

2018
Q1

Berita NECF

What's Inside?

- 3 Be a Blessing by Giving Back to Society
- 4 Apologetics Module Helps Thinkers Believe and Believers Think
- 5 Learning from Bonhoeffer to escape Social Media
- 6 A Retreat that Refreshes and Renews
- 7 Initiating Community Empowerment-Direct Access to Fair Markets
- 8 Seven Characteristics of Liberal Theology
- 10 Lifting the Spirits of the Tamil Pastors' Widows
- 11 Ordinary Membership Of NECF Approved From June-December 2017



Chairman's Message

'A Measure of Revival'

By Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng

"And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape... and give us a measure of revival in our bondage." Ezra 9:8

The Jews had spent years in exile under Babylonian reign. God, however, stirred up Cyrus (the ruler of Persia who had conquered Babylon) to allow the exiled Jews to return to their homeland.

Four and a half months after arriving in Jerusalem (7:9 cf 10:8-9), Ezra was alerted to the problem of mixed marriages in the community, something expressly forbidden by God. Ezra, in sorrow and remorse, prayed this prayer from which we can glean a number of significant lessons.

First, **God is merciful**. In His mercy, God used Cyrus to consent to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. This is despite their sin in intermarrying with the Gentiles.

The mercy of God does not condone sin but God still brought the remnant back to Jerusalem. The Church in Malaysia may fall short of God's standards of holiness, but that does not mean He cannot or will not be merciful to His Church.

Secondly, **God can bring a measure of revival** in spite of His people's sin. Ezra acknowledged in his prayer in 9:8, that there was bondage. This sin plagued the Israelites during the period of the Judges (Judges 3:5-6). Even Solomon with all his wisdom succumbed to marrying foreign women.

Yet Ezra's prayer revealed he believed that some measure of revival was possible. It might not be a full-blown revival like some of the revivals seen in the past but some measure of revival was not improbable. Similarly, we can hold on to God's grace – that a measure of revival remains possible in our nation and in our churches. There is hope.

Thirdly, **we may still be in bondage even when revival happens**. Even as Ezra prayed, the Jews remained under the bondage of captivity, this time under the Persian Empire. While we may not be victims of territorial bondage, the reality is Christians today are still under all kinds of bondages - be it economic, religious, political, family or even personal sin. The encouraging truth is that being under bondage does not mean that revival cannot happen. In fact, some of us may even continue to be bound until the Lord Jesus returns.

Continued on page 2...

NECF members, have you paid your membership subscription?
Please contact us!

Berita NECF is a quarterly publication of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia.

NECF MALAYSIA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairman

Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng

Vice Chairman I

Pr Dr Khoo Kay Hup

Vice Chairman II

Pr Chomy Ching Choon Mee

Honorary Secretary

Rev Elisha Satvinder

Honorary Treasurer

Pr Sam Ang

Assistant Honorary Treasurer

Rev Ong Sek Leang

Committee Members

Rev Dexter Low

Rev Samuel Surendran Krishnan

Pr Tay Wah Seng

Rev Foo Moy Peng

Rev Gabriel Jabanathan

Elder Thomas Lim Kok Beng

Pr Chin Lee Yean

Rev Datuk Jerry Dusing

Rev Dato' Dr Justin Wan

Elder Kong Yeng Phooi

NECF MALAYSIA STAFF

Management Team

Pr Dr Khoo Kay Hup

Pr Sam Ang

Rev Andy Chi

Assistant Secretary General

Rev Andy Chi

Executive Secretaries

Yvonne Chin (Confidential Secretary/ASG PA)

Katryn Tan (Finance/NECF Foundation)

Rev Daniel Loh (Administrator/Tamil)

Pr Alfred Tais (Bahasa Malaysia/Orang Asli)

Dr Ngeh Hoong Eng (Chinese)

Jack Cheah (Business & Economy and Education)

Assistant Executive Secretaries

Tan Poh Kian (Prayer)

Clement Tan (Legal & Research)

Carrie Lim Suk Pei (Chinese)

Administrative Secretaries

Usun Wan

Belinda Kwek (Receptionist)

Artwork

Murphy Goh

NECF
MALAYSIA

ADDRESS

32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya,
Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 603-7727 8227 Fax: 603-7729 1139

Email: enquiries@necf.org.my

Website: www.necf.org.my

Printed by

Akitiara Corporation

1&3, Jln TPP1/3, Tmn Perindustrian Puchong
Batu 12, 47100 Puchong, Selangor.

