

DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA
SYNOD PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2014

THE CEDARS OF LEBANON

20 AUGUST 2014

Alkitab – Brain Drain - Discipleship

The recent events of the MH370, MH17, the Allah word, the confiscation of Alkitab, the hate speeches, the indecisive decision of the police on the custodian issues even after the High Court rulings, the numerous proselytisation of kindergarten, school and college students, etc. have driven home a serious question for all Malaysian Christians as a whole, particularly we the Anglicans, to ponder over – what God is saying? Some of these issues may possibly not have good solutions and will later simmer into the back of many people’s minds as historical events, while others may linger on longer and some may be resurrected by certain quarters as their ammunitions for their struggles and advances. History has told us that they are usually treated as just part and parcel of events of that one generation. Nothing of these can with stand the test of time or has any relevance after half a century, except as historical records.

The issue of the Selangor government with its Menteri Besar has overtaken the limelight of the media. Everywhere we go, we can hear people talking about it, even before and after church and in cell group meetings. A moment ago it was the seized Bibles then MH370, and followed by the water drought and MH17, and now Selangor. I am sure there are many more issues occupying our little minds. In the midst of all these, we are actually entering into a very difficult spiritual realm with lots challenges from extremisms. I am not a prophet of doom and neither a prophet of prosperity gospel. The real issue has to return to the big question – WHAT IS GOD SAYING?

“... [E]ven if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith ... is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”¹

What can we Anglicans in West Malaysia do to prepare ourselves for the eventuality? I can see there are THREE things we all must acquire, work towards and live by in order to make sure our next generation can survive and able to contribute to their society and nation i.e. EVANGELISM, CHURCH PLANTING, DISCIPLESHIP. Generally, these are three parts of the one Christ’s GREAT COMMISSION² which all Christians cannot ignore.

“In order to guarantee the survival of the Church of the next generation we need to teach our people how to evangelise and be able to articulate their faith in word and action. That requires training disciple makers to guarantee a multiplier effect.”³

Malaysia as a nation is going through a difficult phase of its life. It is in this middle age phase of the life of this nation⁴ where she has to change gear in order to move forward and advance in a more

¹ 1 Peter 1:6-7

² Matt 28:19 “Therefore **go** and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The 4 crucial and essential aspects (in bold letters) of the Great Commission cannot be denied or absent.

³ <http://www.anglicanwitness.org/news/>

confident pace. The race based politics and segregation of racial and religious motive and policies have strangled the health and life of this nation. After 51 years of hard works and striving together, suddenly due to insecurity, narrowness of world view, greed and selfishness, things are left to rot and some even deliberately are been dismantled. There seems to be a dark patch and gloom hovering Malaysia now and in the near future. Brain drain has increased at a very fast pace. I have met many people whom I knew before and they have left for 'greener pastures'. People are talking about it but very little results are seen from those little efforts of trying to arrest the brain drain process and luring those who have left to return. Can the Church do anything? Church members too are sending their children to study overseas in droves and telling them not to come back. The outward flow already has a great impact on our churches such as a reduction of members which in turn leads to a reduction of talent, manpower and money. Inevitably, such scenario will all the more warrant more EVANGELISM, CHURCH PLANTING and DISCIPLESHIP. In fact the present churches have to work doubly or triply hard to gain more members and plant more churches and make more disciples.

1.0 The Vision of a Cedar

One day recently, I woke up having a thought of a tree – the cedar of Lebanon. It was there in my mind for a whole day. I looked up the Bible, concordance, dictionary and Wikipedia. I have found that the cedar of Lebanon⁵ is a type of tree grown in the mountainous region of Lebanon⁶ as well as the surrounding regions such as Israel, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Its scientific name is *Cedrus Libani* – is an evergreen coniferous pine which can grows up to 40m (130 ft) and has a truck size of diameter of 2.5m (8 ft 2 in) and at attitudes between 1000m – 2000m (3,300ft – 6,500ft). It is a sought after tree due to its straight long truck and hard wood. King David and King Solomon had their royal palaces, as well as the Temple of Jerusalem, were built with this type of wood.⁷

