

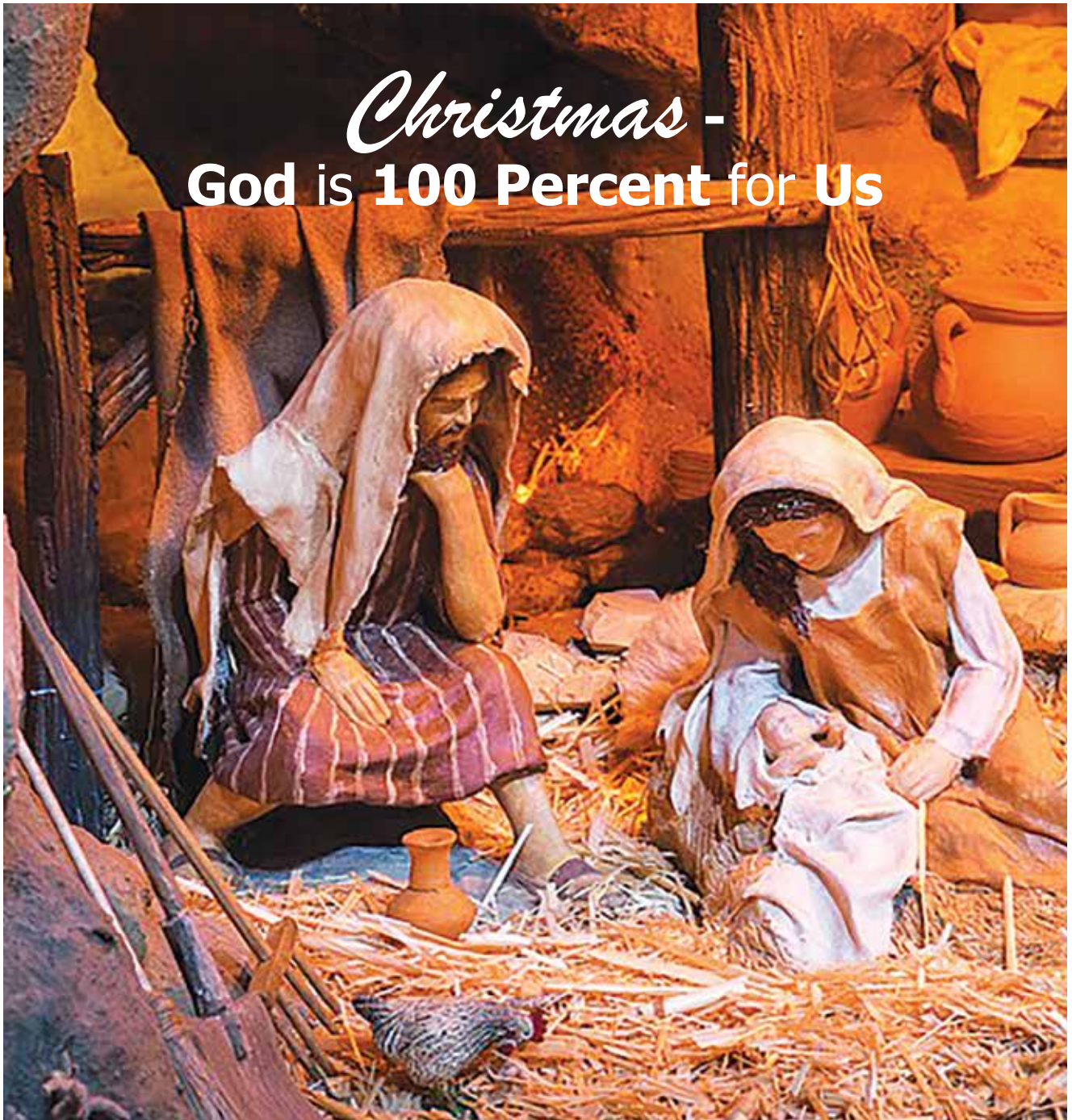
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Christmas -
God is 100 Percent for Us