NECF 2018 CALENDAR



August

- 1 Klang Valley 40-Day Fast and Pray Launch at FGAKL
- 7 40-Day Fast and Pray Begins
- 16 BM Klang Valley Roadshow & Prayer Gathering
- 17 BM Mentakab Roadshow & Prayer Gathering
- 26 Tamil Youthnet Missions Trip, Sri Lanka (26/8/2018 to 5/9/2018)
- 31 Merdeka Day

September

- 6 BM Johore Roadshow & Prayer Gathering
- 14-15 Seminar with Dr Frank Damazio
- 15 Tamil Youth Intercessors Summit at Taiping
- 16 Malaysia Day Prayer Rally at FGT
- 16 Chinese Malaysia Day Prayer Rally
- 24-26 Chinese Pastoral Care Retreat at Grand Kampar Hotel

November

- 17 Tamil Pastors' Widows Christmas Gathering
- 27-29 BM & OA Pastors' Retreat

December

- 25 CFM Christmas Hi-Tea

March

- 9 Bahasa Malaysia (BM) & Orang Asli (OA) Combined Prayer in Penang
- 10 Tamil GO Youth Missions Follow-up Training
- 22 Council Meeting with Northern Region Pastors & Leaders
- 23 BM & OA Combined Prayer in Klang Valley

April

- 2-4 Chinese Deputation Trip to Alor Setar, Kangar, Sg. Petani

May

- 12 Biennial General Meeting at PJ Gospel Hall
- 21-23 Chinese Deputation Trip to Gemas, Kluang, Segamat
- 26 Tamil Young Women's Conference & Workshop at Seremban

June

- 21-23 BM Mentor Gen Muda

July

- 26 BM Penang Roadshow & Prayer Gathering

...continued from front page:

Lastly, and more importantly, we can learn from Ezra's example. When he heard of the people's sin, he was devastated, as vividly described in 9:3: "So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished." He responded in the right manner by praying and fasting and weeping before the Lord.

Like Ezra, we too need to be broken before the Lord. We need to pray and weep rather than be despondent and surrender to our bondages.

We must believe that for a little while, grace can be shown to our nation and the Church, and consequently, we will experience revival!



Tan Sri Joseph Kurup speaking at the Christmas High-Tea

‘Be a Blessing by Giving Back to Society’ was highlighted at Christmas High-Tea

By Jack Cheah

The CFM’s (Christian Federation of Malaysia) High-Tea was hosted by NECF on 25 December 2017 at the Metro Tabernacle A/G, Batu Caves. It was attended by politicians from both sides of the divide: ministers in the Prime Minister’s Department Tan Sri Joseph Kurup and Datuk Paul Low, Opposition leader Datuk Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng were among those present. The event was also attended by Members of Parliament and State Assembly representatives, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, religious and community leaders, pastors and other distinguished guests.

Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng, NECF chairman speaking for CFM highlighted that at Christmas time Christians are not to forget to continue to give back to society because God has given us so much, including the salvation of our souls. Christmas truly is a time to reflect on God’s grace and mercy in His gift of the Child born on Christmas Day. The Gospel of John (chapter 3 verses 16-17) states the true meaning of Christmas: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

He added that Christmas is not only about the salvation of man’s soul. The gift of God to the world should move Christians to give to others and not just to receive. They need to continue to ask themselves how they have been good neighbours to their fellow neighbours, their work colleagues and their fellow students in institutions of learning. More importantly, they need to think about how they have given to their nation to demonstrate their appreciation to God for granting them peace, prosperity and harmonious relationships amongst the diverse ethnicities and religious adherents of the land.

Rev Eu also pointed out that the Malaysian Church, through the years, has always reached out to all communities. Many people

have benefited from the mission schools, medical clinics and hospitals, soup kitchens, dialysis centres, humanitarian aid activities, drug rehabilitation homes, old folks’ homes and children’s orphanages. He said that Jesus had always been mindful of the poor, the needy, the sick, the widows, the prostitutes, the children and the tax collectors - people who needed to repent and be saved and healed. He further said that whilst the Malaysian Church can rightly pride itself to have been a positive contributor to social and relief work to society since her inception, the Church also needs to boldly state that it will also stand up for justice, especially for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised. Rev Eu stated that in this regard the Church is always pro-justice and pro-righteousness, issue-centric and non-partisan.

He concluded his message by stressing that the Church has always been passionate about being a blessing to Malaysia and that passion has not abated.

In his capacity as the Minister representing Prime Minister Najib Razak at the event, Tan Sri Kurup said Malaysians need to respect each other’s culture and religion. He emphasized that unity was key for Malaysians to progress and they should be tolerant towards other races and religions. He called on Malaysians to respect others who may have different values. He said we are at our strongest when we are united as one, even if there is a difference of religion.