My mind was quickly led to the thought of the correlation between the Cedar tree and the Church in Malaysia. I was asking myself, "What has this tree to do with the Malaysian Church?" I believe that God wants the Malaysian Church, which is still a young tree, to grow to be like the full bloom Cedar of Lebanon. It is a timely call for the Malaysian Church to continue to grow to its mature size. We shall capture every opportunity to press on towards the higher goal that God has set for us and to make this a reality. What then is it install for the Anglicans and the Diocese of West Malaysia?

⁴ Malaysia was formed in 1963 together with Malaysia, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Later in 1965, Singapore left Malaysia to be an independent state.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedars_of_Lebanon

⁶ Ibid., The Lebanon Cedar is the national emblem of Lebanon and is displayed in their flag and coat of arms as well as the symbol logo of their national airlines – the Middle East Airlines.

⁷ 1 Kings 5:6ff; 7:2ff – Solomon built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon which is almost twice the size of the Temple of Jerusalem.

Our own Diocese was formed in 1970. In human terms, we have just reached the middle age adulthood i.e. 44 years old. This is the time where one can either soar higher or be complacent and contented with his own life. Since we have much room for improvement, we cannot afford to slow down or stop our progress. Anything not growing is doomed to deteriorate. It is precisely at this juncture, we must start to change gear and move to the next phase of our journey towards the high calling of God. Let us capture the vision of the Cedar of Lebanon where it is just timely for the tree to grow stronger and taller and keep bearing much seed cones. This is also the time the Cedar tree will grow to branch out with more branches and more needle-like leaves.

The Anglican Church came to this region through the East India Company as early as 1805. It was a chaplaincy church then under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. Later in 1814, when the Diocese of Calcutta was formed, our region and all the churches east of Calcutta were carved out together and were made part of it. It took 65 years before our region became a new diocese namely the Diocese of Singapore, Labuan and Sarawak in 1869. 40 years later, the church grew to witness the one united diocese becoming two dioceses – Diocese of Borneo and Diocese of Singapore (later Malaya was added). It then took another 60 – 70 years for these two dioceses to grow into 4 dioceses – Diocese of Kuching in 1962 (earlier as Diocese of Labuan and Sarawak in 1869), Diocese of Sabah in 1963, Diocese of West Malaysia in 1970, and Diocese of Singapore since 1909.⁸ We have come of age now to start growing new churches and growing new dioceses.⁹ New dioceses will see decentralization, more ownerships, more focus growth, more representations especially in a nation like ours, and more shepherds to rely on to hold the fort in case of extreme persecution.

The Cedar of Lebanon must grow and multiply.

2.0 The Seeds of the Cedar

The Cedar is grown from its seed cones and they will mature in 12 months from pollination. It will take many years to grow before they can become a full bloom tree. They are usually grown in harsh and challenging conditions, especially in the snowy mountains. According to horticulturalists, a mature Cedar tree will produce its seed cones every two years.¹⁰

Initially, we see each seed as the potential of a tree, and eventually when we observe closely we can see a mother of a myriad of trees. Similarly, each soul is precious, and this new life has the potential of multiplying into millions and billions of new souls. Evangelism is the way forwards that Christian leading new soul into the kingdom of God. We need to employ every possible healthy and ethical methods or ways to reach the unreached and unchurched. There are so many methods available for us to adopt but the best way is to contextualize and indigenize it. For example, Alpha Malaysia is

⁸ Batumalai S., A BICENTENARY HISTORY OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF THE DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA (1805 – 2005) IN THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH EAST ASIA, Percetakan Muncul Sistem, Melaka, Malaysia, 2007, p. 11-20.

