

# berita **NECF**

## The Greater Kingdom Reality Calls Us to Stand Firm

By Eugene Yapp

**I**N a time of strife and uncertainty, there are two postures Christians may take. The recent raid on the Bible Society of Malaysia can illustrate. The incident, in which two BSM staff were taken in for questioning and over 300 copies of the Iban and Bahasa Malaysia bibles were seized, has engendered two types of responses from the Christian community.

One is a firmer approach to ensure that Malaysia does not slip further down the slippery slope of becoming a theocratic state. The second, in the name of sensitivity and caution to prevent worsening tensions, is a softer stance to avoid what Samuel Huntington called “a clash of civilisations”.

Each response has its own merits and legitimacy. Advocates of a firmer stand feel the government and the courts have failed to protect a secular society, a trend arising from Islamisation policies put in place sometime back. Those who prefer the second, softer approach see the possibility of more strife and even violence, and therefore appeal to “kingdom ethics” based on the Sermon of the Mount to “turn the other cheek” (see article *On Turning the Other Cheek* on page 8).

However, the Christian posture to adopt in this context of civil order and political contestation cannot be decided with reference to certain selected passages of scripture alone or by an appeal to general political orientation, as legitimate as it may be. Our posture must be determined and judged by the foundational principles of broad-based Christian political tradition.

### **The context**

It is first essential to note the context that shapes the problem. The context suggests a growing body of law that, when enforced, promotes religious hegemony so that Islamic legal enactments govern all aspects of the religion and life.

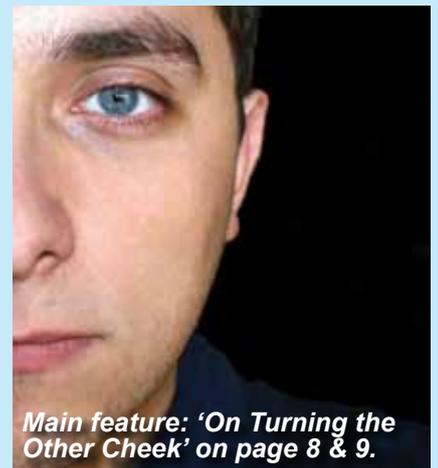
For example, in Selangor, the Administration of Muslim Law Enactment 1952 regulates private behaviour and personal morality of Muslims, such as fasting during Ramadan and consumption of liquor. The enactment provides for the function of a religious council that will regulate such personal matters. Beyond this, there is also the Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Amongst Muslims) Enactment 1988 which was used by the religious authorities to conduct the raid on BSM.

It is clear that even non-Muslims are being subjected to this religious and legal hegemony.

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The crafting of such laws go hand-in-hand with the state's monopoly over religion. These laws allow the state to brandish its religious credentials and to legitimise its regime. Over time, and with the aid of various agencies and state apparatus, this is how public opinion is shaped into understanding Islam as the "official" religion of the Federation, no longer just for ceremonial purposes as the drafters of the Federal Constitution intended it. Thus comes the need to "defend" the religion and its sovereignty.

In sum, the context we are in now is one where the state and the official religion are fused, to the result that Malaysia's "qualified-secular" polity and democratisation process is under challenge.

### **Accepting powerlessness**

Given this scenario, Richard Mouw's question is pertinent: "What kind of actions, if any, are compatible with the commitments of those who are living in grateful response to what God did in the cross of Jesus Christ?"

Some have answered this question by pointing to servanthood. Pacifist theologian John Howard Yoder is one who calls for a posture of servanthood by accepting the "obligation of voluntary subordination" to government domination.

This obligation of voluntary subordination includes accepting powerlessness in the face of oppressive regimes. To accept powerlessness, Yoder suggests a "toleration of the existence of government – a refusal to engage in revolution or insubordination even against tyrannical governments". Such restraint is the willingness on our part to participate in God's victorious patience with the rebellion of His creation.

In this way and to this end, Christian engagement with hegemony takes on a higher plane knowing that beyond and above oppressive regimes, there a regime that is both higher and normative which would eventually come about.

Yoder has a persuasive and appealing argument. But the question remains whether this posture is adequate given the social conditioning and circumstances of our context described above?

### **Denying self**

Scripture testifies that through his death on the cross and his resurrection, Christ brought reconciliation between God and creation, and established the Kingdom of God.

Although there is an aspect of the kingdom that is "not yet", the presence of the kingdom is nevertheless already manifested on this earth with the defeat of evil forces and the forgiveness of sin secured. With the Kingdom of God present,

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

# Dagon Cannot Stand

**T**HE lack of clarity is fertile soil for politicians.

The Selangor MB's note to the Home Ministry to clarify the status of the confiscated Bibles, after the infamous raid on the Bible Society of Malaysia on 2 January 2014, only confirms what the general populace has suspected all along – "Allah" is being used as a political football.

The Home Ministry's reply that their processes are subject to State laws reveals the flip side to the game – that Pakatan also does not have the political will to "do the right thing" despite its many rallying cries against the ruling BN.

Notwithstanding its church-friendly stance, Pakatan has been disappointingly reticent in its support for the 10-point solution and to amend the State enactments accordingly. Strangely, the BN has emerged the friendlier party, as they at least have offered the 10-point solution, though they are equally unenthusiastic in amending the enactments in States under their control. In such circumstances, it does hold true that there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies when it comes to politics!

As we get annoyed and flabbergasted by the daily shifting of stands by our politicians, imagine what must go through the minds of the pak cik, mak cik, hawkers and village tribal leaders with a lesser penchant to discern the intrigues and double-speak of their leaders.

There are those who are convinced that the Allah fracas is nothing but a covert ploy to distract the *rakyat* from its discontent over price hikes, corruption and the *kangkung* blooper.

To create further smokescreens, we also witnessed the added effect of mysterious "Allah banners" outside five churches in Penang and the repeat of a firebomb lobbed at a church<sup>1</sup> – located no less in an Opposition State, of course. Nevertheless, these incidents have not escaped the public as sheer political play. Almost nobody believes that the peace-loving people of the Church would stealthily put up such banners to provoke.

