

beritaNECF

EDITORIAL

Flowers From Many Gardens – Shaping Our Nation's Destiny

MALAYSIA has always prided herself as a model nation of tolerance and multi-culturalism.

Despite the trauma of 1969, Malaysians can confidently say we have made many strides towards nationhood since 1957. Prof Datuk Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi in an essay entitled "Towards a Shared Destiny" laid down the following advances made in terms of nation building:



- The identification of race with social and economic function has been weakened.
- The vibrant economy has united our disparate racial groups.
- Sabah and Sarawak have given to pluralism a territorial dimension.
- By encouraging entrepreneurship and allowing the minority communities to provide leadership in the economic arena, twin objectives have been achieved: the economy has developed fabulously. Every community has acquired a stake in the country.
- It must also be borne in mind that some of the racial and religious discord that exists in our society is a natural process of democratic freedoms. As society opens up, pent up feelings are expressed, often in ways that are deeply hurtful to others.

With the current debate on race and religion in full public view, racial and religious polarisation has reached an all time high.

Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria in his *Malaysian Journal on Human Rights* (Vol 7:2013) article outlined some of the problems.

- Disputes pertaining to confirming conversions of the dead.
- Problems of divorce and inheritance between couples one of whom converts to Islam.
- Seemingly irreconcilable jurisdictional disputes between syariah and civil courts.
- Muslims sentiments over the use of the word "Allah".
- Moral policing resulting from an imposition of Islamic values on others.

Added to this list of already problematic issues is the recent raid by JAIS on the Bible Society of Malaysia and the Court of Appeal decision that the use of the word "Allah" is not essential or integral to the Christian faith. Malaysian society is indeed polarised more than ever before.

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In the midst of these challenges confronting the Christian church, what can Christians do to restore the fragile fabric of society and restore moderation where all can live in peaceful co-existence?

Many believe that tension is on the rise and it is therefore incumbent upon the Christian community to respond in a manner that is tempered with both justice and mercy so that the fabric of Malaysian life will not be further torn apart.

Perhaps the more fundamental question at this juncture is to ask, what is the Lord doing with the nation and what plans has He installed for the nation?

I have no firm solutions except three “Ps” for consideration, drawn from Scripture:

The first “P” is *purification*. Hebrews 12:10-11 tells us that God our heavenly father disciplines us as His children so that we may share in His holiness. The purification that God brings to His church in this season is for the fruit of holiness so that we may truly shine as a holy light and speak holy truth to the nation. Scripture warns us that the discipline for the pursuit of such holiness is painful rather than pleasant, but will later yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The Church and Christians must therefore be obedient and willing to embrace such purification and be found faithful, rather than seek to avoid it because of our fear or our unwillingness to face pain.

The second “P” is *perseverance*. Philippians 3:12-16 brings to us the example of the Apostle Paul who endured all things for the sake of Christ. The Apostle Paul is a great example for us in perseverance. Thus, Paul says, not that he has already obtained perfection but what he does is to forget what lies behind and to strain forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The journey in this season will be hard and perhaps lonely for some. It is a journey fraught with uncertainties; of being misunderstood, ridiculed, saddled with false accusations and even criticism and blame.

Whatever it may be that society or critics want to throw at the church for doing the mission of God, Christians should persevere, forgetting what lies behind and pressing on towards the goal of fulfilling that which God has called the church

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

The Devil's



IN 1978, I got hold of a book by Kurt Koch, *The Devil's Alphabet* in which the writer detailed practically every trick, scheme and wile of the evil one.

Today, the devil is hardly asleep and has even made progress. He has built up his arsenal with more novel weapons of wickedness, evil and deception.

The Church, meanwhile, is not alert, having forgotten the warning of the apostle Paul about deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, and some departing from the faith in the latter times.¹

Since the days of Peter Wagner during the early charismatic revival, the awareness and excitement over spiritual warfare has undeniably waned. Indeed tares have been sown amongst wheat, whilst good men slept.² The giant is lethargic with sleep. Far too many today are like the disciples at the Garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus was betrayed. Let us not be deluded to think that the Church could possibly be a giant, whilst the devil gloats in the fact that she is asleep.

The Malaysian Church needs to be awakened to the ongoing intensifying spiritual warfare in our land.

The devil's top four favorite weapons are -

1. **Division and disunity.** We may yet witness the biggest scandal when members of the Body attack and maul each other before a fallen world;
2. **Falsehood, deception and blatant lies.** In the last days, he will move in lying wonders³, there will be false apostles and deceitful workers⁴, deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons⁵. These are becoming more evident both in the West and in our nation;
3. **Pornography and every form of uncleanness will be practised.** No doubt countless will be "led away by various lusts⁶" and many of our potential Josephs, Daniels and Davids would have committed adultery a hundred times over before they hit their teenage prime because of the free flow of filth on the Internet. Our next generation of successors are being despoiled and surely disqualified before they can even stand behind the pulpit;

4. Spiritism, vampirism, the emerging spirit of Jezebel and practically every unclean spirit.

Interestingly, the infamous Raja Bomoh was busy performing rituals to cleanse the highway after the late MP Karpal Singh's fatal accident. It is not uncommon to hear of spiritists being invited to do their bit in commercial offices where there are jealousies, marital infidelity and the like. Some politicians reportedly have special rooms with altars set up to keep and honour spirits of the underworld.