⁹ The issue of growing new dioceses was raised in the Synod Presidential Address 2009.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedars_of_Lebanon

redupping its 15 lessons in DVDs with Malaysian faces instead of Nicky Gumble. One of the best methods is to let ourselves to be trained as lights of the world i.e. making each one of us to be able to articulate our own faith and testimony confidently and precisely.

“The end, for Christians, is God’s work of salvation.”¹¹

“A man reaps what he sows.”¹²

A church is destined by her evangelism efforts. When no seed is sown, one shall not have any expectation of harvest. Exercising prayer or faith alone, in a non sowing church, without evangelism will not bring any result of increase or growth. Evangelism should be an intentional and deliberate course of action and desire. The Bible says *“without vision, the people perish.”¹³* I say, without evangelism, the people perish too. As much as a lamp needs oil to keep it lighted, a church needs evangelism to keep it growing and glowing.

The ‘waves of change’¹⁴ are always here. Today we have in most cases three to four generations living together under one roof. Our churches are experiencing the same. At least three to four generations worshipping in one church. Everyone knew that it is a great struggle for any pastor to try keep in tune and in harmony all the different generations of worshippers. We often see either the senior group voicing up or complaining of the loud noise, fast songs and the lax clothing of the young ones or the young ones leaving the church for other fast tempo churches against an old traditional setting only suitable for senior citizens. The young parents are complaining of the lack of nursery or crèche facilities in the church while the middle age adults complain that the preaching is not substantial enough – not relevant to the society and needs of the nation. Can the church possibly reach out to all generations worshipping together in one service? Should the church be thinking of expanding herself to cater for all people with different services where essentially keeping the same message and ethos intact?

For a long time, I was disturbed by the fact that many of our churches are unable to attract and contain visiting guests. There are many categories of guests visiting our churches these days, such as the curious one – those only come to experience and see, the seekers – those quite interested in Christianity but seeking, the enquirers – those who are keen to find out about the type of church, the invited – those are specially invited by church members, the interested – those who are really looking for a church which they can call home church, etc. Many of our churches lose them immediate after their first visit. They are never seen again in our churches. These are potential seeds which can germinate into a great tree. We need to place some mechanisms to contain some of these seeds.

¹¹ Eugene H. Peterson, THE JESUS WAY – A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus is the Way, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007, p. 7.

¹² Galatians 6:7

¹³ Proverbs 29:19

¹⁴ Gary L. MacIntosh, ONE CHURCH FOUR GENERATIONS – understanding and reaching all ages in your church, Baker Books, Grand rapids, Michigan, 2002, p. 11ff.

Among all of these categories, I wish to single out one particular group of Christians – those converted and accepted Christ overseas while studying. I was one of those. This group does not have a home church to go to. They will usually tag along with the recommendation of their friends and seniors. There is also a subset of this group who are those Christians from smaller towns and villages going to bigger cities for study and work. They too do not have a home church in the new environment, and are not familiar with the environment and churches in the larger cities. I do not have the statistics but I tend to believe that more than half of them fall off and never come to church. Perhaps some will occasionally attend church during festive seasons, marriages or funerals.

While I was serving in St Peter's Ipoh, I have a desire since 20 years ago to start a church in Klang Valley. I have observed some of my church members ended up in churches of other denominations. I praise God for them. But what about those who did not turn up to church, there are those who were lost in the sea of busyness, sophistication and tempting colours of the world. At the same time, I was also concerned of the many children of my parishioners who went overseas to study and not attending church upon their return. Many of them were very active in their varsity Christian fellowships but not now. A huge number ended up in Klang Valley, Johor Bahru and Penang. Obviously they have the freedom to go to any churches in these places but they are not. The common response is busyness and no friend.¹⁵ These are precious seeds which we cannot afford to lose.

