

# DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA

## SYNOD 2011

23<sup>TH</sup> – 25<sup>TH</sup> August 2011 at Grand Kampar Hotel

### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## THE CONNECTING CHURCH

There are so many types of names given to churches these days that speak of the one same idea. These are named as Church Without Walls, Cell-Group Church, Church In The Market Place, New Expression Church, Contemporary Church, etc. The one same idea is to promote a conceptual phenomenon that leads to becoming a Church that connects with the people or community and with God. All churches, in actual fact, are supposed to be connected with the society and community and with God all the time as a go between i.e. what the church is for? Archbishop William Temple famous saying, as he referred to the purpose of the church, is: *“The Christian Church is the only co-operative society that exists for the benefit of its non-members.”*<sup>1</sup> Is our Anglican Church a go between connecting with our society and community with God? Before we answer this question, let us look at where we are at the moment?

### 1.0 The spirit is willing and the flesh is weak

I wish to bring our memory back to the 2009 Presidential Address where we were all very excited to receive the challenge to work towards the reality of a province of West Malaysia. I sense that by the year 2020 we will still be far from the target. I say this because of the lack of one major factor – CONNECTION – how connected are we? Jesse Rice in her book ‘The Church of Facebook’ writes:

*“At the root of human existence is our great need for connection: connection with one another, with our own hearts and minds, and with a loving God who intended intimate connection with us from the beginning. Connection is the very core of what makes us human and the very means by which we express our humanity.”*<sup>2</sup>

Let us examine our connectivity with different level of groups and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Bunting (ed); *Celebrating the Anglican Way* (Grove Books, Hodder & Stoughton, London UK, 1996) p.235.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse Rice; *The Church of Facebook – How the Hyperconnected are Redefining Community* (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 2009) p.28.

## 2.0 The Facebook Church

If we are talking about the church for the next generation, first we must ask ourselves – do our churches have the next generation now with us? Are we connecting with this generation? The common expression is that they are very different from us. They have few common characteristics which our churches seem to have difficulty to accommodate:

- *“God is not with them before 11.00am”* – They find it very difficult to attend the Sunday morning services which are usually held before 11.00am. Is there a necessity to create another service for them? Or another timeslot?
- *“Boring and dull services”* – The existing services do not attract them and in fact repel them from attending. Can we find the Connect?
- *“Churches are for the seniors and adults”* – They feel that the church leaders are not sensitive to their needs. Are their voices being heard?
- *“Churches are too old fashion and not up to date”* – They are very much into high tech and find it difficult to adjust to turn pages of hymn books which are often torn and tattered with missing pages. With hymn books, they too could not clap their hands and sing along with movement, and the music is too slow and too soft. Is the tradition hindering them and can it be adapted?
- *“There is no more life after church services”* – The connection stops after the services. They want to continue to connect during the week through face book, emails and smses, etc. Do our churches have alternate avenues for interaction and connection?

This is a Facebook generation. Facebook is their second life. They believe the substance in the face book more than the preaching from the pulpit. One has never seen so many responses in any given church situation than in the walls, messages and chats in face book. In a normal classroom, one will never get so many queries and answers as compare to that in any given chat room in the internet. The famous Pastor Nicky Gumbel and Pastor Rick Warren are constantly online with his Twitter and LinkedIn<sup>3</sup> to get in touch with his people worldwide with helpful scripture verses and provoking thoughts. Some of our clergy and members are also constantly on face book but I hardly see spiritual messages or helpful insights from their pages. All I usually see are the casual chat, unprocessed and impromptu sharing and responses. Some are often in their games and Farmville almost daily. I wonder when they will grow out and tired of it. There is a need to re-employ face book for God’s messages and encouragement along with the usual chat and wishes. We need to add spiritual values into Facebook.

