(or university) for producing "unemployable graduates". But for the seminary/university to follow the dictates of the Church/State uncritically is to forfeit its intellectual and prophetic witness to the sanctity and unity of all truth. Yet not to relate closely to the Church makes the Seminary an irrelevant ivory tower without a pastoral base. Such confusions and tensions are reflected in the three areas below:

- The current pastoral theology and practices, church leadership and management.

- The well-intentioned but somewhat indiscriminate proliferation of independent or local church-based and Christian NGO-sponsored theological or Bible schools and institutes. Too many of these are not accredited by any credible national or international education or theological body.



Such a scenario reflects the misunderstanding of the purpose and function of theological education among church leaders, as well as the shortcomings of many theological institutions themselves. This is especially true when they become more 'market driven' to produce more graduates to serve the churches and to upgrade their programmes the way some businesses 'upgrade' their brands!

We need not here trace the rise and decline of theological and education institutions from the early church monastic movements through the medieval cathedral schools and universities that made theology the queen of the sciences. We also do not need to trace the developments that the terms "theologian" and "theology" underwent from initially in the early monastic tradition – respectively as "a man who

theologise properly, leading to the possibility of not only ultra-fundamental Islamic groups like the Talibans or Al-Qaeda, but also the ultra-right wing, Bible-thumping "evangelicals" who have been nicknamed "Christian Talibans". At another level, without theological reflection, we can also see that if there are some Muslims who are blindly pro-Arab and all things Arab, there are also some Christians who are blindly pro-Israel and all things Jewish.

We should note that there is more unity or tolerance among churches now, as among the major seminaries, but there are continuing tensions between Church and Seminary. This is tragic, although it is paralleled by the tensions between the State and the University ("Town and Gown"). The two respective pairs of entities ought to work together. Instead, the Church (or State) accuses the Seminary

- The epidemic quest for diplomas, bachelor's, masters and doctoral degrees.

Degrees are not necessarily indicative of quality training. Hence the joke among many is that the church can "die by degrees", or that Jesus (or the prophets, the 12 disciples, or John the Baptist) never had a degree. Two decades ago, a Christian NGO leader boasted that the only degree needed was "P.E." – Personal Experience or otherwise "P.H.D." – Preaching, Healing and Deliverance.

Today, Malaysian Christian leaders, including those from the independent churches, are more conscious of the need for more than just "P.E.". Their issues with regards theological training are with relevance, duration, stream (evangelical or charismatic – today both words need qualification) and etc.

...

Many can see or sense that since the Reformation, not only has the Word of God gone back to the laity, but also the Ministry of the Word such as preaching and teaching in the Church – as well as the Sacraments, including the marrying and the burying of the dead in non-denominational, independent churches – in line with their view of the priesthood of believers.

Besides being the new clergy in church, they are also multi-gifted high-income professionals or corporate figures in the marketplace.

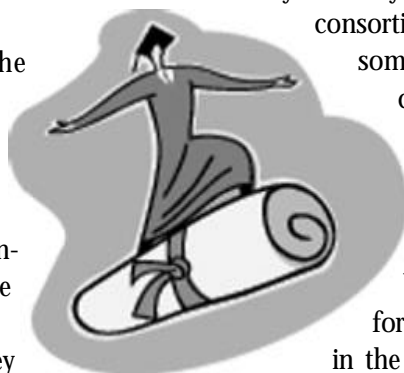
In the past, “ordinary” males go into church work, and the “cleverer” ones, if they love the Lord, dominate in the larger “Kingdom work” outside the church in Christian and secular NGOs and volunteer social concern ministries.

Today, these gifted articulate market-place leaders and professionals dominate in the church and are the church board or council members, especially in the non-denominational, newer independent or “emerging” churches. Some are lay-pastors themselves.

Many can even be suspicious of traditional seminary-trained or ordained ministers. This is natural but unfortunate, coming as they often do from the corporate world. This situation can lead to the corporatisation of the church.