The call by the de facto head of Pakatan for "peace talks" over the Allah fiasco amidst rising temperatures in race relations and Putrajaya's tacit indication that it will consider such talks is indeed a welcome sign. From an optimist's point of view, this may well augur the nascence of political maturity in our nation. While it can be seen as a call for a "time-out" to regroup, as in a football game, the more shrewd view is to attribute it to a "third force" – the unseen hand waiting in line to assume leadership if the conflict tips over.

A recent report in TIME referring to the three former presidents of the Philippines noted, "in the Philippines, ex-leaders don't fade away – they engage in extreme feuding."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the Philippines is a microcosm of what ails Asia, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand.

Governor Jerry Brown, in tackling California's budget deficit, once joked that his dog was calling on Californians to "bark if you don't like the deficit". Perhaps it is time right-thinking Muslims and Christians join hands and shout "Allah" to show that we are no longer amused by the god-napping drama, and that we do not want to "play" anymore.

The prayerful and peaceful Church cannot be relegated to being a non-entity in this fight for the political soul of the nation. The Church has been diligent in assembling her people to pray for Malaysia, the nation that millions still proudly call 'home'.

We are also a hopeful people. We believe God still moves in mysterious ways. The Al-Kitab in 1 Samuel 4 and 5 affords us a timely lesson: Though the Philistines had the upper hand over the people of God, nevertheless in the face-off between the god of Dagon and the Ark in the temple, Dagon fell. We take encouragement from history as to how divine disputes can and will pan out.

<sup>1</sup> Church of Assumption, Lebuah Farquhar, Penang, on Sunday, 26 January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> TIME, 3 Feb 2014 issue.



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any false pretension of power to usurp the rightful place of Christ and the freedom secured, has been unmasked.

Christians should therefore reflect this greater reality by resisting dominion that holds itself out as absolute and totalitarian. Lesslie Newbigin's words are illustrative,

*"If the Gospel is to challenge the public life of our society, if Christians are to occupy the "high ground" which they vacated in the noontime of "modernity", it will not be by forming a Christian political party or by aggressive propaganda campaign ..... It will only be by movement that begins with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known and experienced and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusion which has remained hidden and expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the Gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life and recognize they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole of society."*

In resisting absolute and totalitarian regimes and any false pretensions to power, the church ought to be a prophetic voice calling out right from wrong, and a catalyst for social change.

In the transforming power of the kingdom, Christians are called and set apart by the work of Christ on the cross to a commitment on a very different set of values. Being set apart unto holiness should not be taken as an excuse not to act against injustice but rather to be strategic in engaging the

regimes of the word and the civil order on Christian terms.

It is only on such terms of engagement and social witness that the church will succeed in demonstrating the greater reality of the Kingdom and His righteousness on earth as it is in heaven.

In this respect, Christian social witness must reflect what Carl F.H. Henry says concerning the necessity of public engagement to transcend a partisan agenda and be based on social justice that reflects God's universal demand for righteousness.

In so doing, we should not be naïve. Such forms of engagement will draw criticism and even hardship. While Christians ought to bear in mind that our God is able to overrule circumstances and work for the good of those who love Him, there must always be a realism that Jesus did declare to those who follow him to first "deny themselves and take up the cross".

This surely suggests that bearing the shame, living out hard times for the sake of truth, justice and righteousness, are the order of the day rather than deliverance from every hardship. In short, we are to be prepared for difficult and trying times ahead.

What will come in the days to come, nobody can tell. Circumstances may improve or may worsen drastically. But the call to live out the Gospel by speaking against and remedying the wrongs cannot be neglected and glossed over. It is indispensable to a vibrant Christian witness that is both faithful to the Gospel and yet one that is modest; resting on the hope that God will intervene for His own and bring to completion what He has started.

References:

*Richard J Mouw, Politics and the Biblical Drama. Eerdmans, 1976*  
*Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. Eerdmans, 1989*  
*John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus. Eerdmans, 1972*

## NECF Malaysia Welcomes New Members

### Ordinary Members

1. Sidang Jemaat Kristus Bersatu, Pekan, Pahang (Elder Hashim a/l Achiang)
2. Persatuan Perkhidmatan Sosial Pembaharuan Hidup, K. Kinabalu (President, William Chin)
3. Sanctuary of Divine Glory (Tamil), Kulim (Pastor Sourimuthu Mudiappen)
4. Ignite Community Center, Seri Kembangan (Pastor Daniel Dharminder Singh)
5. River of Life Sanctuary JDR (Eng/Punjabi), Kuala Lumpur (Pastor Manjit Singh)
6. Maranatha Apostolic Church (Tamil), Sg Buloh (Pastor Jesudass Devenesan Joseph)
7. Caring for the Future Bhd, Sabah (Chairman, Mitsuhiko Abe)
8. Praise Emmanuel Assembly (Tamil), Seri Kembangan (Pastor Isaac Siva Gandhi Maniam)
9. Antioch Church (Chinese), Batu Pahat (Chairman, Tay Soo Hong)
10. Gospel Mission Church (Eng/Chinese), Sg Petani (Rev Samuel Lau Pee Chai)

# Responding to Possible Action against Churches for Using “Allah”

**B**ELOW is an advisory that NECF issued to member churches on 3 Jan 2014, following the raid on Bible Society of Malaysia by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) a day earlier. The advisory also addresses two other scenarios – one, based on earlier news that JAIS would send letters to all Selangor churches reminding them to comply with the Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988 that bans on a list of Arabic words, including “Allah”. And two, in the event that pressure groups hold demonstrations outside churches on Sundays during worship services.

