

DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA

SYNOD 2012

21 AUGUST 2012

St Katherine's Church Kajang

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Rt Rev Datuk Ng Moon Hing

THE LORD IS HERE

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1.0 Put God back into the Equation

The world is turning fast with lots of changes and challenges. However, the present trend seems to indicate that the concept of God is gradually been pushed out of the happenings and decision making. Though citizens in a number of nations are shouting for democracy, the concept of God is hardly included in those struggles. We can see this in the middle eastern and north African nations. While these were done in the name of God, the actions and activities did not seem at all reflect the presence of God. The whole society in this world has been somehow been 'hijacked' by some extremist groups. They used God's name to get their way to fulfill their agenda but in actual case, they seem to be the least qualified group to represent God; otherwise we are suggesting a violent and inhumane God that we are having. Our community is seen moving more and more towards an atheistic secularism that is contrary to the so-called secularly principled government where God is present. A recent study done on the nations which are governed by religious leaders has found that these nations actually fare worse than those so-called secular governments run by non-religious leaders in terms of democracy and humane policies.¹ Another study on the so-called Christian majority countries has found that the crime rates, corruptions, unjust policies and discrimination are as rampant as other non Christian majority nations.² Where is God? Supposedly, the higher the number of Christians presence in a given nation or situation which suggests a greater coverage of the Christian 'salt' and 'light', the greater effect on Christ-likeness should be seen.³ This is obviously not the case presently. A quick glance at the churches will lead one to wonder whether God is present. If He is, why are there so many problems and unChristian behaviours and attitudes prevalent? What about the Christian leaders in the churches, do they reflect the presence of God? Are they consistent in their approaches for their family lives and their careers? Where is the place of the Holy Spirit? Thus, it is important and very urgent for us to 'put God back into the equation'. What is the answer of the church in this? Do we, the Anglicans, differ from other Christians? A quick

¹ **Predominantly Atheist Countries have lowest Crime rate** According to study by Bawomolo, <http://www.nairaland.com/121066/predominantly-atheist-countries-lowest-crime> Of course, we cannot just depend on such an article to make our conclusion. The editor did put up a disclaimer that correlation doesn't mean causation.

² A Canadian TV broadcasting service known as Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) has many documentary videos and journals which discuss on such issues like "Is the majority Christian nations any better?", etc.

³ Bill Moyers Journal, **A Evangelical Christian for Peace** by Ronald J. Sider, the President of Evangelical for Social Action in USA. http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/11/an_evangelical_christian_for_p.html

look at our churches in the Diocese seems also to suggest that 'the real presence of Christ' is far away for the daily activities and church life. What then should we do?

2.0 God in The Politics

The RM2billion question of the actual date of the GE13 is being discussed in every coffee shop, by newspaper, social media and on the lips of most Malaysians. A related question to the GE13 – 'Who is the next government?' On the surface, we are looking at Barisan Nasional versus the Pakatan Rakyat. Deep beneath, we need to look at the question of who a more 'Integrity-Justice-Fairness-Policy Driven' government is. If we are not careful, we can end up either with a government which plays God or a government which exclude God. It is very dangerous and bad for the nation.

Quite a number of Christians as well as non Christians have asked me 'why is the Malaysian Church not vocal and are they too scared to voice up?' Prior to 2008, it was a different scenario altogether. We all have to take the blame together. The Christian Church in Malaysia like any citizen was then having a sort of 'phobia' to speak up directly and indirectly created by the former ruling leaders. After the political tsunami of 2008, everyone including the Christian Church somehow has the 'guts' to 'face the music' in the event of speaking up. There are also some considerations to ponder over before making a conclusion here. First, the Christian Federation of Malaysia has among its members many different theological stands on almost every issue and many schools of thoughts.⁴ It is always a challenge to get consensus from everyone or at least from the leaders of the three component bodies. Second, CFM has always been engaging with the relevant authorities for the concerns and benefits of the Christian communities since its conception. Some of the issues facing by the Christian Church then were resolved within many sessions of close door discussions with the relevant authorities. When a matter has been dealt amicably, there is always not necessary to be vocal on it. However, there are still issues unresolved for some time such as the 1986 Printing & Publication Act on the usage of the word 'Allah' and the State Legislative Enactment of the usage of the word 'Allah' and other words.