Overall, it can be considered to be one of the best Christmas High-Teas that has been hosted. The turnout was good with about 600 people attending the event and there was favourable feedback to the well-planned programme.



Jack Cheah is the Executive Secretary of the Business & Economy Commission and the Education Commission, NECF



Distinguished guests at the gathering

Apologetics Module Helps Thinkers Believe and Believers Think

By Lim Fang Say



In-depth discussion with the RZIM moderator

The Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) Academy plus Core Module course was first introduced in Malaysia back in February 2016, starting with a group of 13 participants hailing from six different churches. Through collaboration with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, NECF believed this online apologetics course would dovetail with its wider efforts to establish a deeper thinking culture among the Christian community in the nation.

Based on RZIM's motto of "Helping Thinkers Believe and Believers Think", the Core Module is the starting point for all who are interested to pursue apologetics. As the centrepiece of RZIM Academy curriculum, the module aims to equip believers to better respond to individuals around them who are asking honest questions and holding sincere objections to the Christian faith.

The module is taught entirely online through 26 lectures over 12 weeks featuring lectures from Ravi Zacharias, Os Guinness, John Lennox, Michael Ramsden, Amy Orr-Ewing and many more experts who explore the four questions of a coherent worldview, namely origin, meaning, morality and destiny. In addition to the recorded lectures, discussion forums and student blog pages for posting assignments have also been designed to make it easy for participants to receive regular feedback from peers and the Academy moderators.

It should be noted that the Core Module in Malaysia is run on the "Academy Plus" format. Unlike the standard online format found elsewhere, the "Plus" element allows for students to meet up as a group with the RZIM moderator in person for in-depth discussions and exchanges. Jose Philip from the RZIM Asia office in Singapore commuted to Subang Jaya regularly over the 3-month period to meet with the course participants during the weekends. These sessions proved helpful for the group to evaluate and review how the contents of the course impacted the participants' personal witnessing efforts in their day-to-day encounters with non-believers.

The pioneer group of students in Malaysia successfully completed the Core Module in July, 2016, and in 2017 we saw the start of the second round of the RZIM Academy Plus Core Module with the participation of six students. This second Core Module concluded its run in early November, 2017.

Feedback from participants of the Malaysian chapter of the Academy Plus has generally been positive. Here are two:

"RZIM Core Module has helped me appreciate the purpose of apologetics and how we ought to understand others and the reasons for their worldviews. As a believer, it has also helped me appreciate my faith and see the depth of the Gospel and hope Christ offers," said Joyce Eu of FGT Subang Jaya.

"RZIM Core Module has been a great help to our evangelism ministry. It has given me a better understanding of counter perspectives and engendered my interest to study other world views to be more effective in my engagement to share the Gospel," said Ps. Vincent John of Tabernacle of Christ, Melaka.

For 2018, we are continuing with our RZIM Academy Core Module course. No dates have been fixed yet but it will take place somewhere between the 2nd to 3rd quarter of the year. The Course fee remains at USD100 per student. It is at a discounted rate with NECF subsidising part of the cost.

NECF would like to see more Pastors, Christian Leaders, Church Workers, Marketplace Leaders and tertiary students sign up for this course. It is essential for us to provide intellectual leadership for our churches. Nancy Randolph Pearce, an American evangelical author on the Christian worldview sums up our concern:

"To be effective in equipping young people and professionals to face the challenges of a highly educated secular society, the church needs to redefine the mission of pastors and youth leaders to include training in apologetics and worldview. Pastors must once again provide intellectual leadership for their congregations, teaching apologetics from the pulpit. Every time a minister introduces a biblical teaching, he should also instruct the congregation in ways to defend it against the major objections they are likely to encounter. A religion that avoids the intellectual task and retreats to the therapeutic realm of personal relationships and feelings will not survive in today's spiritual battlefield."



Lim Fang Say is the Head of Operations at Eagles Dialysis Centre and worships at Full Gospel Tabernacle Subang Jaya

Learning from Bonhoeffer to escape Social Media

Edited by Jack Cheah



Standfirst

This is an extract from an article by Tony Reinke, a senior writer at desiringGod.org as it appeared on the website on 20 January 2018.

Social media addicts each of us according to Tony Reinke, a senior writer at desiringGod.org. We love matching wits in Facebook comments or spreading another throwaway selfie on Snapchat. The allure of social media is the desire to be seen, omnisciently seen, if not always affirmed, at least always put in view of others. Smartphones promise to protect us from athazagoraphobia — the fear of being forgotten. So we impulsively connect, from the moment we wake up to the moment we must surrender ourselves to sleep. All of it conditions our digital behaviour, including our emotions.