The Church must wage warfare against principalities once again, return to the Word, and re-learn worship; for in His presence darkness will have to flee. For those already overtaken by sin and demonic influences, the Church needs to do the work of restoring⁷.

Incidentally, Kurt Koch in his book did not have a demon for the letter "z". The last book of the Bible, Revelation, forewarns in the last of the last days when the Pit is opened, every demonic spirit will be unleashed to accompany the Beast from the bottomless pit.⁸ I suppose one could say every demonic spirit from his "zoo" will then come forth to complete his alphabet.

Believe me, it will hardly be a tasty alphabet soup.

¹ 1 Tim 4:1

² Matt 13:24ff

³ 2 Thess 2:9 *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders*

⁴ 2 Cor 11:13

⁵ 1 Tim 4:1

⁶ 2 Tim 3:6

⁷ Gal 6:1ff

⁸ Rev 9:2,3,11.



Lessons in Humility: Nazarite Training Phase 1

By Melissa Ong & Sheryn Wong



NAZARITE Training Phase 1: Humility was held for a week in March 2014 and led by Pastor Jerome Ocampo, founder of Jesus Revolution Now! from the Philippines. It drew an overwhelming response of more than 370 delegates, mainly young adults, from as far as Penang and Sabah.

The Nazarite Training programme is aimed at equipping young adults to be catalysts for change in society. More than just biblical knowledge, it is aimed at changing and building character. Hence, learning to exercise humility was important as a first step.

Pastor Jerome talked about the need to develop the right qualities that can bring about this Divine-inspired change. Besides exercising Humility, we also need to cultivate Hunger, and to pursue Holiness. Here are some take-home points we gained from the sessions:

Defining Humility by Defining Pride

The easiest way to understand humility is to define its direct opposite, Pride. Pride is thinking we can act apart from God and refusing to acknowledge who we are in His eyes. James 4:6 says "God opposes the proud but favours the humble".

There are two kinds of pride – one that thinks: "No one can do it better than me". And another that says, "I can't do it; I am nobody". Thus, Pride is seeing one's self as higher or lower than you actually are. Humility is being exactly who you are in God's sight. If we reject who we are in God's eyes, we end up on one of two paths: The path of rejection (unbelief) or the path of rebellion (pride).

Self-Love is Not Necessarily Selfish

We learnt to correctly understand what it means to love one's self. God has built within humankind the desire to pursue happiness and dread misery. Many times we put ourselves through unnecessary misery by saying, "We are sacrificing for Jesus". However, yet loving ourselves and pursuing happiness is not selfish or wrong. If we can't love ourselves rightly, we will have difficulty loving others rightly.

It is only when we pursue self-love alone, disregarding God and others, that we become selfish.

Meekness is Not Weakness

We learnt that meekness is not weakness; it is having power under control. Anger, Pastor Jerome added, is the opposite of meekness. The cause of anger is clinging to one's personal rights,

as conflict does not happen with others unless personal rights are involved. The result of unwillingness to yield these rights is anger.

However, a distinction with holy anger must be made. Holy anger is a right reaction against the wrongs done to others, especially God. It is constructive and not selfish. But selfish anger is sin.

Understanding Irritations

Irritations are like a grain of sand, bringing either benefit or harm. In the eye, it will be a cause of irritation, infection and loss of vision. But in an oyster, it can be turned into a pearl. Irritations are God's way of increasing our sensitivity to the needs of other people, or expanding our world of opportunity, or developing inward qualities which are essential to transformative living. We need to change our perspective in order to see the "potential pearl" inside the oyster. "The problem is not the problem, how you see the problem is the problem," Pastor Jerome said.



Pastor Jerome speaking on identifying Pride.

The Consecration

A symbolic ceremony was held at the end of the programme for the youths to consecrate themselves to God by yielding their rights. We wrote down on pieces of paper our rights to the things we held dear – activities, music, money or friends. Then we tore them up at the altar. Many were weeping and kneeling as they surrendered their precious rights to the hands of a loving God, who can handle our lives much better than we ever could. We then pledged to live a life committed to humility by signing our names in a book.

Nazarite Training was impactful as we saw a generation surrendering their rights to God and pledging to live a life committed to Humility. There are plans for a Phase 2 of Nazarite Training, and we urge many more to sign up. Email youthnet@necf.org.my or "like" our Facebook page "NECF Catalyst" to stay updated on upcoming events.

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to be, serving society and the community in truth, justice and righteousness.

The third "P" is *peace* in the Lord. Again, the Book of Philippians reminds us that Christians have the peace that surpasses all understanding that will guard our hearts and mind in Jesus Christ.

This peace is not just a cessation from hostility but a firm, settled conviction that all things may be put before the Lord and that we as Christians may be able to rest fully in the Lord come what may. That peace is the great assurance from our Lord and the Holy Spirit we may go forth.

As we become aware of the Lord's purifying work in the Church, we must persevere whatever the circumstances and be steadfast in our lives and all that we do. Then we will begin to experience the peace of the Lord. This then allows us to fulfil our mandate and call to bring light to the nation in peace and reconciliation amidst conflict and strife.

It is time now for Christians to shed narrow, inward interests and contribute proactively to building bridges across ethnic groups and to dismantling walls of separation and dissent; to bring about healing, reconciliation, peace and prosperity for our land.