## ***I. On non-jurisdiction over non-Muslims***

- a. Should your church receive any letter from JAIS purporting to act legally and insisting that your church stop or refrain from using the word “Allah” or any other banned words listed in the Enactment, kindly forward a copy of the letter to us and then seek legal advice on the matter.
- b. NECF has already stated our position regarding the use of the word “Allah” in our statement dated 10 January 2013 “Advisory to National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia member churches on the use of “Allah” by non-Muslims”. The Christian Federation of Malaysia has also issued a fact sheet “When, Why and How Christians Use the Word “Allah”” dated 16 May 2013. Although the High Court decision is now overruled by the Court of Appeal, our position still stands as it is based on our Constitution.
- c. NECF’s position is based on Article 11 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution which provides for the right of any person to practice and profess his or her religion.
- d. While Article 11(4) of the Constitution allows state and federal laws to control or restrict the propagation of other religions among Muslims, this *does not affect one’s rights to manage and to profess one’s own religion* under Article 11(1) and (3) which includes the use of words, language, worship and other aspects of practicing the religion.

As such, the ban against non-Muslims from using “Allah” under the Enactment 1988 is only within the context of the propagation of religion, and does not affect our rights to profess, practice and to manage our own affairs, including to worship and read the Alkitab in churches, homes and any place of Christian meetings.

## ***II. On protests outside churches***

Should there be a protest in the form of public gathering at or near your church premises, please be advised on the following:-

- a. Advise your members to stay within your premises and do all you can to keep the peace and stay calm. Call for prayer and intercession for the peace, harmony and protection of all God’s people and property.
- b. Immediately lodge a police report and request for police presence and assistance to keep the peace and safety of all persons.
- c. Ensure you have prepared a team of your own comprising your church leadership or staff with a clear chain of command and

- instructions on what each person is to do in such a situation.
- d. Video the protest and ask the media to be present.
- e. Once the videotaping has been done, keep the copies for evidence in the event of legal proceedings.
- f. DO NOT engage with the protesters to avoid any unintended provocation. Let the police or authorised personnel handle the matter.
- g. Ensure that your church or organisation has an updated list of police station numbers in your area and media contact numbers.

## ***III. On possible attempts to raid a church or premises of a Christian organisation***

- a. In general, the Muslim religious authorities have no jurisdiction with respect to non-Muslims. Christians therefore have the right to deny entry to any religious department officer who requests entry into a meeting at a house, church premise, or any private property used for Christian worship and activities.
- b. However, if JAIS or any religious officers are accompanied by the police and insist on entering your premises, you must ensure: (1) their identification as authorized officers (rank of Inspector and above); and (2) they produce a search warrant before obliging entry into your premises for a search<sup>1</sup>. Any doubt over the validity of their actions can subsequently be challenged through legal recourse.
- c. If there is no warrant and forced entry is used, allow this to proceed with consideration for the personal safety of your staff/ church members present. But do video record the entry and keep the recording as evidence. As a safeguard to having recording devices confiscated, try to get as many people present as possible to make simultaneous recordings. Pay attention and note down any items that are seized and confiscated.
- d. As the raid takes place, inform your media contacts as soon as possible.
- e. Lodge a police report on the raid and note the use of forced entry and seizure of items. In your report, state that your church or organisation has been denied your rights to the exercise of freedom of religion under the Federal Constitution.

In this season of trial and testing, we urge the Christian community to be cognizant of their rights under the Federal Constitution and not to respond with fear or uncertainty. Any action that any Islamic religious authority takes against you is unconstitutional and can be challenged in court. Let us be reminded that the Lord God is sovereign and in control of all circumstances in Malaysia. Let us continue to worship Him and give Him glory as we always have and to continuously offer prayers for the welfare and wellbeing of our society and beloved nation.

In Christ,

Eugene Yapp  
Secretary-General  
NECF Malaysia

*Section 54 Criminal Procedure Code provides for a search warrant to be issued in certain specific instances for purposes of conducting a search and inspection.*



## Keeping Track of the “Allah” Court Cases

**F**AR from over, the “Allah” controversy will continue to stir the nation now that the following three cases are in the courts:

### 4 March – The SIB Sabah case in the High Court:

SIB Sabah filed for a judicial review of the Home Ministry’s actions after three boxes of Sunday School books from Indonesia were seized at the Sepang Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) in August 2007. In filing the suit, SIB Sabah also asked the court for the seized books to be returned. The books have been returned but SIB Sabah is pressing ahead in seeking declaratory reliefs on the right to use “Allah” by Christians. SIB Sabah President Rev Datuk Jerry Dusing has said, “It is more than just a word; it is about the fundamental right to worship God in the way we have been doing for generations without hindrance”. On 4 March 2014, the High Court will decide whether to grant leave to SIB Sabah to proceed with its request for a judicial review.

### 5 March – *The Herald’s* appeal to the Federal Court:

The Catholic publication is appealing against the ruling delivered last October by the Court of Appeal that it cannot use “Allah” in its Bahasa Malaysia version. The appellate court had decided in favour of the Government which sought to reverse the High Court ruling in 2009 allowing the weekly its constitutional right under the freedom of religion to use the word. The Government’s ban on the word is ostensibly to prevent Muslims from getting “confused” which may then lead to a breakdown in public order. The High Court ruled that there was no such evidence because *The Herald* is circulated and read within a small non-Muslim circle and is available by subscription only.

The Federal Court will decide on 5 March 2014 after hearing arguments, if it will allow *The Herald* to proceed with its appeal. The Catholic Church is also raising 26 questions of law to the Federal Court covering constitutional issues (on Islam as the religion of the federation, on the freedom

of speech and freedom of religion); administrative issues (the Home Minister’s powers to ban *The Herald*); and the scope of the court’s powers to decide on religion (the Court of Appeal said that “Allah” was not integral to Christian faith and practice).

### 6 March – The Jill Ireland case in the High Court:

Eight CDs from Indonesia were confiscated from Jill Ireland Lawrence Bill, a Melanau Christian from Sarawak, at the LCCT in Sepang on 11 May 2008. The CD titles had the word “Allah” in them, such as *Cara Hidup Dalam Kerajaan Allah*. Jill Ireland filed for a judicial review of the seizure in August the same year, asking for a declaration that she has a legitimate right to use the word “Allah”. The High Court has granted her leave for the judicial review. The next date for case management is 6 March 2014. What’s notable in this case are the affidavits filed in support of Jill Ireland by Malay Muslim academicians – Universiti Malaya law professor Dr Azmi Sharom and International Islamic University law lecturer Dr Abdul Aziz Bari. Both affirmed the constitutional right of non-Muslim minorities to the freedom of religion, including use of “Allah” as long as it was not for propagating Christianity.