Some time ago, I was praying and I was informed that Alpha International wanted to have an Asia Hub and they are looking for a church to work with them to build up as an Alpha Resource Church. I prayed and immediately jumped into such opportunity. As first I was looking at the churches we have and to source one among them to become an Alpha Resource Church. I pondered and weighed over and over many times and finally decided to start a new church entirely. There are too many baggages with the existing churches for them to change over or embrace a new style of church life. I took the bold step to suggest to Holy Trinity Church Bromptom for the possibility to jointly start a new church in KL. I wrote to the Bishop of Kensington seeking for the assistance to send some people to assist in the new church plant in KL. After more than one year of planning and execution, this new church plant will be called Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang (HTBB) and is situated on the top floor of LOT 10. The dedication service has been set on the 21 September 2014 at 11.00am.

The first of the reasons for the establishment of this new church plant is to capture the returnees from overseas, particularly UK. I have met quite a number of them who are still unchurched. Some are floating members of churches where they move around to different churches each Sunday. Of course, this new church plant is also to reach out to other overseas returnees and finally also to those coming from smaller towns and villages as well as those who are from Klang Valley. This is a different generation and is a crucial, strategic, potential and dynamic generation for change. They are the up and coming leaders of the society and nation, given a few years of experience and

¹⁵ Hannah Yeoh, BECOMING HANNAH – A Personal Journey, Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, Malaysia, 2014 . I agree with Hannah Yeoh that there are many more overseas graduates who choose not to come back to Malaysia sighting discrimination, injustice, unfair treatment, low pay, etc. The calling for them to return to Malaysia is another issue which has to be treated in another occasion.

assimilation with the society. They are the seeds of the next group of leaders in the church as well as in the nation.

“True success comes only when every generation continues to develop the next generation.”¹⁶

Church planting must not be stopped. We have been reminded always *‘the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few’*.¹⁷ The population of Malaysia is growing rapidly. The church must also follow suit and in fact she should grow even faster. In 2008 Synod Presidential Address, I have set forth a target to plant 200 new churches in the diocese in 10 years. I praise God that we have planted about 50 new churches – many are still quite young though, some are new congregations and outreaches within parish churches. We presently have a diocesan missionary in the person of Rev Canon John Ganapathy who spearheads this area. I hope to find someone from among the Chinese speaking group to be a full-time missionary for such purpose. Evangelism is the way to bring in new people and Church Planting is the way to keep them inside for training and growth before sending forth.

The Seeds of Cedar must be identified and set free to germinate into many huge Cedar trees.

3.0 The Usage of Cedar

In the olden days, temples and palaces are made of Cedar wood. King Hiram of Tyre hired Sidonians to hew cedar trees from Lebanon mountains, and floated them down to the Mediterranean Sea, and from there to transport them up to Jerusalem for the building of the Temple of Jerusalem and King Solomon’s Palace.¹⁸ The Cedar wood is also used for worship.¹⁹ The Egyptians used it for their mummification of Pharaoh; the Phoenicians used it for building commercial and military ships; and the Summerians designated the cedar groves as dwelling of their gods.²⁰ What can our Church be useful for in the nation of Malaysia? The way we are doing church is somewhat detached from the everyday life of the nation. Of late due to the ‘restriction’ of the use of the word ‘Allah’ and the raid of the Bible Society of Malaysia with some seized Bibles, the Church in Malaysia seems to be working together quite a bit and becoming more aware of the issues of the nation.

We moan and grumble over the problems and issues of the church and nation. The church talks about F.A.T. – Faithful, Available and Teachable but the public talks about C.A.T. – Competency, Accountability and Transparency. Can we merge the two? We have seen many of our churches having great struggles with the C.A.T. while the society is looking forward for people with F.A.T. We have leaders in our church who are really faithful and available most of the time, however, the level

¹⁶ John Maxwell, DEVELOPING THE LEADERS AROUND YOU, Nelson Business, Nashville, Tennessee, 1995, p. 188.

¹⁷ Matthew 9:37 and Luke 10:2.

¹⁸ 1 Kings 5-7.

¹⁹ Leviticus 14 and Number 19.

