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Episcopal Address

10th Session General Conference: 17-22 Sept 2012
The Methodist Church in Malaysia

BY BISHOP HWA YUNG

Moment



THE CREATING WORD MADE FLESH

Ephesians 1:3-4
 “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”
 The story of Christmas begins with the beginning of the work of the Son of God. And His first work is recorded in Genesis chapter 1. The story of His love for us that led Him to give up the glory, beauty and perfection of heaven to come to our

dirty, dusty, pain-filled world begins not in Bethlehem, or in the Old Testament prophets. We must go to the beginning of His story lest His birth become simply the beginning of another story of a tragic and misunderstood life.
 The cross of Golgotha stands firmly planted in Genesis chapter 1. Even before the creation, Christ’s pain and suffering on that coarse structure was anticipated. Ephesians 1:4 reveals that even before the foundation of the world God’s plan of salvation was already in place.
 Even the coarse Roman soldiers knew

that His robe could not be cut into pieces without destroying it. Likewise, the Bible is one complete piece – woven of one thread. Cutting out anything leaves the whole thing to unravel. To remove the beginning of the story of the Word and His work in Genesis is to remove the foundation on which His work of salvation stands.

Yes, the Christmas story is far more than the story of the birth of an important baby. It is the center of the story of creation itself!

PAINTING: “THE CRUCIFIXION, SEEN FROM THE CROSS,” BY JAMES TISSOT

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Malaysia National Prayer Network

BELOVED (Delight in the law of God)

“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”
 “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water; which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.
 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”
 (Joshua 1:8, NIV; Psalm 1, NIV)



Pray that

| We may be established in His Word and revived through His righteousness
 | Our spiritual leaders that the pure, simple and steadfast spirit is not distracted by ministries and many labors.
 | Our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. Tanzania: Christians struggle to find a place to worship.

Continue to Pray

“But let justice roll on like a river,
 righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (AMOS 5:24, NIV)

Nation

| The nation will do what is honest and fair and right.
 | The government of the day, all ministers and deputies; to know wisdom and understand the insights of the wise, to live disciplined lives and discard the ways of the fools, corrupt practices and greed and will not politicise religion or ethnicity.
 | For the simple to receive insight, and the young, knowledge and discernment.
 | For help and relief for the flood victims.

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Episcopal Address

10th Session General Conference; 17-22 September 2012

The Methodist Church in Malaysia

By Bishop Hwa Yung

(This is an amended version for wider circulation within the church.)

1. Greetings and Thanksgiving

i. *Greetings to all delegates and guests*

Warmest greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ! May the grace and peace of God be with you all, especially to our honoured guests, some of whom have travelled from afar!

On behalf of the Methodist Church in Malaysia (MCM), I welcome you to this 10th Session of the General Conference (GC) of our church. Whether you are a delegate or a fraternal guest from one of our sister Methodist Churches, I pray that God will bless you richly in your time of conferencing with us. And may you be a blessing to our conference also!

ii. *Thanksgiving*

As I come to the last few months of my time in the bishop's office, there are many things for which I am thankful, both to God and all members of the MCM, including:

- For the unity that the Presidents and members of the General Conference Executive Council (GCEC) shared at the highest levels of the church's leadership, and the support they have given me and to the church as we seek to advance the work of the MCM
- For the abundant material, financial and personnel resources God has given to our church.
- For the continuing signs of renewal and spiritual growth throughout the MCM, including the greater emphasis on prayer, the numerical numbers in church membership, and the expansion of local ministries and overseas missions.
- For the growth in Christian discipleship and deepening awareness of our Christian socio-political responsibilities.

I would also like to add a personal word of thanks to all in the MCM at large for all the love, welcome, and support they have showered upon my family and me. I am deeply privileged to have been given the opportunity to serve God and all of you in my present office. I therefore wish to say like Paul to all that your love and support in many ways have been 'like a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches

in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.' (Phil 4: 18f)

iii. *Outline*

Allow me to briefly outline what I propose to do for the rest of my address. I will not try to give an overall summary of the work of our church...

What I would like to do is to draw attention to some highlights of the work of our church. I will then look at some of our statistics and briefly look at their implications, before going on to discuss some things concerning our *Discipline*. I will finally close my address with some thoughts about our future directions.

2. Some Highlights in the Past Quadrennium, and Trends

Let me begin with sharing some highlights and overall trends.

i. *Some major events at the GC level*

The following are some of the major GC events in the past quadrennium:

12.8.2010 - 125th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service of the MCM, Kuala Lumpur, at which the *Road Map* for the next 10-20 years was launched.

18.2.2011 - Launch of Youth website (<http://www.methodistyouth.com.my>), Miri

23-24.2.2011 - Signing of MOU with The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), Chiangmai, for trusteeship of our property in Thailand for the purpose of ministry & mission.

30.4-2.5.2011 - 2nd Methodist Prayer Convention, Sibul; attended by some 3000 from the whole church, and with about 10,000 on the last night in Sibul City Square.

15-16.8.2011 - Ministry to Indigenous Peoples Forum, Sibul; for the purpose of discussing how the work of various ACs can be coordinated.

12-15.10.2011 - GC Special Session, Port Dickson; to deal with revisions to the *Discipline*.

23-25.2.2012 - Bahasa Malaysia Ministry Forum, KK; organised by SCAC but attended by members of all ACs. This served as a continuation for the Sibul meeting on 15-16 Aug 2011.

12-14.4.2012 - Mission Consultation, Kuala Lumpur, to share the work being done by each AC in overseas missions, and how these can be coordinated.

14-16.7.2012 - Methodist Women Gen-

eral Conference, Kuala Lumpur.

20-21.7.2012 - Laity Conference, Kuala Lumpur, with the theme 'The Christian & Nation-Building'; attended by lay leaders from all ACs.

ii. *Our building programme*

The second thing I wish to comment on relates to the building programmes at the various levels of our church.

a. First, over the past four years, forty-three new buildings have been erected as sanctuaries for worship, either completely new structures or major renovations. They are as follows by ACs: CAC, 13; SCAC, 10; SIAC, 2; SPAC, 2; TAC, 6; and TRAC, 10. If we add all the other buildings for Christian education, kindergartens, etc., you probably have to add at least another 20-30 major buildings or more. The cost of these new structures varies from a couple of hundred thousand ringgits to some twenty million each. Simple mathematics will tell you that the total amount spent is a lot of money, amounting to some RM150-200 million at least!

b. You may be interested to know that some of the building programmes do have special significance.

- Hoover Memorial Square, Sibul, dedicated on 16 Aug 2009: This is now a major landmark in Sibul City, commemorating the contribution of James Hoover for his significant contributions to the Methodist Church in Sarawak, as well as to the whole economic development of Sarawak.

- New Block for Methodist College, Kuala Lumpur, dedicated on 21 Aug 2010: this has now become the flagship of the Methodist educational enterprise in W Malaysia, with enrolment in excess of 1100 today.

