

Berita NECF

Editorial

Does the Malaysian Church need the Quake?

In the recent June 30 *Newsweek* issue, the front cover had this interesting title, "How the Quake changed China". With the 2008 Beijing Olympics just around the corner, the Sichuan quake couldn't have happened at a worse time.

But the Chinese are a resilient people, thanks to its long history of hardship which has built in them the tenacity to thrive in the worst circumstance. Their resolve and optimism can be seen even in their writing.

In their depiction of the character for crisis, they have chosen to combine the words 'danger' and 'opportunity'.

Having gone through the 7.9-magnitude earthquake that flattened parts of Sichuan, the Chinese government saw the opportunity to rebuild the country, albeit with a heavy price in the loss of 69,000 lives and 17,000 missing, not to mention the material loss.

The quake also brought China as a nation to an unusual display of government transparency and openness. They open their doors to receive aid from old rivals such as Taiwan and Japan. It was a humbling experience when, earlier,

their focus was centred on the infrastructure for the Olympics and the fast pace of economic growth.

The Word of God in James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." What lessons can we learn?

Pride has its way with many of us. As Christians, we claim that we intentionally do not want to be proud; yet by our lifestyle and preference to remain in our comfort zone, we have given the perception that we are a proud people. Until and unless God does a good shake-up, we will continue to remain in our holy cuddle.

The Sichuan disaster drove many out of their comfort zones. It leveled the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and provided the opportunity for the rich to give their wealth for reconstruction and skills to rebuild businesses.

In their suffering, the people saw the need to work together to restore what had been destroyed by the quake. They showed the world that together, they were shaken but not crushed, pressed but not trodden.

Does the Malaysian Church need such a shake-up? We pray not, for we doubt our preparedness to

suffer a fate of this kind, having lived a relatively comfortable and trouble-free existence.

Nevertheless, not our will but His be done and should the good Lord sees it fit to shake our Church for our good end, we ask that He will be merciful to us.

Over the next two years, NECF Malaysia will be working out its national agenda on Nation Building through the Local Church (see Pg 3). We are not waiting for a quake or a disaster to happen to us to get us thinking about preparing for future eventualities; we must begin now.

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Chairman's Message

Black is Black

White is White

*"Woe to those who call evil good, and good
evil; who put darkness for light,
and light for darkness."
(Isa 5:20a NKJ)*



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Who can doubt that there is something deeply wrong in our nation? Apathy characterises many in power – care for the poor and suffering is increasingly impersonal. Honour and respect are in short supply – from the top to the bottom. Promiscuity and perversion are escalating. Crime is becoming rampant. Justice is suspect because selective prosecution is practised.

Some politicians lie and cheat like it is second nature to them, and too many plunder the resources of our nation without conscience.

We seem to have lost our moral and spiritual equilibrium. We have allowed the moral fog of evil men to descend and obscure our discernment, blurring the line between good and evil to the point where many are mistaking one for the other.

Let us not forget that Satan is the father of lies. Lying and deceiving are so symptomatic of our times. Refusing to differentiate, many have come to call evil “good” and good “evil”. The Bible warns us of such times and people.

There are many examples of this twisting of right and wrong. For instance, we see evil men devising phrases and statements to solidify misrepresentations, distorting blatantly untrue statements into something that the human psyche passively accepts as

truth – words such as “gay rights” and “pro-choice”.

The Bible calls them homosexuality and murder, and they are sins.

Closer to home, we have statutory declarations, thrown at each other so freely, so much so these can no longer be taken at face value as statements of truth.

Lying and deceiving are now happily called “spin”, and they typify our generation and so many of our leaders.

The real danger is when the Church is either oblivious or becomes a party to this evil. During the “last days” before the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Jeremiah pointedly accused the people of the Book, by declaring “...truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.” (Jer 7:28b NKJV)

Unless God’s people stand tall as standard bearers to declare truth and call evil and good by their right names, we become participators of these sins. It is time the Church rise from her slumber to disperse the fog so that others may see clearly.

The statesman Edmund Burke once said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

The Church, filled with good men, can be “good for nothing”...unless we speak up! Yes, it’s time we speak up.

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We can't change things overnight, but through much effort and perseverance beginning now, we will be ready to roll up our sleeves when the time comes.

This is a Macedonian call to the Malaysian Church, with the present window of opportunity that we have. We urge all of you to embrace this agenda so that the strong can bless the weak, and the rich can work with the poor.

NECF Nation-Building Agenda

OUR nation is undergoing rapid changes that are already impacting the values, ethics and lifestyle of the people. Churches in Malaysia therefore have to firstly discern the implication of the changes in order to respond appropriately and productively.

Following that, churches will then have to double their efforts in responding to the changes.

On NECF's part, we will work with churches by equipping, encouraging and providing churches with the opportunity for effective and excellent ministries in the following key areas:

- Financial – example: establishing a micro enterprise company that will work with churches in identifying viable projects to impact the community;
- Health – example: helping churches to work together to establish community clinics or hospitals for the rural poor; and helping churches who have existing medical ministries to network by pooling their resources in manpower and finances;
- Education – example: assisting in the education of the migrant poor in Malaysia; and
- Socio-Political – example: engaging and highlighting to the government the MyKad issue affecting East Malaysian Christians; and providing pastoral support to Christian politicians.

Faithful readers of and audience to the mainstream as well as the alternative media are finding themselves becoming cynical by the day in response to the current political scene in the nation. People are tired and fearful of the politicking, bickering and scandals.

As citizens who struggle daily to make ends meet in the midst of the rising cost of living, many of us find it mind-boggling and are anxious about our future and our children's. It's frightening to think that the life of the majority men in the street is held in the hands of the minority, who try to out-scheme each other for personal gains at the expense of the nation's wellbeing.

Others simply cannot afford to be bothered by the political and scandalous nonsense because life is tough, trouble is enough for the day,

analytical ability are not required for what is obvious. A street vendor remarked, "The government is like *kongsi gelap labi*" (underworld gang). He, like many of us – the average Joes and Janes – cannot tell the difference between the government and the unbecoming politicians. An old man at a *mamak* eatery opined matter-of-factly, "I tell you, all politicians are corrupt!" A thinking person said, "Chaos is being stirred up intentionally to punish the people who did not vote for the ruling coalition."

In the midst of the ugly politicking, the middle class has become poor and the poor has become poorer. Poverty rate has shot up alarmingly due to inflation. Daily items, including basic necessities, have become more expensive as the salaried man's earning remain status quo.

Though weary, the rakyat continues

Rakyat Smacked in the Middle

and feeding families is the priority.

Meanwhile, circumstances appear bad enough to set off the idea of deploying the army to maintain public order. This has triggered rumours of an impending emergency rule. Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi brushed off the rumours, telling the people not to be deceived and assuring us that "the government is stable" and "the administration is moving".

Our peace and security are not at risk," he said (NST, 7 July). Inspector-General of Police Musa Hassan told the public not to be "unduly worried" as the joint exercise of the police and the armed forces "was a normal exercise in accordance with the public order manual" (Malaysiakini.com, 5 July). Despite their "assurances", the thought of army soldiers patrolling the streets sends shivers down our spine.

The rakyat, even those deemed non-thinkers and less educated, are watching. Deep thinking and an

to expect and hope for a just government and good governance that is rakyat-centered, so that peace and good quality of life can be realised.