This requires a vision and resolve for unity, not just within the Christian community but across the board with all other communities as well. It is now the opportune time for holding fast to our Christian ideals and virtues and to begin listening to one another for engagement, extending our hand across the divide to those who disagree with us to seek the welfare of the nation.

As Shad Saleem said in his essay, "If we have to go forward as a united nation, we need to go back to the spirit of moderation, accommodation and compassion that animated the body politic in 1957. We can also learn from others. In many societies including Singapore, UK

and the USA, the law is being used to socially engineer a more tolerant society. There is no shame in emulating others and building our garland with flowers from many gardens".



Willing to Go to Jail over “Allah”?

“HOW many here will continue to use the word ‘Allah’?” a speaker asked Bahasa Malaysia church leaders and Christians gathered at the *Berdoa Untuk Negara* event on 16 Feb 2014 at SIB KL.

Almost all hands in the room of over 200 people went up.

“How many here will be willing to suffer persecution because of it?” the speaker continued. Amidst chuckles, half the number of hands went down.

While the questions may have been rhetorical, they certainly provoked thought about the cost of Christian discipleship in the current Malaysian context.

The event, organised by the BM Commission of NECF Malaysia, was to engage BM pastors and churches on current national developments affecting the freedom of religion, in particular the three cases concerning the use of “Allah” in the courts – the Catholic *Herald’s* appeal to the Federal Court, the Jill Ireland case and the SIB Sabah case. Various speakers from BM churches took turns to address the gathering about the challenges faced by BM churches, especially rural ones, and about the on-going conversions to Islam by force or deceit.

A total of 45 BM churches and organisations were represented, mostly from the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) denomination. There were a few from the mainline denominations as well.

The event was part of a series of roadshows by the BM Commission to prepare BM churches to face possible challenges arising from the use of the word “Allah” and to help them understand their rights and freedom of religion. The roadshows continued nationwide at major cities until April 2014.

The highlight of the meeting was a prayer session and a declaration that was read by SIB Sabah President, Rev Datuk Jerry Dusing.

The declaration affirmed God’s goodness and blessings on Malaysia and asked for genuine freedom of religion for every community. Protection was asked for Bumiputra Christians so that they would be free to worship God as they have been according to their tradition.

A plea for forgiveness was made for all sins, prejudices and negativity that Christians have held against others, and an exhortation was made for Malaysian Christians to forgive



those who have wronged and defamed the Christian community. A special plea was made for Malaysians of other faiths by declaring God's love, salvation and blessings for them.

A spirit of boldness and courage was proclaimed over Bumiputra Christians, especially over the younger generation, to remain rooted in their faith and loyal to God's plan for their lives.

The declaration also proclaimed God's sovereignty over the government and judiciary, and asked that they be fair, have integrity and adhere to the Federal Constitution.

Finally, the declaration affirmed the commitment of BM-speaking Christians to continue working for harmony and righteousness in Malaysia, submitting the country to the Lord's sovereign plan.



Prayer Cover for Pastors

FOLLOWING the good response to the first Pastors' Prayer Shield seminar last year, the NECF Tamil Commission held its second seminar in Klang on 22 Feb this year.

Chairman of the Tamil Commission, Pastor Gabriel Jabanathan, spoke on issues connected when praying for pastors, while Pastor Daniel Loh, the commission's Executive Secretary, covered the practical aspects of praying for pastors.

The seminar proved fruitful for all in attendance by examining the lack of prayer for pastors by churches and the reasons why, stress factors that pastors experience, and problems that pastors' wives or spouses face.

The seminar also heard from the practical experiences of six intercessors who prayed for pastors and evangelists, and also looked at exegesis of Bible references on the ministry of intercession, on being watchmen and of spiritual opposition to pastors.

By the end of the seminar, one thing was clear – there aren't enough intercessors in our churches and throughout the nation who will stand behind pastors to fervently intercede for them. A body of intercesors must come together to act as watchmen for these servants of God.

Similar seminars will be held in other regions of Peninsula Malaysia.





MH370: Public Prayer in a National Crisis

THE MH370 tragedy is one which united the whole nation in sorrow. And praying - regardless of one's religious affiliation - became a focal point and a common way for people to cope with the tragedy. "Pray for MH370" was everywhere, on social media and in daily conversations about the missing plane. Various religious groups organised mass prayers for the search operation and there were even inter-faith prayer services.

NECF Prayer Commission Executive-Secretary Pastor Karen Tan talks about how believers can respond in a national crisis like this when religious faith is on full display.



Q1. When praying with fellow believers in the wake of a tragedy, Christians will usually reaffirm God's sovereignty and express their continued faithfulness to Him despite tragic circumstances. Some Christians also pray using very

triumphant language. Are such prayers appropriate and sensitive when said in public in inter-faith services, or when praying with a non-believer?

We definitely have to be careful with our word usage about God. There is a universal understanding of God in people's hearts although the definitions may differ. When we pray with non-believers, we should still use the generic term of "God" so that there is a feeling of inclusiveness. But we should also bear in mind that we pray according to the absolute truths for us as Christians - that God is sovereign over all creation and that there is only one God who alone has the power to redeem.