- Iban Methodist Church, Bintulu, ground-breaking on 26 May 2012: Whereas SCAC already has a number of churches in Bintulu, the first Iban Methodist church is being built there. Right at the end of the service, to everyone's delight, a 'rainbow' or aura suddenly appeared, surrounding the sun. What that signifies, I leave it to you to theologise!

- Methodist Centre, Port Dickson: This centre which holds special memories for many Methodists is being rebuilt and scheduled for completion by the end of this year. We hope that many of our future conference sessions will be held there.

c. Like most in the church, I am aware that buildings are absolutely necessary for the on-going ministry and mission of the MCM. But I also think that we need to be brutally honest with ourselves and ask whether ALL our buildings are really necessary for the advancement of God's work. It is important to note that both in British and American Methodist history, too much money spent on buildings at the expense of ministry and mission was one major cause for the gradual decline of Methodism. Is that not a warning that we should seriously note?

In our *Road Map*¹ there is a recommendation that we should make it a policy to spend at least 50% of the budget of every local congregation on evangelism, social outreach and missions. I would like to challenge every Methodist church in our country to make this our goal—the sooner the better! This may well help save the MCM from suffering a gradual decline in the next generation.

iii. *The Road Map*

Four years ago, we set aside more than a day to discuss some of the vital issues confronting the Malaysian church as a whole, and the MCM in particular. Subsequently, further deliberations and work was carried out and the result was published as our *Road Map*. This was launched at our 125th Anniversary worship service two years ago. The *Road Map* is not a set of completely formulated plans, but rather a set of guidelines for action at various levels of the church. It is gratifying that many of the concerns raised there are being addressed at the local church and Annual Conference levels.

For our purposes, I just want to draw the attention of the GC to the following issues in particular:

a. The need to build strong bumiputra churches in the country, especially in E Malaysia is an urgent matter. Although much effort has already been made in that direction, we must continue to pray and work for even greater momentum in this

area. I take this opportunity to thank all churches and ACs for their interest and support of the Iban and various BM ministries. And the agreement of the GCEC to respond to the request of SIB Sabah to help with the building funds for their training college in Ranau is most encouraging. But finance is only one aspect of their total needs. Let us continue to do and give whatever we can.

One question that we must address in the next quadrennium is whether we need to set up a separate body to oversee this whole area?

b. The Council of Missions' report draws attention to the challenges before us if we are serious about reaching those who do not know Christ around us. Among the issues raised is how we can better coordinate and synergise the efforts of all the ACs. This must be taken seriously. The classic example of our lack of coordination is that we have three ACs working within 100 km of each other in the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar and China meet—but all independently! The MCM now have ministries in 16 different countries throughout the world.² It would be great if there could be more synergy in our overseas missions..

c. On the school front, the Councils of Education (COEs) and Area Executive Councils (AECs) in both E and W Malaysia need to address a whole series of urgent questions. These include:

- How far and wide do we wish to expand our private school network, i.e. the number of Wesley Methodist Schools (WMS) in both E and W Malaysia? And should we do it as two separate COEs, or together?
- How can we continue to strengthen our schools in the government system? How can we take advantage of the newly announced government policy to expand the 'trust school' system to 500 schools? This would give us much better control over our own schools.
- How do we expand our ministry in the

whole area of meeting special needs (for those physically handicapped and intellectually weaker, autistic children, vocational education for those from economically disadvantaged background, etc.) through our schools?

d. We need to continue to keep watch over our churches, and their health and growth in the context of changing socio-political realities and increasing pressures upon the Christian community in this country. Among other things, we need to ensure that we have a steady supply of good and godly men and women for the ministry so that the pastoral oversight and mission can grow and prosper under faithful ministers of the gospel. I will come back to other related matters later.

3. Reflections on National and Church Statistics

i. *Christian population in the country*

The following is the best statistics that I can get for the moment. It has not been possible to get hold of official figures for 1970, hence they cannot be confirmed. But they seem in the right order.

a. Christian population from 1970 to 2010 (Refer to the Table 1 below)

b. Government census figures for 2010:
 Total population of Malaysia 28,334,000
 Total number of citizens 26,013,000
 Total number of non-citizens 2,321,000
 Total number of Christians 2,617,000

ii. *Methodist Church statistics as the end of 2011*

The statistics of the church as the end of 2011 is given on Table 2, Page 11. This gives us an overview of the state of the church as it is today. The figures tell us what we have and see in our churches today.³

Although the total number of confirmed members (over 16 years) is given as 114,065, the 2010 edition of *Operation World*⁴ estimates that the total number of people affiliated⁵ to the Methodist Church

(with three other churches for comparison) as follows:

Roman Catholics	855,000
Methodists	304,000
Anglicans	250,000
SIB	242,000

These figures are good estimates and no more. My personal assessment is that the figure for Methodists is too high—but I hope I am wrong.

iii. *Some comments of our statistics:*

a. Membership Growth based on confirmed members from 2005 and 2011:

2005	97,509
2011	114,065

This gives an approximate Annual Growth Rate = 2.8% This compares favourably with the official Annual Population Growth Rate of the country for 2000-2010, which = 2.0%

b. Weekly church attendance = 71%
 Sunday School attendance = 20,474
 Youth Group (ca. <25 yrs) = 6,069

Based on the above, the question that needs asking is whether we are in danger of having an aging church? Are we giving sufficient attention to the work of children and youth?⁶

4. The On-going Work of the Discipline Review Council (DRC)

i. *The role of the DRC*

The DRC was first set up by the action of the General Conference in September 2000. Its main task over the 12 years was to review the whole *Discipline* and to propose changes based on the following considerations:

- To bring its contents up to date so that the *Discipline* enables the church to address the concerns of today's world in our national context.
- To tidy up a number of contradictory provisions that came from the original *Discipline*, or, more likely, from improperly thought-through revisions since 1968.
- To get rid of provisions which are no longer applicable and which may be holding the work of the church back through burdensome bureaucracy. The goal was to make the church structures more relevant and nimble.

- To bring greater clarity to the *Discipline* and make it user-friendly.

A lot of hard work has been put in by a substantial number of persons in the past 12 years of its existence. And on the whole, I believe the DRC has done a great job. In particular, I just wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr Gopal Sundaram and his team for all their good work over this past four years. As we deliberate over the proposals they are bringing to the GC, let us ask God for wisdom to work together with them in making the *Discipline* a better and more helpful document for our church. In light of this, I would like to add a further detail comment by way of reminder.

ii. *The Discipline should never be our master; rather it should be our servant for the advancement of ministry and mission*

We must never forget that the *Discipline* should never be our master. It is not the Bible of the Methodist Church and should never be treated as such—because it never had that authority!

It is meant to serve as guide to the whole church for proper governance and accountability within the church. And let us thank God that because of it we have been delivered from many problems afflicting many other churches around us.