The above three cases present a spectrum of the right to practice one’s religion – with regards to published material (*The Herald*), the education of young believers (SIB Sabah and Sunday School books) and personal use of materials (Jill Ireland’s CDs).

Prayer points for these cases:

- The judges will decide fairly and without bias.
- The lawyers will present strong and clear arguments.
- There will be peace on the streets and outside the courts during the hearings.
- The outcome will be favourable and in line with what God wills for Malaysia.
- That God’s work among those He is calling to Himself through this controversy will continue unhindered.



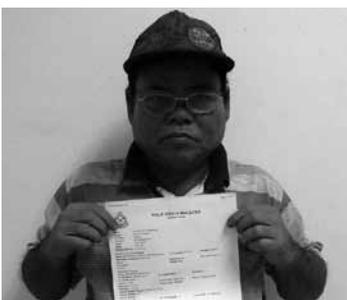
## Bumiputera Christians to Fight Dubious Conversions

**M**ASS conversions of native Christians to Islam in Sabah through dubious means have united the various Christian denominations in the state, and this is an important development for the Bahasa Malaysia-speaking church.

NECF Secretary-General Eugene Yapp said the BM and indigenous churches were banding together to make a stand for their communities and this was crucial for the survival of the Malaysian Church as a whole.

“We have always held that the strength of the Malaysian Church lies with the BM-speaking churches, as 60 per cent of Christians in Malaysia are BM-speaking and come from indigenous communities in East Malaysia,” Yapp said.

The recent conversion of native Christians in Pitas, a remote district in Sabah, also highlights the needs for all churches to work together to support rural Bumiputera churches, whether in terms of spiritual growth, education, poverty eradication and economic development, Yapp added.



*Makadan Masabu, the farmer who lodged the police report.*

Pitas – Kampung Layun Maliau, Kampung Dowokon and Kampung Sosop, and include young children. A report of the incident can be found on The Malaysian Insider.

As a result, a Christian group called Perpaduan Anak Negeri Sabah (PAN) has been formed comprising members of various denominations. They are planning a spiritual revival campaign aimed at indigenous Christians in the state. Political party, the United Pasokmomogun Kadazan Dusun Murut Organisation (Upko), a component member of the Barisan Nasional, has also stepped in to help the villagers with legal measures to reverse their conversions.

The mass conversion ceremony in Pitas was reported by the website of Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) in an

article titled ‘Yayasan Ikhlas sambut 74 orang saudara baru di Pitas, Sabah’ and dated 1 Jan 2014.

Both ISMA and Yayasan Ikhlas were named as the organisations that conducted the conversions in a police report lodged by a Dusun native, Makadan Masabu, at the Kota Marudu police headquarters on 6 Jan 2014 .

The villagers are members of the Protestant Church in Sabah (PCS), which is a member of the Council of Churches Malaysia, a component of the Christian Federation of Malaysia.

A Christian lawyer helped the 64 villagers make their Statutory Declarations in Kota Marudu on 17 Jan, said Alfred Tais, NECF’s Executive Secretary of the Bahasa Malaysia Commission, who is following developments on the case.

The police report filed by Makadan, 57, a farmer, was also lodged on behalf of 27 other Dusun natives. In the report, Makadan said that they were first told that each villager would be given RM800 as welfare aid by an organization from Kuala Lumpur. But upon meeting people from the organization, the villagers were taken to a mosque where their identity cards were collected. Each person was asked to sign or thumbprint a form. Makadan said they did not understand the form’s contents as they were illiterate, and no one explained the purpose of the form.

The group was then instructed to recite words in a different language after which they were told that they were now Muslims. Each person was then given an envelope containing RM100. Though shocked, they did not fully understand what had happened and only realized that they had been “converted” when a PCS church leader explained the matter to them two days later.

The villagers mainly work as subsistence farmers. Kampung Layun Maliau, for example, is so remote that it is still without electricity and running water. Its location was described as a being first, a two-hour drive from Kota Kinabalu to Kota Marudu, then another two-hour drive to Sungai Penipak, and from there, a trek on foot for an hour more on an old logging road.

The villagers now want the Sabah Islamic religious authority (JHEAINS) to delete their names from the convert registry and the police to investigate ISMA and Yayasan Ikhlas for the underhanded conversions.

# On Turning the Other Cheek

By Eugene Yapp & Debbie Loh

**A**S the Allah controversy escalates with provocative banners and petrol bombs, the view that Christians should “turn the other cheek” by giving up the use of the word has entered the fray. Proponents of this view include both Muslims and Christians.

There have been a few well-meaning believers who have written to NECF with the suggestion that national Christian leaders adopt this stance to stave off further discord. Some attach articles that expound this view, asking for our opinion or proposing that we change our position. For the record, NECF stands with the Christian Federation of Malaysia, which includes the Roman Catholic Church and the Council of Churches Malaysia, that our Malaysian Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and the right of every religious group to manage its own affairs, which includes the right to choose words and language in the practice of one’s faith.

An opinion piece titled “Turning the other cheek on the ‘Allah’ issue” by a Professor Dr Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi on Malaysiakini made the rounds recently. A gentle and firm rebuttal, “Solution to escalating ‘Allah’ row” by Patricia A Martinez, a Catholic, also went viral.

Among the points Martinez makes are that Christians have already long been turning the other cheek by not retaliating against demonstrations by Muslim right-wing groups, Selangor Umno roadshows that instigate anti-Christian feelings, threats to burn the Alkitab, false accusations, and harassment and demonization of Father Lawrence Andrew. She also highlights that it is a mistake to refer to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr as examples of “turning the other cheek” because they persistently stood against injustice, albeit using peaceful and non-violent means. Gandhi and King Jr model for us today the meaning of civil disobedience by refusing to submit to unjust laws.