This generation subtly and is already redefining community. That is the reason why they are finding it very hard to fit into our existing community. All the more we need to connect with them before it is too late. “In order to better understand why Facebook resonates so deeply

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<sup>3</sup> Nicky Gumbel at <http://twitter.com/#!/nickygumbel> and Rick Warren at <http://twitter.com/#!/RickWarren>

with so many”, Jesse describes the Facebook community in “four homelike qualities that Facebook uniquely facilitates”. They are:-<sup>4</sup>

1. *Home is where we keep all the stuff that matters most to us.*
2. *Home is where we find family.*
3. *Home is where we feel safe because we can control the environment.*
4. *Home is where we can “just be ourselves.”*

Now this generation is redefining their own new community as Home where they find security and attention. Can we understand them and able to reach out to them?

### **3.0 The Muhibbah Church**

The closest meaning for the BM word ‘Muhibbah’ which I can find is ‘Together in Harmony’ in English. Most of the young seniors in the church today are from this generation i.e. those of the age between 40 and 60. This is the majority group in any given church in Malaysia. When they come together and talk about the good old days, they would almost say things to this effect – *“last time when we were younger, there is no polarization and we can live together with all races.”* One would say – *“I use to have a good muslim friend and we pay visits to each other homes without problem.”* Another would say – *“I was having a muslim classmate sitting next to me for a number of years in school.”*

This is perhaps the most connected church group that we have today. Most of the activities are catered for this group. But this group is growing older and older each day. We need replacement before it is too late. However, before members from this group reaching a ‘worn out’ stage, many can rise up and join the work force of the Lord’s business. There is great advantage for the church to engage with this group.

- This group can be a huge Volunteer force because finance is usually not a problem. They can usually look after themselves.
- They are rich in experience and very helpful for the church though some of the experiences may need to be re-tuned for pastoral and ecclesiastical use. This can be done through re-training and equipping at our TEE centres.
- They are usually in a better position to bridge the divide between the face book generation and the Golden Circle generation because they too are quite computer savvy.
- They are also the most resourceful group in the church and society. They may have their own challenges in the family or career but if properly engaged they can be a powerful force in the church.

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<sup>4</sup> Jesse Rice; op. cit. pp. 76 – 84.

#### **4.0 What is God saying about the spirituality of our nation? Can the Church be a non partisan connection and remain as a force to drive the nation towards God's intended direction?**

A glance at the recent events that have happened in the country will put us in a mode in asking the question: What is God saying to us today? What is the church doing? Which side is the church taking? Some say that the government is God's appointed instrument and therefore we shall support irrespective. What about the evils, corruptions and wastage generated by the God's appointed government, are we to tolerate silently and passively by ignoring the realities? Another group of Christians believe that they are the salt and light of the world and any government or authority blocking or deviating from the truth must be taken to task.

Firstly, the 'Allah' issue with the Catholic newspaper 'The Herald'<sup>5</sup>, the cow head incident, the burning of churches, the pig head issue, the allegation of the conspiracy of forming a Christian State<sup>6</sup>, the Bersih 2.0<sup>7</sup>, and now the issue of raiding of DUMC – Harapan Komuniti thanksgiving dinner and the allegation of proselytisation.<sup>8</sup> On the surface, it looks like religious issues but as we go deeper into it, we tend to see it masquerading with political agendas. Finally when we dig deep into the bottom, we can see that it is actually a spiritual problem.

People seem to have sold out themselves to power-craze, greed and leisure in the expense of spiritual and moral values. It begins with leisure as the supreme agenda. Leisure is so good when it is a reward from our heavy work schedule. It refreshes oneself and re-energises the inner man when it is properly utilized, especially in the reflection and devotion with the Lord Almighty. The problem arises when one demands leisure without having to earn for it. This in

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<sup>5</sup> The Catholic newspaper The Herald was first prohibited to use the word 'Allah' in 2007, subsequently the Catholic Church in Malaysia told the Home Ministry to court. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009, the High Court ruled that it is not illegal to use the word 'Allah'. The following weekend, on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010 onwards, a couple of churches were arson. Metro Tabernacle in Taman Melawati suffered the worst.