Further, the *Discipline* is for the purpose of enhancing and advancing the ministry and mission of the church, and should never be an obstacle or hindrance to it. In fact the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* puts it even more strongly: 'Basic to Methodist doctrine is the idea that polity should be subordinate to mission.'⁷

I was strongly reminded of this same point at the United Methodist Church GC earlier this year. Bishop Peter D. Weaver of the Boston area drew attention to what happened at the first Methodist Conference called by John Wesley. He asked his friends, five clergy and four laity, to give 'advice respecting the method of carrying on the work of God.' In other words, Bishop Weaver pointed out, the question was 'what would be the method for the Methodists?' He goes on to argue that, therefore, every piece of legislation that was accepted at the UMC GC should address the question, 'What is the "best method of carrying on the work of God" for United Methodists today?' He summed up his point with the simple question, 'Can we focus the *Discipline* on discipling?' He

ended this point by urging the GC to reduce the size of the *Discipline*, 'while expanding its focus on discipling.'⁸

I am making this point as an appeal to all of us so that we will never allow the *Discipline* to force upon us a bureaucratic mind-set and mode of action. This will protect us from tying our own hands by rules and regulations that were never meant for that purpose in the first place. Let us therefore remember always that the purpose of our *Discipline* is to enhance and advance ministry and mission, and not hinder us through restrictive rules and regulations!

5. The Road Ahead

Having taken a brief look at the church, I would now turn to ask how we are to respond to the context in which we find ourselves today.

i. *Our national context*

a. The national situation: Despite all efforts by the government and the opposition, and by NGOs, religious groups, and concerned individuals, in the eyes of many citizens, things have gradually deteriorated in the country. The problems include:

- Ethnic tensions: These are not just among Malays, Chinese, Indians and others in W. Malaysia, but involve all races throughout the country. Most agree that tensions have increased.
- Political problems: Apart from the unresolved issues arising from the dissatisfaction on the part of Sabah and Sarawak over the 18- and 20-point agreements respectively, there have never been so much politicking by and bickering between political parties before.
- Social class divisions: There exist vast gaps in wealth between the haves and have-nots, and between the rich and poor, within the same racial groups.
- Corruption or alleged corruption: Certainly the perception is that this problem has gone from bad to worse amongst politicians, and in the civil service, judiciary, private sector, etc.
- Declining education standards: The report that came out last week on educational reform is the first public admission of the overall decline, with PISA scores of the country ranking in the bottom 1/3 of all countries taking part in the tests.
- Brain drain: The extent of this became

Christian Population from 1970 to 2010

	W. MALAYSIA		SABAH		SARAWAK		MALAYSIA	
	Millions	%	Millions	%	Millions	%	Millions	%
1970	0.221	2.51	0.064	9.7	0.188	19.3	0.556	5.33
2000	0.519	2.79	0.72	27.8	0.88	42.6	2.13	9.1
2010	0.710	3.13	0.85	26.6	1.05	42.5	2.62	9.2

Table 1

absolutely clear from the World Bank Report (April 2011).

- As of 2010, approximately 1 million have left the country for Singapore, Australia, Brunei, UK, US, Canada and NZ, in that order.

- Estimated 1/3 are highly skilled workers, hence the brain drain.

- About 570,000 have moved to Singapore; of these 180,000 constitute part of the brain drain.

- This is the strongest indication of the loss of confidence and faith in the government!

b. The Islamisation factor: The above is now also being seriously compounded by the religious factor, as many Muslims have become increasingly assertive about the position of Islam in the country. Hence the increasing pressure towards Islamisation at all levels of society, beginning with the rereading of and the amendments to the Constitution from an Islamic perspective, to the increasing efforts at the Islamisation of the civil service, the judiciary, banking, education and so forth. All these have been made worse by the politicisation of Islam, both by the government and the opposition.

But side by side with these efforts are direct and indirect efforts at conversion of non-Muslims, aimed especially, though not only, at the indigenous people of the country. This is clear from the figures on the Christian population in Sabah and Sarawak in section 3.i.a above, plus other government-sponsored initiatives which many of us are aware of.

Over and above all these are the efforts at restricting the religious freedom of non-Muslims, of which restrictions on the use of the word Allah and importation of the Al-Kitab are only the most blatant of such efforts directed at Christians. The MC-CBCHST and the CFM have both been drawing attention to these issues for more than two decades!

ii. *The challenge of Islam and the international context*

The international context in which we find ourselves is complex and I do not pretend to understand lots of it. But some trends are clear and they will have clear implications for Christians living in Malaysia.

a. First, increasingly we live in a multi-polar world. The west is no longer dominant as it once was, politically, economically and culturally. As other nations or groups

of nations (especially China, Islamic world, and Russia) assert themselves, the limits of western dominance is gradually becoming obvious.

There are many implications. But for the church living in Malaysia, one of the most serious implications is that we can no longer look back to our national Constitution and assumed that nothing has changed since 1957 because the main tenets of the Constitution appear to have remained unchanged. When we achieved independence, the British left the country with a Constitution which guaranteed a secular state, in the sense that the state is neutral towards religion and everyone's religious freedom is guaranteed. At the same time, it provided Islam with a privileged position as the 'official' religion of the country. That is fine so long as everyone thinks like the British! But the emergence of Islam as an increasing influence in the world today means that many in this country no longer think like this. The position of Islam as an 'official' religion has now been changed to 'state' religion in the perception of many Muslims. For them, that means Malaysia's laws must be defined by and brought in line with Islamic law. Hence our present conundrum!

b. Second, with respect to our difficulties, we cannot expect to get much help from churches or governments in the west for a number of reasons. Often western governments are restricted in what they can do because of their declining political influence. Moreover, at times they are driven by economic interests and will not speak up for persecution of Christian minorities in order to protect their oil supplies, multi-billion arms deals, and the like.⁹

Furthermore, within the western church there is relatively little understanding of the true nature of Islam. On the one hand you have right-wing extremists whose provocations of Muslims have led to violent reactions, including riots, murders, etc. On the other, you have ecumenical leaders who keep stressing dialogue when the fact is that in a Muslim majority country like ours, Muslim leaders representing the government usually have no interest in dialogue at all!

Over and above all these, in some circles there is a distinct reluctance to do anything—because the western churches are often weighed down by their own problems.

c. But thirdly, it has to be noted that Islam itself is undergoing tremendous ferment in the world today. Often we only hear about the radicals, Al-Qaeda and the like. But at the same time, there are Muslim leaders who are serious wanting to live at peace and harmony with peoples of other faiths. Within Malaysia, we have such groups like the Sisters-of-Islam and the Islam Reformation Front. And most significantly, Al-Azhar University, the oldest and most prestigious Islamic university in world, just at the beginning of this year came out openly with a public statement insisting that freedom of the religion, including the right of choice, is consistent with Islam.¹⁰ All these represent a genuine window of opportunity for Christians to enter into serious engagement with Muslims in our country.

d. To sum up, with respect to the problem of Islamisation, the church is in a difficult, though not hopeless, situation. Historically, every church that has existed under majority Muslim rule has weakened and many have been wiped out. But the world of the 21st century has changed fundamentally in many ways, and history does not need to repeat itself. Moreover, as the Al-Azhar statement implies, many serious Muslim leaders are aware that Islam has to come to terms with modernity. The question before us is whether the Malaysian church will end up like one of the *dhimmi*¹¹ communities of the past, living under the Shariah with limited religious freedom and second-class citizenship status, or will it become God's instrument of transformation in our nation and become a blessing to all, irrespective of religion or race? I believe that the answer to this question depends a lot on how the church responds NOW!

iii. *What is the way forward?*

a. The Malaysian church today is reacting generally in one of two ways. The more conservative takes the traditional line. Don't rock the boat. Just play safe. Stay on the side of whoever is in power and make our money while we can. If things turn bad, we just pack up and leave. But can we who are called to be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world' (Mat 5:13f) live with integrity in this manner? Can we act with such callous indifference and still be true to our calling to be Christ's 'witnesses ... to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)?