While some leaders still place emphasis on their “P.E.”, including their achievements and networks, they can also be seduced by such advertisements as “experience is important, but degrees do help” (to open further doors? to gain further credibility, especially in the target circle or field of service, such as in church and Christian work local or overseas? and hopefully not just to go on an ego trip!).

With the above factors and influences combined, we can see why there is such a variety of degrees and awards offered



by a variety of theological institutions, initiatives and consortiums in a variety of ways. These include sometimes, as an over-generous transfer of credits and other provisions to customise programmes and courses to fit the prospective candidate’s past experience and achievements, in order to grant them advanced or mature standing that they may be the more speedily accredited or equipped for the church. Such a desire to produce results in the guise of producing qualified or certified church workers have made some church schools do away with exams and written assignments. In other instances, students are seldom failed.

God’s work done in God’s way – like Elijah’s or Samuel’s Schools of prophets of old – will never be irrelevant.

The Church belongs to Him. Theological education and its future are for the Church and the advancement of His Kingdom. Even if the above confusion and tensions amount to a crisis, each crisis carries an opportunity and challenge – even in the context of our multi-cultural, multi-religious society with Islam as the official and dominant religion, rampant materialism, modern and post-modern challenges.

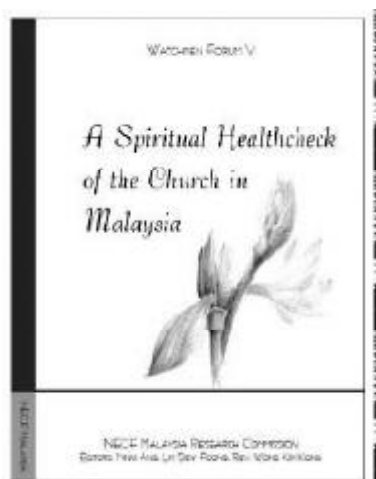
We may not always be able to respond to the external socio-political challenges, but we can certainly try to manage two categorical, internal or institutional, challenges within our Church-seminary Christian community.

This extract is contributed by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. Read the full article in the Watchmen Forum V book entitled “A Spiritual Healthcheck of the Church in Malaysia”, available from NECF at RM12 per copy. See below for more information.

Endnotes

¹ Howard Peskett, “Tweedle D. D./Tweedle D. Dum” in *Eternity* magazine, June 1978 issue. ■

How healthy is the Church in Malaysia?



What are the current issues that the Malaysian Church is grappling with? Find out from this book published by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. The fifth in the commission’s Watchmen Forum series, the book covers topics ranging from spirituality to Christian education to the environment.

Feedback from a reader in the U.S.A via e-mail

“Very impressed by the articles. It was hard for me not to want to repent on behalf

of the American Church, which has in many ways infected the world with a very shallow Christian experience. You describe it as individualism, where I see it as a primary narcissism of the (especially charismatic) wing of the Church in America.

We have exported growth for the sake of growth, magic vs maturity in Christ. Having a focus on spiritual formation or discipleship is a key to reverse the lack in many congregations.

Thanks for exposing this problem, and may God give you and key leaders of the Malaysian Church grace to reverse the self absorption of the church at large.” –Stan Stan E. DeKoven, Ph.D., President, Vision International Education Network, California, USA. ■

Government must safeguard rights of all Malaysians

MCCBCHST
Press Statement

In the wake of the majority decision of the Court of Appeal in the case of Saravanan A/L Thangathony v. Subashini A/P Rajasingam [Rayuan Sivil No. W-02-955-2006] we, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), are greatly disappointed that once again, the non-converting non-Muslim wife of a convert to Islam has failed to get relief from our Civil Courts.

Hitherto, in the case of S. Shamala, she was told by the High Court that it had no jurisdiction to declare as unlawful her young children's conversion into Islam without her knowledge or consent and was advised to seek the assistance of the Islamic authorities. Following that, the widow of Everest hero, the late Sgt. M. Moorthy, also failed to get relief from the High Court on the ground of jurisdiction.