35th Anniversary Celebration Dinner



Ordination of Elder (Rev Esther Lu) and
Deacons (Ps Fionalisa Aldrin, Ps Wahyudy Sylvester)



Bishop Emeritus Hwa Yung addressing audience
at the Thanksgiving Dinner



Ground Breaking for the Sabah Methodist HQ Building



Sabah Methodist HQ Building

*Wishing you a Blessed Christmas
and a Happy New Year*

From:

Bishop Dr. Ong Hwai Teik and Family
and all staff members of Methodist HQ

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First Impressions of Malacca



"A Church After
God's Own Heart"

- Every Methodist personally renewed in his/her first love for Jesus
- Every Methodist congregation revived as in the Book of Acts
- The Methodist Church to be refocused and reframed after the Word of God and the Holy Spirit



Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Christmas - God is 100 Percent for Us

As we enter yet again into another season of celebrating the evergreen message of God's immeasurable love tangibly demonstrated in the Christmas event, I am yet assured by the words of Scripture:

NIV Romans 8:32 *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

In the aftermath of the joyous GE 14 result of 9 May 2018, Malaysians looked forward to a new era of hope and restoration for our nation. It was not to be as we are currently faced with a mixed reality of hope and uncertainty, though the new Government and citizenry continue to pray and work towards a 100 percent change for betterment.

Some grave doubts linger, however, as to whether some of those in power or in positions of the civil service—are really 100 percent behind the reform agenda on pivotal issues such as ridding Malaysia of corruption; embracing and practising the values that all citizens are equal regardless of race and religion; inclusiveness and the rule of law undergirded by a responsible and accountable effective Government that sincerely and perseveringly put the interests of the people above narrow and self-serving personal and political agendas.

In the midst of such a “transition of uncertainty”, Christmas comes to remind us that God is 100 percent for us who believe in Him. This 100 percent is substantiated by the incredible dimension of His unchanging love and purpose from eternity – undefeated and fulfilled:

NLT Ephesians 1:4 *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.*

The apostle John speaks about those whose names are written “in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” [Rev 13:8].

The fact that God is 100 percent for us, unfailingly consistent in sustaining us should spur us on in the fight of faith in a world of which is said “*that the only consistent quality in the human heart is inconsistency.*” In the words of Paul in **ESV Philippians 3:12** “...but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Paul’s persistent, life-time goal was to know Christ, to grow in His likeness and to fully live out the calling God gave him so as “*to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize!*”

Personally, as 2018 closes and a new year beckons us, Christmas is that concrete perennial reminder each year of the 100 percent God Who is 100 percent behind each of those who are His in Christ. We heed the words of another who personally knew the unddisconnectable keeping power of this 100 percent God that is rooted in eternity - **NIV 1 Corinthians 1:8** - *He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

Nationally, as we continue to commit ourselves to “watch and pray” and do all we can for Malaysia in this season of transition and “crossing over”, ***we must not take our eyes off the 100 percent God*** “Who is the same yesterday, today and forever” [Hebrews 13:8]. The gaze of our heart and hope is not on the temporal – but the Eternal and Everlasting Sovereign God, Who chose to “tabernacle” among us.

ESV Isaiah 9:6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

A blessed and holy Christmas to all!

Bishop Dr. Ong Hwai Teik

IN SPECIAL THANKSGIVING

We thank our Almighty God for the constituting of the

SABAH ANNUAL CONFERENCE [SAC]

on 9 November 2018 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah,

after the 15th and final Session of the Sabah Provisional Annual Conference on 8 November 2018.

The Methodist Church in Malaysia Family praise the Lord and congratulate the Rev Dr Hii Kong Hock, SAC President and Mr Yong Siong Mew, Conference Lay Leader, and the rest of our brothers and sisters in the SAC on this significant and joyous development.