Martinez debunks the claim that “Allah” can easily be replaced by “tuhan” in the Alkitab, noting the difficulty this would pose in translating passages with the phrase “I am the LORD your God...”. In the Alkitab, ‘tuhan’ is ‘lord’ while “Allah” is used for the Almighty, Creator God.

She also debunks “one of the biggest lies circulating” – that “Allah” is also used in the Bible in other languages. Indeed, the Arabic word only appears in the BM and Iban bibles, and not in English, Tamil or Mandarin bibles. This false and provocative claim continues to be used in the rhetoric of Muslim pressure groups.

She proceeds to note the status quo long enjoyed by Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians in using “Allah” until the first of the state enactments (in the 1980s) that banned non-Muslims from using that and other Arabic words. And she explains that the Catholic Church only went to court over *The Herald* after exhausting other avenues over the years after “negotiating, pleading [and] providing evidence behind closed doors ended unsuccessfully”. Going to court was simply “a logical and ultimate recourse” – the Federal Constitution, after all, assures citizens the freedom of religion and freedom to manage one’s religious affairs.

“So, do note, Christians did not start this ‘Allah’ issue,” Martinez states.

### Ego-driven?

Still, there are believers who feel that the national Christian bodies are defending their position based on “ego” and a failure to recognise the bigger stakes, i.e. racial and inter-faith harmony.

To cease using the word for such reasons is fallacious, for citing Jesus’ call to “turn the other cheek” in the context of the Allah controversy is, respectfully but plainly, misplaced.

A look at the text where that verse is found in Matthew 5: 38-39 sees Jesus first making a reference to Old Testament law on personal injuries, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’” (v 38) before continuing with the famously misunderstood “turn the other cheek”.

There is a difference Jesus is pointing out here – that while the Mosaic law (Exodus 21: 23-24) allowed for personal retribution, albeit with limitations to ensure the punishment fit the crime, Christ’s fulfillment of the law demands that we give up our right to seek *personal revenge*.

This is not the same as doing nothing or being passive in the face of evil and injustice. For Jesus’ own example saw him confronting evil and greed (against the traders in the temple) and he regularly confronted the Pharisees on their false and hypocritical piety. From Paul’s life too, we see that he knew the law as a Roman citizen and demanded fair treatment from the Roman authorities as such.

The Allah controversy, on the other hand, must be recognized, amongst other reasons, as a political problem, engineered to play into the “Ketuanan Melayu” framework that has come to define Malaysia’s politics, policies and personal morals.

The Bible teaches that following Christ wholeheartedly involves denying one’s self and taking up one’s cross. Life as Christians when confronting the might of the state will involve conflict and a challenge to our comfort zones. Such a posture is not motivated by ego or a failure to recognise the bigger stakes, but is about

standing for truth and walking in righteousness. In effect, it is not so much a pandering to ego but a surrendering of our very sense of safety and security as we stand for truth and righteousness.

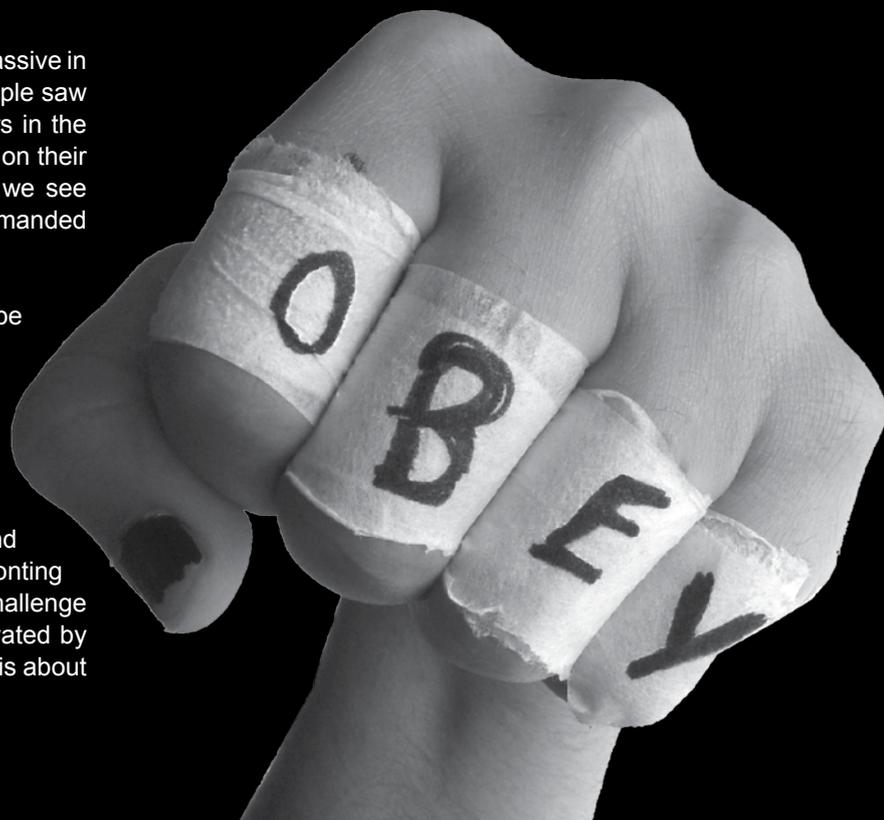
And the truths in the Allah controversy are these:

The larger picture is the common good of all citizens, that genuine freedom of religion and expression may be enjoyed by all in this nation of many faiths.

There are historical, textual and linguistic precedents that justify the use of “Allah” by non-Muslims (see CFM’s statement on *When, Why and How Christians Use the Word ‘Allah’*, 16 May 2013). The different understandings on conception of God between Islam and Christianity is a separate issue that should not be treated as part of this controversy, for the historical fact remains that both religions have shared roots that provide the context for the mutual use of “Allah”, with Christianity predating Islam.

The BM-speaking bumiputera church, which is more than 60% of Christians in Malaysia, deem this word essential and integral to the practice of their faith. They have made their stand in various ways that they will continue using the word. It would be a betrayal to refuse to stand in solidarity with them and this has grave implications for the unity of the collective Malaysian Church.