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedars_of_Lebanon

of competency and accountability and greater still transparency is not up to the acceptable mark yet. How useful can we become when we are having such ineffective persons leading the Church? Thus, I strongly believe the answer is DISCIPLESHIP.

“Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”²¹

In 2009, I was introduced to the Discipleship Model of SaRang Community Church in Seoul, Korea. Immediately, I bargained with the SaRang leadership to allow my priests to experience and learn from their model of Discipleship. They were very generous and accommodating. I have sent more than 20 priests and deaconesses to SaRang Church to see for themselves – how SaRang Discipleship model can be implemented in our Diocese. After 3 years of digesting and sharing of vision, I have decided to initiate two years of Discipleship Training for all parishioners. The first of such Seminar was done in St Mary’s Cathedral in 2012. The subsequent Seminars were done in the regions in 2013 – one in St Paul’s PJ and another in St Peter’s Ipoh. This year in early August, we have tried another Seminar only for Disciple Makers – it is purely designed for those who have gone through discipleship training in their parishes and are ready to be trained as Disciple Makers. Feed backs from the seminar pointed towards one grave issue – it is not the knowledge but the strategy.

SaRang model of Discipleship has a very clear strategy thus it leads to the methodology.²² Only having knowledge without strategy is like a locomotive without carriages or having a bus driver without the bus. If one only having strategy without knowledge, it is like having carriages without the locomotive or having the bus without a bus driver. We need to have both knowledge and strategy together. Each must complement the other. Some of our churches are like the former – having knowledge without strategy – they are talking a lot but without any clear action thus no result. Some churches are like the latter – having strategy without knowledge – they are working hard but without success and result. If our churches are to be useful, we need to acquire the knowledge and strategy along with the ministry philosophy and methodology otherwise we are just a maintenance church. SaRang model of Discipleship is always undergirded with strong prayer meetings and prayer altars in office and at home. Prayer is like the fuel for the locomotive or diesel for the bus.

“Anglican Witness recognises the need to explicitly spell out that ‘whole life’ discipleship is an essential part of the process of evangelism and church growth, and that not only must evangelism include discipleship, but that discipleship must also include evangelism. The implication of lack of such emphasis has among other things contributed to: Christianity and Christian faith that has become unattractive to some people, both of faith and those with none;

- *The growing diminishing impact of Christian influence in public life;*
- *The growing decline in church attendance and members in some contexts;*
- *The growing diminishing confidence in the Bible among Christians and the general failure by many Christians to articulate their personal faith;*

²¹ Bill Hull, THE COMPLETE BOOK OF DISCIPLESHIP – On being and Making Followers of Christ, NavPress, Colorado Springs, USA, 2006, p. 15. citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book, THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP.

²² John H. Oak, CALLED TO AWAKEN THE LAITY, Christian Focus Publications, Ross-shire, 2006.

- *Nominalism – even where the Church is growing numerically, Christian faith tends to remain a nominal religion;*
- *The sustained division between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ and the failure to connect faith and life, faith and work place!”²³*

Is the Church useful to the society? How the people in the society see the Church? We all are struggling with these expectations. The Bishops of the Anglican Church are in agreement that the Church needs to be useful in the midst of the challenging and diverse world and our Church is not living up to her Call yet.

LAMBETH Conference 2008

Resolution 25. “We affirm that evangelism concerns the making of disciples and spiritual growth. This must involve a personal encounter with the risen Christ and a commitment to discipleship. Evangelism is the cutting edge of mission in the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour by word and deed. The Gospel is the life blood of the Church and involves mediating by proclamation, by word, and by action the good news of God’s love in Christ which transforms the whole of life. There must also be a compassionate community, the enabling of others by the leadership of the Church, and the marginalized must be kept in focus.”²⁴