We pray for God's power to break the pride and scourge of power-grabbing among those bent on personal gains.

For, "Whoever among you would love life and see good days must keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:10-12, cf. Psalm 34).

We continue to pray for:

1. truth, justice and peace to prevail;
2. good and just government to become a reality; and
3. God's will to be done and His kingdom expanded.



When the curtain falls

News about the demise of someone known to us naturally provoke us to recollect his life. Often, our thoughts of the deceased tend to be based on the last phase of his life. If this final phase was flawed, that's most probably how we would remember him, never mind if he was a sterling example of humanity in his youth. People who have led worthy lives that impacted their world for the better but crashed out at the final lap or appear to be crashing out – they will, unfortunately, be remembered for the way they finished. Unfair as this seems, this is the reality of perception. As Christians who are bearers of the Name of Jesus, how then do we work towards a grand finish?

Berita NECF asks *NECF MALAYSIA EXECUTIVE ADVISOR REV WONG KIM KONG* for his thoughts. Rev. Wong is at the last lap of his journey in NECF after serving as Secretary-General for 10 years.

What does “finishing well” mean to you in the context of ministry?

Generally, people see finishing well as accomplishing a ministry responsibility or task with satisfaction. The expressed objectives and goals have been achieved without leaving behind any traces of dissatisfaction, complaint or unhappiness within the place of service.

Personally, I prefer to follow Paul's words, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7). It is not just about fighting the fight, but fighting a good fight. Good is a clear indication of finishing well, which means not only finishing the task but making a difference to the ministry and leaving behind significant evidence of the difference.

Finishing well means leaving a legacy on your work. It means having contributed to establishing a solid foundation of the ministry so that the ministry can go on with the colleagues and partners that you have equipped. They can act independently and efficiently without you.

But here, I am mindful of those, especially missionaries, who have put in their whole lives to a particular work and passed on without ever seeing their work bear fruit. Does this mean they have not finished well? No, because often, the impact of their hard labour is felt much later on down the road. There is a legacy still.

In the end, what's important is that you settle with yourself whether you have fought the good fight.

Finally, finishing well means having built a good and lasting relationship in the team that you have worked with. As far as possible, leave the ministry with as clear a conscience as you can have in the area of relationship. To finish well, we do not harbour any grievance against anybody.

How can a person “finish well”?

Firstly, right from the beginning, you must intentionally purpose to finish well. It helps if you have a perspective from the end and know clearly God's will for your future. Visualise the finishing line, and begin your good fight at the start. Purpose in your heart to finish every point of the race well because the final lap depends very much on the previous laps. Each of the previous lap must be evidenced by your excellent performance in order to finish well.

But be careful not to burn out halfway through the race, for the last lap is always the most difficult and most strenuous. So, you must conserve energy and have enough stamina to end well. For this, you need to draw from God's well of strength and wisdom, without a doubt. It is He who sustains us and keeps us going. But there are practical measures we can take, such as having adequate rest, taking periodic breaks to refresh your body, mind and soul, ensuring you don't carry emotional baggages et cetera.

Also, the fulfillment and satisfaction of having completed your ministry is determined by your conscience. Do you have a clear conscience that you have done your job to the best of your ability?

When a person falters along the way such that his race is stalled, how can he get up and continue the fight?

It's not the end of the fight. However, there are things the person must do to continue the race. Firstly, he must admit his wrongdoing, and confess, not just in his heart, but to the people who have been affected by his wrongdoing.

Then, he must make a definite decision to be redeemed

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Building for the next generation through prayer

How do you mobilise children to pray? The question was thrown to children at a recent conference and the immediate suggestion is as expected of children of this generation – through the Internet by for example, starting a blog, creating a Facebook account and going on Skype. Also proposed were the more conventional ways such as attending prayer conference and bringing friends to church.

Interestingly, the adults' reply to the question was: Start from ourselves – parents and teachers – by setting the example of praying and gathering to pray; and get the churches, from top down to children's leaders, excited about prayer. In addition, children must be exposed to local and overseas outreach work through, for example, the Children At Risk ministry, and taught to pray for the work.

The response from both ends of the age group – children and adults – have been noted by the conference organiser who will then map out strategies to increase prayerfulness among our children.

The discussion was held at the recent Children in Prayer (CIP) consultation held in Penang organised by the Malaysia National Prayer Network. Thirty children, 23 youths and 63 adults participated in the three-day conference aimed at raising prayer awareness among children and youths.

Asked what God was doing among the children in the country, the children said:

- God is using His children to preach to the 'Ishmaelites', to pray for people and share the

gospel;

- He is building the next generation;
- Blessing His children with prophetic gifts; and
- Drawing children to Himself and protecting them from worldly things.

The adults' responded similarly. "He has put His call upon us (adults) to take on the mandate to raise the next generation of prayer warriors for Him. The enemy is attacking the next generation. The only way to protect them is to teach them to pray," one adult participant stressed.

Another adult participant commended the organiser for the consultation, noting that they had laid a "crucial building block in God's Kingdom for the next generation".

Besides the discussions, the children and teens also learnt from the adults how to lead effective prayer lives and worship more passionately.

One adult participant commented, "I can feel the presence of God in all sessions, especially the praise and worship sessions. I learnt how to explode and can feel the presence of God more clearly now. At the last session, as the kids were praying for the adults, they began to be filled with the Spirit and cry. It is as if they knew what the adults were going through and were feeling the adults' burden."

Another adult participant was inspired by the different generations from different denominations coming together in one unit at the consultation.

However, Zoe Lim, 13, felt that the messages were directed more at the parents at the consultation than the children. She also hoped that someday, such consultations would be organised entirely by children under 20.



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or helped. Next, with all humility, ask for help. Finally, allow the ministry, church or organisation to chart a constructive rehabilitation plan or programme. Rehabilitation is a dirty word to many people as it implies that a person is helpless on his own. Dirty or not, when you are down and you can't get up, be humble enough to admit it and beg for help. Otherwise the finishing line will just be a mirage.

The whole process of helping the wounded person must be redemptive, reconciliatory and restorative. The primary purpose is to restore the person and help him get up to continue the race.

For the third party, the 'outsiders',

we must allow the person to be restored. I like the story of the potter's clay in Jeremiah 18 because it speaks of second chances. So, give him a second chance. Who knows, we may need that second chance ourselves.

What else can a person do to "finish well"?

Finishing well has to do with closing the chapter of your ministry. Firstly, you must recognise that you are about to complete the task and acknowledge that you are not indispensable.

Secondly, you must recognise that the ministry does not belong to you alone, but the Body of Christ, and that someone else will be able to continue the good work. Some people are very possessive of their ministries and find

it hard to give up a ministry they love so much. So, be prepared to let go of your "Isaacs". If not, the ministry will stall instead of flourish under another person. You need the humility to accept and hope that someone may and will take the ministry to greater heights in a way that is different from yours. But don't *suka-suka* (randomly) quit. Identify the right moment to finish your task and when the time is right, have the security to pass on the baton to your successor.

Finally, finishing well in your ministry means letting God lead you on to the next part of the race. You may be stepping on new territories, new ministries, playing different roles. Move on and purpose in your heart to run the next part of the race well.