Following an uproar from civil society, the Right Honorable Prime Minister declared that although Article 121(1A) of the Constitution would not be amended, laws will be amended to remedy the situation. Though it has been more than a year since then, there have been no amendments to any law as yet to clarify the jurisdiction of the Courts. We regret that our Civil Courts have continued to fail in their constitutional duty to protect the rights of all Malaysians, including non-Muslims, as can be seen in this latest case.

In Subashini's case, the husband converted to Islam and converted the elder son, aged 3, to Islam without the wife's knowledge or consent. The husband then applied to the Syariah Court for custody of the son, again with no notice to the wife.

The wife then presented a petition for divorce and ancillary relief and applied to the High Court for an injunction restraining the husband from (i) converting the children of the marriage to Islam, and (ii) commencing or continuing with any proceedings in any Syariah Court with regard to the marriage or the children of the marriage. The High Court initially granted an injunction after hearing only the wife, who at that time did not know of the substance of her husband's applications in the Syariah courts.

This injunction was continued whilst the case was heard in the High Court. After the husband submitted his evidence, and after the High Court heard both parties, it refused to give the injunction. However, the High Court granted an interim injunction to the wife pending the hearing of an appeal to the Court of Appeal, known as an "Erinford Injunction".

The majority decision of the Court of Appeal dismissed the wife's appeal and set aside the Erinford Injunction with cost, effectively shutting the door on Subashini's rights as a mother to prevent the Syariah court making a determination as to her marriage and as to the custody of her children. To add

to her problem, the majority ruled that Subashini, a non-Muslim, must apply to the Syariah Court, instead of applying to the High Court. Of particular concern to us is the statement by YA Dato' Hasan Lah, JCA, that the High Court and the Syariah Court must be regarded as having the same standing in this country.

We are also concerned to note that the grounds of judgment of the learned YA Datuk Suriyadi Halim Omar, JCA, quoted a verse from the Quran and appeared to be elevating the role and prominence of Islamic law and the Islamic judicial system in Malaysia.

We would respectfully remind members of the Judiciary that the Federal Court, Court of Appeal and the High Courts in Malaya and in Sabah and Sarawak are all civil courts and Judges of those courts take an oath of office to uphold the Federal Constitution, which guarantees non-Muslims the fundamental liberty of professing and practising their faiths in peace and harmony.

It is very clear and specific in the State legislative list in the 9th Schedule of the Federal Constitution that the "Syariah Courts ... shall have jurisdiction only over persons professing the religion of Islam ...". The learned Judges in the majority appear to note that requirement in their judgments, but with respect, appear to contradict themselves by then requiring the non-Muslim wife to go to the Syariah courts.

We express our objection to any requirement for non-Muslims to have to go to the Syariah Court for relief as such courts apply Islamic theological law. Religious laws cannot be applied to people who do not profess that religion. The Court of Appeal in this case and civil courts are expanding Article 121(1A) of the Federal Constitution.

We are also concerned that Syariah Courts are usurping functions which are not theirs. Consequently, non-Muslims are unable to obtain relief when the Syariah Court makes an order which interferes with their fundamental liberties guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. The Federal Constitution is the supreme law of Malaysia. Our highest court had declared in the case of *Che Omar bin Che Soh v. P.P.* (1988) 2 MLJ 55 that Article 3 of the Constitution was never intended to extend the application of Syaria to the sphere of public law.

We object to any interpretation of our Constitution or our laws that deprive any person of his fundamental liberties, and deny access to a non-Muslim to the High Court applying the general civil law.