We don't have to specifically articulate this out loud but this should always be our framework. However, praying for or with non-believers is a good opportunity to convey these facts - that we trust in a God who is in control of everything and that we affirm ourselves as mere human beings who



A space for writing prayers and wishes for MH370 at a bookstore in the Klang Valley.

are finite and incapable of knowing the whole truth. I think affirming our humanity is important – it is another universal principle for most people and is easily appreciated especially in a time of distress. I think this humility should be emphasised in our prayer and is the posture we should adopt when we come to God.

So we can keep to these principles but communicate them in a general sense in public prayer with non-Christians.

And for those who pray in tongues, I would suggest not speaking aloud in tongues but quietly under your breath.



Q2. Does the Bible say anything about praying for non-believers?

Yes, definitely, it is our duty. Jesus said to pray for your enemies and to love them. If we are to pray for our enemies, what more for people in distress and sorrow? Prayer is part of our duty to be salt and light

2 Kings 5 tells of the healing of Naaman from leprosy. Naaman was not a believer of the God of Israel, but his Israelite slave girl saw his illness and suggested he go to the prophet Elisha. Likewise, it is our duty as believers to recommend prayer to those who are in need.



Q.3 Would it be appropriate to pray for a miracle at this juncture of the search, or in situations when reality suggests that a situation cannot be salvaged? There is this tension of wanting to be realistic on one hand, but also hopeful in our prayers because we believe in a powerful God.

In some cases, people may still insist on praying for miracles because they are not ready to handle and face loss. I feel it is better to prepare ourselves to face loss. The larger issue here is the person's inability to, as yet, face reality.

That said, as I mentioned earlier, we should always take a humble position and affirm our finiteness and inability to know everything, much less the outcome.

Thus, we should always pray for God's will to be

done, recognizing that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts not like our thoughts. In a national tragedy like this, it has shown us that we are all human, and that despite our country's religious tensions, we are able to unite through prayer over a single crisis. It has brought out the beauty and frailty of our humanity. This can set people in a better position to receive God.

Whenever I am called to pray for people near death in hospitals, I always pray for the readiness of heart to face whatever the outcome may be with the confidence that God will always take care of us.

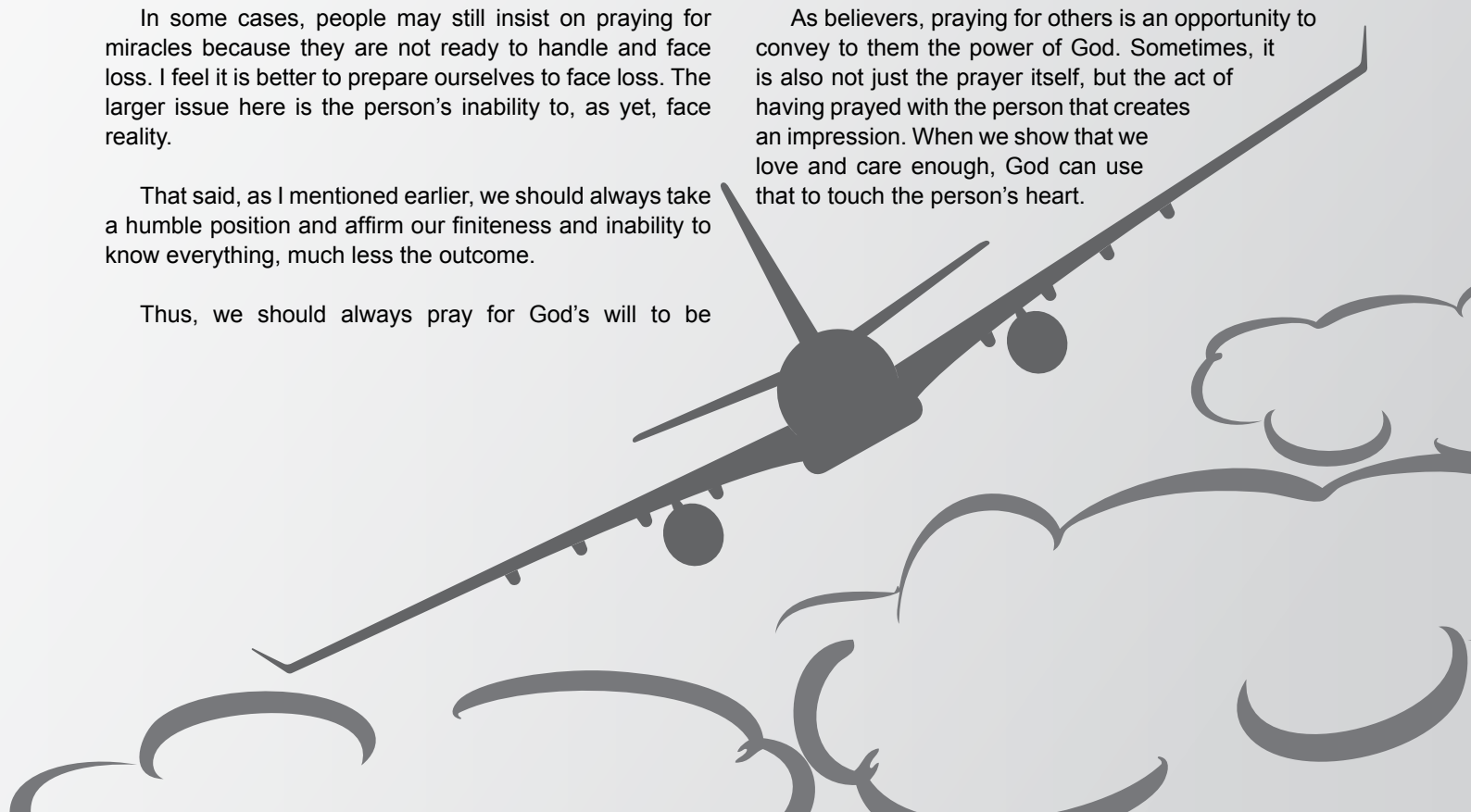


Q.4 How can we broach the topic of prayer and seize the opportunity to pray for non-believers, whether for a sick loved one or a colleague in trouble, or a friend who has faced loss?