The other way in which many Christians

are reacting is to jump on the political bandwagon, often in support of the opposition—on the assumption that if PR comes into power, all our national problems would be solved. Even if that is true, do we think that the Islamisation issue will automatically disappear? The answer is plain.

b. As I prayed about the present situation, increasingly I have been forced to a simple conclusion. The Malaysian church is worried about the country; but could it be that God is more concerned about the church? Allow me to explain.

Many are concerned about the way corruption is seriously destroying the nation. But how can the church speak up with real moral authority against corruption when the church itself is not known for holiness and integrity? We are aware our country is terribly divided by race, religion and class. But can the church bring reconciliation to it when our own churches are so disunited and so often thrive on competition against one and another? Malaysia has been slowly (but now thoroughly) messed up since Merdeka in 1957. How can the church which is so relatively weak bring transformation to the nation when we have not learn to turn to God in prayer to seek power from on high?

c. Yet, has not Jesus Christ, our Lord, promised His church spiritual authority and power to bring transformation to the world? Consider, for example:

To his disciples he said: ***'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'*** (Mat 16:18).

In his letter to the church of Thyatira, He tells those that have remained faithful to the things of God, 'Only hold fast to what you have until I come. The one who conquers and keeps my works until the end, to him ***I will give authority over the nations'*** (Rev 2:25f).

Do we believe that these promises are real? Do we really have the authority to bring changes? Do we take the message of the Bible seriously? I can only say that as Methodists that we not only should—indeed we must because both our Methodist tradition and our Christian beliefs demand that!

Four years ago, in my sermon at the beginning of the 9th Session of the GC, I quoted David Martin, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, London School of Economics. He

has carried out much sociological study of Christian churches in history, including Methodism in the early years and Pentecostalism today. And his clear conclusion is that history demonstrates that people at the margins of society can effect major socio-political changes at the centre! In his book, *Forbidden Revolutions*, he writes:

'One of the main themes ... is how those things and those processes that lie at the social margin can, nevertheless, be powerful sources of change. In the case of Pentecostalism in Latin America, I tried to show how poor and marginal people could initiate a revision of consciousness amounting to a cultural revolution. This revolution takes place in a social space that they have devised for themselves as a carefully bounded and protected enclave against the corruptions of the outside world. In the case of religion in Eastern Europe, I want to show how a church, banished to the margin and officially confined to a restricted social, could become a major conduit of symbolic opposition and, eventually, a major channel of revolution once sufficient cooperating circumstances were present.'¹²

d. Given the above realities, I have therefore come to the conclusion that we need to plead with God to bring new life into the Malaysian church once again. Or, to use an old fashion word, we need a revival from God. Such a revival must so deeply touch our churches that it will lead to true holiness, unity and prayer throughout the church in the nation. Only then can we speak against corruption with real moral authority. Only then can we help to bring reconciliation to our deeply divided nation. And only as the church really knows what it is to pray can we reach up to God so that the power of heaven can be poured upon earth to renew it once again!

If this happens through the grace of God, then the Malaysian church will become a source of blessing to the whole nation and to all its people. But if the church fails, we will end up as one of the *dhimmi* peoples in Islamic history, with limited freedom to worship God and living as second-class citizens in this land. How then shall we live?

e. It is important that I make myself clear. I have only drawn attention to the socio-political issues before us because we need to understand the context which the Malaysian church is in. And my hope is that understanding this context will enable us

to come to a greater a sense of seriousness and urgency about the challenge before us.

Certainly I am not urging the church to forget about our primary task of proclaiming the gospel and building God's church in this nation, and instead give priority to politics. That is not what I am saying! In fact that is the exact mistake many in the church are making today: by jumping on the political bandwagon we are forgetting to focus on our primary task of witnessing to Christ, and building a church that is 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'¹³ in our nation! When the church remembers this and begins to act and live as God's people once again, when the church learns afresh to be truly holy, united and prayerful, then God comes in His power and glory. He will revive the church and through the church bring transformation to the world! We must put first things first.

iv. *How will we in the Methodist Church respond?*

How then will we as the Methodist church respond to all this? We are one of the three largest Protestant churches in the country. In terms of organisation and resources, we are probably overall better off than all others. God has been good to us. Jesus in one of his parables reminds us that 'Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required' (Luke 12:48). What does this mean for us?

Wesley once wrote this statement in a letter to one of his assistants: 'Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.'¹⁴

There are gathered at this conference eighty-four voting delegates, plus a few more without voting rights. We are roughly equally divided between clergy and lay. But will the ninety plus Methodists gathered here be counted among those 'who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God'? If so, then I believe we can make a difference in Christ's Name. If not, I fear for the future of the church in this beautiful land of Malaysia!

'Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

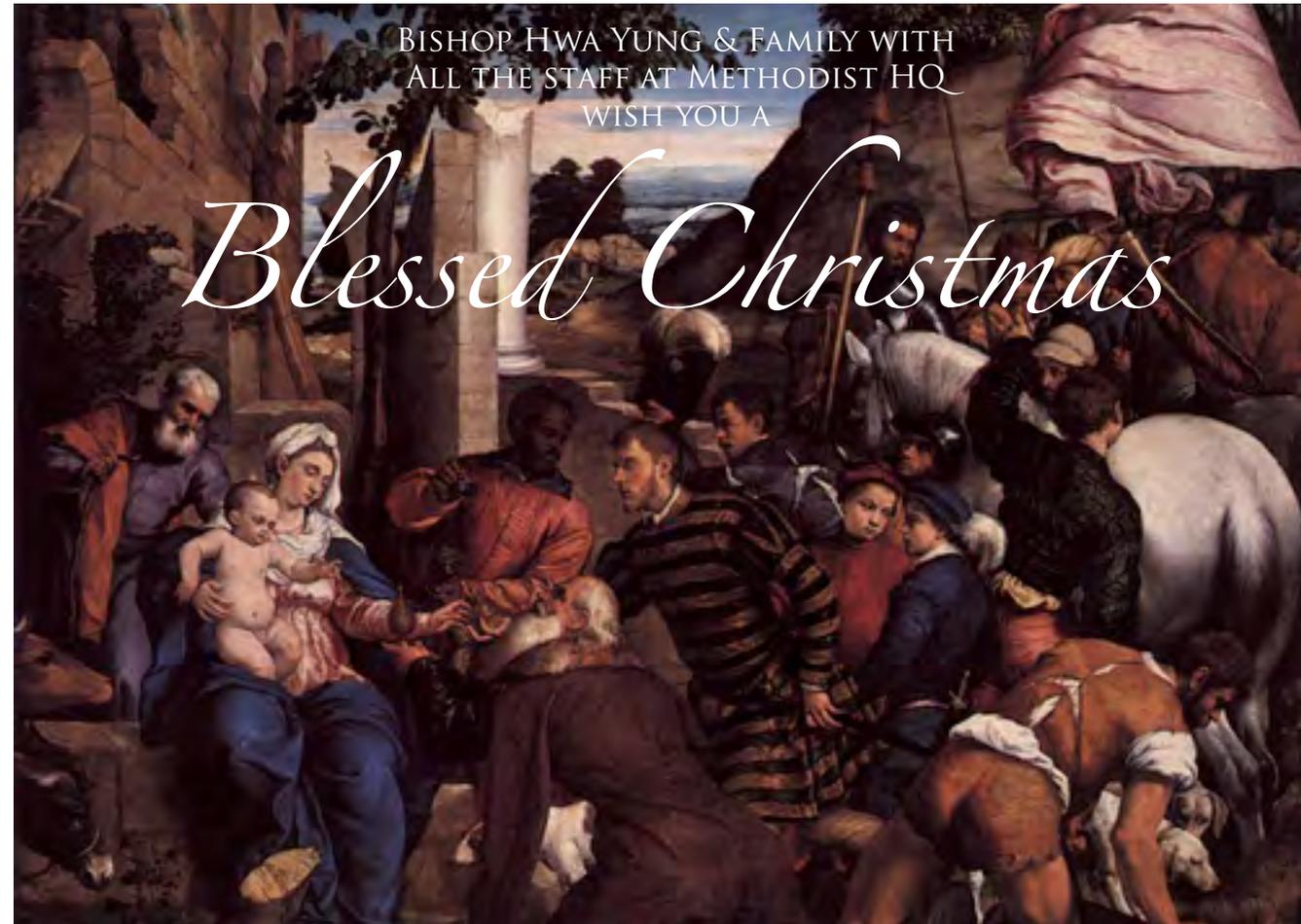
Bishop Hwa Yung
The Methodist Church in Malaysia
18 September 2012

Footnotes

1. *A Road Map* (Petaling Jaya: The Methodist Church in Malaysia, 2010), pp. 18f.
2. Australia, Bolivia, Cambodia, UK, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, plus a few others.
3. I have not included the category of 'Preparatory members' (i.e. those who have been baptised as children but not yet confirmed) because there is some confusion here. Some ACs have given cumulative figures which may need some tidying up; others have given figures for the current year only. I have also left out the figure for those who have been baptized and above 16 years of age but not confirmed as adult members. We do not know where these people are and what their present status is.
4. Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7th ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica Publishing, 2010), p. 556.
5. The term 'affiliated' generally includes adult members, children, and any who would identify themselves as Methodist if asked census time.
6. Many of our churches have strong BBs

- and GBs, and these have not been taken into consideration.
7. N. B. Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism, Vol. I & II* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), p. 780.
8. Bishop Peter D. Weaver, 'The Resurrection Revolution,' in *UMC GC, Daily Edition*, Vol. 4.3 (Apr 26, 2012) pp. 1928f.
9. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith That Endures—The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 2006, p. 335) tells of a specific case in which attempts to stop churches being burnt in Indonesia in 1996-7 were stonewalled by American government officials because of the concern to protect some huge arms deal with Indonesia. One of those trying to help told him: 'We set out to fight persecution in Indonesia; we ended up fighting it in Washington, D.C.'
10. See 'Al-Azhar Document: Statement about the future of Egypt' by *Egypt: State Information Service (SIS)* at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Story.aspx?sid=56424> (Accessed: 28 Aug 2012). The original statement is in Arabic. An unofficial English translation is available.

11. The term *dhimmi* means 'protected people', meaning that non-Muslims historically in Muslim-majority lands were not full citizens but given recognition as being protected in return for accepting a subjugated status and payment of extra taxes.
12. David Martin, *Forbidden Revolutions—Pentecostalism in Latin America and Catholicism in Eastern Europe* (London: SPCK, 1996), p.66.
13. The phrase 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' comes from the Nicene Creed, the one summary of the faith accepted by all three major branches of the Christian church, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant. 'One' refers to our unity, 'holy' to our moral purity and being set apart for God, 'catholic' means universal, including all of every race and language, and 'apostolic' means that the church is faithful to the Apostles' teaching.
14. Letter to Alexander Mather, 1777; cited in Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), p. 266.



BISHOP HWA YUNG & FAMILY WITH ALL THE STAFF AT METHODIST HQ WISH YOU A

Blessed Christmas

Adoration of the Kings by BASSANO, Jacopo

MEMBERSHIP FIGURES OF THE WHOLE METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA 2011

Annual Conference (AC)	Local Conferences or Churches (LC)	Preaching Points	Pastors & Ministerial Staff under Appointment by the AC ¹	AC Ministerial Students in Training	Missionaries		Confirmed Members	Attendance			Membership in MW
					Missionaries Appointed Overseas by AC	Missionaries Sent Out by LC		At Sunday Church Worship	In Sunday Schools	In MYF	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
CAC	118	67	128	17	Nil	Nil	26,460	20,107	6,119	1,876	2,066
SCAC	100	24	162	19	34	Nil	30,319	29,358	9,444	1,921	4,105
SIAC	47	453 ²	40	10	Nil	Nil	27,734	9,025	518	350	763
SPAC	11	10	49	2	Nil	Nil	1,886	1,738	443	183	395
TAC	48	56	54	2	Nil	2	8,881	6,138	1,643	650	1,375
TRAC	39	4	35	8	Nil	18	15,637	11,950	2,247	1,089	672
SMC	37	20	84	3	Nil	Nil	3,148	2,308	60	Nil	Nil
Total	400	634	552	61	34	20	114,065	80,624	20,474	6,069	9,376

¹ This includes all Traveling Elders, Ministers on Trial, Approved Supply Pastors, and those appointed to various Boards, Social Outreach, etc. within Malaysia by each Annual Conference. But it does not include all staff appointed by local churches themselves, or those serving as missionaries overseas.

² Most of the worship services in SIAC are conducted in longhouses. They are considered preaching points.