<sup>6</sup> The allegation first came out public through the news report on the front page of Utusan Malaysia that DAP and Christian pastors in Penang have a conspiracy to topple the government and to set up a Christian State and to have a Christian Prime Minister.

<sup>7</sup> The Bersih 2.0 march was aiming to speak loudly through actions to have a fair, clean and just election rather than words which according to them have been falling on deaf ears. The Bersih 2.0 march was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011 in KL.

<sup>8</sup> There is no proselytisation at all. Harapan Komuniti (HK) is a non faith based non-profit charitable NGO. Its Exco has a Malay, a Buddhist and a Christian. It is a member of the Malaysian AIDS council. On the 3 August 2011, HK has a closed door thanksgiving service for the donors and well-wishers. HK chose DUMC Hall No. 3 as it venue because it was free of charge. It seemed unfortunate because it was Ramadan and there were a couple of Malays and it was held in a church premise. JAIS raided the church premise and of course the HK Thanksgiving dinner and later claimed that it was only an 'inspection'. Some Malays were questioned and later hauled up for questioning and counseling in JAIS department.

turn breeds greed and more greed until a point when one decides to cross the line of moral and spiritual values. It is at this point that the spiritual eyes are blinded by the agenda – leisure. In order to continue in the pursuit of obtaining or maintain such level of leisure, one will eventually resolve using unethical and sinful ways to retain it. At such crucial time and on a very thin line of decision, one will easily fall into a power-craze adventure. This will ultimately lead to a point of no return where one will try everything and anything possible under the sun to gain power even through evil or unthinkable means. Then God will just be a lip service but the heart is far away.

Secondly, in the religious and inter-faith level, how is the church supposed to engage herself with other faiths? The government is trying to set up an Inter-faith committee to resolve some religious issues. Before it was launched, it almost died pre-maturely because it was sabotaged by some high profile government leaders.<sup>9</sup> Many conservative Christians call such Inter-faith meeting as compromising one's faith.<sup>10</sup> How then are we to connect if we stand alone in isolation?

As we saw in many other countries where inter-faith groups cannot meet and sit down to dialogue, there is almost and always religious violence. When violence flares, there will be no more testimony or virtue to be seen or heard. It will become Disconnect. Is respecting another faith considered a compromise? An advice from Mosab Hassan Yousef concerning Middle East conflict that we can learn lessons from, he states:<sup>11</sup>

*“Religion is not the solution. Religion without Jesus is just self-righteousness. Freedom from oppression will not solve things either. Delivered from the oppression of Europe, Israel became the oppressor. Delivered from persecution, Muslims became the oppressors. Abused spouses and children often go on to abuse spouses and children. It is a cliché, but it's still true: hurt people, unless they are healed, hurt people.... Truth and forgiveness are the only solution for the Middle East. The challenge, especially between Israelis and Palestinians, is not to find the solution. The challenge is to be the first courageous enough to embrace it.”*

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<sup>9</sup> The government sponsored Inter-Faith Committee, which is known as the Special Committee to Promote Inter-religious Understanding and Harmony, has its first Chairperson in the person of the late Datuk Hajjah Illani Ishak. She was replaced by the former National Unity and Integration Department (NUID) director-general Datuk Azman Amin Hassan, after Datuk Illani Ishak died of cancer on February 24. (By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal, August 19, 2011 - <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/new-interfaith-chief-named-amid-growing-race-religious-tension/> )

<sup>10</sup> The Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) was established in the 1980s. Since its inception, the Islam leaders refused to join because they felt that Islam is considered by them as higher than all other religions and there should be no mutual dialogue. The conservative muslims also see that such council can only depict a compromising attitude and stand whereas the liberal muslims want to dialogue.

<sup>11</sup> Mosab Hassan Yousef with Ron Brackin; *Son Of Hamas – A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices* (Authentic Media, Milton Keynes, UK, 2010) pp.250-251. Mosab is a son of the founder of Hamas, Sheikh Hassan Yousef, and he became a Christian and sought political asylum in America.