When people have needs that are beyond their own ability to meet, where there is a great need for divine intervention – it is always a great opportunity. People will want a greater power to help, even if up till then they have not believed in a divine being. But we must always ask permission before praying for them. Some may still say no, depending on their background. But usually it takes a very desperate situation before people will allow God to come into their lives. So it is an opportune time for Christian believers to offer them this powerful tool of prayer.

We are also not praying to “show off” that our God is greater than theirs. We should come with the attitude that we pray to show care and concern as fellow human beings. Don't have the attitude that says “only the Christian God can answer prayer” – that would be offensive.

As believers, praying for others is an opportunity to convey to them the power of God. Sometimes, it is also not just the prayer itself, but the act of having prayed with the person that creates an impression. When we show that we love and care enough, God can use that to touch the person's heart.



News Digest:

The Religious Liberty Context Behind the Headlines

FOR your awareness and prayer – a round-up of recent news and developments affecting religious liberty:

Syariah law does affect non-Muslims

Indonesian massage therapist, Halimah, became the first person in Malaysia to be convicted of *khalwat* (close proximity) under Syariah law, despite not being Muslim. She was arrested in Dec 2011 by the Penang Islamic Religious Affairs Department (Jaip) while attending to a customer, and charged in Feb 2012. The illiterate 42-year-old mother of two pleaded guilty, saying she was afraid and unable to follow the court proceedings. In Sept 2012, the Syariah High Court upheld the lower court's decision, despite documents that verified Halimah's Christian faith. These were her baptism record, family records, and a letter from the Indonesian consulate. Halimah is seeking to overturn her conviction at the Syariah Court of Appeal. Her case came up on 18 March and is still pending. Her lawyer, Cecil Rajendra, called the case "a travesty of justice", stressing that Syariah law is not applicable to non-Muslims, and that non-Muslims are not to be tried in a Syariah court.

Religion used to silence critics

Scholar Kassim Ahmad, 81, was detained by the Federal Territory Islamic Department (Jawi) and charged on 27 March under Syariah law for insulting Islam and for not complying with the religious authorities. Kassim's "crime" was to have spoken at a seminar in February where he held forth critical views of Malaysia's *ulama* (Islamic scholars) and their chokehold over society. Some Muslims have come to Kassim's defence, questioning the religious authorities' intolerance and defending his freedom of speech and right to differ. Even former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad said those who maligned Kassim did so because they didn't have the intellectual capacity to engage him. Kassim's case highlights the use of religion as a tool for political control.

On record: Zero conversions by Muslims to Christianity

There has not been a single application to the Syariah

court by Muslims seeking to leave their religion in the last ten years. This was announced in Parliament on 24 March by the minister in the Prime Minister's Department who oversees religious affairs, Datuk Jamil Khir Baharom. On the other hand, 4,520 people converted to Islam between 2008 and 2012. This was just the figure for converts in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. However, this information is unlikely to convince those who say "Allah should not be used by other religions because it would confuse Muslims".

Syariah-civil clash over child custody and police inaction

The High Court and Syariah Court in Seremban have issued conflicting decisions in a custody battle by a Hindu mother, Deepa Subramaniam, for her two children who were converted to Islam by her husband. The Syariah Court awarded custody to the father, Izwan Abdullah, in April last year, while the High Court on 7 April this year gave Deepa full custody. Izwan embraced Islam in 2012 and then converted the children, aged six and nine. The civil court's decision was based on the fact that the marriage union was made under civil law. It is unclear whether the civil court's decision now overrules the Syariah Court, but Izwan allegedly "kidnapped" one of the children two days after Deepa was granted custody, according to a police report she filed. Police have refused to act against Izwan, with the Inspector-General of Police saying the force did not want to get caught in between two courts.

Policing hotel guests' reading

Reading materials of religions other than Islam are banned from hotel rooms in Pahang under a new directive by the Pahang Islamic and Malay Customs Council (Muip) from 6 March. Hotel proprietors are to ensure that no such materials, including Bibles, are placed in the rooms, and if any are found, they are to be removed immediately. The penalty is a fine of up to RM5,000 or jail up to two years, or both. Muip's rationale is that non-Islamic materials in hotel rooms amount to propagating other faiths to Muslims. The directive was made under the Control and Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Among Muslims Enactment 1989. Critics of the move have noted that hotels

are not religious establishments and are used by people of all faiths.