We urgently call on the Government to immediately pass laws to safeguard the rights of all Malaysians, so as to ensure non-Muslims have full and proper access to justice. ■

COMING UP

East Malaysia BM Leaders Conference

? **PLACE:** MIRI, SARAWAK

? **DATE:** May 8-10

? **FEE:** Fee: RM90 before April 8 and RM120 thereafter (fee covers accommodation, meals and materials)

- **Speakers:** Rev. Dr Nus Reimas (Chairman of the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship), Rev. Dr Herbert Tan (Leadership Development Consultant at Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ) and Alfred Tais (NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary for the BM Commission)
- **Contact:** Pr Peter Mutang (013-812 9922); or Pr Robin Ato (013- 814 0028)

LEADERSHIP is not just about position but influence. Effective leaders are able to influence their members to accomplish God's will for the church and their lives. How does one become an effective leader? This conference will address this question and many more. Pastors, church leaders and ministry workers are urged to attend.

? **PLACE:** RANAU, SABAH

? **DATE:** May 15-17

? **FEE:** RM90 before April 15 and RM120 thereafter (fee covers accommodation, meals and materials)

- **Speakers:** Rev. Dr Bambang Widjaya (former chairman of the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship and currently an advisor to the fellowship), Rev. Dr Herbert Tan and Alfred Tais
- **Contact:** Pr George Mikil (013-860 8285), Bernard Yong (019-812 3399) or Cathrine Pondong (019-830 2589)

Both conferences are jointly organised by NECF and the Ranau Council of Churches and Pusat SIB Sarawak. Immediately after the conferences, a one-day consultation will be held where the speakers and leaders will discuss the challenges facing their churches and brainstorm ways to overcome them. ■

CFM: Guarantee non-Muslims right to find justice in civil courts

The Christian Federation of Malaysia views with great concern the recent decision of the Court of Appeal in the case of Subashini v. Saravanan, where she, although a non-Muslim, was urged to submit to the jurisdiction of the Syariah courts to seek recourse from the break-up of her family, when her husband converted to Islam. It is troubling to note, and indeed of great concern to all Malaysians, that what is clearly stated in the Federal Constitution, that the Syariah courts shall have jurisdiction only over persons professing the religion of Islam [Schedule 9, List 11 (1)], is now being extended, by the court decision, to include non-Muslims.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia respects the Federal Constitution to be the supreme law of the country [Art 4 (1)], and therefore, it must guarantee the right of all non-Muslim Malaysian citizens to find justice served in the civil courts of the country.

In view of this development, the Christian Federation of Malaysia joins with all other likeminded Malaysians in raising our concern to the government. Decisions like this impact negatively on the social fabric of Malaysia.

We therefore, call on all elected members of Parliament to do everything within their means to defend our Constitution, and to safeguard the right of non-Muslim citizens to find remedy and justice in the civil courts in matters pertaining to civil rights and liberties. ■

Preserving heritage of religious buildings

LIKE other buildings, church buildings or other religious buildings can be designated as a heritage site if they have natural heritage or cultural heritage significance.

This is covered in the National Heritage Act (Act 645) which was gazetted on Dec 31, 2005, and came into effect on Mar 1, 2006. The Act provides for the creation of a National Heritage Register which can be inspected by the members of the public. This register will be administered by the newly-created National Heritage Department under the Ministry, which is headed by the Heritage Commissioner, Prof. Dato' Siti Zuraina Abdul Majid. Find out more about how you can play a role in nominating sites to be included in the register. You may read the Act on the Parliament of Malaysia website - www.parlimen.gov.my The act can also be purchased from the Government Printers at RM13.50 a copy. ■



Due to its rapid economic growth, Selangor is currently the richest, most populous, industrialised and urbanised state in Malaysia. It has the second highest GDP per capita (after Penang) and was declared the first developed state in Malaysia in August 2005.

STATISTICS (MALAYSIA STATISTICS DEPARTMENT, 2005)

Population: 4,736,100 (est.)
Ethnic groups: Malay 50.73%, Other Bumiputera 1.46% (Temuan, Mah-Meri), Chinese 28.07%, Indian 13.45%, Others 1.04%, Non-citizens 5.25% (Indonesian, Myanmar, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese)
Religious Breakdown (2000): Islam 55.7%, Buddhism 24.4%, Hinduism 12.1%, Christianity 4.3%, Taoism/Confucianism 2.0%, Tribal 0.3%, Others 0.4%, No Religion 0.5%, Unknown 0.3%
Incidence of poverty (2004): 1.0%, Hardcore 0.2%

Selangor is about the most modern and “Westernised” state; however, the rise of religious extremism is worrying. While religious freedom (Article 11 of the Federal Constitution) is generally respected, it is restricted to those who do not profess the Islamic faith.