Introducing Sabah Annual Conference (SAC)



Bishops, Presidents, Guests and Delegates at the 1st Session of Sabah Annual Conference

2018 is indeed a special and historic year not only for the Methodist family in Sabah, but the whole Methodist Church in Malaysia! In conjunction with celebrating the 35th Anniversary of establishing Methodist churches in the ‘Land below the Wind,’ the Sabah Provisional Annual Conference (SPAC), 14 years after its formation in 2004, is constituted as a full annual conference – Sabah Annual Conference (SAC).

During the 15th Session of SPAC held on 8th November, 2018, President Rev Dr Hii Kong Hock formally moved the motion that SPAC be formally constituted the Sabah Annual Conference on 9th November, 2018. This was in accordance with the approval by the 11th General Conference Session held on 20-23 September, 2016 at Kingwood Hotel, Sibuan, Sarawak, which permits SPAC to become a full Annual Conference within the Quadrennium 2017-2020 once it has achieved the 25 Elders benchmark. This motion was unanimously passed by the delegates present! One Elder (Rev Esther Lu Yi Tin) and two deacons (Ps Fionalisa Aldrin, Ps Wahyudy Sylvester) were ordained during the closing ceremony of the 15th Session.

On the morning of 9th November, 2018, Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik officially declared open the 1st Session of Sabah Annual Conference. Bishop Ong, in his message, reminded us of the “Crossovers” faced by the Israelites, and exhorts SAC to prepare for the challenges ahead. All the other five Annual Conferences’ presidents, the superintendent of Sengoi Mission Conference, GC Secretary Mr Anthony Row and Council of Laity Chair Datin Judy Chin were present to grace the occasion and greeted the delegates.

The Ground-breaking ceremony for the new Sabah Methodist Headquarters Building was solemnized by Bishop Ong

on the same afternoon, and this was followed by a grand Celebration Dinner in the evening. Bishop Emeritus Dr Hwa Yung gave the exhortation during the dinner which was attended by 900 people, including the EXCO members of the Sabah Council of Churches.

As we reflected on the past, we truly see God’s blessings and guidance. 35 years ago, on seeing many Foochow migrants in Sabah wandering astray from their faith, Rev Siew Chiu Huo came to Sabah to gather them back to the church. With the pioneering spirit and efforts of our forefathers, Chinese Methodist churches soon flourished in the major towns of Sabah, such as: Kota Kinabalu, Tawau, Sandakan, and Keningau. 35 years have passed. Today, we have extended our ministries beyond the boundaries of language, ethnicity, and geography! Besides Foochows, many local Chinese clans are joining us. Through evangelism, social work and pastoral ministries, we have planted churches – English and Indigenous (BM) included – in cities, towns, and the interior areas of Sabah. Moreover, we have also ventured into overseas missions and set up centers in Thailand and Myanmar.

On 11th November, 2018, SAC local churches throughout Sabah celebrated our 35th Anniversary Sunday Service to give all glory and praises to God. SAC shall continue to strive in “Pressing Goalward, Enlarging Territory” in the future. Generations come and go, but we shall continue to faithfully nurture disciples, raise up new leaders, and utilize our resources to build lives as well as infrastructure. *Soli Deo Gloria* – Glory be to God alone!

By President Hii Kong Hock
Sabah Annual Conference

Hope Methodist Vocational Centre

Thanksgiving and Dedication Service cum Graduation Ceremony on 26th October 2018

We thank God for His grace and vision which He gave to the Methodist Church Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik to convert an empty school building in historical Sitiawan into a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) centre, called Hope Methodist Vocational Centre (HMVC). The vision was to provide living skills so as to empower the poor and less academically-inclined Malaysians, especially those from ethnic groups that have high incidences of school dropouts, to succeed in the market place, perhaps even to be future entrepreneurs.