At the first anniversary of Independence Day, 31 August 1964, an oath stone was unveiled at Keningau witnessed by both State and Federal leaders. Inscribed on a plaque in Bahasa Malaysia were three principles agreed to by local chiefs: (1) freedom of religion in Sabah; (2) the Government of Sabah holds authority over lands in Sabah; and (3) native traditions and customs should be respected and preserved by the Government. It is significant that freedom of religion was the first principle.

I shall now look at how well the states of East Malaysia have observed religious liberty since the formation of Malaysia in the larger sense of concerted government programmes that have breached this liberty. Of the two states, it is Sabah that has fared poorly.

Religious Liberty in East Malaysia: Promises and Assurance

by David Fung, PhD

During the era when Tun Mustapha Harun's United Sabah National Organisation (USNO) led the Sabah Government from 1967 to 1974, there was a government-initiated and planned programme to "integrate" Sabah's diverse ethnic groups into the Malay culture. It was being promoted by federal policy. Professor Gordon Means describes the programme as follows,

"This involved public emphasis upon symbols of Malay cultural identity, the rapid development of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language, and the promotion of Islam as the national language, and the promotion of Islam as a means to create cultural and religious conformity within the state. Under the direction of the United Sabah Islamic Association, which was supported by the USNO government, a very aggressive programme of Islamic conversion was instituted with much publicity given to mass conversions of many thousands of new Muslims. In 1973 Islam was made the official religion of the state and Bahasa Malaysia was adopted as the state's sole official language. Pressure for conversion to Islam was particularly great on those in politics, since USNO viewed Islam as a prerequisite to ethnic power-sharing in the Mustapha government. By 1973, within the Sabah Legislative Assembly only five members still professed to be Christians, even though Muslim communities in Sabah constituted less than 40 per cent of the population and most of the leaders of the non-Muslim communities had earlier had nominal Christian affiliation."

It was as a response to such programme that a pro-tem

committee (later called the Sabah Council of Churches) comprising the mainline churches in Sabah, including the Roman Catholic Church, met to unite churches to speak in one voice on issues affecting the Church's interest.

In the 1976 state election, USNO retained 20 seats and the newly-formed Berjaya Party led by Tun Fuad Stephens emerged the victor capturing 28 seats. Sadly Tun Fuad, the new chief minister, together with Datuk Peter Mojunting and other ministers in the new cabinet met with an untimely death when the light aircraft they boarded crashed just before landing at Kota Kinabalu on 6 June 1976. Datuk Harris Salleh, the deputy president of Berjaya Party, took over the helm. The first four-year term of Berjaya saw rapid economic development in Sabah.

In March 1981, Berjaya returned to power in a landslide election victory capturing 43 out of 48 seats.

However, the Berjaya government would be remembered for an unsavoury episode of blatant abuse of religious liberty through the manipulative classification of indigenous tribes. In the 1980 Census, the Berjaya government abolished the traditionally-accepted identification of tribal people and replaced the diverse ethnic people groups with a catch-all category "Pribumi" which unjustifiably include all the indigenous peoples of Sabah together with Malays from Peninsular Malaysia, and immigrants from the Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia.

The intended political effect was "to blur Sabah cultural and tribal identities." The Berjaya government stepped up the process to integrate Sabahans into Malaysia; and in line with the federal policies, the Malay language and Malay-Muslim culture were promoted as the basis for national integration.

In the period from 1976 to 1985, the Berjaya government claimed to have converted over 32,000 to Islam in a flagrant disregard of the Twenty Points assurance and the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. The Kadazan indigenous people, among whom many were educated and raised in Catholic Missions schools, felt most maligned. The epitaph to the Berjaya government of Harris Salleh was written by another multi-cultural party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), led by the Kadazan Paramount leader Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan. In the 1985 elections, PBS spectacularly defeated the mighty Berjaya Party.

The fall of the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran at the hands of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

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in 1979 intensified Islamic revivalism starting from Iran and spreading ripple-like throughout the Muslim world. Another name for the Iranian Revolution was the Islamic Revolution. Multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia was not spared. Some of the developments discussed below could arguably be said to have flowed and gathered momentum from this world phenomenon, and I would relate them briefly in passing.

Dakwah organisations directed or sponsored by the government have been around but Islamic revivalism has increased efforts to proselytise and to lead a “pure” Muslim life in line with the strict dictates of the Qur’an. The Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (Perkim) was one of the more notable ones. As the voice for the right to an Islamic way of life gain ascendancy, so the sphere of Islam’s dominance increased in multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia. The territory gained by Islamic revivalism was at the expense of the religious space accorded to the people of Malaysia who profess and practise other religions. The heady mix of race and religion in Malaysia makes it an even more potent force.

No man is an island. Sabah and Sarawak, though situated on the island of Borneo together with Indonesian Kalimantan, felt the effects of Islamic revivalism. Dakwah has taken many forms. There were increasing complaints concerning secondary school students in the interior of Sabah and Sarawak being pressured to convert to Islam in the *asramas* (school hostels) ran by the government. Many of these students have to live away from their homes to attend schools that would typically take a few days’ walk.

The overzealousness of the state Islamic authorities affected everyone. On 11 December 2003 the Sabah State Mufti made and published a fatwa (ruling) in the State Gazette prohibiting non-Muslims from using 32 words in Bahasa Malaysia in their teaching and in the propagation of their belief. Some of those words are “Allah”, “Quran”, “Fatwa” and “Syariah”. On 29 December 2003, various government authorities entered and seized several titles in a Christian bookshop. The reason for seizure was that the books contained the word “Allah”.

The push for Islamic compliance is coupled with calls for a more Islamic way of life. There is little tolerance for freedom of religion among the Muslims. As recent judicial decisions have shown, sadly for Malaysia as a whole, there is no real freedom of religious choice for Muslims. There can be no real freedom, for the subjugation of a citizen’s right of access to the wider and generally accessible civil courts (which dispense justice in accordance with the law of the country) to the Syariah court (which by definition

and existence would defer to Islamic rules and regulations) is not religious freedom. The basic human good that predicates religious profession and practice – freedom of conscience – is ignored.

In Sabah, since 1978 it has been an offence for anyone to propagate any religious doctrine or belief without the permission of the Sabah Majlis Ugama Islam among Muslims, and the offence shall be tried before the magistrate’s court and punishable with imprisonment of up to one year or a fine up to RM3,000 or both. Attempted apostasy out of the religion of Islam is apparently also an offence for the Muslim who has shown by word or conduct that he or she intentionally claims to cease to profess Islam

or declares himself or herself to be a non-Muslim. The syariah court has the power to order that the apostate (*murtad*) be detained in the Islamic Rehabilitation Centre for a maximum period of 36 months on the pretext of rehabilitating the person so that the person could repent of the attempted apostasy. If such a detention occurred, it remains to be seen whether the draconian statutory provision contravenes Article 11(1) of

the Federal Constitution and is unlawful.

All has gone awry. The idea of Malaysia was built upon goodwill and mutual trust among different communities spanning distinct racial groups with separate religious beliefs. The 13 May 1969 racial riots remained a blot in the nation’s short history.

The Rukun Negara, issued on 31 August 1970, is a document considered by many to be an instrument required to unify the various communities of this country into one united nation. It was intended as a complement to the Constitution. Its five principles formulated in relation to the Constitution – belief in God, loyalty to king and country, upholding the Constitution, rule of law, good behaviour and morality – are printed on the back cover of all Malaysian school exercise books. It is hoped that these five principles would capture for all Malaysians, starting from young, in a readily-comprehensible form the aspirations of all Malaysians with regard to their nation. Belief in God is of course based on Article 3 and 11 of the Constitution.