Facing the Silence

Reinke further adds that social media is a brew of emotionally stimulating drugs we mix for ourselves. It means to leave social media, even for a few days or just a couple weeks, is to encounter the harsh reality that we will be un-missed on our absence, un-noticed in our silence, and even un-anticipated upon our return back. To escape social media is to taste the bitter sting of oblivion, a little hint of elderly loneliness or the midlife identity-crisis brought down now into every age demographic.

Silence and the Self

In his sermon on Psalm 62:1 — “For God alone my soul waits in silence” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer took time to explain the modern fear of silence, and to show how modern man has avoided it by media, a phenomenon operating in late 1920s Germany.

First, he said, we seek new noise to avoid ourselves.

“We flee silence,” Bonhoeffer said. “We race from activity to activity to avoid having to be alone with ourselves for even a moment, to avoid having to look at ourselves in the mirror. We are bored with ourselves, and often the most desperate, wasted hours are those we are forced to spend by ourselves” (Works 10:503).

“We use the noise of media in our lives to drown out the things we’d rather not face.”

Silence and the Lamb

Reinke shows from Scripture that silence is a demonstration of our steadied faith, a resolved trust in the Redeemer to move and act and deliver. When the temptations and dangers increase, the godly can hush the noisy alarmists around them

and reclaim silence (see Psalm 37:7 and Psalm 62:1-2). Silence is confidence in God.

Silence is also a divine invitation according to him. And that’s the deeper modern fear. “Not only are we afraid of ourselves, of discovering and unmasking ourselves,” Bonhoeffer writes, “but even more we are afraid of God, that he might disturb our aloneness and discover and unmask us, that God might draw us into partnership and do with us whatever he wants. Because we fear such unnerving, lonely encounters with God, we avoid them, avoid even the thought of God lest he suddenly get too close to us. Suddenly having to look into God’s eyes, having to be accountable before him, is too dreadful a notion; our perpetual smile might fade, things might get completely serious in a way to which we are not at all accustomed.”

Silence and the Community

“Self-chosen silence is the new expression of social empowerment in the digital age. Silence is freedom.”

Reinke comments that Bonhoeffer is not celebrating social isolation and loneliness. There is an aloneness that stems from brokenness. Bonhoeffer is applauding the intentional silence we should learn to embrace — what we now call solitude, the decision, when given opportunities for noise, to choose stillness. Self-chosen silence is the new expression of social empowerment in the digital age. Silence is freedom. And silence is a form of guarding the health of the local church.

As Bonhoeffer’s ministry developed, he would take the two truths of this early sermon (that silence forces us to face ourselves, and silence opens us to God’s voice and call), and apply them to community life.

In his book *Life Together*, he says we learn in community the patience and honesty necessary to be alone. While alone, we meet God and develop the authenticity necessary for communal flourishing. “Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community. Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone” (Works 5:83).

So Bonhoeffer asks “Is the Word of God close to me as a comfort and a strength? Or do I misuse my solitude against the community, against the Word and prayer? Individuals must be aware that even their hours of being alone reverberate through the community. In their solitude they can shatter and tarnish the community or they can strengthen and sanctify it. Every act of self-discipline by a Christian is also a service to the community” (Works 5:92).

Continued on page 6...



BM and OA pastors and wives who attended the Pastors@2R Retreat.

A Retreat that Refreshes and Renews

by Rev Samuel Surendran Krishnan

The Bahasa Malaysia and Orang Asli pastors were really grateful that NECF was able to organise the annual Pastors @ 2R Retreat for them from November 21-23, 2017. This was the fourth consecutive year that this event has been held to encourage, empower and edify pastors and their spouses.

What is the goal of the Bahasa Malaysia and Orang Asli Commission for this retreat? The 2R Retreat which stands for “Refreshed and Renewed” Retreat is designed in such a way that it is not loaded with teaching and preaching sessions. It is organized to encourage pastors to refuel their ministry passions and to be refreshed in their personal walk with the Lord. We want pastors to come to this retreat, which is usually held at the end of the year, to laugh, relax, connect with new friends, build networking relationships, eat good food and enjoy a refreshing time of worship. Throughout the retreat, many creative sessions/activities were planned ranging from group discussions, talk-shows, creative games, group presentations (drama/skits), sharing of national issues and some inspirational devotions. The retreat welcomes spouses of the pastors to attend.

The event was held at the M-Roof Boutique Hotel in Ipoh, Perak. A total of 30 plus pastors and their spouses

participated in this event. There is a constant request that the retreat be extended by an additional day to facilitate the attainment of the goals of the retreat more effectively. The cost has always been an issue if we were to extend the number of days for the retreat. As a matter of fact, we ensured that pastors and their spouses were given subsidies to encourage more participation.