Presentation of Certificate

By God's grace, it took 2 ½ years of tireless planning and preparation by the Board of Governors (Board) to build the infrastructure and HMVC began its first course, Air-conditioning & Refrigeration, in April 2018 with 9 pioneer students. We thank God that the students had completed 4 months of theoretical and practical lessons in classrooms and workshops at HMVC. Besides studies, the students also had great fun participating in team-building sessions, playing indoor and outdoor games, completing daily basic cleaning duties, acquiring communication skills in English and learning godly and Christian principles. The students also had a 3-month intensive apprenticeship at a renowned Ipoh air-conditioning & refrigeration firm. We thank God that these students have now successfully completed their course and are ready to go into the job market.

On 26th October, a Thanksgiving and Dedication Service cum Graduation Ceremony was held at HMVC with guest of honour, Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik. Many local Manjung District Methodist church pastors and leaders, friends, parents, Board members, Methodist Council of Education staff, graduates and staff of HMVC were invited to the celebrations.



Plaque Dedication

The Board chairman, Lt Col (B) Leong Pook Seong gave an inspiring speech thanking God for His provisions and answered prayers. He thanked Methodist Church and Bishop for their moral, spiritual and financial support. He was grateful for the unity of the Board members, HMVC teaching and administrative staff, local TRAC, TAC and CAC church pastors and leaders for their contributions and involvement in making HMVC a success.

YB Dato Ngeh Koo Ham, representing the Perak state government, presented a mock cheque of RM20,000 as a donation to HMVC.

The Thanksgiving and Dedication service was conducted by Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik ably assisted by Rev Joshua Chia, Mr Khor Hong Yin, Rev Victor Leong, Mr Ding Poi Kooi and Lt Col (B) Leong Pook Seong. The worship service was conducted by the Bahasa Malaysia Ministry of Wesley Methodist Church, Sitiawan led by Mr Edward Lee.

Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik delivered a sermon based on Matthew 15:21-28 concerning "Lord help me and God's lost sheep" and ended with God's assurance on giving us all a future and a hope based on Jeremiah 29:11.

The Thanksgiving and Dedication Service ended with Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik unveiling the commemorative plaque at HMVC workshop hostel block.



Group Photo

The Graduation Ceremony commenced with an opening speech by HMVC vice-principal, Mr Michael Loh Seng Poh, congratulating all students who were graduating and thanked those present especially instructor/trainer cum warden, Mr Liew Kam Yoong and English teacher, Ms Uthaya for their support and dedication. Three graduates, Simon Kor, Yunnan, and Bah Lick, shared their testimonies on what they had learned and achieved and thanked God for giving them this chance of a lifetime.

Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik presented the HMVC graduates with their hard-earned HMVC graduation certificates and

Industrial Training certificates. Mr Simon Leong, managing director of the Ipoh air-conditioning & refrigeration firm, Zone Air (M) Sdn Bhd, gave the graduates the assurance that he would offer job opportunities to them as they had achieved excellent grades and had a great desire to learn.

Besides receiving their respective graduation certificates, each graduate was also given a HMVC Graduation Declaration and Accountability Prayer Card to always meditate on. They were asked to be responsible and committed to life-long learning in their technical skills, be matured God-fearing persons that contribute back to society and nation building. They are to develop godly virtues with integrity, pray and depend everything on God Almighty, be grateful for the training received and always be thankful to God.

The graduation celebration had left behind an important message to the new batch of students and that is they must work hard, strive for excellence, never give up and continue to pray and seek God's wisdom and direction in order to attain life-long success.