Table 2

追求天长地久单身亦祝福

诗巫哈巴谷团契生活营

惠冰、益萍 报导

63位来自诗巫、古晋、美里、民都鲁、甚至澳洲的弟兄姐妹，于8月31日-9月2日参加哈巴谷团契在诗巫乌也路卫理公会百周年纪念园举办，并为时三天的生活营。

情人？知己？

在专题“情人？知己？”中，受邀讲员诗巫东教区长黄开和牧师透过马太福音时十九10-12，提出有人因生来残缺，也有为神福音的缘故等而独身。哥林多前书七7-9，保罗指出单身或结婚皆是上帝的带领，上帝给某些人有独身的恩赐。因此，在寻找未来伴侣时，当先寻求神的心意，才是蒙福之道。黄牧师强调在开始一段恋情直到进入婚姻，我们当先预备自己。黄牧师引用社会学家Dr.Evelyn Duvall 及 Dr.Reuben Hill说的：“预备你自己，对于选择伴侣具有重大的意义。你婚姻的成功与否，决定于你是否将爱的方式，以及爱和被爱的能力带入你的婚姻之中。一个心智成熟的个性，是你带入婚姻中最好嫁妆。” Elof Nelson也说：“婚姻的成功，不只是要找合适自己的伴侣，更重要的是你自己也要做一个合适对方的伴侣。”

黄牧师继续分享说，无论我们单身或进入婚姻，都要在爱中成长，并朝着“无条件的爱”前进。上帝对我们是无条件的爱。在“选你所爱，爱你所选”并决定进入一段关系时，必须慎重考虑对方的信仰、学历、家庭背景、性格、身高、长相，及对方是认识、熟悉的人。



因为婚前婚后会有微妙的情感变化，必需调整好心境，做好接纳的准备。谈到知己，对未婚者而言，知己可以变成情人！对已婚者而言，知己可以变成第三者！所以，千万不可企图在婚姻外找知己；知己会成为夫妻关系出现问题的前兆，存有一定的危险性。不可太高估自己，以为自己不会陷入这样的情况中。

最后，黄牧师总结说，结婚或单身都是

上帝美好的心意。已婚的要好好经营婚姻和家庭。至于单身贵族也要活得越来越丰盛。身为上帝的子民都要靠着上帝恩典，爱上帝，并爱人如己，做上帝在这个时代的见证人。我们以自己的生命，告诉世人，我们除了在乎曾经拥有之外，更要追求天长地久！开幕仪式于晚上举行。大家编排出“JESUS”一字，点燃起一根根的蜡烛，由黄枫清会友传道及林恩慈牧师燃放烟花宣布开幕。

生活中的挑战

第二天，邱和平牧师分享主题“璀璨的星”，引用约书亚记五章鼓励大家反思：1.神对以色列的要求有哪些？2.对你的单身生活有何启发？约书亚记五章中的“割礼立约”代表对神忠诚，“与神同工”代表没有吗哪供应，“让神为帅”代表神在生命中的掌管。罗马书十二1-2提醒我们藉着上帝的帮助行事，将平凡的每一天，一一放在上帝面前，成为献给祂的祭物。

邱牧师提醒与会者不要在未三思就让自己“适应”于周围的文化中。反之，要把焦点放在上帝那里，那将会使你从内里更新，觉察上帝向你所要的是什么，并且即刻回应祂。世界的文化总是要把你拉倒在成熟的水平上，但上帝却是要使你发挥最美好的，让你整全成熟。邱牧师表示，姐妹是误认为基督徒适婚男生是“稀有”，常思想和谈论异性，将安全感建立在男性身上，被情绪捆绑等。弟兄则太依视觉来审断女性、难

以表达自己的感受，害怕失去形象或尊严、惧怕一生委身等。邱牧师提醒人的整全性：感情（EQ）、身体（HQ）、灵性（SQ）、思想（IQ）、意志（WQ）。我们是璀璨的“星”吗？整全璀璨的生命，不在男女关系中，而在上帝那里。营会的最高潮“夏威夷综艺乐翻天”，由参与者以夏威夷风精心装扮。之后，大家以“第一支舞”翩翩起舞。此外，各小组在才艺表演中以DIY音乐，唱游或广告呈现。

第三天，大家预备心参与主日崇拜。林恩慈牧师谈到关系与安全感：起初神创造一切，我们与神、人、大自然和自己都有着美好的关系，且有安全感。但自从人类犯罪开始，我们与神的关系破裂；人与人之间出现问题，互相指责；人类开始破坏大自然；最后自我也出现问题，存着种种负面情绪。

林牧师透过路十五11-24提醒我们天父上帝的慈爱，祂从不撇下我们，藉着耶稣基督的宝血，我们得以重新回到祂面前。在十五22节，神给到祂的儿女有地位（袍子）、权柄（戒指）和自由（鞋），我们是否有看重这几子女的身份？我们要重新拥有各方面美好的关系与安全感，就必须重新修补与神的关系，让神成为我们生命救主与掌管者。透过每天读经祷告，是唯一维持与神美好关系，明白神心意的出路。营会接近尾声，每一位参与者带着依依不舍与感恩的心，各自回程！

Living

And Jesus answered him saying, “It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.” (Luke 4:4)

Mission **Worship** **Fellowship** | **Discipleship** | **Care & Concern**



III. Enhancing Friendship with God

What then should we do if we sincerely desire to deepen our friendship with God in the events of our daily life?

BY DR. LEE BEE TEIK

A. We need to renew our minds with God’s word so that we can:

Think God’s thoughts with Him and live as a practical but not a mere academic child of the Father. Jesus did say that if anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know it. The converse is therefore true i.e. if we are not sincere in wanting to do his will, then He hesitates to reveal His will to us. The more we obey Him in daily small issues privately or publicly, the more we will be able to think His thoughts. In fact, there are enough guidance stated in the Bible as to how to live lives worthy of Him. However,

more often than not, we either do not read it enough or ignore it out of fear of having to obey Him. Whether others know whether we are obeying Him or not is irrelevant because He holds us, especially adults, accountable for our response to His directions generally and specifically.

We can know our security in God’s ownership of our lives. We need to know and understand where we stand before the just and holy God who has justly fulfilled justice for us through the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God who is His only begotten, Jesus. Nothing can change God’s love for His treasured possession who come to Him by trusting His Jesus. Without the assur-

ance of salvation, Hence, the enemy’s main plays on our weakness and uses this strategy against His people:

a. He goes to God’s beloved created men and women to lie to them that God does not really love them but want to make use of them. He plants doubts of God’s integrity in His children by twisting facts to make it sound as if He is threatened by the very humans He created with delight (Genesis 3:1-7, Proverbs 8:27-31). By this method, he hopes that they will forsake God and live according to their own natural ways. Eve and Adam did. How often have we fallen into the same trap when we struggle in our life in Christ? Some may respond to this lie

by living according to the gospel of works and are deeply unhappy as they try to earn God’s salvation all over again.

b. He goes to God and accuse His children before Him in the hope that God, their everlasting faithful Father, will give up on them too! Will He ever do so for a moment? A resounding “NO” (Romans 8:31-39)! However, unless we know His verdict on these critical issues in our pilgrimage, we will not be rested in our Father’s love and the friendship through His Son. We will constantly be insecure and restless, instead, and wonder why we find it so difficult to simply trust

A seed must die before it can become a shoot, then a branch and then a plant with flowers and fruits. God at times uses models from the plant and animal kingdom, including a donkey that talked, to reveal His truth to us. The process of sanctification in life takes time and only He knows how long. But our stubbornness to let Him have a free go in our individual life does not help hasten the process.