The best part of this retreat is the focus on a light programme with lots of opportunities to laugh and relax. Many pastors enjoyed the programme design and we feel our goal of making it 2R—to be Refreshed and Renewed has been achieved. The Commission hopes to make this as a key event for the pastors each year. It is through this event that NECF is able to share with the pastors the national issues and other relevant topics pertaining to nation building and current challenges affecting churches in Malaysia. This is definitely the best avenue to connect pastors to NECF’s vision and at the same time to inspire and encourage them to be faithful and fruitful in their ministries and lives.



Rev Samuel Surendran Krishnan is the chairman of NECF’s Bahasa Malaysia and Orang Asli Commissions and Senior Pastor of Excel Point Community Church, Penang.

...continued from page 5

Serious Solitude

Serious solitude can feel unnatural, uncomfortable and too serious. Bonhoeffer grants it “will feel rather funny, indeed perhaps even quite empty the first few times. Before long, however, the soul is filled; it begins to come alive and feel stronger” (10:504).

Bonhoeffer believed it to be the special work of the Holy Spirit to lead each believer into this serious solitude, into

the quiet place where our deepest needs are exposed and the greatest eternal truths can once again wash over our souls.



Jack Cheah is the Executive Secretary of the Business & Economy Commission and the Education Commission, NECF



Initiating Community Empowerment-Direct Access to Fair Markets

by Kon Onn Sein

A major problem the Orang Asli (OA) Jakun community faces in Kampung OA Ulu Gumum is the depletion of their forest and resources. Logging and oil palm plantation schemes have damaged a large part of their forests. Traditionally, the forest was their hunting ground, food source and bank – in effect, their supermarket, pharmacy, timber warehouse and DIY shop. Now their immediate source of livelihood has been tragically cut down. More devastatingly, their life savings and retirement plans have also disappeared almost overnight. The incomes derived from the remaining forests are meagre and unable to sustain their growing families.

Some have bravely tried to adapt to their impoverishment by planting 2-3 acres of oil palm and rubber trees through state-sponsored oil palm schemes administered by the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA). This provided the early OA families with work and dividends but many could not adapt to being mere labourers. They supplemented their livelihoods with hunting and foraging in the remaining forest. This became harder as they had to travel deeper into the forest. Some of the younger ones went to work in distant contract farms for days or weeks, while others who were more educated got jobs in different cities. But being ill-equipped to live in the city, they often returned with little savings.

Their diminished forests and the consequential imposition of a modern cash economy mean that they are unable to maintain their traditional livelihoods. To buy food and necessities that they would have otherwise obtained from the forests, the OAs now need to find another way of generating cash to sustain their modernised world.

However, this is not easy. With low literacy levels, frail land rights and no capital, the OAs lack access to fair markets. Middlemen who buy their produce or engage them to collect forest produce or work on their contract farms normally give them low prices and wages.

One approach that has been initiated is to provide direct access to fair markets for the OAs without going through the middlemen through an integrated vegetable farm. This is to ensure that they would not be exploited by these middlemen who purchase their produce at much below market prices or hire them either to collect forest produce or work on their contract farms at very low wages. In one such project, a non-profit organisation, the Foundation for Community Studies and Development (YKPM) facilitated a starting grant and provided technical and marketing support to eight OA farmers to start a community vegetable farm using natural farming methods.

The eight farmers realise that this is the best livelihood strategy available to them that keeps their community together. There is skill transfer, they have farm ownership, and they can scale up, double their incomes and earn adequately to provide for their needs without destroying their environment. Best of all, they can be near to their family and have time for their community.



YKPM helped to set up OA Organics, which is the trading name and partnership between the OA farmers and the marketing cooperative.

Partnerships are formed with retail outlets to sell the produce. Some of these outlets took commissions and some, like The Hive and Baba Low restaurants, allowed them to do it for free.

Through its Facebook account, OA Organics were able to reach out to the wider Malaysian public. A major supermarket chain has adopted OA Organics as part of its corporate social responsibility and plans to sell the produce at its outlets in the country.

The eight farmers have now gained confidence and commitment towards this farming and marketing strategy. In July 2017, three more OAs joined the community farm, two more replicated the strategy in their home gardens and six others were ready to expand another 1.5 acres. These are heartening signs that the community farming programme

Continued on page 10...

Seven Characteristics of Liberal Theology

by Dr Ng Kam Weng

Standfirst

This is a reprint of an article as it appeared on September 27, 2017 on www.krisispraxis.com. It is reproduced here with permission from the writer.