Let us turn the other cheek by not responding in like manner to the acts and words of violence thrown against the Church, for vengeance is the Lord’s. And let us quietly go about our faith, loving and doing good works to all as we resist unjust laws and hold fast to the truth.



# Lessons from the Contradictions of Nelson Mandela's Life

By Debbie Loh

**W**AS Nelson Mandela a Christian? As the world mourned the loss of a great statesman and architect of South Africa's peace and reconciliation, many pondered this question. Mandela rarely touched on God or his faith in speeches or writing; yet, his public life spoke of the very same values that Christians cherish: forgiveness, sacrifice, justice, redemption.

An article in *Christian Today*, written after Mandela's death on 5 Dec 2013, notes his Christian upbringing, involvement with a Christian university student group and the Bible study classes he taught as a youth. He faithfully attended Sunday worship during his 26 years of imprisonment, and studied Islam while at Robben Island. After his release, Mandela spoke at various Christian events, in which he expressed clear convictions about Jesus the risen Messiah who conquered death, and identified the struggle for racial equality with the Lord's experience of poverty, suffering, persecution and ultimately, crucifixion.

In reality, Mandela's life was complicated and some historians have accused the media of sanitizing his legacy. As a youth, he was willing to use violence and formed the militant wing of the African National Congress. On the personal front, his first wife accused him of adultery, he had difficult family relationships, and there are hints from interviews with his children that he wasn't a good parent.

Yet, the world remembers him as a statesman, father of South Africa, grandfather of the world, peace maker and international mediator. He won the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, the crown amongst the 200 other honours and awards he also received.

If anything, this paradox reminds us of a Biblical pattern – God's use of flawed men and women to achieve a greater good. Mandela himself reflected on the contradictions in his life and wrote:

"...a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying to be clean. One may be a villain for three-quarters of his life and be canonized because he lived a holy life for the remaining quarter of that life. ...In real life we deal, not with gods, but with ordinary humans like ourselves: men and women who are full of contradictions..." (from *Conversations with Myself*).

## A 'closet Christian'

It has been noted that Mandela chose not to speak openly about his religious beliefs for fear of the divisions that



it could cause to fragile South African unity.

The African news portal, *Mail & Guardian*, described Mandela as "a closet Christian" and notes his aversion to speaking about his faith in public in case Christianity became misused as a political tool. In his guardedness, Mandela was rejecting the modus operandi of white Afrikaners who used Christianity to support the view that whites were God's chosen people while blacks were subservient.

It is not the intention of this article to make a judgment on whether Mandela's reluctance to label himself as Christian was an appropriate testimony. Rather, it is to focus on the fact that he lived out the Gospel's values of forgiveness and reconciliation in his public leadership role instead of just talking about it.

This gives us food for thought as Malaysian Christians become more engaged in society, politics and government in this fractious climate. What does our identity as Christians mean for the harmony, blessing and good of all in the nation, unless we walk the Gospel's talk?

## The truth comes first

In upholding those values, Mandela was able to balance his commitment to what he knew to be true, just and righteous *while at the same time* build bridges of reconciliation. More often than not, we are driven either way to polarizing positions or ineffectual compromise.

Mandela knew the art of balancing commitment to justice

# Berdialog dengan Gereja

By Chris Chong

**C**HRISTIAN-Muslim relations in the past few years have been sorely tested over the Allah controversy. Into this breach comes the unlikely figure of Mujahid Rawa. Since 2010, the Member of Parliament (Paris Buntar) has been involved in a series of dialogues with churches in an attempt to heal strained relations between both faith communities. Coming from PAS with its Islamist credentials, he comes across as a surprising agent of reconciliation.

In *Berdialog dengan Gereja: Sebuah travelog kedamaian* (Dialogue with the Church: A travelogue of peace), Mujahid gives an account of how he became involved in interfaith dialogue as well as the events and people involved. He shares an insider's account of how the PAS leadership formulated their position with regards to the Allah controversy. He also gives, from a Muslim perspective, reasons why Christians should be allowed to use Allah.

However, the most interesting parts of the book are his reflections on dialogue and peace. Noting that Malaysia is a diverse society where misunderstanding and conflict can arise, Mujahid believes that the way to peace between faith communities lies in dialogue to clear misunderstandings and misconceptions. But for dialogue to happen, there must first be a willingness to build friendships that transcend differences and the desire to bring goodwill to the process.

As Christians, we too are called to bring the shalom of God to our little corner of the earth. In Jeremiah 29:7, we are reminded to "... work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you ..." and in the Beatitudes, we are taught that the peacemakers shall be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).

Let's not be distracted by who Mujahid is and the party he represents, but consider the challenge his book throws at Christians. Can we be honest and ask ourselves if it isn't the prevalent Christian mindset to shun interfaith dialogue? More importantly, can we afford to shun such dialogue in light of Jesus' call for us to be peacemakers?

Should we not take part in bringing shalom to our beloved nation by joining hands with people of other religions including Muslims in dialogue and friendship? I recommend all Christians to read this book and ponder its message.

An English edition of this book is in the works and should be in bookstores soon.

*Chris Chong is a university lecturer and a member of the Friends in Conversation group on faith and community issues.*

with concrete demonstrations of love and reconciliation. While not backing down from the truth of his political and moral cause (racial equality), he also reached out to whites, forming a coalition government with FW de Klerk as first Deputy President (can we even begin to imagine this in our local politics?) and got black South Africans to support the national rugby team, the Springboks, by wearing a team jersey. Symbolic as it may have been, it was a masterstroke that united the nation.