Compiled & Submitted by:

Khor Hong Yin

Executive Director

Methodist Council of Education

希望卫理技职中心2018年10月26日的感恩和奉献礼拜及毕业典礼



Bishop Dr. Ong Hwai Teik as the Speaker

我们感谢神赐予卫理公会会督王怀德博士祂的恩典和异象，将历史悠久的实兆远的一间空置学校改建为一所技术技职教育培训中心，即：希望卫理技职中心。其异象是提供谋生技能的培训，使我国的贫穷和对学术无兴趣的一群（特别是那些辍学率高的族群）能在职场上有一番作为，甚至在未来创业。

蒙神的恩典，管理委员会花了2年半不懈地进行规划和准备，把基础设施建好，并于2018年4月以空调与制冷课程开课，共有9名学员。我们感谢神，学员们在希望

卫理技职中心的课室和工作坊完成了4个月的理论和实践课。除了学业外，学员们还参与团队建设，各种室内和室外运动，乐在其中，也完成日常基本清洁工作，获得英语沟通技巧及学习敬虔和基督教原则。他们还在怡保一家著名的空调制冷公司进行3个月的学徒式强化训练。我们感谢神，这些学员如今已修完课程，并准备投入职场。

我们于10月26日在希望卫理技职中心举行感恩和奉献礼拜暨毕业典礼，会督王怀德博士为荣誉嘉宾。曼绒县当地的许多卫理公会牧师和领袖、朋友、家长、管理委员会成员，卫理公会教育理事会的职员，希望卫理技职中心的毕业生和员工都应邀参加庆典。

管理委员会主席梁璞祥中校发表了鼓舞人心的演讲，感谢神的供应和应允的祷告。他感谢卫理公会和会督提供精神、属灵和经济支援。他感谢管理委员会成员、当地的三一年议会、淡米尔年议会及华人年议会的教会牧师和领袖之间的合一，他们的付出和参与使希望卫理技职中心获得成功。

YB 拿督倪可汉代表霹雳州政府向希望卫理技职中心捐赠一张20,000令吉的模拟支票。

会督王怀德博士主持感恩和奉献礼拜，并由Joshua Chia

牧师、许宏仁先生、Victor Leong牧师、Ding Poi Kooi先生及梁璞祥中校全力协助。崇拜由实兆远英文卫理公会国语事工主持，由Edward Lee先生带领。

会督王怀德博士根据《马太福音》15: 21-28讲了一篇有关“愿主助我和神迷失的羊”的道，并以《耶利米书》29: 11这段经文中，神叫所有人末后有指望的保证作结束。

感恩和奉献礼拜结束时，会督王怀德博士在希望卫理技职中心的工作坊宿舍为纪念牌匾揭幕。

毕业典礼由希望卫理技职中心副校长Michael Loh Seng Poh先生致开幕辞，祝贺所有毕业学员，并感谢所有出席者，特别是讲师/培训师兼舍监Liew Kam Yoong先生和英语老师 Uthaya女士所提供的支援和奉献。三位毕业生是Simon Kor、Yusnan和Bah Lick，他们为所学和达致的成就分享见证，并感谢神赐予他们毕生难逢的机会。

会督王怀德博士将希望卫理技职中心宝贵的毕业证书和

工业培训证书颁发给希望卫理技职中心的毕业生。怡保空调制冷公司Zone Air (马) 有限公司董事总经理Simon Leong先生保证将为毕业生提供就业机会，因为他们成绩优异，也有积极的学习精神。

每位毕业生除了获得毕业证书外，还收到一张希望卫理技职中心毕业宣言和问责祷告卡，以便随时默想。他们受促对自身的技能负责，并致力于终身学习，成为敬畏神的人，回馈社会和国家建设，以诚信和祷告培养敬虔美德，并在一切事上信靠全能的神，为所受的培训和未来的工作感恩，并常常感谢神，也感谢所有为希望卫理技职中心祷告和提供经济支援的施恩者、赞助人和支持者。

毕业庆典给新一批学生留下一个重要信息：他们必须努力学习，追求卓越，永不放弃，继续祷告和寻求神的智慧和方向，以便终身取得成功。

许宏仁
卫理教育执行干事 呈报

Features

News from SCAC

BB Love Box - A Mosaic of Generosity

DEC 8, MIRI – After five weeks from its launching, the BB Love Box came to a close at Bintang Mega Mall (BMM).