The Selangor Religious Affairs Department (JAIS) closely monitors deviationist teachings and groups that are deemed ‘heretical.’ Those found guilty are sent to the Ulu Yam rehabilitation centre.

Cigarette smoking was decreed *haram* (forbidden) by the Selangor Fatwa Council in 1995 (www.e-fatwa.gov.my); and it is a crime to violate a gazetted *fatwa* (Islamic decree). Such decree was seen by many as downright unrealistic. It has so far not been enforced. In 1995, the council issued a *fatwa* banning Muslim women from participating in beauty contests.

In 1997, JAIS arrested three Muslim girls for taking part in the Miss Malaysia Petite contest. The incident drew intense criticism from several quarters stating that the arrest violated fundamental principles of democracy and fundamental liberties

guaranteed by the Federal Constitution.

The overzealousness of the religious officers and some religious enthusiasts has distressed the non-Muslims in the state. Even before the controversial Moorthy court case was resolved, another tussle for a dead body arose in Banting last July. Discovering that the MyKad of deceased Kandasamy S. had the word ‘Islam’, the police removed the body from Banting Hospital mortuary with no regards for the feelings of his non-Muslim family members. JAIS later declared the deceased a non-Muslim due to lack of evidence.

The latest scramble over deceased Rayappan A. last December brought great embarrassment to the religious authorities. Following an uproar, the Prime Minister intervened and the claim was eventually withdrawn but not without disparaging remarks from both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

The Malaysia Hindu Sangam stated in its June 2006 press statement, “The non-Muslim community now does not know when the Islamic authorities will claim that one of our family members is a Muslim.”

Minister in the Prime Minister’s department, Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili, said that Selangor registered second highest (after Penang) in the number of cases involving social and religious conflicts (*The Star, Jan. 17*).

In recent years, several secondary schools’ Christian fellowships have been closed down when new, overzealous principals took over.

Conflicts of laws

Section 5 of the Syariah Criminal



Offences Enactment 1995 forbids conversion out of Islam to avoid punishment. While the state’s Administration of the Religion of Islam Enactment 2003 has no provision for a Muslim to convert out, Section 61(3)(b)(x) & (xi) of the enactment gives the Syariah High Court the jurisdiction to declare whether a person (living or dead) is a Muslim or not.

Regardless of the constitutional guarantee to the right to propagate, the state religious authorities have since 1988 placed certain restrictions by ratifying the Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Amongst Muslims) Enactment.

Last May, JAIS claimed that Christian and Buddhist missionary groups had, in the guise of social services, spread their teachings to Muslim patients in several hospitals. It ‘counterattacked’ by launching the ‘Rakan Masjid’ programme to encourage Muslim evangelists to frequent hospitals (malaysiakini.com).

Corruption

Several issues in the last two years have given the state government a bad name. The public has oftentimes decried its ineffectiveness and the absence of transparency and sense of priorities for public interests. The Selangor Development Corporation (PKNS) continues to be seen as gravely lacking in accountability.

Last October, the Klang Municipal Council was heavily criticised for appointing three members of a family as municipal councillors. The public fumed when Menteri Besar Dato' Seri Dr Mohamed Khir Toyo said there was nothing wrong in that. Action was, however, taken after the Sultan and the PM intervened.

The MB later admitted that the system was flawed as it allowed law breakers to become councillors (*The Sun, Nov. 15, 2006*) and thus opened doors for misdemeanour and dishonesty. The appalling fact was that three Klang councillors flouted the laws by building lavish mansions without approval, in defiance of the Town and Country Planning Act 1974. They were fined as a result of public protest, but were not disciplined for insulting local government regulations.