The question here – "Is God still in control and present within the Malaysian Church?" We who profess God must discern His leading and direction for us in this nation. Therefore it is prudent and essential for all of us to exercise our vote. Leave the result with God. He knows what the best solution for our nation is. The Hebrews were sent to Egypt for 400 years before God raised Moses to be their liberator. The early Christians had to hide in caves and catacombs for 300 years before they were allowed to live as normal citizens during Constantine's era. The Soviet Union closed its door to churches for 70 years until its collapse. The Christian door in China was closed for 30 years before liberation came. Myanmar's 60 years military rule since 1962 has finally opened this year. As we sense the time of God's movement, I strongly believe that now is the time for the Malaysian Church to awake and rise up and move to the running track for the 'real' event. I sense that so far we have only been doing the warming up exercise and getting prepared. The time has come and 'the Lord is

⁴ Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has 3 main component bodies, namely the Roman Catholics in Malaysia, the Council of Churches of Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship.

here'. Let's inquire of God and move with Him: as the Lord told King David, 'as soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you...'⁵

*'It is time for all of us to reclaim the public square as a forum for responsible and civil discussions on the social and political malaise that we are facing, rather than allowing it to be deformed and impair the health of our democracy. The choice lies within each of us.'*⁶

*'It is precisely because I know that only Jesus can usher in the perfect government that I continue to share the good news of the kingdom. True change will only come when sinners are transformed by the gospel. No human leader can bring this about. But as representatives of the coming kingdom of God, Christians are to live by kingdom values in every sphere of life. And this includes coming out to vote.'*⁷

3.0 God in the Community

The constant call for a Green World with Organic Food policy depicts an imbalance and unhealthy world we are in. We are the contributors to this mess. Once upon a time, there was not any need to purchase bottled water. Now the bottled water costs more than petrol. We never need sophisticated water filters and now almost every urban household in Malaysia has water filters. Some have more than one filter in their homes. It has never dawned upon us to buy organic food but the chemical, pollution and pesticides used has forced us to look for organic food stuff. Where is God? What has happened to the moral and ethics of the manufacturers and farmers as well as consumers? It seems that the world is now a 'Money- driven' one. It portrays the acute weakness of the Capitalistic system. Does the Church have an answer to it? Can we bring God back again to this arena? Looking at the problems of the financial world which exploded in 2008 in USA and now in the European nations, the fear of God does not seem to be anywhere near the top rung leadership of the big corporations and banking institutions. Why and when is God being pushed out of the picture?

Can a Social-Capitalistic-Green system work? Is there such a system? In the Old Testament, we learnt of God's instruction to the new nation that came out of Egypt to be different from other nations then. It should be a WELFARE nation where it is the responsibility of every child of God to look after the poor and needy and those who serve God fully without another career. Each Israelite was

⁵ 1 Chronicles 14:14-15. Here it records an event after King David has inquired of the Lord about the second Philistines raid and got into a preparation mode. David definitely has waited for the Lord's initiative above his own. He was deliberately sensitive to the leading of the Lord and the Presence of the Lord was clearly with him.

⁶ Christopher Chong, an article, **Democracy in Malaysia**, in the book edited by Joshua Woo and Tan Soo Inn, **The Bible and the Ballot**, GraceWorks, Singapore, 2011, p18.

⁷ Tan Soo inn, an article, **Vote**, in the book edited by Joshua Woo and Tan Soo Inn, **The Bible and the Ballot**, GraceWorks, Singapore, 2011, p23.

commanded to have three tithes⁸: (1) the usual or general tithe is a tenth and to be given to Levites (Num 18:21), who in turn had to give a tenth of that to the priests (Num 18:26ff); (2) the tithe which was associated with the sacred meal involving offerer and Levite (Deut 14:22-27); (3) the tithe paid every three years to the poor (Deut 14:28-29). It should be a DEBT-FREE nation – the notion of cancelling debts at the end of every seven years and doing it generously (Deut 15:1ff). It should be a FAIR and FORGIVING nation – every person can and may defend his own life from any false accusation by giving him another chance to live and to prove himself (Deut 19:7ff).