The East Malaysian experience has shown that the promises given at the time of Malaysia’s formation were and remain foundational to the writing of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. The Article 11 guarantee of religious freedom, read together with Article 3, ought to protect and sustain the commitments made by the people of Malaysia.



The idea of Malaysia was built upon goodwill and mutual trust among different communities spanning distinct racial groups with separate religious beliefs.

This is an extract. The full article will be available in an upcoming book about religious liberty in Malaysia published by the NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Commission. DAVID FUNG, an advocate and solicitor in Sabah, is a member of the commission.

The June 2008 *Christianity Today* issue carried a small report in the US about the Kenneth Copeland ministry's refusal to cooperate with a financial investigation launched by a senator. Charles Grassley, the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, had last November asked for detailed information about the spending practices of the ministry.

According to *christianpost.com* (22 June), the senate probe was prompted by reports of alleged lavish spending and possible abuse of non-profit status.

To avoid the senate inquiry, the Copeland ministry has instead invited the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) to conduct its own inquiry. The move has been described as "deceptive and misleading" by Rusty Leonard, founder of North Carolina-based watchdog organisation *MinistryWatch.com* because any IRS investigation would be confidential.

Explaining its move to ask the IRS to investigate, Kenneth Copeland Ministries of Network CEO John Copeland said, "The church desires to protect its and all other churches' First Amendment rights, and by this action, we believe we are doing just that."

Meanwhile, on Malaysian soil, the public has called Petronas to open its accounts and explain how vast revenues from the nation's oil exports have been spent. Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has accused Petronas of wasteful spending and its bosses of "living like kings". "The company has operated behind such a thick smokescreen of secrecy that it rates as one of the least financially transparent and accountable oil producers in the world," according to Dean Johns' *Malaysiakini* report "Living in a fuels paradise" (June 11).

Petronas is reported to have recorded a profit of RM570 billion, of which RM336 billion has been paid to the government since its set-up in 1974. The government has countered that the money had been used to finance development projects and subsidies, while Petronas has replied that its accounts are made public annually. However, the public is not satisfied with these. Increasingly, people are demanding a detailed accounting of how the money is being spent.

Just like the public expect Petronas and other government-owned corporations to be transparent about their finances, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), – including para-church organisations (PCO) – are also expected to readily open their books when requested. In fact, NGOs ought to lead the way in financial accountability

as a model of uprightness and integrity. Unfortunately, we sometimes hear stories of contributors or donors questioning organisation's management about financial fraud or dubious spending. Some of the "questioning" have even evolved into full-blown confrontation and investigation with much mud-slinging. Occasionally the police are called in to probe, and one can be sure the press will not let this go unreported. This is indeed sad, especially

if PCOs are involved as the good name of the Christian community is then negatively cast. Society is quick to pounce on such stories, especially if they involve PCOs since we preach so much about morality.

PCOs, therefore, owe it to all and sundry, and most especially God, to be exemplary financial managers – transparent, accountable and above reproach.

"But we are only accountable to God", some may respond to the demand for public transparency.

Indeed, accountability to God is vital, but people form their impressions of both people and organisations at the outward appearances, according to accreditation agency ECFA Standards and Best Practices.

ECFA – Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability – based in the US, serves Christian ministries by helping them earn the public's trust through the adherence to seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship.

Founded in 1979, ECFA aims to provide accreditation to Christian nonprofit organisations that faithfully demonstrate compliance with established standards for financial accountability, fund-raising and board governance.

ECFA's Standards of Responsible Stewardship focuses on board governance, financial transparency, integrity in fund-raising, and proper use of charity resources. In addition, it has developed a series of practical undertakings, called Best Practices, which encourages members to strive for the highest levels of excellence in the accountability process.

The organisation works like an audit firm, only much more as its members have to stringently subscribe to its Seven Standards, which are "pass-fail" Standards – if a member fails in even one of the Standards, its membership is struck out.

While Malaysian PCOs do not have such an agency to attach to, they can nevertheless employ ECFA's stringent standards on financial accountability to safeguard their good name and that of the Lord's.

(For more on ECFA, check out www.ecfa.org)



Accounting for your ringgit and sen

For Better Yield, Work Together

Synchronised evangelistic and prayer effort will yield better results. NECF Malaysia is therefore urging churches to participate in this year's Celebration of Hope Malaysia (COHM) – an evangelistic project mobilised by NECF in partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

COHM runs the Matthew and Friends (MAF) programme where Christians invite friends to their homes for a meal, followed by an audio-visual show and discussion. NECF has set aside Dec 19 to 21 as the official period for churches to run the project. Last year, 800 churches

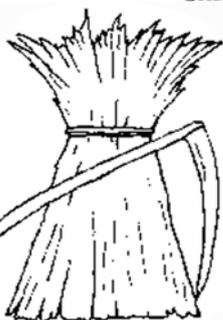
nationwide invited 40,000 people for the meal, show and discussion during the Christmas season. Some 10,000 people indicated acceptance of the faith while 7,000 rededicated their lives. Although COHM trained about 2,000 churches last year, in the end only 800 churches actually participated in the project. Nevertheless, the project has helped NECF to identify some current trends in the Malaysian Church that need to be addressed for more effective evangelism and discipleship.

In this year's re-run, NECF will provide each participating church a master copy of the MAF DVD show. NECF will also partner Christian organisations to provide free or subsidised Bibles and discipleship materials for follow-up.

NECF MALAYSIA Financial Statement January – June 2008

Income Gifts & Donations	RM 150,320
Subscriptions received for 2008	<u>RM 145,256</u> RM 295,576
Expenses for same period	<u>(RM 350,345)</u>
Deficit to date	<u>(RM 54,769)</u>

As annual subscriptions can only sustain us for 3 months of operating cost, the deficit will increase drastically. We therefore appeal for help so that we can continue to function effectively for our ministry to the Malaysian Church.



Learning to be a better intercessor

“STANDING in the gap” is a phrase commonly quoted to urge Christians to intercede for the nation or another's behalf. At the recent national Tamil prayer conference on June 21, guest speaker Mohan C Lazarus spoke on this but went further to describe the characteristics of people standing in the gap (PSIG).

Firstly, they have a heart of compassion for souls. Just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and Nehemiah wept for his people (Neh. 1:4), PSIG ache for the people they are praying over, said the founder and President of evangelistic organisation “Jesus Redeems” in India.

Secondly, PSIG pray sacrificially and are willing to pay the price for standing in the gap. Thirdly, PSIG pray according to God's will and desires, and not according to their desires. To do this, they always seek God's heart and have an intimate relationship with Him.

Following the message, the participants spent some time praying for the nation and the Church. It was an intense and emotional time with much tears, repentance, confession and supplication. When he challenged the youths to be PSIG, many youths went forward to commit to be intercessors.

At the next session, Bro. Mohan spoke on the subject



NATIONAL TAMIL PRAYER CONFERENCE

“Pray in the Spirit” based on Eph. 6:18 and urged the participants to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit. To the question “Why pray in the Spirit?”, he explained that “our fight is against wicked spiritual powers.”

“When we pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit gives revelations which are essential for spiritual warfare,” he said. He then shared

testimonies from his personal ministry where praying in the Spirit gave tremendous victories and breakthroughs from the bondage of Satan.