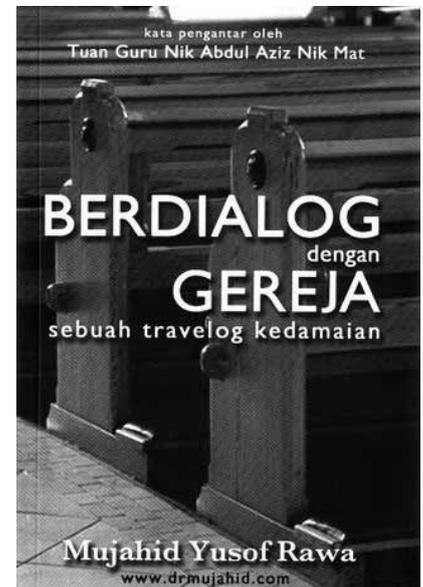
Most of all, Mandela understood the importance of upholding truth and accountability as prerequisites for genuine healing, peace and reconciliation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights abuses under apartheid gave a hearing to both victims and perpetrators, with amnesty given to the

latter as a means to uncover the truth. Though not perfect, the commission was deemed largely successful in helping South Africa transition to a multicultural democracy.

This has relevance to Malaysians now, for pursuing justice involves speaking truth to power. The Christian ethos of being peacemakers and turning the other cheek has more often been interpreted as meekness of the doormat variety, a reluctance to display resistance when standing for the truth. But genuine healing and reconciliation comes only after wrongs and abuse are first admitted. Thus Mandela saw to it that an accounting took place.

May we learn from his life that flawed as we are, we can be of use to God; as vocal as we may be about our faith, it means little unless we live it; and as much as we shout "Justice!" we must first seek the truth.



# Praying Strategically for the Nation

By Karen Tan



*United prayer: Committing the different spheres of influence in the nation to God.*

**H**OW should we pray for national transformation? While we are asked to pray for rulers and those in authority (1 Timothy 2: 1-4), there is also strategic prayer that targets the pillars of any nation.

God has promised in Psalm 2: 8, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession”. Read together with Matthew 28: 19 to make disciples of all nations, it is clear that if the nations of this world are to be Christ’s inheritance, Christians must be involved in discipling others, and in nation-building as part of discipling nations.

At the National Prayer Summit on Nation Building Through Prayer in November 2013, Pastor John Mulinde from Uganda talked about prayer that builds and disciples

nations. There are five spheres of a nation that should be addressed when praying for transformation.

## Five spheres

The first is the religious system of the land. According to Mulinde, this is the most powerful force as it determines the moral value system and the unwritten code of conduct of a place. It is more even powerful than politics as it affects the spiritual climate. See in this context, the role of Christians as a “priesthood” in a nation becomes vitally important. We have a spiritual influence over the land if we exercise our priestly duties by interceding for the nation.

The second is the sphere of family that covers marriage and parenting. These, as we know, form the foundations of society. The third is the economic realm. The fourth

is government, and the church's role is to function as a conscience and guide so that government submits itself to God's authority.

The fifth is the corporate belief system of a nation. This value system is found in the corporate culture of the nation, in the education system, in entertainment and the media. The corporate belief system of a nation influences the mindset of a society.

When the Church in a nation is not strategising and not uniting in prayer to uphold these five spheres, we have then failed our mission.

### **Prayer as strategy**

Prayer is one part of a holistic strategy for discipling nations. Mulinde stressed that it all begins with the state of our hearts. True intercessors allow God to renew them on the inside. They are aligned to His will and pray according to His heart. When this happens, they are confident that God will answer (1 John 5: 14-15).

But prayer (and fasting) comes first and foremost. This pattern is seen in the life of Jesus and in the early Church. Jesus prioritised the disciplines of prayer and fasting. He also prioritised the Word which he used against his Temptation in the desert. Then, he prioritised missions – preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The same pattern is seen in the Acts of the Apostles of the early Church in Jerusalem. They were committed to prayer and fasting, and the Holy Spirit came. Peter then stood up to quote Scripture and preach the Word, after which we are told 3,000 believers were added to their number. Then, the apostles went out to do missions. An added priority was giving.

In summary, the strategy must begin with prayer and fasting, which attracts the abiding presence of God. It must also include the Word, preaching (missions) and giving.

Many Christians have lost the discipline of prayer and fasting. Yet, these habits are so vital if we want to see God's breakthrough and if we want to move with His timing. Let us return to these basic disciplines in order to:

- 1) Be spiritually awakened.
- 2) Build a culture of abiding in God's presence.
- 3) Reach out for God's destiny for your nation, city, church and family.

*Mulinde: True intercessors allow God to renew them internally.*



## 'I Will Build My Church'

**T**HIS year's edition of the 40-Day Fast & Prayer booklet with the theme "I Will Build My Church" will soon be available. The adults' version will be printed in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin and Tamil, and the printed children's version will be in English and Mandarin only. There are plans to distribute the children's booklet in the other languages by soft copy.

Orders can be placed early by sending an email to [prayer@necf.org.my](mailto:prayer@necf.org.my). Please include your church's name, address and number of copies requested. Stay tuned for more announcements about the pricing via email, our website and on Facebook.

The theme based on Matthew 16:18 is appropriate as the Malaysian Church faces one of her most tumultuous periods in recent times. Amidst threats against the Church, against Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians and their freedom to worship with the words they choose, the Church collectively needs to be of one mind and spirit and in submission to the will of God. Only He can bring everlasting change and goodness.

*And I tell you that you are Peter,  
and on this rock I will build my  
church, and the gates of Hades will  
not overcome it.  
Matthew 16:18 (NIV)*

For the Church to be in submission to God's will, unity of the body is paramount. A strong national church must emerge in order to be a vibrant testimony and to provide holistic witness to the nation. More than ever now, the people of God need to be united. Only then can the Church remain strong and impact the nation effectively for Christ.

Let us gear our hearts, minds and spirits to engage in prayer and fasting for the Malaysian Church! The 40 days of fasting and prayer will begin on 7 August and culminate on Malaysia Day, 16 September.

## New Staff

NECF welcomes new staff who began work with us in January this year:



*Pastor Karen Tan,  
Executive Secretary,  
Prayer Commission*

I've worked in the property sector for 12 years before joining full-time ministry, where I've served for the last 14 years, including as a missionary in Thailand for a short stint. I'm an itinerant pastor with the Assembly of God Church and my hobbies are prayer, reading and playing with my children. Feed me sushi and good dim sum anytime!