The Guest-of-Honor was Dato' Lau Siu Wai, duly represented by Allen Wong Lung Hing, the Event Manager of BMM.

Honorary Captain Hii King Ong, the Sarawak State Commissioner of The Boys' Brigade In Malaysia (BB), delivered his speech during the Closing Ceremony.

Also in attendance were the BB Deputy Sarawak State Commissioner, Honorary Captain Lawrence Wong Ching Tuong, Rev. Simon Ting Chu Yih, Miri District Superintendent of the Methodist Churches, Frankie Choo Ngie Ping from Sarawak Oil Palms Bhd, Petrus Lasong from BEM On The Rock, Miri Brigade Officers and Members.

In his speech, Commissioner Hii thanked Dato' Lau Siu Wai and Bintang Mega Mall for their generosity and the free use of premises. He also congratulated the Northern Region Boys' Brigade (Bintulu, Miri and Limbang) for collectively raising 5,500 gifts for the needy people and students.

The recipients were: **Bintulu** - SJK Sebieu, SMK Bandar, Perpikat Bintulu, PKKN Bintulu, Kidurong KM15, Sg Plan New Squatters, Rumah Panjang Jalan Sebauh, **Miri** - SMK Chung Hua, SMK Dato' Permaisuri, SMK St. Columba, SMK Bakong, SMK Riam, SMK Pujut, SJK(C) Chung Hua Krokop, SJK(C) Chung Hua Lutong, SJK(C) Chung Hua Miri, SJK(C) Chung Hua Pujut, SJK(C) North, SJK(C)

Chung San, SJK(C) Chung Hua Tudan, SJK(C) Chung Hua Bakam, SK Pujut Corner, SK St Columba, Tadika Riam, Mei Ann MC (BM Congregation), Gan En MC (BM Congregation), Taman Tunku MC (BM Congregation), Gereja Methodist Tudan (BM Congregation), Life MC (BM Congregation), Yi En MC (BM Congregation), Permyjaya MC (BM Congregation), BEM On The Rock, Tudan Learning Center, Rumah Panjang Peter, Rumah Panjang Nora, Rumah Panjang Kam, Rumah Panjang Gasah, Desarus, **Limbang** - SMK Limbang, SMK Kubong, SJK (C) Yuk Hin and SJK Chung Hua Limbang.

For the first time since its inception six years ago, the BB Love Box was done simultaneously throughout Sarawak's three regions Southern (Kuching and Sri Aman), Central (Sibu, Bintangor and Sarikei) and Northern (Bintulu, Miri and Limbang).

Publicity on the Love Box was further enhanced through major newspapers, the popular radio station TEA FM and social media platforms Facebook, YouTube and Whatsapp.

Rev. Dr. Tie King Tai, the President of the Methodist Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference (SCAC), personally helped to promote the project with video via YouTube and Whatsapp. Other pastors who also enthusiastically promoted the Love Box were Rev. Alfred Damu Bulang (St. Columba Anglican Church, Miri), Rev. Law Hui Seng (Eng Tao MC, Sibu), Rev. Nicholas Tan (Gereja Methodist Tudan, Miri) and Pastor

Linberg Wong (Agape Grace MC, Miri), Rev. Winnie Lau (Gan En MC, Miri), Rev. Eric Hii (Hwai En MC) and Rev. Lu Yia Ping (Mei Ann MC).

A Mosaic of Generosity

Encouragement and support for the Love Box came in all forms of unexpected and pleasant surprises bundled with heartwarming stories.

When YB Dr Michael Teo Yu Keng, the Member of Parliament for Miri, pledged RM3,000 during the Opening Ceremony, the BB Sarawak State Council subsequently received RM5,000!

The community-at-large are such a generous and caring people. During the event period, so many good-hearted people came forward to donate unconditionally. Many were humble and chose to remain anonymous.