The conference in Petaling Jaya, organised by the NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission, was attended by over 1,000 people from throughout the peninsula.

In his welcoming message, NECF Chairman Rev Eu Hong Seng shared about “Prayer Misses” based on Jer. 37:1–3 where King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray for him, but refused to heed God's word through Jeremiah.

He cautioned the participants that they could be prayed for and still “missed out”, and listed some reasons for this, such as disobedience or even partial obedience, unrepentance, and mistreatment of our fellow brethren.

Rev Eu then reminded the participants to always have their hearts at the right place so that they will not miss out.

Rom. 13

God's Servant

Christians often look to Romans 13 to answer questions on the relationship between Church and State. Some appeal to the passage to argue for unqualified submission to the authorities. I find this rather troubling since such a recommendation ignores the dynamic nature of the State that can swing from being God's servant (Romans 13) to being a demonic State demanding ultimate allegiance and worship from its subjects (Revelation 13).

But what is stated clearly in Romans 13 – that the State is merely a servant of God and thereby possesses only limited authority – is correct. Likewise, the State – being merely one created institution amongst other divinely-installed institutions (family, school, market and church) – must respect and refrain from infringing other spheres of human authority.

Primary Social Task

The primary social task of the Church is to be itself – that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the dangers of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption.¹

The Church must resist two temptations:

- i) Subjecting the gospel to 'righteous' anger, lending itself as the instrument of political/ideological struggle. Charles West has given us a pertinent challenge,

"The church must project Christ's Lordship into the search for a proper structure of justice and peace in society, which is also the business of political authorities. It must do so holistically, not taking refuge in the false purity either of nonpolitical projects or a romanticised oppressed people. It must do so in a secular way, recognising the involvement of every religious project in the mixed motives and misused powers of human life, the need of correction, and the limits of political coercion in the establishment of true humanity. The life of the community of faith with Christ Himself should keep things in proper perspective."²

- ii) Accepting the terms on which the State allows them an undisturbed existence so long as it (the Church) remains isolated from the concerns of society. The end result would be that the Church legitimises the status quo. To quote West again, "the

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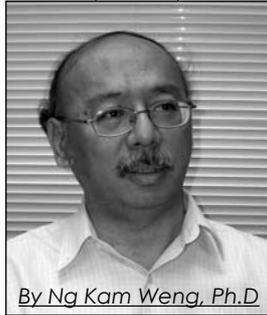
Rev. 13

Demonic State

Church of Jesus Christ is called to be the Church for the world, not the servant of one of the world's powers."³

Conditional obedience

We affirm the clarion call from Bonhoeffer when he insisted that the individual's duty to obey the State is presumed until the State directly compels him to offend against the divine commandment, that is to say, until the State openly denies its divine commission to enforce social justice and protect the freedom and dignity of the individual and forcefully suppresses the gospel. At this point, Christians must choose to disobey the State for conscience sake and in obedience to the Great Commission.



By Ng Kam Weng, Ph.D.

Realistic Social Engagement

Christians must avoid a naïve political outlook and must not pretend that they are pure and immune from the temptations of power. Still, the Church cannot avoid being in the world even though it may not be of the world. The Church must engage politics in a 'secular' manner, that is rooted in concrete historical realities and yet, while recognising that notwithstanding its mixed motives, it will seek to project Christ's lordship into the search for a proper structure of justice and peace in society.

The Church should acknowledge that no human form of government is perfect, and all are necessarily under constant scrutiny in terms of the processes which they have promoted and do promote, and the processes which they counter and negate.

As human rights are inter-related, and are also subject to ongoing historical processes, their fulfilment, negation or violation by any group or agencies or even churches, have to be judged in a similar manner. Structures created by human beings are in constant danger of becoming self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling, and hence of becoming idols – in a truly biblical sense.

The right balance

A Christian approach to civic responsibility balances both Kingdom Justice and the Gospel of Peace in order to distinguish responsible from irresponsible political action. Pursuing justice without peace only perpetuates social conflict. Accepting peace without justice amounts

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to capitulation to a hegemonic power. Politics is judged on moral terms derived from a transcendent authority (God).

Christian political analysis must be rooted in local history and social context. This requires sensitivity to the ever-changing dynamic equilibrium between the competing power groups in society. Demands for both individual rights and community rights must take into account the enduring principles that were foundational when the founding fathers of the nation agreed in a social-legal contract at Independence (1957) and formation of Malaysia (1963).

We must deal with the full reality of politics and government in the contemporary world. Public policies must be supported by public arguments that go beyond simplistic quoting of scriptures (Biblical or Quranic), naïve moralism or mindless ethnic nationalism. We cannot work for anything less than a cosmopolitan, pluralist democracy.

This calls for a hermeneutical retrieval of Christian political theory that was vigorously developed in church history. I have in mind the Christian understanding of Statecraft which is defined as the “art of careful reasoning, judging, and acting in the process of making, executing, and adjudicating public laws.” Good statecraft depends on insight into God’s creation (including human nature), which is an order unfolding through the history of countless human generations.

If the Christian community fails to pool together its intellectual resources to inform its social engagement, it will by default remain divided and confused by the conflicting political dogmas and buffeted by social currents. It will easily be intimidated by hostile political groups and passively accept a political agenda that is imposed on it and remain ineffective with its ad hoc and piecemeal participation in national politics.

The challenge to develop a Christian political perspective that is coherent, integral, and comprehensive is indeed urgent. The fruitfulness of such a project is promising. Christian witness demands nothing less than the fulfillment of a contextualised Christian political theology that can assist citizens in their defence of freedom and justice.

This is an extract of the article “Human Dignity and Religious Liberty”. The full article will be available in an upcoming book about religious liberty in Malaysia published by the NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Commission. DR NG KAM WENG is Research Director at Kairos Research Centre.

Endnotes

- 1 Philip Wogaman. *Christian Perspectives on Politics* (SCM 1988), p. 127
- 2 Charles West, “Christian Witness to Political Power and Authority”, in *Missiology* 9 (1981) p.439
- 3 Charles West, *Ibid.*, p. 436

Speaking in Bahasa

BAHASA BENEDICTION

Pronounce the benediction at the end of your weekly worship service in Bahasa Malaysia with the word “Allah” to impress upon all congregations to continue to use the word without fear or favour – that is the call of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) on churches throughout the country

The call was as a show of support for SIB Sabah which has filed a court case on the use of the word “Allah” and several other issues the East Malaysian churches have been facing in practising their faith

are the various administrative taken to deny access to Christianity in Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia

- We have a right and are entitled to use any language – Bahasa Malaysia – any other language without any grounds of differing faith; and
- All efforts will be taken to ensure that

How many percent of Malaysian Christians live in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak)? Thirty? Forty? Maybe even 50? The answer is 75 percent and more! Astounding as this seems, that is the official figure by the Department of Statistics Malaysia.

The statistics quoted were from the Population and Housing Census of Malaysia conducted in 2000. At that time, Christians made up 9.1 percent (around 2 million) of the total population and of this, 75.66 percent (around 1.5 million) are from East Malaysia.

With the majority of East Malaysians speaking Bahasa and our brethren there worshipping in the Bahasa language, it is therefore crucial that they have unrestricted access to Bahasa resources and books to help them grow in the faith.