We need to know the difference between the organisation church and the organism church. Many have witnessed, too many times, how, if the organisation church is

or simmer in our prolonged anger to the destruction of our spiritual life in Christ. Resentful and troubled souls result, peace of mind becomes an illusion and the reality of God’s abundant life disappears. Hope for change also becomes blurred. Our testimony before a watching world vanishes, guilt sets in, the beloved living organism church becomes weak in her discipleship and witness...Satan laughs.

One day, the organisation church will not be needed any more because there will be no tears, sicknesses, weaknesses and sins. The bride of Christ will simply love and

and obey God though we desire to do so very much; we will repeatedly need others to reassure us that God still cares for us in spite of our present suffering as pilgrims.

We need to know the difference between sanctification in status and sanctification in life. Mr. Chan Yik Keng, the late senior member of the Cantonese Chinese Methodist Church in Penang, explained this well in a sermon in 1970. He stated that once we receive and belong to Christ and are marked by the Holy Spirit in us, we have been made right with God. However, due to our unholy selves in an unholy world, we still need to work on our minds so that the Holy Spirit can gradually transform us into His likeness, day by day (Romans 12:1-2). Knowing this difference will enable us to be less hard on others and be more patient with ourselves. We will run or plod on towards Christ, our coming Bridegroom and Friend, because we know our redemption is secured by Him through grace, not by a bit of our ability.

problematic, many bear resentment against God, church leaders or members as they become so discouraged that they no longer have the joy of God’s salvation. The organisation church consists of some necessary local or wider church structures that exist in a damaged world and church i.e. called denominational or independent local churches. It is temporal and imperfect by nature. In contrast, Scriptures reveal to us that Christ came to save the organism church, His living eternal body, not the temporal organisation. The latter is needed for the time being before He comes again just as national government systems are needed to help us be more disciplined, whether we like it or not, so that the human community will be safer from each other’s failures to love as He has loved us.

If we do not accept this differentiation, when the organization church disappoints us, we become so confused about who church members are and should be like, that we either turn away from a particular community of a local church in frustration

obey Him and His people without hesitation. They cannot sin any more. Even the lions and the lambs will be friends! The reality of such a state still needs to be experienced with hope by those of us still in this old world. However, accepting the above difference will empower us to be more patient with each other when the organisation goes wrong, as it will now and then. We will not be so discouraged that we throw Christ, His ways or His people out of our lives because a fellow church member sin against us or unknowingly hurt us without cause. We will be able to forgive faster and endure longer as organisations may come and go but Christ’s friendship is eternal (John 17:3); we will be able to continue to rejoice always, pray constantly and give thanks in all circumstances because this Friend stays the same. HE is unchanging in His loyalty to us in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, humility, faithfulness and self-control!

If we see the local church as an organism, we will naturally view our fellow

church members as brothers and sisters of one family with God as our Father, Jesus as our Elder Brother and the Holy Spirit as the Enabler who moves us to be God's family.

Exercise

- Regularly, go to your room...close the door...be silent before Him and yearn after God...secretly, sincerely and specifically. Converse with your Beloved Friend. Write down the discussions and petitions that take place between you and your God. Read the Bible reading and meditate on His word. Be silent in His presence and by faith look to

forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and then, with fellowmen. Christ, having become the complete atonement for the sins of the world, does not give us any excuse for not forgiving those who wronged us (Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:52).

We need to identify those we are angry with and forgive them one by one. Forgiveness is facing the cross of Christ and placing all our enemies' (still on earth or not) known and unknown wrongs against us, our wounds and evil responses of unforgiveness, at its foot, through sincere prayers. It is also a change of loyalties from worship

- "You will never be like your brother/sister!" (I will always be a loser.)
- "I cannot live without my dada/sex/money/him/her!" (I feel so insecure and unwanted)
- "You are an accident." (I need to prove that I am not.)
- "I own you...you must do always what I tell you!" (I have no right of my own.)
- "You cannot have a holiday till you finish all your work!" (I have to work for my needed rest but will enough be enough?)

We then need to switch on to listen to the new cds of God's views of you.

- "Even if you do nothing, God's love for you stays the same...has not changed a bit! We cannot add anything more to what Christ has done for us. He knows we are made of dust and cannot save ourselves. That is why He had to do it for us and that is why His invitation to be reconciled with Him is GOOD News indeed!

As we obey him through forgiving our enemies, His healing grace will flow into our lives to embrace and to heal...emotionally, mentally, spiritually, socially and even nation wide...for God is for us and not against us.

weakness and not strength. Who wants to be known as weak in our surge for personal, family and social development and enjoyment? Few see true repentance as a precious gift from the holy God to His people. Repentance from daily sins breaks humanly impossible barriers to a growing fellowship and delight in our gracious Father and fellowman. Repentance bring forth a well-spring of freedom to love and be loved, to cry and to laugh, to know His ways for us and a freedom of expression of our God given creativity without having to pretend all our life (1 John 1:9)!

Dr. John White (the late doctor, Bible

UNLESS we confess them to the Saviour as soon as conviction comes. God takes us at our word. Whether we may see God's glory or not is not for us to say, but we need to seek to be right with Him each day. However, a prayer to see His glory may be appropriate if it is so that, in contrast to His glory, we may see ourselves as utterly sinful so that we may repent of our sins and/or be deeply grateful for His mercy to us. If God shows us our sins, then we will repent but if He does not, we can be assured that He knows what He is doing and be at peace. Consequently, we do not have to carry the burden of true guilt that results from our



Jesus alone. This may take a few minutes, hours, days or weeks. (If 2 Corinthians 3:17 is true, God's glory would have been a bit more reflected from your face without your realising it. His acceptance and peace will follow you into the arena of family, church and society. For His honor).

- Read biographies of the saints of old who have gone way ahead of us and learn from them how to relate with God and how he relates with His living body.

- Read about God's creation to be reminded of His greatness and sovereignty over all but reject anything which smells of idolatry e.g. prosperity gospel, exaltation of people/ministries instead of Jesus, etc.

B. Receive His Healing Grace through our forgiveness of our enemies

The whole gospel of our Lord Jesus is about

of self and its resentments to the worship of God alone. Since Christ has once for all paid the total price of all our sins (including that of those who wrong us), forgiving one another is simply practising justice in the eyes of God. Debts cannot be collected twice. Therefore, when we believe that forgiving our enemy is being unfair to us, it is the enemy's lie and we suffer the most inwardly. We, of all people, must know that we are unfair to them if we do not forgive them.

Forgiveness includes a change of cds. We need to switch off the old audio words from our minds e.g.

- "You are useless!" (means I am of no worth as a human)
- "Don't think that you will make it in life unless you are perfect!" (I have to be perfect before I am somebody in this world.)

- "You are My treasured possession!"
- "Just be your personal best for Me, not the ideal unrealistic unreachable self in this imperfect world."
- "You are unique and have only to be yourself so you can return your real self back to the God who created you for a unique purpose."
- "Your identity is in being God's beloved child, not in earthly family name/status/possessions/degrees/external beauty/sportsmanship/fast cars/worldly knowledge/self-centredness/sex/drugs/relationship with VIPs/theologians, etc.