At the Bintang Mall Love Box booth, a group of five visiting students from SJK Chee Mung (Batu Niah), even pooled their pocket money to buy a 2-kg packet of Milo! Their testimony was uploaded in Facebook. "I'm sure these students have learned the good moral value of helping others who are in need. Thank you to Miss Choo Chung Mee, the teacher-in-charge of these students. You have taught them education is not confined to learning inside the classroom only," commented Commissioner Hii in his speech.

A young family from Brunei bought three bags of rice, Milo, school bags without any hesitation when they were approached by the BB Officers on duty at the booth. Such acts of generosity were aplenty and encouraging.

"Helping people when they are down is the gift of a helping hand depicted in the Book of Ecclesiastes (4:9) and a friend brings warmth to our lives.," continued Commissioner Hii, who is also the Honorary Captain of 7th Kuching Coy.

"We cannot deny there are needy people in our community. During this season of Christmas, it is a timely reminder for the more fortunate to render practical and emotional support to the less fortunate. In The Boys' Brigade, it is our duty to lift them up. When we bless others, we in turn receive blessings, encouragement and strength," he added.

Big corporations, Pullman Waterfront Hotel Miri and Sarawak Oil Palms Berhad participated as collaborators in Miri. The former even organized a Christmas Lighting Ceremony on Nov 22 and extended their invitation to students and teachers of Tudan Learning Center to the event, followed by a scrumptious buffet dinner.

The Boys' Brigade Sarawak State Council wishes to thank all who have donated and helped make the BB Love Box an overwhelming success.

by Lt James TC Wong, 4th Miri



Group picture after Closing Ceremony



YB Dr Michael Teo Yu Keng visits the BB Love Box Booth on Nov 3



Commissioner Hii (far right) presents a gift to a child from Tudan Learning Center



Group photo of 4th Miri and SK Pujut Corner Miri



Capt David Wong (6th Miri) at Desarus, Miri

Arminianism and Calvinism: How should Arminians (and Calvinists!) Respond (Part 4)

By Rev. Dr. Andrew Tan and Mr. David Tan

Introduction

This is the fourth and final article in a series written to assist Methodist members to be aware of their own doctrinal position which is Arminian. In the first article, we explained how the “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement has brought Calvinism back onto the theological centre-stage, and raises challenges to our Arminian beliefs. We discussed issues of God’s sovereignty, human free will, and the problem of evil and unbelievers. In the second article, we examined some of the key Scriptural passages in this debate. In the third article, we looked at some common misunderstandings about what Arminians actually believe. Here, we put forth our suggestions about how to address differences and disagreements in our church communities and in wider Christian circles. We hope that this series of articles will help us not only to understand our doctrinal position and the Scriptures that support it but also to see it as credible, and be able to articulate and defend it – and with this article, to work out our differences in a manner that honours God.

Do We Need to Talk/Teach About This?

Theological differences over Calvinism and Arminianism have created dissension among fellow believers, split local churches, and caused denominational splits. Many Christians have gone through their whole lives without ever learning about this issue and seem to be just fine in their faith journey. Why can’t we simply shelve this issue, which seems to be more trouble than is worth addressing, and let people believe whatever they want to believe? We (the writers) obviously think this is an important issue, or we would not have dedicated four separate articles to this topic. Here is why we think our churches need to teach on this issue.