*Jack Chia, Process and Systems  
Administrator*

I've worked in the public service for 33 years and my last posting was with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. I love anything hot and spicy, in particular, perut ikan, pasembor and laksa Siam. I jog and do gardening to keep the calories in check. I worship and serve at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang.

# How to Lead and Grow Your Organisation

**T**HE Eagles Leadership Conference returns for the third year with the theme Leading Organisations. It will be held at First Assembly of God Church in KL from March 28-29, 2014. Registration, at RM180 per person, is already open with a downloadable, printable form and brochure at [www.necf.org.my](http://www.necf.org.my).

Great leaders build and develop great organizations. Today's churches and organizations need to deal with rapid change, uncertain transitions, breakdown of family life and many social and economic realities. This conference brings together best practices, thought leaders and industry experts to equip you to lead and sustain your organization effectively.

This year's conference features a team of eight speakers, all of whom are leading captains in their respective fields of influence. One of them is Dr Chew Weng Chee, the Senior Pastor of SIB KL. He joins the rest of the panel in sharing their experience and proven knowledge of what it takes to become an effective leader for God in the Church as well as in the marketplace.



Find out more by downloading the conference brochure and share it with your leaders, marketplace members, friends and others who will benefit from this conference. You may also call NECF at 03-77278227 or email your inquiries to [conf@necf.org.my](mailto:conf@necf.org.my).



*Irene Than, Office Administrator cum Secretariat Support*

I worship at The Vine Sanctuary, Bandar Sunway, where I serve as a Worship leader and intercessor. I've had 24 years in corporate accounting, credit control, sales and marketing and as a travel planner and four years in church administration and property maintenance management. I love travelling and meeting people, getting to know their culture and food – all suited to my bubbly personality!



## Looking Out Looking Up

**AFGHANISTAN** The two houses of Afghanistan's Parliament have passed a law that bans testimony by relatives of abuse victims. The "Prohibition of Questioning an Individual as a Witness" law will have the effect of silencing victims and those who witness crimes against them. Human rights groups say this law will make it "impossible" to prosecute abusers and denies justice to the most vulnerable in Afghan society, where "honour killings" – the murder of a family member who is deemed to have "dishonoured" the family name – is still an accepted part of culture. Rape victims, women who have relationships their families disapprove of, or women who flee abusive husbands, are considered to have brought shame on their families and may be abused as punishment or targeted for an honour killing. The law is not yet in force and needs to be ratified by President Hamid Karzai. This growing conservatism comes amidst the staggered withdrawal of US military troops from Afghanistan which is to be completed by the end of 2014.

 PRAY for the president to respond to the protests by human rights groups against this law. Pray for God's mercy and ministering to women, children and the vulnerable in Afghan society. Pray that the influence of the Taliban and other conservative forces will diminish and for God to move in dreams, visions and miracles among the people there. Pray for the secret believers who are at risk if their faith is discovered. Ask God to protect and encourage them. Pray that the withdrawal of foreign troops will not lead to a return to civil war. – Guardian, OD

**SRI LANKA** The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) reports that persecution of

Christians was at an all-time high in 2013 with 103 incidents, representing a 100% increase from 2012. For January 2014, twelve cases were reported. One of them involved a mob of Buddhist monks who attacked two churches in Hikkaduwa, burning bibles and vandalizing church property.

 PRAY for God's protection over Christians in Sri Lanka and a restoration of inter-racial peace. Pray that persecuted believers will place their trust in the LORD and continue to be His witnesses. Pray that those inciting religious hatred would experience a change in heart and come to repentance and knowledge of the saving grace of God. – WEA

**INDIA** Rev. Sanjeevulu was stabbed by a group of men who pretended they wanted to pray with him. On 11 January, the pastor came out of his house in Andhra Pradesh to answer a group of visitors who said they wanted to pray. The men then stabbed and beat him, prompting his wife to come out. She, too, was attacked but survived. Sanjeevulu was treated in hospital but died two days later from his injuries. Christian leaders who then held a peaceful protest in Hyderabad calling for justice were arrested for demonstrating. Police have said they will investigate the murder. Another Christian who knew Sanjeevulu said he had had heated discussions with members of a Hindu fundamentalist group before and they had threatened him.

 PRAY for comfort, peace and protection upon Rev. Sanjeevulu's family. Pray that his family members and all Christian leaders responding to his murder would act in obedience to the Holy Spirit during this difficult time. Pray that the authorities will take the case seriously and the attackers be brought to justice. Remember church leaders throughout India who minister in difficult and hostile environments. – WEA, AN

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)** Christian-Muslim violence in the CAR has grown worse after a rebel group

withdrew and left destruction in its wake amidst a rocky transition to a new government. The rebels are hitting civilians as revenge against the government and burning villages as they go. However, a pro-Christian militia group has also been responsible for attacks against Muslim civilians. Religious leaders of both faiths have appealed to both groups to stop the violence. Dieudonne Nzapalainga, the Archbishop of CAR's capital, Bangui, has said the violence by Christians are not "coherent with their faith. You cannot say you are Christian and kill, burn, destroy your brother." About 1 million civilians have been displaced and require urgent humanitarian aid.

 PRAY for Christians here to live and act in accordance with the true teachings of the Gospel. Pray for the new government to have the means and credibility to stop the on-going violence. Pray for the availability of humanitarian aid for those displaced and suffering. – WWM

**IRAQ** Christian organisations report an increase in attacks and threats against believers in 2013. This was partly due to the conflict in neighbouring Syria which is spurring Muslim terrorist groups to strike harder against Christian targets who have been murdered, kidnapped or suffer other forms of abuse because they are easy targets being a minority group. Iraq is listed as no. 4 on Open Doors' World Watch List of countries where persecution of Christians is greatest. In recent weeks since late January and early February, a new wave of violence has swept through the capital Baghdad as part of long-standing enmity between Sunni and Shia groups.

 PRAY for believers who face opposition from their family and communities because they have chosen to believe in Christ. Pray for all innocent people caught in the violence between rival Muslim factions. Pray for wisdom for expatriate Christians who are being increasingly monitored by the authorities. Pray for Christian workers who are providing help through trauma counseling, training and income-generating projects. – OD