Local authorities continue to be criticised for disregarding public views. The de-gazetting of the green lung of Bukit Gasing despite residents' objection is one example. The authorities' weaknesses have also contributed to problems such as environmental damages. The approval of hill-slope developments in violation of guidelines has caused damage to the Bukit Cahaya Seri Alam agricultural park and reserve in Shah Alam. Experts have also linked flood in certain parts of Shah Alam to uncontrolled and irresponsible development.

Public confidence in the local authorities is thus wearing thin. Meanwhile, the MB has consistently declared that "no one is above the law." Recently, at the state government employees' monthly meeting, he reportedly advocated transparency and accountability as two of the four principles of state governance.

The other two were comprehensive participation of all stakeholders and predictability (*Bernama, Jan 15*). When four gambling dens near the Sekinchan police station were exposed, he immediately transferred the Sabak Bernam district council president and ordered action against the Ampang Jaya enforcement officers for negligence of duties.

Neglecting the poor

The Selangor government, in its ambitious pursuit for development, has neglected the wellbeing of the poor, the Orang Asli in particular. For example, the Temuan families were deprived of home due to the state's acquisition of their land in Bukit Tampoi (in Dengkil) to build a highway. The Shah Alam High Court's judgement favoured the Temuan and ordered the state government to pay compensation.

The ruling was also upheld by the Court of Appeal. The court reprimanded the government for treating the Orang Asli "in a most shoddy, cruel and oppressive manner." The state government, the United Engineers (M) Bhd, the Malaysian Highway Authority and the Federal Government are appealing against the Court of Appeal's decision.

Several months ago, the state government ordered five bulldozers to tear down 51 homes in Kampung Berembang. Hundreds of enforcement officers stood and watched while

PRAY FOR

- **State Government:** Transparency, integrity and impartiality for *menteri besar* and all local authorities in governance; Effectiveness and competence in all policy implementations; Wise financial management and good stewardship; Give priority to public interest and wellbeing; Committed to poverty eradication; Implement appropriate development plans without affecting the poor and the environment; and remove corrupt officials.
- Religious freedom provided by the Constitution be upheld and respected by all; sensible religious authorities; against the spirit behind religious zealots.
- Orang Asli be accorded just treatment and dignity
- Decrease in crime
- Sense of civic consciousness and environmental cleanliness in the communities; public health awareness to reduce disease-related illnesses (e.g. dengue).
- **The Church:**
 - Unity (Kingdom-minded, Christ-centred churches)
 - Awareness of challenges facing the Church and wisdom to address them
 - Effective role in issues affecting the community, excels for God in marketplace, passion in rural outreaches.

the residents, with crying children, stood in the rain in despair. It was also reported that 21 residents and activists were detained for hampering the demolition process.

Others

According to the National Crime Index, the first seven months of 2006 saw a sharp rise in crime in the state (second highest after Penang). The state also topped the list of suspected dengue cases with a total of 656 cases reported in the second week of January.

The Church

It has been said that sizable English-speaking churches with marketing savvy and hi-tech cum feel-good worship are found in the Klang Valley. They are financially well off, have the capacity to operate various ministries with attractive evangelistic activities and the ability to organise seminars featuring internationally renowned speakers.

In other words, they are self-sufficient. However, the majority of the churches in Selangor are modest. Though small in size, they quietly and faithfully serve the Lord and are actively reaching out in their own ways to their respective communities. Migrant ministries are flourishing.

Some of the challenges faced by the Church are: the performance-driven inclination, the complacent longtime believers and indifferent second generation Christians, the yet-to-be-reconciled tensions between the modernist-thinking leadership and the discontented intellectual youth, and the rampant consumerism within the church culture.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



IRAN Before Christmas, while Iran's secret police were interrogating more than a dozen newly imprisoned Christian house fellowship leaders, Iran's President Ahmadinejad wished Iran's Christians a happy Christmas.