Some of my readers wonder what I have in mind when I refer to liberal theology in my discussions. It is indeed challenging, if not problematic when we try to define a 'movement' that does not accept authority (including biblical authority), rejects defining creeds and doctrine and displays an amorphous social mission. As Gary Dorrien aptly explains in his authoritative 3-volume work, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Westminster Press, 2001-2006),

The essential idea of liberal theology is that all claims to truth, in theology as in other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority. Christian scripture may be recognized as spiritually authoritative within Christian experience, but its word does not settle or establish truth claims about matters of fact. [vol.2. p.1]

Daniel Day Williams offers a classic definition of liberal theology,

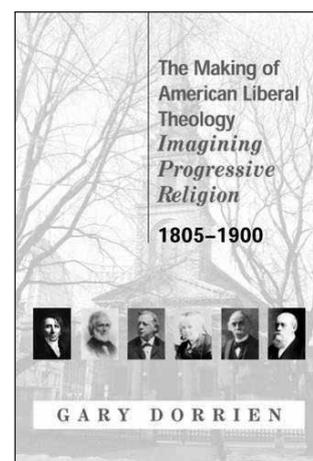
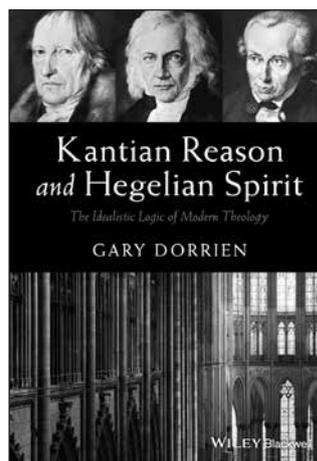
By 'liberal theology' I mean the movement in modern Protestantism which during the nineteenth century tried to bring Christian thought into organic unity with evolutionary world view, the movements for social reconstruction, and the expectations of 'a better world' which dominated the general mind. It is that form of Christian faith in which a prophetic-progressive philosophy of history culminates in the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. [Gary Dorrien, vol.1, xix.]

This definition anticipates that liberal theology evolves with its evolutionary worldview. Gary Dorrien complements Williams' definition as he captures the intellectual presuppositions that drives the evolving agenda of liberal theology:

Liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially historical criticism and the natural sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to contemporary people. [vol.2, p. 3]

But as the French adage goes, "the more things change the more things stay the same." The outward forms and institutions of liberal theology may change, but its underlying intellectual outlook remains the same. Kevin DeYoung gives a helpful summary of what Dorrien identifies to be the enduring characteristics that define liberal

theology. [I strongly recommend readers who want to understand the philosophical background of contemporary theology to read Gary Dorrien's complementary historical survey, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealist Logic of Modern Theology* (Blackwell, 2012)]



SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY

Below are seven characteristics of liberalism that have been culled from the first volume of Dorrien's trilogy. The headings are mine; the indented text is from the book.

1. True religion is not based on external authority

The idea of liberal theology is nearly three centuries old. In essence, it is the idea that Christian theology can be genuinely Christian without being based upon external authority. Since the eighteenth century, liberal Christian thinkers have argued that religion should be modern and progressive and that the meaning of Christianity should be interpreted from the standpoint of modern knowledge and experience. (xii)

What's more, Dorrien recognizes this rejection is something new in the history of the church.

Before the modern period, all Christian theologies were constructed within a house of authority. All premodern Christian theologies made claims to authority-based orthodoxy. Even the mystical and mythopoetic theologies produced by premodern Christianity took for granted the view of scripture as an infallible revelation and the view of theology as an explication of propositional revelation. Adopting the scholastic methods of their Catholic adversaries, Protestant theologians formalized these assumptions with scholastic precision during the seventeenth century. Not coincidentally, the age of religious wars that preceded the Enlightenment is also remembered as the age of orthodoxy.

Continued on page 9...

...continued from page 8

Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy heightened the Reformation principle that scripture is the sole and infallibly sufficient rule of faith, teaching that scripture is also strictly inerrant in all that it asserts. (xv)

Note that Dorrien does not believe inerrancy was a Princetonian invention.