Similarly, we as a Church can learn and develop our policy and system in line with the teaching of God. This is lacking in our churches. First, we can learn to tithe to God, not one but three. It is so difficult to even make one tithe, let alone three. Though it is difficult for individual to make one tithe, we must continue to tithe to God. Have we, as a Church, tithed? If we are following the OT instruction fully, then there are three tithes. First one goes to God for the use in God's ministry, another for God's servants, and the third for welfare. Apart from regular church ministry, perhaps each church can look at the welfare and social arena and get involved. Let's make the world a more livable place, by starting with our own backyard, the community surrounding our church. Let's us put God's presence back to our community. The Anglican Care is set up for this purpose that the needy can find assistance and at the same time they too can find God. The Malaysian Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education (MICPE) is set up for equipping the workers so that they can help themselves through the presence of God as they help others.

In the arena of welfare, we may have to seriously act to save the world from human destruction. Thomas Friedman in his book 'Hot, Flat and Crowded' remarked that 'we may be the first generation in human history that literally has to act like Noah – to save the last pairs of a wide range of species'⁹ when he was referring to the last two Yangtze soft shell turtle left in China. Biodiversity preservation is an area that we need to pay attention to and address urgently. Human actions are causing destruction to the natural realm at an escalating rate to a thousand times faster than normal. Irresponsible actions caused by governments and corporations as well as individuals where 'pollution, unbridled hunting, and runaway economic development are destroying habitats and wiping out plants and animal populations with stunning speed'.¹⁰ We need to put God back into this equation desperately and affirmatively. We are destroying God's created world and eventually our homes and ultimately ourselves, if nothing is done and God is not brought back.

'In this age of economic and environmental instability, we may be tempted to flee to safety. We may be tempted to turn inward, and shield ourselves from all risks. We may be tempted to become more insular, and more self-focused.'¹¹ This is really a risky business. But the desire of God seems to point

⁸ There may be differences in the interpretation on tithing. First, it is the outright one-tenth to God where Christians commonly talk about. Second, it is the second one-tenth annually set aside for appointed celebration in reverence and thanksgiving with the people of God especially the servants of the Lord. Third, one-tenth is set aside every three years to give to the poor and needy.

⁹ Thomas Friedman, **Hot, Flat and Crowded**, Penguin Books, London, England, 2008, p141.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Peter H. W. Lau, **The Book of Ruth** – Risky Kindness, Genesis Books, Armour Publishing, Singapore, 2012, p38.

to the opposite direction for our action and involvement. This is what Peter Lau in his book, 'The Book of Ruth', called 'Risky Kindness'. We can show kindness but it is risky.

4.0 God in the Church

The Anglican Communion has spent a large portion of its time and energy been grappling with the issue of human sexuality. So much so that it has 'split' the Communion.¹² Some Christians are wondering what the stand of our Diocese on the issue on the setting up of the homosexual gay church in Malaysia and gay marriage between a Malaysian male and a black male US citizen. It has been clear right from the beginning that as early as in 1997, we are the host of the Second Global South Encounter where the famous Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality was issued. We together in the Province of South East Asia were championing the famous 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10. This was further strengthened by the adoption of the Anglican Covenant in 2011.¹³ Our Diocese subscribes to the orthodox interpretation of the Scripture on family and human sexuality. We took a similar stand with those who uphold the orthodox view of Scripture in other denominations and nations. Joe Kapolyo, a native from Zambia, returning to Genesis 1:27 has described with these words "in His own image' are made interchangeably with 'male and female' or heterodox human sexuality'. He further added that 'love is the most characteristic feature of the relationship between male and female'. Quoting from Richard Foster, from his book 'Money, Sex and Power', he said:¹⁴

Our human sexuality, our maleness and femaleness, is not just an accidental arrangement of the human species, not just a convenient way to keep the human race going. No, it is at the centre of our true humanity. We exist as male and female in relationship. Our sexualness, our capacity to love and be loved, is intimately related to our creation in the image of God.

On a larger scale, we must not be too pre-occupied by the sexuality issue. In fact, the family is the most basic unit of the community, we must not be distracted away from it. The issue of the family

¹² In 2001, the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) was commissioned to explore whether the Anglicans share is sufficient to hold them together in the midst of an impending schism within the fabric of the global Communion. Bishop Lim Cheng Ean was a member of the IATDC from 2001 to 2007. The full report was published by the Anglican Communion Office. **Communion, Conflict and Hope** – The Kuala Lumpur Report of the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, ACO, London, 2008.