In our last issue, we called for solidarity for our East Malaysian Bahasa-speaking brethren by pronouncing the benediction at the weekly worship service in Bahasa, using especially the word “Allah”. And to help the non-Bahasa speaking churches, we have below a sample Bahasa benediction that may be used. Also available below in Bahasa is “The Lord’s Prayer”.

Praying and singing in Bahasa are little reminders that we are the Malaysian Church.

BENEDICTION

Jemaat yang dikasihi, pulanglah dalam damai sejahtera Allah Bapa, Allah Anak dan Roh Kudus menyertai kita sekarang ini sampai selama-lamanya. Amin.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Bapa kami yang di sorga, Dikuduslah nama-Mu, Datanglah Kerajaan-Mu, jadilah kehendak-Mu di bumi seperti di sorga.

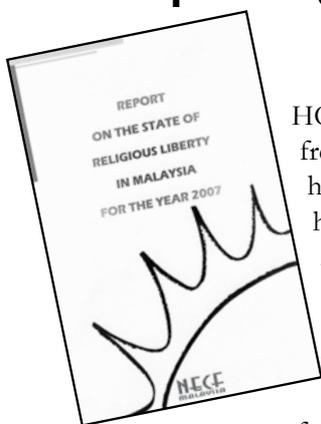
Berikanlah kami pada hari ini makanan kami yang secukupnya dan ampunilah kami akan kesalahan kami, seperti kami juga mengampuni orang yang bersalah kepada kami; dan janganlah membawa kami ke dalam pencobaan, tetapi lepaskanlah kami daripada yang jahat. (Karena Engkaulah yang empunya Kerajaan dan kuasa dan kemuliaan sampai selama-lamanya. Amin.)

CLEARING UP TROUBLE IN BIN

“THANK God the prophet Elisha does not live in Sabah, otherwise he would have been labeled a Muslim,” quipped Patrick Cheng, NECF Malaysia’s Senior Executive Secretary. He pointed to *2 Kings 3:1*, which read: “*Tetapi bertanyalah Yosafat: ‘Tidak adakah di sini seorang nabi TUHAN, supaya dengan perantaraannya kita meminta petunjuk TUHAN?’*” Lalu salah seorang pegawai raja Israel menjawab, katanya: “*Di sini ada Elisa bin Safat, yang dahulu melayani Elia.*”

Patrick stumbled on the Malay translation of Elisha’s name while reading the Bible and made the jest in reference to Berita NECF’s article “MyKad Woes Over Bin” that

Report highlights abuses on religious freedom



HOW did Malaysia fare in religious freedom for the year 2007? Specifically, how did the Malaysian Government handle and respond to religious liberty incidents?

It got worse, according to the just-released NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Annual Report 2007, which presents a thorough

account of religious liberty abuses and violations that occurred in 2007.

“Despite clear and increasing evidence of cracks in the nation’s social fabric, the top political leadership continued to insist that the bonds holding the different communities together were strong.

“In contrast to the past, when such religious matters were treated with much greater sensitivity, there were multiple high-profile incidents, such as conversions out of Islam, destruction of places of worship, confiscation of religious material and enforced burials by religious authorities,” the report said.

Produced and published by the NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Commission, the annual report monitors and audits the Government’s action on and response towards cases relating to religious liberty. The aim of the report is to raise awareness on the sufferings of the victims due to the authorities’ unjust actions and/or inaction.

The Commission has also released an incident form where members of the public may report incidents where religious liberty has been abused or curbed. The form can be obtained from the NECF office or downloaded from the *NECF website www.necf.org.my (under the Religious Liberty Commission section).

To get a hardcopy of the report, contact the NECF office. The softcopy is available in PDF format on the NECF website.

appeared in the last issue. The article highlighted the plight of Sabahan Christians whose MyKad carry the entry “Islam” because the registration department officers automatically regarded them as Muslims since their names have the word “bin”. For generations, many Sabahan non-Malay bumiputeras (indigenous people) have “bin” in their names but this does not mean they are Malays or Muslims.

When those affected tried getting the registration department to change their religion to Christianity, they were told to bring their parents to verify the information. However, most of the time, their parents have passed away. And even when some brought their parents to the department, they were then told to go to Putrajaya (in Kuala Lumpur) to get the data changed. The process is so cumbersome that the majority of them just give up pursuing the change.

Many of them are now facing problems – such as the registration of their marriages (since they are Muslims, their marriage must be registered by the Islamic authorities), the registration of the children (since they are Muslims, their children are automatically Muslims) and inheritance (since they are Muslims, inheritance matters are handled by the Islamic authorities).

To help resolve their many issues, NECF started a nationwide exercise in May to gather information on the number of East Malaysian Christians facing the problem.

With the information, NECF will then work with the Christian Federation of Malaysia to meet the relevant government authorities to discuss the issue.

The exercise is expected to be completed in end-July.

NECF MALAYSIA WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Good Harvest Centre, Engkilili, Sarawak, *represented by Rev. Peter Shin Jung Chae*; Overcomer Community Centre, KL, *pastored by Isaac Chee Wooi Chi*; Harvest Vision Evangelistic Centre, Penang, *pastored by Kelvin Tan Khai Heon*; Jesus Christ Family Ministries, Ipoh, *rep. by Rev. C. Jeyabalan a/l Chelliah*; Harvestime Church, Ipoh, *pastored by Elder Lee Meng Chak*; Antioch Ventures Bhd, Rawang, *rep. by Rev. David Packiam*; Sungai Way Christian Church, PJ, *rep. by Elder Heng Thin Fook*; Elim House Church, Subang Jaya, *pastored by Lee Shaw Ming*; and Amazing Grace Christian Fellowship, KL, *pastored by James Doss*.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Pr Dicky Wong Siew Cheong; Terence Ung Howe Pang, Rev. Hahm Kyoung Soo, Rev. Hannah Choi Sil Ja; and Phillip Yong Khi Liang.

Coming Up

CHILDREN'S PRAYER CONFERENCE **Aug 18–19, Heritage Centre (PJEFC), P. Jaya**

CHILDREN are a powerful influence to those they come in contact with. Their unabashed utterance of things important to them makes them good witnesses, especially to elderly family members. That's why God uses children to bring the Good News to people and places where many have difficult access to.

It is therefore important to equip and empower them to share the gospel, to encourage them not to be ashamed of the gospel when people reject them because the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

The coming National Children's Prayer Conference has this mission. Organised by the National Children Prayer Network Malaysia, the two-day conference targets children aged four to 13 years. Register your children before July 31 to qualify for the early bird fee of RM35. Thereafter, it is RM40. Call the NECF office (03-7727 8227) for more information.

CHINESE PASTORS AND LEADERS RETREAT **Sept 8–11, Awana Genting Highlands**

THE NECF Malaysia Chinese Commission aims to gather some 400 pastors, full-time pastoral workers and missionaries serving the Chinese-speaking community at the National Pastors and Leaders Retreat and Training Conference for a time of refreshment and rejuvenation.

The four-day retreat has a light schedule with plenty of time for participants to rest from the rigours of ministry and fellowship with one another.

The speakers are NECF Executive Advisor Rev Wong Kim Kong and Asian Outreach President Emeritus Rev Dr David Wang, a leading expert on China.

Rev Wong will share on how to manage church and inter-personal conflicts, an issue that full-time workers have to grapple with often. Meanwhile, Rev Wang – a much sought-after speaker whose leadership, writings, ministry and messages have touched countless lives – will speak about fruitfulness in ministry.