2. Christianity is a movement of social reconstruction.

One of the most influential definitions of theological liberalism was offered in 1949 by an able latter-day proponent, Daniel Day Williams: "By 'liberal theology' I mean the movement in modern Protestantism which during the nineteenth century tried to bring Christian thought into organic unity with the evolutionary world view, the movements from social reconstruction, and the expectations of 'a better world' which dominated the general mind. It is that form of Christian faith in which a prophetic-progressive philosophy of history culminates in the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth." (xiv)

3. Christianity must be credible and relevant.

Specifically, liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the nature and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people. (xxiii)

4. Truth can be known only through changing symbols and forms.

Bushnell admonished that "all our difficulties and controversies" regarding the truths of revelation were caused by a basic failure to face up to what was known about the clothing of truths in signs and analogies. The problem was not peculiar to New England theology, he suggested; it was an "almost universal sin that infests the reasonings of mankind concerning moral and spiritual subjects." Throughout the world, people treated the symbolic forms of their truths as the truths themselves. (151)

5. Theological controversy is about language, not about truth.

Bushnell debated various doctrinal points with his adversaries, claiming always that their disagreements were about language usage, not lack of belief: "All my supposed heresies, in reference to these great subjects, are caused by the arrest of speculation and the disallowance of those constructive judgments, or a priori arguments, by which terms that are only analogies, and mysteries that are most significant when taken only as symbols, are made to affirm something wiser and more exact than what they express." (151-52)

6. The historical accuracies of biblical facts and events are not crucial, so long as we meet Jesus in the pages of Scripture.

He cautioned that the faithful reader of scripture is not obliged to assume the truth of the Gospel narrative "by which the manner and facts of the life of Jesus are reported to us." That was the matter in question, "We only assume the representations themselves, as being just what they are, and discover their necessary truth, in the transcendent, wondrously self-evident, picture of divine excellence and beauty exhibited in them." Bushnell counseled that the biblical narrative is not very impressive aside from the extraordinary character of its pivotal figure, but the more that we study the figure of Jesus, "a picture shining in its own clear sunlight upon us," the more clearly we are brought into the source and light of all truth: "Jesus, the Divine Word, coming out from God, to be incarnate with us, and be the vehicle of God and salvation to the race." (399)

7. The true religion is the way of Christ, not any particular doctrines about Christ.

The Word of Christ is not a doctrine or the end of an argument, but a self-authenticating life; it is morally regenerative spiritual power claimed in Christ's spirit... Moving beyond their mentor, the Bushnellians accented the humanity of Christ; Munger and Gladden lifted Jesus' teaching above any claims about his person. In both cases, however, a self-authenticating moral image conceived as the power of true religion was in control. The true religion is the way of Christ. (399-400)

Dorrien observes that this kind of religion was a departure from historic orthodoxy.

Traditional Protestant orthodoxies place the substitutionary atonement of Christ at the center of Christianity, conceiving Christ's death as a propitiatory sacrifice that vicariously satisfied the retributive demands of divine justice. (400)

The new progressive religion of liberalism understood Christianity quite differently.

By the end of Beecher's life, it was almost prosaic for Munger and Gladden to assert that Christianity is essentially a life, not a doctrine. (405)

Conclusion

Liberalism is not a swear word to be thrown around. It is a diverse, but identifiable approach to Christianity, one that differs significantly from historic orthodoxy, not to mention evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Liberals believe they are making Christianity relevant, credible, beneficial, and humane. Evangelicals in the line of J. Gresham Machen believe they are making something other than Christianity. That was the dividing line a century ago, and the division persists.



Dr Ng Kam Weng is Research Director of Kairos Research Centre, Petaling Jaya. He worships at Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church.



Pastors' Widows at the Christmas gathering

Lifting the Spirits of the Tamil Pastors' Widows

by Rev Gabriel Jabanathan

The NECF Tamil Commission hosted its third Tamil Pastors' Widows Christmas get-together on the 18th November, 2017. The event is part of the compassionate and service oriented programme undertaken on a small scale by the commission. It was an awesome day to see 24 pastors' wives, whose husbands once faithfully toiled in the Lord's vineyard and who have now gone to be with the Lord, gathering together again enthusiastically for this event. The Founder Director of WWM (Women with Mission), Pastor Geetha, played a key role in bringing these women together.

The speaker for the day was Jasmine Adaickalam, the Managing Director of CCODES, an organisation that specialises in providing consultancy, training, designing people-centred development tools, systems and solutions for community oriented organisations and public service

agencies. She delivered a passionate message that lifted the spirits of those present.

It was a day of celebration with songs and Christmas carol singing led by a local church in Kapar. Some of the testimonies were heart-touching. Each of the pastors' wives was given a Christmas cash gift and their children were blessed with school stationery items. A joyful spirit filled the atmosphere. It was a delight to see the women laughing and singing! The Tamil Commission, after successfully hosting these three annual events, plans, in a small way, to look into the educational needs of the children. The Commission also takes this opportunity to thank all those who generously contributed in kind and cash for this event.



Rev Gabriel Jabanathan is the Chairman of the Tamil Commission, NECF and Senior Pastor of the Charis Word Centre Networking Churches.