- "God delights in you!"
- "Your ultimate 100% submission is to God alone. All other people-to-people submission is relative only since all have sinned and fallen from the glory of God but are now being redeemed by the grace of God through Christ Jesus.."

Exercise

Forgive your enemies on your own or seek pastoral counselling from a trusted brother or sister in Christ (it may be someone who is able to listen to your heart's cry and lead you closer to God, your Friend, once more. It may be a friend, a pastor or a specifically trained personnel).

C. Experience Deep Repentance

Though repentance is brought about by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we are allowed to pray for it if we realise we have sinned in some specific or vague area of our thought, word or action but are unsure of its definition or severity. However, it seems to me that 'repentance', just like 'submission' (to direct or delegated spiritual authority), is a dirty word in many circles today. To undergo godly sorrow seems to be a sign of

teacher and author), likened the process of repentance to the emerging butterfly kicking off the web that entangles its legs as it seeks to be free from the cocoon. Unless it untangles itself, it will not be free to fly, something which it has been created to do. Similarly, unless we repent of our repeated or new sins, after the initial point of salvation, we cannot enjoy God's friendship though we much desire Him.

Exercise

If, for a while, we have not felt the evil of sin in our lives, it is a good exercise to pray that the Holy Spirit will cause us to know our specific sins, if any, and cause deep godly sorrow in our hearts so that we will proceed with seeking God's forgiveness. We cannot put sin in a pocket and hope it keeps quiet. One day it will make noise and we will have to still bear its consequences

unconfessed sins, or false guilt when Satan accuses us of sin that is non-existent in God's eyes (Revelations 12:10).

Christian testimonies in biographies or life are filled with case after case of transformed lives and relationships with God and fellow human beings when God's means of the grace of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation flow from God to the humbled us and from us to one another.

When was the last time we prayed for the Holy Spirit's conviction of Jesus' righteousness, our sin and the judgement on the evil one already? (John 16:8-11).

A hymn writer lovingly asked:

"What will you do with Jesus,
Neutral you cannot be for
Some day your heart will be asking
'What will He do with me?'"

Essay

“We are the clay, You are the potter;
We are the work of Your hand.” (Isaiah 64:48)

Fond Memory of Bishop C.N. Fang

The Humble and yet Admirable Servant of Our Lord

BY ALFRED K. LEE

Following Sister Tan May Lian’s article on Bishop C.N. Fang in Jan/Feb 2012 issue of Pelita Methodist, I must also say something to recognize him. I’ll touch on events of 1960s, 70s & early 80s.

In early August 1968, I was one of the seven lay delegates of SAC (Sarawak Annual Conference, now Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference or SCAC) to attend the constituting conference of the autonomous Methodist Church in Malaysia and Singapore and followed immediately by the first general conference of same at Raffles Hall, University of Singapore, Nassim Road, Singapore. In addition to SAC, there were SIAC (Sarawak Iban Annual Conference), TRAC, CAC and TAC delegates, each annual conference with fourteen, divided equally between clergy and lay representatives. So, there were seventy “electors” in the chamber. To elect our new bishop would require a simple majority of 36 votes.

For majority of SAC & SIAC delegates from Sarawak (none from Sabah yet), this was new experience in a new environment for, it was just 5 years after the formation of Federation of Malaysia. Electioneering was not permitted. A lot of whispering went on inside the meeting hall, a lecture hall of the university. Balloting began in mid-afternoon. It must go on, round after round, until a winner appeared. Then, Rev. C.N.Fang stood up after few rounds of indecisive voting. He said he was inexperienced and inadequately equipped for this important appointment as bishop. He thanked those who voted for him and appealed to the delegates to cast their votes on more qualified fellow pastor. Then Rev. Denis C. Dutton expressed the same sentiment.

This was my first-ever impression of Rev. Fang and Rev. Dutton. History tells us that both pastors were one after another elected as bishop of Methodist Church in Malaysia subsequently. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord direct his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9) Isn’t so?

Bishop Fang would sometimes reveal some “insider-job-dealings”

So, secret balloting continued. It was dinner time. Someone shouted, “we’ll end up without dinner tonight if we go on like this!” At the 13th voting, Rev.Dr.Yap Kim Hao, pastor of Wesley Methodist Church Kuala Lumpur, obtained 39 votes and therefore elected as Bishop of Methodist Church in Malaysia and Singapore. The long day was Tuesday, August 13, 1968. (The Church was later separated into two



entities, Malaysia and Singapore.)

Back to Kuching and I didn’t meet with Rev. Fang until I was assigned to Kuala Lumpur to work in a finance company end of 1972. By then he was President of CAC and then Bishop of our Church.I purposely went to visit him. Being told that my finance firm was the only East Malaysia-based financial institution opening a branch in nation’s capital and that it was rather difficult for any East Malaysian to penetrate into West-Malaysian-dominated market, let alone a rather small banking group from Sibu, Sarawak, he immediately prayed and blessed me and my set-up. Later on, he helped further by diverting some personal and church surplus funds for time deposit with my company.

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Praise the Lord!

My office was on the quieter side of Jalan Bukit Bintang then, and it was a two-way traffic, not congested as it is now. So, Rev. Fang would pop in at his timing and had

coffee with me. Even to simple club’s set lunch as he would prefer economical eating. It was one of those occasions I boldly suggested that from my observations in Taipei (university time), Sibu, Kuching, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, I felt that the academic attainment of the clergy was lagging behind the lay world and that there was room for improving deliveries of sacred sermons. Instead of showing his displeasure, he agreed with me!

I am quite sure this piece of friendly dialog played a part in his thinking and deliberations with fellow Christian denominations to organize a theological seminary in Malaysia, later known as STM (Seminari Theologi Malaysia). And, Rev. Dr. Denis C. Dutton, while pastoring Wesley Methodist Church Kuala Lumpur, was appointed Principal of STM in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur.

As a member of KL Wesley, Rev. Dutton drafted me to serve in the finance committee of both Wesley and STM. Financial situation of STM during the initial period was challenging. I even raised some friendly

donations from Sibu, my home town, to defray utilities bills. Also, to back up what I said to Bishop Fang about the importance of sustainable learning and, in memory of the untimely departure of Lily C. Wang, my late wife, I donated all collections from well-wishers to STM through Bishop Fang in 1982, such sum adequate for one student’s whole semester expenses at STM.

Bishop Fang would sometimes reveal some “insider-job-dealings”. He said he was so frustrated at being rejected to erect and display the cross sign outside Wisma Methodist, Lorong Hang Jebat, Kuala Lumpur. The appeal to reconsider was eventually brought up to the highest level of government in this land, the Prime Minister of Malaysia (Tun Hussein Onn) was approved.

During my brief but close association with Bishop C.N.Fang, the legacy he left behind is rich and resourceful. Our Lord said to Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:6) “Not by might nor by power, but by MY Spirit.” May the Holy Spirit be with all of us.

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