Intra-Islamic conflicts

Christians may be concerned over their religious freedom, but Shia Muslims remain the most persecuted religious minority in Malaysia. They are illegal and deemed as deviants. They face harassment, arrest and interrogation if their meetings are discovered. On 21 April, a local Shia cleric, Mohd Kamilzuhairi Abdul Aziz, was arrested at a luncheon gathering while giving a speech. His arrest was conducted by the Selangor State Islamic Department (Jais) and the Registrar of Societies (ROS). Kamilzuhairi is being investigated for violating the Societies Act. But Shia groups can never legally exist in Malaysia; attempts to register with the ROS are rejected. Another persecuted Islamic group also deemed deviant and declared illegal in Malaysia are the Ahmadiyya.

For prayer: Freedom of religion and conscience is part of the common good mandated to humankind as stewards of this earth. The idea of a common good, which is for all people regardless their religion – stems from the doctrine that man is made in the image of God and has dignity. Pray for the preservation of religious liberty and the rich diversity of communities that is the foundation of Malaysia's multi-racial character.

Selangor State Government Shirking Responsibility

THERE is now an impasse over the more than 300 Bahasa Malaysia and Iban bibles seized from the Bible Society of Malaysia bookshop on 2 January by the Selangor Religious Department. Promises were made in the early days after the raid by Selangor Executive Councillors to resolve the issue and have the bibles returned. But on 2 April, the Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim, said the BSM had to write to the Attorney General in order to "show that the society intends to get the bibles back". Below is a press statement by the Christian Federation of Malaysia taking the Selangor government to task:

4th April 2014

Selangor State Government Shirking Responsibility

It was reported on 2 April 2014 that the Selangor State Government had advised the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) to write to the Attorney General to request for the release of Bibles seized from its premises on 2 January 2014.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) is disappointed by this apparent attempt on the part of the Selangor State Government to wash its hands off the matter.

The fact remains that the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS), acting under powers purportedly given to it by a State enactment, raided the premises of BSM and seized more than 300 copies of the Alkitab and the Bup Kudus, Bibles written in Bahasa Malaysia and the Iban language respectively. These Bibles remain in their possession.

The officers of JAIS may be authorised to act only after consultation and on the advice of the Selangor State Government. The Selangor State Government is accountable as in the raid of BSM, JAIS acted as an agency of the Selangor State Government. It is therefore perverse that the Selangor State Government is now asking BSM to look to the Attorney General to resolve this matter.

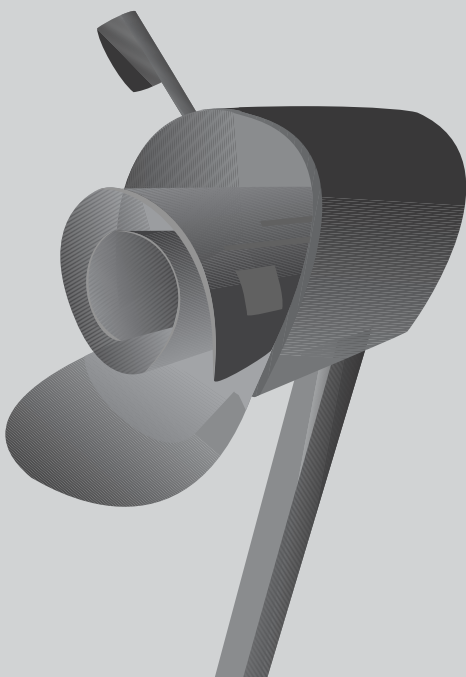
CFM strongly urges the Selangor State Government to act without further delay to order the safe and prompt return of the Bibles to BSM.

It is a ludicrous suggestion that JAIS had the necessary power to seize the Bibles, but that it is only with the approval and authorisation of the Attorney General that these very same Bibles can be released. This is nothing short of 'passing the buck', and is totally unacceptable.

The Selangor State Government is duty bound to act in this matter and must not shirk its responsibility. Order the return of the Bibles now.

Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng

*Chairman and the Executive Committee,
The Christian Federation of Malaysia*



Engaging Hollywood's 'Noah'

By Pastor Dr Chew Weng Chee

A few Christian leaders were invited by the Home Ministry to a preview of the movie "Noah" on 12 March 2014. SIB KL's senior pastor Dr Chew Weng Chee was among the group that also included Christian Federation of Malaysia Executive Secretary Tan Kong Beng, NECF Secretary-General Eugene Yapp and NECF Researcher Mable Leong. On 4 April, the Ministry's Film Censorship Board Chairman declared the film banned in Malaysia, on the grounds that it was "insensitive" to Muslims as it depicted a prophet, and after "considering Islamic facts and history".

Despite the ban, the film is bound to be available in other ways and will certainly be a topic of conversation because of its mass appeal as a Hollywood production. How should Christians approach this version of the biblical story of the flood, and how can they engage with others who talk about it? Pastor Chew reviews the film:

I enjoyed the film in terms of its special effects and excellent acting from Hollywood heavyweights like Russell Crowe and Anthony Hopkins. However, there are some features about the movie that needs analytical comment from a Christian point of view.

The overall plotline keeps to the biblical narrative. God wipes out humankind by a devastating flood due to the sinfulness of man so that He can start again with Noah and his family.