...continued from page 7

gives hope and inspires others in the village. However, to reach economy of scale and to grow their incomes further, the farm needs to be scaled up to five acres. Currently, a sum of RM100, 000 is needed to scale up, help more OA communities and achieve sustainability.

The ultimate goal is that this eco farm will bring hope, restore dignity and inspire others to adopt similar methods of livelihood strategies. In its own small way, this farm is making businesses work for the poor.

In recognition of its efforts to act heroically and/or selflessly, building bridges between different communities, and in doing so promoting racial harmony and unity, OA Organics was one of the 10 winners of the 2017 Star Golden Hearts Award.



Kon Onn Sein is the General Manager of the Foundation for Community Studies and Development (YKPM). He worships at Evangelical Free Church (EFC) Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

Ordinary Membership Of NECF Approved From June-December 2017

Church	Pastor	Town	State
Abba Love Revival Centre	Pr Jackson Kwan Wai Kang	Sandakan	Sabah
Ethnos Evangelical Fellowship	Pr Sarlo Socobos	Ipoh	Perak
Fountain Church	Pr John Wong Wai Meng	Petaling Jaya	Selangor
Full Gospel Church Ayer Tawar	Pr Yu Wang Huang	Ayer Tawar	Perak
GB611 Bread of Life	Pr Chang Kok Chung, Joel	Ipoh	Perak
Good Shepherd Assembly of God	Rev Joseph Thamburaj	Petaling Jaya	Selangor
Hope City Church Kuala Lumpur	Pr Joel Sebastian Burden	Kuala Lumpur	WP
International Baptist Church Bukit Indah	Elder Craig Davis	Iskandar Puteri	Johor
Kelana Jaya Gospel Centre	Elder Andrew Chee	Petaling Jaya	Selangor
Manna Myanmar Christian Fellowship	Pr Francis Lee Pak Lee	Kuala Lumpur	WP
Praise Baptist Church	YH Dato' Henry Benedict Asirvatham	Tanjung Tokong	Penang
Revival Mission Ministries	Pr Zechariah A/L Jugdey Singh	Ipoh	Perak
The Free Word Chapel	Pr P.C. Aginas A/L A.A.Gomez	Johor Bahru	Johor
True Friend Berhad	Mr Cristhappa Samuel	Petaling Jaya	Selangor
Westlake Community Church	Ms. Chan Sook Yian	Kampar	Perak
Word of Yeshua	Pr John Rajendran	Kuala Lumpur	WP

NECF
MALAYSIA

the 大豐收
Harvest
Tuaian • அறுவடை

மத்தேயு | Matius | 马太福音 | Matthew 9:35-38

40 DAYS FAST & PRAYER | 7 AUG - 15 SEPT 2018
四十天禁食祷告 | 2018年8月7日至9月15日
40 HARI PUASA & DOA | 7 OGOS - 15 SEPT 2018
40-நாள உபவாசம் & ஜெபம் | 7 ஆகஸ்ட் - 15 செப்டம்பர்

FELLOWSHIP CUM LUNCH OF THE NORTHERN REGION CHURCHES WITH THE NECF COUNCIL

The NECF Council would like to extend a special invitation to Pastors, Elders and Leaders of churches in the Northern Region to attend the above event as follows:

22 March
Thursday 2018
10.00 am to 1.30 pm

Excel Point Community Church (EPCC)
Level 12A, 105,107, Jalan C.Y. Choy
George Town
10300 George Town
Penang

16th
BIENNIAL
GENERAL MEETING & TALK

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF
TOMORROW
12TH MAY 2018
9.00AM to 1.00PM
Petaling Jaya Gospel Hall

speakers

REV. ELISHA SATVINDER	-	Evangelism
REV. ONG SEK LEANG	-	Discipleship
PR. DR. KHOO KAY HUP	-	Prayer
REV. DR. EU HONG SENG	-	The Word

NECF
MALAYSIA

NECF
MALAYSIA

the
Harvest
MATTHEW 9:35-38

40 DAYS FAST & PRAYER
7 AUG - 15 SEPT 2018

KLANG VALLEY 40-DAY FAST & PRAYER LAUNCH	MALAYSIA DAY PRAYER RALLY
WEDNESDAY, 1 August 8-10pm Full Gospel Assembly KL (FGAKL) Lot 689, Taman Goodwood, Jalan Kuchai Lama, Off Jalan Kelang Lama, 58200 Kuala Lumpur.	SUNDAY, 16 September 6-8pm Full Gospel Tabernacle (FGT) Wisma Eagles, 5 Jalan TP4, Taman Perindustrian UEP, 47620 Subang Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan

OPEN TO ALL