Tass Saada, a former sniper and chauffer for the leader of PLO, Arafat, is now an ambassador for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, emphasizes the importance of dialogue remarks:<sup>12</sup>

*“For every conflict in which we become embroiled, the answer lies not so much in our own understanding as in relying, trusting, leaning upon the Lord. That is how the crooked paths become straight – in our families, our communities, and across our world.... When God is allowed to plant his peace in our hearts, we can then influence others in the same direction. We become peacemakers. We get the chance to illuminate blind spots that are blocking reconciliation.”*

## 5.0 What is God saying about the spirituality of the Church in Malaysia?

Within the Christian circle, there are also so many issues. The ‘gay’ issue has split the Anglican Communion.<sup>13</sup> Some conservative and orthodox Anglican Primates have boycotted the recent Primates Meeting in Ireland as a protest over Canterbury of not taking The Episcopal Church of United States to task for ordaining two gay/lesbian bishops. The Global South Churches have been vocal in this aspect against the Western counterparts of forcing their way ahead to pressurize the whole world to adopt their agenda. Some of the western agendas have also spilled over to our nation; as we have read about that one Malaysian guy so called gay pastor has started a gay church in KL, and is getting married soon.<sup>14</sup>

Among the various Christian denominations in the nation, on the surface there is good working relationships and harmony when we respond to the authorities that discriminate against Christians. At the ground level, the accusation of ‘sheep stealing’ is still a concern. Are we not serving the one same God? Is there no avenue to sit down, talk and share openly? Where are all the Christian virtues? It seems that everyone is fishing in the same ponds? I believe the ocean is big enough for all to fish in. Church leaders need to trust God and work with His agenda – His sheep shall be One.<sup>15</sup>

According the Malaysian Housing and Population Census 2010, the number of Christians in the nation has increased from 2,126,000 (9.1% 23.3 million) to 2,617,000 (9.2% 28.3 million).<sup>16</sup> In fact the Christian population grew at a faster rate at 23% then the Malaysia population at 21.7%.

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<sup>12</sup> Tass Saada with Dean Merrill; ***Once An Arafat Man – The True Story of How a PLO Sniper found a New Life*** (Tyndale house, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2008) p.227.

<sup>13</sup> The gay issue has also affected all the other denominations in the Western World. It is coming to the East as well.

<sup>14</sup> I was told recently that this gay pastor is an American ordained Anglican priest. See <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/8/18/nation/9319063&sec=nation>

<sup>15</sup> John 17:21

<sup>16</sup> The Population and Housing Census 2010 can be viewed here – [http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1215&lang=en](http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1215&lang=en)

The Christians in West Malaysia only constitute about 27.1% (709,207) while East Malaysia has 72.9% (1,907,703). From this statistics, we can see the Christian community has grown consistently in numbers. Has the Malaysian Church grown simultaneously spiritually? The numbers seem to depict a growth not very much more than the normal birth rate of the nation.

On one hand, we rejoice with the growth in numbers but on the other hand, we are quite worried with the lack of readiness of the Church in Discipleship Training, Mission Outreach, Social Involvement, Guarding the Truth, Biblical Understanding, Prayers, Environmental Consciousness and Involvement, Education & Medical Ministry, Migrant Ministry, Crisis Relief & Mercy, Christian Spirituality, etc.

We can see shallowness within the spirituality of our churches through the weekly bulletins, magazines, preaching, pastoral write-ups, seminars, conferences, prayer rallies, etc. There is insufficient healthy substance in many of the rallies, seminar and conferences organised. A lot focuses on the number of attendance and participation rather on the essence of the training or teaching. Christian leaders are not spared from the shallowness of spirituality. Peter Ting in his book 'Bouncing Back From Crisis' relates concerning the shallowness in spirituality with pastors and preachers:<sup>17</sup>

*"Often when we have some measure of success in life, with the limelight on us, it is very easy for us to forget the source of our power. That is when we allow pride to come in to exalt self rather than God. And this is the beginning of the downfall for many great preachers as they attain celebrity status and live a questionable extravagant lifestyle supported by contributions from their unsuspecting gullible followers."*