To enable many full-time workers to attend, the registration fee of RM250 has been highly subsidised (from RM680) through the generosity of some Christians.

In addition, NECF will give to the participants' churches a Good TV satellite television connection each. This evangelistic-based 24-hour satellite TV comes from Taiwan and features cooking shows, talk shows, sermons, learning English segments and others in Mandarin, Hokkien and Hakka.

BAHASA PRAYER CONFERENCE **Oct 2–4, Heritage Centre (PJEFC), P. Jaya**

THE NECF Bahasa Malaysia Commission aims to gather Christians from all 14 states to identify the challenges and current issues in each state for prayer and action. At the same time, they will be ministered to by Pr Daniel Pandji, the national Indonesian prayer mobilisation coordinator. He will base his message based on *Jer. 29:7 to help the Bahasa Church better understand its role in nation-building.

Registration fee of RM50 covers materials, lunch and refreshment. For more information, contact the commission's executive secretary, Alfred Tais, at 03-7727 8227 or 016-2283 119.

*(*Jer. 29:7 – And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.)*

SOUTH-EAST ASIA PRAYER CONSULTATION **Sept 9–12, Heritage Centre (PJEFC), P. Jaya**

PRAYING for foreign workers in Malaysia will be one of the highlights at the conclusion of the annual consultation. Participants, coming from all over South-east Asia, will also pray for agencies and their people who are ministering to migrant workers here.

Malaysia is home to some two million foreign workers, and increasingly, churches are establishing outreach ministries to serve their needs.

This year's consultation, hosted by NECF Malaysia, carries the theme "Breakthrough and Harvest". The concluding meeting on Sept 12 will start at 8.30p.m.

Come and bless the many nations that God has brought to our doorstep.

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION **Oct 18, NECF Conference Room**

THE NECF Women's Commission is organising a consultation to develop a Christian Women Agenda for 2020. The closed-door consultation will attempt to cover as many areas as possible that affect women, including politics, education, family, business, finance/corporate, health, legal, missions, pastoral and theology.

The consultation will have the participation and contribution of Malaysian Christian women who are pioneers or recognised leaders in these realms to speak. Each of them will speak for some 10 minutes, followed by discussion, brainstorming and prayer.

Besides the speakers, female leaders from churches and organisations will also be invited to participate at the consultation to be held on October 18 at the NECF Conference Room.

DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS MALAYSIA (2007)

Population: 2,404,500

Ethnic groups: Indigenous peoples/Dayaks 48.2%, Chinese 25.5%, Malay 22%, Others 0.4%, Non-Citizens 3.7%

Religious Breakdown (2000): Christianity 42.6%, Islam 31.3%, Buddhism 12%, Tribal Animism 5.2%, No Religion 3.9%, Taoism/Confucianism 2.6%, Others 1.3%, Hinduism 0.1%, Unknown 1.0%



State Spot

History and political development

The largest state in Malaysia, Sarawak was loosely under the control of the Brunei Sultanate in the early 19th century and was under several different rulers thereafter until 1963 when it joined the federation of Malaysia. In negotiating the Malaysia Agreement, Sarawakians insisted on autonomy in four areas: civil service, local government, land and immigration. Sarawak has the right to refuse entry of Malaysians from the peninsula.

In 1965, the first chief minister Datuk Stephen Kalong Ningkan, an Iban himself, put together a coalition, but it was unstable. Barisan Nasional (BN), the rival coalition led by Umno, threatened to motion a vote of no-confidence. A legal dispute occurred, a state of emergency was declared, and Ningkan was finally removed.

Since 1970, Sarawak has been governed by BN under two Muslim chief ministers of Melanau descent: Abdul Rahman Yakub (1970-1981) and his nephew, Abdul Taib Mahmud (1981-present) of Parti Bumiputera Bersatu, a component party of BN. Umno, however, has not been able to make inroads into the state.

Sarawak contributed 21% to BN's simple majority victory in the Parliament in the recent general elections.

Ethnic groups & religions

Sarawak is reported to have more than 40 sub-ethnic groups, each with its own distinct language, culture and lifestyle. Dayak is the loose term for these indigenous peoples.

The majority of the Ibans, who make up some 30% of the total population, practise Christianity. The Bidayus form about 10% and many too are Christians. Most Melanaus (5%) are Muslims; their lifestyle and practices are similar to the Malays.

The phrase "Orang Ulu" is a term used to collectively describe the numerous tribes that live upriver in Sarawak's vast interior. They include Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Kejaman, Punan, Ukit, Penan, Lun Bawang, Murut, Berawan, Saban and Kelabits. They together make up roughly 5.5% of Sarawak's population and the majority of them are Christians.

Regardless of their religious background, many continue to practise traditional rituals and beliefs. Under the Federal Constitution, they are the natives (Bumiputeras) who enjoy special privileges similar to that of the Malays. Sarawak is the only state in Malaysia without a state religion. There are no state provisions or penalty for converting out of Islam.

However, Sarawak faces some restrictions (from the federal government, the Home Ministry in particular) in the distribution of Malay-language Christian materials. In April 2003, the Iban-language Bible, Bup Kudus, was banned because it contained the word 'Allah' (in the phrase Allah Taala) which is supposed to be exclusive to Muslims. Before this, Bup Kudus had not faced any problem in the last 15 years of existence. A few weeks later, the then acting Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi (now Prime Minister), lifted the ban after a public outcry.

Nevertheless, Sarawak has the least number of incidents of disputes relating to religion compared with other Malaysian states.

Two Major Concerns

REGIONAL IMBALANCES, DISCRIMINATION IN FEDERAL POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Blessed with the abundance of natural resources, Sarawak by right should be one of the wealthiest states in Malaysia. It has one of the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants in Bintulu and is a major producer in crude oil from its offshore wells in Miri.

However, for decades, the state's economy has been lagging behind the urban centres in the peninsula. Like Sabah, it is only given 5% oil and gas royalties.

The New Economic Policy (NEP), designed in the 1970s to improve or elevate the economic status of Bumiputeras, does not seem to have done much for many Sarawakian natives. Figures show that at least one minority group remains deprived of basic needs. The Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute (Asli) in a report prepared for the Ninth Malaysia Plan says that some 12,000 Penans in the interiors are lagging behind in income, education and health.

In 2006, Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein promised to tackle the lack of basic and physical facilities in the rural and remote school in Sabah and

Sarawak. However, little physical improvement has thus far been seen. In May 2008, he said the ministry had planned to review its priorities in the National Education Blueprint to give priority to schools in Sabah and Sarawak.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has assured the people that the government was giving equal focus to all in the country and said the development corridor in Sarawak would bring opportunities to the people, notably the younger generation. The rural development would be given due attention, particularly on basic infrastructure, water and power supply and the building of road (*The Star*, 11/6/2008). He also said that the evidence could be seen in the decline of poverty rate from 7.5% in 2004 to 4.2% in 2007. However, reduction in poverty rate is far from convincing, especially with the recent petrol hike and rising cost of living due to inflation.

The unfortunate facts are: feelings of marginalisation and deprivation are prevalent among the Dayak community, despite their special rights and privileges enshrined in the Federal Constitution. For years, Sarawakians receive only 30% treated water; regional imbalances have yet to be corrected; and a fair distribution with regard to the control, management and ownership of the modern economy is yet to be seen.