His message sounded like an attempt to seduce them into believing that Shiite Iran is more Christ-honouring than the 'oppressive powers' in 'Christian states' which have created havoc in Iraq and ruined Iran's Christmas by levelling sanctions against it.

It is reasonable to infer that Ahmadinejad means to seduce the official church of ethnic Armenian and Assyrian Christians into becoming compliant – even grateful – collaborators in exchange for limited 'privileges'. Ahmadinejad could then appear supportive of the church and religious liberty in general.

And Ahmadinejad needs friends. Iranian women, students, intelligentsia and trade unionists are all becoming increasingly courageous in their protest against the regime's repression and belligerence.

Thus, Ahmadinejad's seductive efforts will present the official church with a painful, watershed choice: collaborate or share the persecution.

However, the reality is that Christians who actively evangelise are persecuted. Persecution escalated dramatically through 2006 under Ahmadinejad's direction, and it is expected to escalate in 2007. Reportedly, new government directives will soon place the church even more under the thumb of the intelligence ministry and security forces.

Pray that God will give Iran's Armenian and Assyrian Christians great spiritual discernment and wisdom, as well as moral clarity and courage so that they will not be deceived, seduced or tempted. Pray they will trust God completely.

Pray for Christians who are imprisoned, that God will comfort, protect and deliver them.

Pray for God continuous protection on all Iran's evangelists – from the trained Bible scholar and career missionary to the humble children sharing their simple faith with friends – so that the gospel of salvation through the biblical Jesus can spread across the nation. ■

THAILAND The civil strife in southern Thailand has great repercussions for, not just Malaysia but, the region. Islamic separatists staged at least 49 bombings, shootings and arson attacks during the Chinese New Year period in southern Thailand, killing at least nine and wounding 44.

Suspected Islamic separatists burned down Thailand's biggest rubber warehouse located in Yala. The CNY weekend attacks in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces were the biggest show of force by Islamic separatists in the south since the military seized power in a coup last September.

Some 2,000 people have been killed in three years of unrest (*The Star, Feb 21*). Analysts and officials said the Thai army has become so preoccupied with politics that it is neglecting the problem in the south.

Muslims are terrified to come forward to present information because they fear retribution from a militant movement which treats suspected informants with severe brutality.

Pray for the leaders of the country – especially Gen Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, the nation's first Muslim to head the army – to take firm and wise action to arrest the escalating violence in the region. Pray for success for the army and police personnel in nabbing those responsible for inciting hatred and division, and causing the deaths of many innocent civilians. ■

BURMA The military government has again asked for lists of all the names of Christian children's homes, assemblies, church pastors, leaders, members and families. It has also fixed the time for worship which forbids Christians to meet outside these "official" times.

Christian leaders do not know what the government is going to do with the lists. Pray God gives Christians in Burma peace, wisdom and boldness during this time. Pray for their protection and that their lives will reflect their trust in God, so that many non-believers will be drawn into the the saving knowledge of Christ. ■

KOSOVO The (Muslim) Ottoman Empire occupied the Balkans during the 14th Century. The Christians they subjugated won back their freedom through the 1912–13 Balkan Wars. During the Ottoman era, large numbers of ethnic Albanian Muslims (now called Kosovars) moved into Serbia's southern regions, now known as Kosovo. These Kosovars then rebelled against the resulting Serb rule, protesting that 'their' land was 'occupied'.

This Kosovar separatist cause accelerated from 1941, through the WW2 Nazi-Muslim alliance and the subsequent pro-Albanian, pro-Arab, anti-Serb Communist dictatorship. The Kosovar vs Serbia struggle for Kosovo escalated through the 1990s, erupting into war in 1999. On Feb 2, the UN's special envoy proposed that Kosovo basically be ceded from Serbia to the Kosovars. Ethnic and religious tensions in Kosovo are likely to explode.

Pray for justice and for God to protect the small Orthodox Serb remnant in Kosovo, and for wisdom and divine guidance for the country's political and religious leaders. ■