When God is far away, it is we who have drifted, not Him. I fear the agenda of the Malaysian Church which seems to depend more on the size and number game, "the multimedia special effects and external showmanship than anointing from God"<sup>18</sup> instead of the depth in spirituality, biblical knowledge with correct and responsible interpretation. The result of this is commonly attributed to the poor interpretation of the Bible and a silent rejection of professional scholarship to the Biblical text. "Correct interpretation, therefore, brings relief to the mind as well as a prick or prod to the heart" exclaimed Gordon Fee.<sup>19</sup>

## **6.0 What is God saying about the spirituality of our Parishes and Missionary Districts?**

I wish to see our parishes and missionary districts having niche areas. This can be the bridge to connect to the society. Niche areas can be a drawing factor. No one in the nation can put a finger on any of our Anglican churches and describe its speciality because we don't have yet.

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Ting; *Bouncing Back From Crisis* (Good News Resources, KL, Malaysia) 2007, p.62.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.63.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart; *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (PVM Harvest Resources, PJ, Malaysia, 2003) p.18.

Perhaps the busyness of our priests, deaconesses and leaders has clouded their charisma. If a person is deeply spiritual and walking with God, I believe that it will somehow shine through his life and character. Unfortunately, many of our parishes have lost their connections with the society and community. If nothing is done to correct it, I fear its closure is imminent especially with the pressure and head-on 'persecution'.

- The lingo used by the churches is not easily understood by the communities around.
- The activities organized are concentrated around own members and thus become disconnected with the communities.
- The lethargic and 'tidak apa' attitude towards social needs, relief works, environmental issues, legal and political matters on human rights and justice, discrimination and abuses, migrant's right and fair treatment, etc. have weakened the effectiveness of our testimony and witness.
- The little involvement in training and assisting our Bumiputra brethren and their churches to stand on their own feet till they can do their own mission.<sup>20</sup>
- The lack of local theological writings and critical assessments of the needs and situation of the people and issues in the nation and in the world.

Our parishes need to be pro-active in connecting with the society. Last year I mentioned about Community Nights as a good link to the society. Of course, tuition classes, Feeding the Hungry programme, Nehemiah project, Maria project, etc. are signs of a good beginning. We can do more. Priests and pastors too need to be involved and to lead the parishioners to greater involvement in caring ministry. Our parishes must be seen by the community as relevant to them. The Migrant ministry is a huge harvest field which is at our door step, we must not ignore.

As our parishes are planning to connect with the society, there is an equally important connection with our God. To quote one of the great evangelists of the 1930s, John Sung wrote in his last letter to the Evangelistic Bands in Nanyang before the Pacific War broke out in 1941:<sup>21</sup>

*"It is my hope that every evangelistic band will eventually develop into a prayer band, whereupon the Nanyang region will turn to Christ in the foreseeable future. Each band should comprise five to seven members who will go down on their knees in the presence of the Throne as they meet weekly. They will "open the coffin", be cleansed in the Blood and read a chapter of the Bible together. Thereafter, the Holy Spirit shall guide them in their meditation as they take turns to read the Bible, According to their respective enlightenment,*

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<sup>20</sup> The BM Bible is still in Goodnews translation. The Bible Society of Malaysia is presently working on a new BM translation that resembles a Study Bible type. Both finance and personnel are needed.

<sup>21</sup> Levi; ***The Journal Once Lost*** – Extracts from the Diary of John Sung (Genesis Books, Armour Publishing, Singapore, 2008) pp.500-501. Evangelist John Sung, lived from 1901 – 1944, has visited Nanyang (South East Asia) 6 times in the 1930s and has caused a stir in the churches with great revival which has eventually prepared for the Japanese Occupation. Levi is the youngest daughter of John Sung.