While being in the process of transformation to be a disciple of Christ, there is a need for two-fold transformation – an inner transformation and an outer transformation. The Inner Transformation is the change and growing more like Jesus in character, life, emotion and thought. This is the arena of spirituality, behavior, thought pattern, mindset, lifestyle and concept of ownership, etc. Many Christians are struggling with getting this transformation aright²⁵, let alone the other transformation. The Outer Transformation involves the change of one’s world view from self to the larger community including the people of God and the involvement of social transformation and change and nation building.²⁶

“We have many Christians but part-time disciples, many business men and women but part-time disciples, many pastors but part-time disciples”.²⁷

²³ <http://www.anglicanwitness.org/discipleship/discipleship-introduction/>

²⁴ <http://www.anglicanwitness.org/discipleship/244-2/>

²⁵ This issue of Inner Transformation is essential and important for discipleship training. Peter Scazzero’s book on Emotionally Healthy Spirituality and Tan Siang Yang and Douglas Gregg’s book on Disciplines of the Holy Spirit are two good ones on this topic.

²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, THE CHURCH IN THE WORKPLACE – How God’s people can Transform Society, Regal Books, Ventura, California, 2006.

²⁷ <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/08/evangelism,-church-planting,-discipleship-vital-for-church-survival-bp-moon-hing.aspx>

Part-time disciples will only be able to have partial impact on the church, society and nation. We need full-time disciples. Discipleship training must be intentional. It is the missing link of the church today. We don't need to debate further rather embark immediately on obtaining the ministry philosophy, knowledge, strategy, and methodology of Discipleship and start going.

First, set in the Agenda of your PCC an item on discipleship.

Second, allocate some budget for discipleship training.

Third, organize a discipleship training programme in your own church. Start with a small group.

Fourth, have a monthly evaluation on the item of discipleship.

Fifth, keep doing the discipleship training for every member of your parish.

Sixth, send those who are keen and willing to go further in becoming Disciple Makers where they can train others.

"Discipleship is the relationship I stand into Jesus Christ in order that I might take on his character. As his disciple, I am learning from him how to live my life in the Kingdom as he would if he were I. The natural outcome is that my behavior is transformed. Increasingly, I routinely and easily do the things he said and did."²⁸

The Cedar wood must be intentional for good purpose and use.

4.0 The Symbolism of Cedar

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon."²⁹

The Cedar of Lebanon has always been referred to as strong, big, fragrance, stable, important, useful, etc.,³⁰ it is not sufficient to be associated with the symbol of Cedar alone. The psalmist particularly mentioned that the Cedar of Lebanon was planted by the Lord.³¹ This association of the Cedar of Lebanon with the Church reminds me of our nature.

- The Church is planted by the Lord
- The Church must grow and expand otherwise she will deteriorate and become redundant.

²⁸ Bill Hull, THE COMPLETE BOOK OF DISCIPLESHIP – On being and Making Followers of Christ, NavPress, Colorado Springs, USA, 2006, p 16. citing Dallas Willard's speech at Spiritual Formation Forum in 2004.

²⁹ Psalm 92:12

³⁰ Hosea 14:5, 6; Isaiah 2:13.

³¹ Psalm 104:16

- The Church must become useful when she matures and grow to her full bloom size otherwise she will be as good as firewood.
- The Church must produce and multiply otherwise she will face her own destiny soon.
- The Church must provide and cater for her young otherwise she will face a lonely old life.
- The Church must offer her usefulness for the society and nation otherwise she will be as good as non existence.

The Cedar must stand tall and bring glory to the Creator.

A prayer from Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyred while ministering mass in 1980:

“We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and to do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master builder and the worker. We are the workers not the master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”³²

³² Jonathan Ingleby, Tan Kang San, and Tan Loun Ling (ed.), CONTEXTUALISATION AND MISSION TRAINING – Engaging Asia’s Religious Worlds, Regnum Books International, Oxford, Great Britain, 2013, p. 15. citing The Board of Mission of the Archbishop’s Council, PRESENCE AND PROPHECY, Church House of Publishing and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2002, p. 210.

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