¹³ The 1997 Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality can be found at http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/the_kuala_lumpur_statement_on_human_sexuality_2nd_encounter_in_the_south_10/ . The 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1:10 can be found at http://theroadtoemmaus.org/RdLb/32Ang/Ang/Lmbth/L_SEX%20RESL01.HTM . The Anglican Covenant can be found at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm> . The Province of South East Asia has adopted the Anglican Covenant with a proviso to include an improved amended Preamble which can be found at http://www.anglicanwestmalaysia.org.my/sub_page.aspx?catID=4&ddlID=302 or http://www.anglican.org.sg/index.php/blog/comments/preamble_to_the_letter_of_accession_province_of_southeast_asia

¹⁴ Joe M. Kapolyo, **The Human Condition** – Christian perspectives through African Eyes, IVP, Lester, England, 2005, p53.

must be placed in the centre of the big plan of God together with the many concerns and foci of the balanced agenda of God. Ronald J. Sider puts it comprehensively –

‘The Bible makes it clear that God cares a great deal about the well-being of marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, justice for the poor, care for creation, peace, freedom, and racial justice....faithful evangelical civic engagement must champion a biblically balanced agenda.’¹⁵

When we mention family, we are actually speaking of the variety of ministry within a family. Right from the babies till the grand seniors, the church has responsibility to minister to them. While we have ministries set up according to different age categories, we will still need a ministry for inter-generational needs and relationship. A wholesome family ministry is one that can cater for the immediate family as well as the extended family. This will include the singles and the seniors.

We praise God for the various auxiliary bodies in the Diocese and their faithful ministries. Can we re-look at all the activities and programmes that we are having, and see whether God is included? King Solomon in Psalm 127:1 reminded us that without God, all our efforts are futile – ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain’. God is interested in our families for He is the one who ordained the first marriage in the Garden of Eden. We need a family ministry.

5.0 God in the Individual Life

The Christian life is supposed to be a life of service and discipline. It is never meant to be an easy one – ‘... he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me [Jesus]’ (Luke 9:23). It can be a ‘life of love’ and ‘a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph 5:2). When God is left out of the equation, our lives will easily fall into what Apostle Paul called ‘the old self’. It is the former way of life, corrupted by deceitful desires, unholy, untrue, falsehood, and unwholesome attitude which is destructive, full of bitterness, rage and anger, slander and malice, evil intent and unforgiving. (Eph 4:25-32) Sometimes when we look at some of our PCCs and some Christian behaviors, one will wonder where God is. I have no doubt that the vast majority of Christians in our Diocese do sincerely believe in God. But somehow some have left God out of their lives, family, career, society and church.

Discipleship is the way that the Lord Jesus himself has recommended. He said ‘Go and make disciples of all nations...’ (Matt 28:19) Paul refers this as ‘imitators of Christ’ (Eph 5:1) We have been talking about putting off the old self and putting on the new self; setting our minds on things above and not on things below; live a transformed life and renewal of mind. The big question ‘HOW do we start?’ still lingers over us for such a long time until some have to ignore and abandon the idea. There are those who are always looking for antidote through the prayers and the laying on of hands by the priest and often visiting preachers. Such action can only bring a temporary solution though it seems to be the easiest. In it, there is little effort on the part of the seekers. However, discipleship is a life-long process set in accordance to the pathway of Jesus Christ. Our fear is when Christians begin to

¹⁵ Ronald J. Sider quoting from an article ‘**For the Health of a Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility**’. http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/11/an_evangelical_christian_for_p.html

take Discipleship as a course or module. There is no certificate in becoming a disciple. It is a process and a lifestyle. This September 14-15, the Diocese is organizing an Introductory Seminar on Intentional Discipleship. It is intended to highlight and prepare the people to adopt a lifestyle of discipleship. The September seminar seeks to propel and set the tone for intentional discipleship. Five basic foundation practices must first be laid before one can launch into the full Discipleship Training, namely:

- A disciple is one who knows his Saviour personally and can articulate the gospel clearly and to present his testimony in season and out of season. Some of the existing tools for personal evangelism will be used – Four Spiritual Laws, Bridge of Life, John 3:16 model, etc.
- A disciple is one who has a prayerful life and knows how to pray in a wholesome manner. Often times we have seen Christians only concentrate on supplication (praying for the welfare of oneself) and to a much lesser extent on partial intercession (praying for the welfare of loved ones and those whom he knows). It is necessary to teach members a proper and balanced prayer life.
- A disciple is one who learns to serve with a servant heart joyfully and willingly. This is a humbling exercise especially in the area of submission and sacrifice like ‘walking the second mile’. ‘God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble’ (Prov 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5) Roy Pointer once mentioned in an article to the Leadership Magazine, ‘A good leader is a good follower.’
- A disciple is one who learns and studies God’s word closely and can feed himself spiritually from the Bible. The Inductive Bible Study method is a good and simple tool to have.
- A disciple is one who is willing to learn to give generously, walk in Jesus’ footsteps, and live a life worthy of the Lord in the area of thought, word, and deeds.

It is my hope that our diocese can develop a centre for Discipleship Training for our own people as well as for others. SaRang Community Church Discipleship Ministries International is also keen to look for a place outside Seoul Korea and someone to partner with for the development and expansion of its Discipleship Training model.¹⁶ We could partner with SaRang Church if only we are serious and prepared for it. It is a long haul ministry. Knowing ourselves and our past track records which is not very glorious, we need to offer more prayers and be fully committed to such a process seriously. This is a basic but essential calling from the Lord to those of us who consider themselves followers of Christ.

In the last solemn letter to Timothy, Apostle Paul reminded Timothy to hold firm to the seven characteristics of a good disciple of Christ, as described and suggested by Anthony Loke, in his book, *Passing the Baton: ‘the goods soldier – dedicated and single-minded; the disciplined athlete – serious and abiding; the hardworking farmer – toiling and sweating; the persecuted criminal – enduring and*

¹⁶ The SaRang model of Discipleship Training is not the only model. It is also not a perfect one. I am sure there are many models in the market. This is one who is willing to work with us and to help us to get started. I don’t mind partnering with them so that we don’t have to re-invent the wheel.

persevering; *the unashamed workman* – faithful and accurate; *the consecrated vessel* – righteous and ready; and *the teacher-servant* – kind, gentle and forbearing.¹⁷

I hope and wish to see all the Diocesan Boards and Committees as well as Parishes and Missionary Districts and outreaches take the Discipleship Training seriously. This is the way to put God back into the equation.

6.0 Conclusion

In the pursuit of our Vision 2020 – Mission Challenged: One in Christ, and the goal of creating more dioceses, we must not only be pre-occupied by the number game – the number of parishes and dioceses. It is essential to grow healthy dioceses according to God’s desires. Our Gospel is good news with a balanced agenda for this world. Therefore, we must pursue to be:

- A political Church but non-partisan – one that speaks on behalf of her members against corrupt and unjust authorities, and to guide and promote a just, fair and harmonious nation. We need people who wish to be trained in this arena.
- A relevant Church – one that keep with the time in order to be in the cutting edge; the younger ones with appropriate music and social media; the seniors with relevant oldies; the professionals with dynamic leadership sharpening skill; the needy with loving care; the trainees with suitable mentors; etc. We need youth evangelists as well as full-time or part-time evangelists or pastors.
- A koinonia Church – one that relates and shares ecumenically, generously in gift, aspiration and energy, sacrificial in kind particularly with the unfortunates. We need people who are interested in the arena of welfare, care, relief and mission.
- An unashamed Church – one that reaches out and invites others freely to share in thanksgiving and blessings from an authentic faith and lifestyle worthy of the Lord. We need more to be trained disciples of Jesus.

Let us who are disciples and servants of the Lord continue to run the race that He has set for us, and at the same time encourage and invite others to join this race. Let us pray to the Lord of Harvest to send out willing and humble workers into His harvest field.

To God be the Glory!

¹⁷ Anthony Y.F. Loke, **Passing the Baton** – Meditations from Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy, Genesis books, Armour Publishing, Singapore, 2012, p6

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