Despite the faithfulness of the overall theme, there are glaring misrepresentations in the movie that are unbiblical. Among them are:-

1. The main character Noah is far from being the righteous man that Genesis 6 makes him out to be. In the film, Noah is obsessed with the idea that humans ought to die because of their sin, to the point that he attempts infanticide. He is portrayed as a man consumed with the belief that the human race, including his entire family, should not survive because of sin. He tries to kill his newborn grand-daughters to stop the human race from procreating. To say the least, this is bizarre and totally unbiblical.
2. The appearance of Rock Giants in the film is supposed to be Hollywood's portrayal of the biblical



Nephilim, the product of sexual union between man and fallen angels. In the film, they help Noah build the ark and also help him fight off his enemies. For their reward, they are zoomed up to Heaven and redeemed. It is tantamount to saying that demons can be saved through good works!

3. Noah's nemesis, Tubal Cain, the grandson of Cain, hacks his way into the ark, hides among the animals, kills and eats an endangered species of lizards to survive, and finally fights a battle with Noah. I am trying to read the Director's mind in putting in this extra biblical character into the story. The best that I can come up with is that Tubal Cain is the Devil incarnate that seeks to kill off Noah to thwart God's salvation plan for mankind. This is artistic license at its limit.

Notwithstanding these biblical distortions, there are positives that we can glean from watching the movie.

For one thing, it will serve as a good springboard to talk and engage with your non-Christian friends. The whole concept of sin and God's judgment can be discussed, leveraging on the theme and special effects of the film. The flood scenes are very compelling and gripping.

God's mercy and grace in forgiving Noah and finally saving his family in the ark make a good starting point to share the Gospel pointing to Jesus as the divine ark that will save us if we choose to come under His shelter.

All in all, we must view the movie as a product of Hollywood. The director, Darren Aronofsky, is a self-professed atheist and was reported in the Washington Post describing Noah as "the least biblical movie ever made".

We have to watch the movie with that in mind and with a dose of realism – since when has Hollywood been expected to produce a scripturally accurate movie designed for theological students?

In fact, producers would deliberately want to provoke controversy, knowing very well that controversy sells. They need to recoup back the US\$130 million spent on making the movie. Watch the film, by all means, but approach it with an open and informed mind so that you will not be stumbled.

NECF's position on the Home Ministry's ban is that the decision, made on the basis of one religious perspective, is an unfortunate reflection of growing intolerance and increasing Islamisation in the country. The imposition of a single and dominant religious position does not hold well for Malaysia's multi-religious society, as religious persuasions should not and cannot be dictated by the sensitivities of only one religion. In modern times, there will be no end to the amount of content that can be deemed offensive or insensitive. It would be more appropriate to provide education and discussion, and to affirm religious teachings on a particular subject to counter inaccuracies, rather than to impose bans.



Movie poster credit: Official 'Noah Movie' Facebook page

Pastors' Fellowship Gathering in Kuantan

THE Kuantan Pastors' Fellowship and NECF met on 30 March for a briefing on current issues concerning religious liberty and for corporate prayer. There was a good turnout of about 40 pastors from evangelical churches and a few mainline churches.

NECF Secretary-General Eugene Yapp briefed them on issues concerning the raid and seizure of Malay and Iban bibles at the Bible Society Malaysia office on 2 January, as well as the state laws that ban the use of certain words. Yapp informed the pastors of NECF's position on such laws –that they are unconstitutional.

In the evening of the same day, the group met again at Petra Centre church in Kuantan, the church of NECF Council Member Elder Thomas Lim. The youth of the church led in a time of heartfelt worship. Pastors from different churches then led the corporate prayer and there were moments of tearful repentance and crying out to the Lord.



Some of the Kuantan pastors and leaders in worship, and intercession for the nation.

NECF Prayer Commission Executive Secretary Pastor Karen Tan spoke on Ezra 7:10, underscoring the need to observe the Word of God, in addition to just studying it, and to teach it to others.

'Observing the Word and teaching it to others concerns our actions. We must go beyond repentance to action,' she said.

Farewell to a Faithful Servant



Bee Gaik (right) says her goodbyes at a farewell lunch at NECF.

AFTER 15 faithful years with NECF Malaysia, Administrative and Confidential Secretary Ching Bee Gaik retired from service in March. NECF thanks her for her dedication to the ministry. As she shared in a farewell note to the staff, "It is here that I learned what full-time ministry is. We are put here to serve God and serve God we must."

Farewell, Bee Gaik, and may the Lord prosper you and give you joy in all that you undertake for Him!

Also leaving NECF is Yvonne Chin, Administrative Secretary, and Communications Executive Secretary, Debbie Loh, who is also Writer and Assistant Editor of the Berita NECF.

Statement on Anti-Christian Seminar at UiTM

AN anti-Christian seminar on the use of “Allah” and Christology was held at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) on 6 May 2014. Among the highlights reported were that there were Christian evangelists going “undercover” among Muslims, and reasons why Christians should convert to Islam. Books that were derogatory of the Christian faith and which warned of a “Christian agenda” were also distributed to the university students. UiTM is a publicly-funded institution. In response to the seminar, NECF and the Christian Federation of Malaysia issued the following media statements:

7 May 2014

The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia is appalled by the recent forum organised at UiTM.

The programme was negative and did not promote peaceful co-existence and harmony.

If such programmes are permitted to run in other higher institutions of learning in the days ahead, it will only raise confusion and a sense of prejudice among Muslim students against people of other faiths.

Institutions of higher learning should instead be promoting mutual understanding and acceptance.