*members should wash one another's feet, encourage and love each other. In addition, they are to comfort and share one another's sufferings and burdens. The more they love one another, the more they will be as one in the Lord, even unto death..... I have seen many evangelistic bands falling apart after some years, and the reason is that they emphasize only on the work itself, at the expense of prayer. As a result, their work in the past was not accepted by God. Because of such failures, God has used my illness to bring me to the hills so that I can see the importance of prayer and the sweetness of spiritual communion. It is of utmost importance that we are in close communion with God."*

## **7.0 A church that connects**

We urgently need to re-work with our churches to prepare the followings, without which we would be overrun by other forces, let alone moving towards forming a province of West Malaysia.

- We need to connect with the Face book generation – recruiting more young people to serve two years as youth workers or children workers. The diocese will provide the training and support. There will be no expectation or pressure for anyone to continue after the two years contract is up.
- We need to create Silver Circle for those in the age group between 36 and 50 in order to tap the vast resources and experience within it.<sup>22</sup> This is a dynamic group with great potential and leadership. It can be the bridge to connect the Face book generation with the Golden Circle generation.
- We need to be in the fore front and vocal in issues that pertain to the policies of the nation. We must be able to provide a bright future for our next generation by setting in the right values and just policies. We must be “wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove”.<sup>23</sup> We need to help set the nation on her track to proper spirituality and with moral responsibility.
- We require to move the parishes and missionary districts to a higher level of commitment and to discover their niche areas. First, all priests, deaconesses and church leaders need to be trained and re-trained. This will be followed by engaging their ministry for a 10,000 hours rule according to Malcolm Gladwell's theory.<sup>24</sup> Each ministry needs to carry on at least for 5 years before any form of specialization or expertise can be seen.

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<sup>22</sup> Initially, I have plans to create Silver Circle for the age group between 31 and 45. Since the DYC has preferred to amend their age to 13 – 35 from 13 – 40, instead of 13 – 30, I have no choice but to reclassify the Silver Circle for the age group from 36 – 50.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 10:16

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Gladwell; *Outlier*, (Back Bay Books, New York, 2008) p. 38 – Chapter Two: The 10,000 hour rule. 10,000 hours is equivalent to one year two months or 14 months. If a person spends 10 hours a week, he

- We need to help the Bumiputra church to be standing on her own feet. This is the future of our church in Malaysia. Since about 60% of the Christian population is Bumiputra Christians, there is a great need in the supply of BM training materials and literature.
- We need to work together at all levels to connect and re-connect with the nation.

## 8.0 Actions

Let us pray and work towards:

- To see 40 new workers annually – comprises of priests, deaconesses, evangelists, youth workers, lay pastors, lay readers, etc.
- To see two new caring projects annually.
- To see all the existing priests, deaconesses, evangelists, and lay pastors commit to training and re-training in TEE centres or STM.
- To see 20 new church plants annually.
- To see 5 students in STM annually.
- To see deeper spiritual discipline and character transformation through MICPE and Spiritual Formation.
- To see our church engaging relevantly in the society for a just, peaceful, fair, and harmonious nation.
- To see our church taking mission locally and abroad<sup>25</sup> for mercy, relief and church planting, particularly with migrant ministry.
- To see our church developing niche areas in the Lord's business.
- To see our church grows in discipleship.

“We bring glory to God, and therefore worship Him most appropriately, when we bring the Great Commission to its completion.... If we refuse to leave our home comforts, we will never be able to take the Gospel beyond ourselves.”<sup>26</sup>

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needs 19 years to reach 10,000 hours. If a person spends 40 hours a week, he will need 5 years to be an expert in that field according to Malcolm's 10,000 hour rule.

<sup>25</sup> Chua Choon Lan (chief ed.); *Carry The Spices – Singaporean Doctors in Medical Missions and Pastoral Ministry* (Publication of Medical Missions Foundation, Singapore, 2007)

<sup>26</sup> Kuan Kim Seng; *Our Duty and Our Joy – A Call to Worship God Acceptably* (Genesis, Armour Publishing, Singapore, 2008) pp. 91-92.

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