The Economic Planning Unit's Development Composite Index placed Sarawak 11th among the 14 states in the country (*NST*, 8/9/07).

NATIVE CUSTOMARY LAND (NCL)

Sarawak's rainforests, the homeland of the natives even before the formation of Malaysia, have been gradually depleted by indiscriminate logging and land clearance for palm oil plantations. In Sarawak, any land occupied by indigenous groups before 1 Jan 1958 is regarded as theirs under the Native Customary Rights (NCR).

In March 2005, at a seminar on NCR sponsored by human rights group SUHAKAM, the Dayaks highlighted their plight. Among the complaints raised were:

1. The encroachment on native customary lands violates and disregards the native law, culture and traditions;
2. Arbitrary issuance of provisional lease and timber licensed to private companies by the state government;
3. Compensation received by the State government covers only property and fruits (the value of the land was not included) and does not match the market value; and
4. Logging activities have caused environmental pollution, jeopardising the source of drinking water, and destruction of crops and property.

According to the Borneo Resources Institute Malaysia (Brimas) Sarawak, indigenous people's NCR are often violated by the authorities. "Government alienate the customary land of Dayaks to private companies without prior consent from the community, resulting in them becoming squatters on land that they have been staying on

for generations."

Some examples are:

1. Orang Ulu villagers in Ulu Baram were promised economic benefits if they gave up their NCR land for oil palm plantations. They were given 30% equity in the project. They have yet to get the profits, nor have they been paid for their work (*malaysiakini.com*, 12/3/07).
2. The Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (Sadia) has called for pressure to be exerted on the state government to stop global logging giant Rimbunan Hijau from "discriminating, robbing and depriving the indigenous people of the natives' customary land rights." (*malaysiakini.com*, 10/11/07)
3. The Penan have been most affected. They complain of game depletion resulting in widespread hunger and loss of traditional medicines and forest products. Nomadic in culture, the Penan have been displaced for decades due to deforestation and conversion of land to oil palm estates, from which they receive no benefits (*malaysiakini.com*, 16/12/07).

On June 27, 138 Bidayuh families claimed initial victory over the state authorities to prevent their NCR land from being taken away from them without any consultation and compensation. The Kuching High Court granted an interim injunction to stop Naim Cendera Lapan Sdn Bhd, a quarry licence holder, from entering their farmland. The natives said that the stone quarry would cause damages to fruit trees and other crops in their NCR land which has existed for more than a century.

The PM has in recent months promised to fully develop Sarawak, reduce poverty and restore regional balances. The Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy is expected to increase the state's gross domestic product (GDP) by five times when it is fully realised in 2030 (*The Star*, 21/4/08).

(The full article is available on the NECF website.)

PRAY

1. Honest and just state government to fairly and effectively eliminate poverty among the natives.
2. All state projects to prioritise public interests and no ethnic groups to be left behind.
3. Business community to help create job opportunities; the rich to empower the poor.
4. Effective implementation of laws to protect the natives and their NCR land.
5. Wipe out any discriminatory policy and action.
6. Commitment of both federal and state governments in improving communication/transport links, health and education facilities and the provision of basic services in the rural areas.
7. **CHURCH:** unity, vibrant and relevant (e.g. in social & ethical issues), effective youth discipleship, greater passion for the lost, more workers in rural areas; and good support from the churches in the peninsula.

Zimbabwe What began in 2001 as government interference in Anglican affairs has developed into religious liberty abuse so severe and violent that “dissident” Anglicans – that is, most Anglicans – in the capital, Harare, now risk death to meet together. And there is no reason to believe that President Mugabe’s religious repression and persecution will end with the Anglicans of Harare.

With Mugabe’s win in the recent June 27 election, he will doubtless move to control all churches of all denominations nationwide. There is currently a huge amount of anxiety.

With religious liberty already being so seriously violated, what does the future hold? In Harare, thousands of Anglicans have been locked out of dozens of church properties because the Anglican Church had the audacity to stand up to Mugabe’s corrupt puppet-bishop Rev Dr Nolbert Kunonga.

In 2001, Zimbabwean secret police secured the election of Kunonga to the post of Anglican Bishop of Harare. Kunonga had been in the USA, teaching Liberation Theology in the Rev Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Seminary in Barrytown, New York.

But by Oct 2007, as courageous organised opposition was rising, Kunonga knew his power was waning. So, in a politically-motivated stunt he moved to separate the diocese of Harare from the Anglican Church of the Province of Central Africa – a grouping of dioceses in Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – on the false claim that it was full of homosexuals. Subsequently in Nov 2007 the Anglican Church of the Province of Central Africa removed Kunonga from his post as bishop of Harare on the grounds of schism.

European-educated Rev Dr Sebastian Bakare, the former bishop of Manicaland (the region bordering

Mozambique) was brought out of retirement to stand in for Kunonga. Kunonga challenged the Church’s decision in Harare’s High Court.

In Jan 2008 Harare’s High Court upheld the Anglican Church’s right to govern its own affairs, but ruled that Harare’s Cathedral be shared between Kunonga and Bishop Bakare. On Feb 10, Kunonga, in defiance of the court order, barricaded himself inside the Cathedral along with some 40 members of the ZANU-PF youth militia. In early May the Supreme Court dismissed Kunonga’s appeal. Furthermore, Kunonga has now been formerly excommunicated by the dean of the Church of the Province of Central Africa.

State-orchestrated violence against Harare’s Anglicans has since exploded. Mugabe’s police have seized all the Anglican property in Harare and marked “dissident” Anglicans as traitors.

Today the Anglican churches in Harare are locked to all but those who support Mugabe and his puppet-bishop, Kungona. The situation for “dissident” Anglicans is further complicated by the fact that in mid-May, police invoked security laws and broadened the ban of public rallies to include public prayer meetings.

In early June, the Bishops of the Province of Central Africa issued a “Pastoral Message” in which they express their deep concern and dismay at the marked escalation in violence and called upon the perpetrators of violence to respect the law.

Please pray for the nation at this time of trial. PRAY: for many innocent who are suffering – for our brethren to experience God’s miraculous providence, patience and comfort; for God to avenge the injustice and violence against innocent

“...the Spirit helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom 8:26)

people in His own time; for courage to speak out against the oppression and injustice; for the cry of liberty to grow stronger; and for the Church to remain strong. (For the full report, go to <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/view.htm?id=190>)

ALGERIA The Algerian government has been appeasing Islamists since early 2008 by implementing its 2006 ‘Presidential Order Concerning Religion’ and repressing Christian worship and practice.

Habiba Kouider, 35, was charged with ‘practising non-Muslim religious rites without a licence’ after police found Bibles in her handbag on March 29. Her case is so controversial that on May 27, the court postponed its verdict. On June 3, four Algerian Christians got jail sentences and fines for ‘attempting to shake the faith of Muslims’.

The government asserts that religious liberty is part of a foreign conspiracy to colonise Algeria. But many Algerians are crying out for liberty and justice.

PRAY: for people like Habiba Kouider and all other Algerian believers at risk of persecution – for grace, faith, strength and courage to run the race; raise up more courageous voices for liberty within Algeria to urge Algerians to have a hunger and hope for a more open, honest, progressive and equitable future; continue to bless the Algerian Church with growth in numbers as well as in grace, love, knowledge and wisdom; for God to provide for all the various Arabic language ministries that are so impacting this hungry nation.