One could perhaps ask how Muslims would feel, if followers of other faiths were to invite their experts to interpret how the Koran should be interpreted.

The seminar smacked of gross insensitivity and went against the grain of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib’s “One Malaysia Policy”.

It is deeply disappointing, and this is only putting it mildly, that in the first place, this seminar was allowed to be held.

Eugene Yapp
Secretary-General
NECF Malaysia

7 May 2014

Seminar at University Clear Abuse of Trust and Stewardship

CFM supports academic freedom, and the right of a public university such as the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) to organise a public lecture on any topic, but academic freedom and public university facilities should not be used to present and promote skewed statements with no opportunity for rebuttal of facts. That is a clear abuse of trust and stewardship.

If there is to be sincere and genuine academic freedom, then let us have an intellectual exchange with integrity instead of a one-sided presentation with arguably inaccurate information being disseminated as fact.

Otherwise, yesterday’s seminar at UiTM would be nothing more than hate speech and sectarian religious propaganda thinly disguised as academic freedom, which causes a great diminution of scholastic integrity, greater disservice to intellectual honesty, and greatest discredit to the reputation of the public institution.

Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng
Chairman and the Executive Committee,
The Christian Federation of Malaysia



Looking Out Looking Up

BRUNEI on 1 May announced the start of implementing Syariah punishments, or hudud. It is to be introduced in phases and is to include stoning and amputation of limbs. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, who first announced intentions for hudud last year, said they were meant to be a "firewall against globalization", specifically mentioning the Internet. According to reports, a Catholic priest serving there said the new rules would also punish "propagation of religion other than Islam to a Muslim or a person having no religion". The priest said this may affect infant baptisms. Brunei is home to thousands of migrant workers, including Filipino Catholics.



PRAY for divine intervention and God's sovereignty over this situation. Ask for wisdom for Christian leaders as they minister and serve in Brunei. Pray that Christians will maintain an effective witness despite the circumstances. Pray that eyes will be opened to the consequences and abuse that can potentially arise in the implementation of these rules. – Agencies

NIGERIA On 14 April, 230 female students from a secondary school were kidnapped by Boko Haram militants. The group is linked to Al-Qaeda and is seeking full Syariah law in Nigeria. Members came in several pick-up trucks and herded the girls into the trucks after overpowering school security. Several girls escaped, leaving 187 still missing. It is believed that the girls will be made to do cooking and chores for the militants in their jungle hideouts, but there are also fears for their physical safety and that

they will be forced into marriages and to convert to Islam. The school where they were taken from is in Chibok, a Christian enclave in Borno state. Most of the girls were from Christian families and locals see the kidnapping as an attack against Christians. The Christian Association of Nigeria, the country's largest network of churches, called for a day of fasting and prayer on 25 April for the missing girls and the continuing violence. Locals are also angry that the government security forces seem slow and incapable of rescuing the girls. Some parents have tried to take things into their own hands by going into the jungle to search for their daughters themselves.



PRAY for God's mercy to answer the prayers of the anguish parents and community members. The people feel the government and security forces are acting too slowly and are desperately turning to God. Pray for the missing girls as they are being held captive, that they will know the Lord as their rock and salvation under such terrible circumstances. Pray for the international community to have the will to oppose the Boko Haram. Pray for Nigeria's government that it will prioritise its citizens' safety and allocate resources accordingly.

UKRAINE Pastors in Ukraine have asked churches worldwide through the World Evangelical Alliance to pray for unity in the nation's people and among churches and pastors. This is because there are large regional differences in pro-European and pro-Russian support. Although Christianity in Ukraine has flourished in the last two decades after the end of Soviet rule, the current crisis over Crimea and fears of a Russian invasion have brought up old divisions. The Church in Ukraine must not be divided over politics, and over pastors and church leaders who believe that they should participate in the political reforms.



PRAY that the Church in Ukraine will understand her true mission and mandate

in Ukrainian society. Pray that the Church will seek the common good and welfare of all citizens. Pray for the spirit of humility and patience in the Christian body despite differing political opinions. Pray for peace and an end to threat of hostilities in the face of Russia gathering its troops along Ukraine's borders and amidst violence by pro-Russian rebels in towns and cities. Thank God for the spiritual legacy in Ukraine after the fall of Communism and pray that this legacy will be preserved. – WEA

UZBEKISTAN Askar (pseudonym) is a 37-year-old who dreamt of migrating to America where he could practice his Christian faith freely. In Uzbekistan, Christians are under constant harassment and surveillance as the government, fearing threats to its authority, lumps extremist movements and religious groups together. Askar has been jailed and interrogated three times for leading a cell group and sharing the Gospel. He has wanted to "give up" and flee to the US. But through other Christians, Askar realized God's words to him: "Askar, if not you, who will worship and serve me in Uzbekistan?" Askar has decided to forsake his American dream to remain in Uzbekistan. "I will serve God here with my family, no matter what the future brings."



PRAY For the struggling Christian community in Uzbekistan, who like Askar, are subject to questioning and periods of imprisonment for practicing their faith. Pray that they will receive encouragement through the Word and the Holy Spirit. Ask God to change the hearts of the government leaders that they will rule with justice. Ask God to open the eyes of the government leaders to distinguish between militant groups and those who just want to practice their faith. – OD