The issue of salvation is important to Christian belief and practice. It informs our understanding of our relationship to God, to our sinful past, and to the future destiny to which we have been saved for. The Scriptures clearly and repeatedly state that salvation is God’s initiative, not ours, and that Christ gave us life while we were dead in our sins. Both Calvinism and Arminianism attest to this. When we fail to teach a sound doctrine of salvation, we create a vacuum that can be filled with false teachings. In many Christian circles, the default understanding of salvation is semi-Pelagian, which amounts to “I chose God of my own free will,”

without the acknowledgement in Arminian theology that it is God’s grace that enables any choice at all. This faulty understanding claims human credit for God’s gift, and can lead to pride and a misplaced sense of worthiness. Going back to the Scriptures for biblical teaching on salvation will quickly lead to passages that discuss both the divine and the human role in the process of salvation. Any effort to form a coherent and consistent understanding on the subject will lead to Arminianism, Calvinism, or some other position. Thus, it is not possible to study salvation deeply (and to the degree that the writers think we ought to) without grappling with the issues at stake in this theological debate.

Given that this is such an important yet divisive issue, we need to know how to work out our differences in a loving manner without pretending that these differences do not matter. In the remainder of this article, we provide some suggestions for our interactions with individuals, in our churches, and in interdenominational spaces.

Addressing Differences with Our Fellow Believers

When we began this series of articles, we pointed out that the debate on Calvinism and Arminianism has been ongoing between evangelical Christians for over 400 years. It is not going to be resolved soon – and will probably not be until Christ returns! When encountering a fellow Christian with whom we disagree on this issue, let us remember first and foremost that they are a brother or sister, a fellow believer in Christ. This means our response should not be to treat them like an unbeliever that we need to convert to our point of view. There are some within the “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement who treat Calvinism as if it were on par with the gospel, Arminians as deficient Christians, and aggressively attempt to convert them. It was such incidents that led us to write this series of articles. We are unaware of Arminians doing the same in the Malaysian context, and hope that remains the case. We call all sides to put this matter in proper perspective. Salvation is an important topic and our understanding of the process of salvation has tremendous implications, but neither Calvinism nor Arminianism is the gospel. The gospel that Jesus preached is “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the gospel!” (Mark 1:15). Paul writes about the gospel in Romans 1:16 that “it is

the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” The gospel is God’s kingdom and power and the invitation to participate in both through repentance. And, thank God that our salvation and participation in God’s kingdom does not rest upon our ability to correctly understand and articulate the process of salvation!

There is certainly room for dialogue and debate. In this, we encourage fellow believers on both sides to seek to understand the other, and hope that our tone and approach have been a model for how to do so.

Addressing Differences in our Churches

We think and hope that what we have written thus far is uncontroversial. How this debate plays out in our churches, however, is more difficult and may bring back unpleasant memories for some of our readers. Let us make clear that what we suggest here is in our best attempt to grapple with this matter in the context of imperfect knowledge, communities, and organisations. We have already laid out our case for teaching a robust theology of salvation. Naturally, if that is to take place, it must happen in our churches. How do we decide what to teach? What should we do if we do not agree with the teaching in our church? These are difficult questions we will try to answer here.

A compromise that seems appealing at first glance is to teach all the theological options we consider consistent with the Scriptures, and let individuals decide what to believe. The first difficulty with this is how a church community decides what is consistent with the Scriptures – many Calvinists have seen Arminian theology as incompatible with the Scriptures, and John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, did not think that Calvinism was an acceptable option either! Assuming, that a church was able to agree to teach both Arminianism and Calvinism while closing the doors to other theological options, it would still face the challenge of achieving consistency and coherency in teaching and pastoral care. This debate on salvation has implications far and wide, touching on the origin of evil, the problem of suffering, and understanding how God’s sovereignty and human choice interact not only for salvation but on all other matters as well – including subjects such as prayer and seeking guidance. When incoherency on such a scale is exposed, it generates confusion and dissonance, and tends to lead to a desire for resolution, unless these logical incompatibilities are hidden by generally avoiding teaching and discussion on these subjects.

If churches need to make a choice on what to teach, who exactly gets to make that decision? That depends. In some denominations, stances on many theological issues are decided at the local church level, and it is appropriate that the church leadership and members resolve these issues according to the decision-making framework they have already established. In the Methodist Church, we commit to sharing a broad array

of theological stances at the denominational level. From an organisational perspective, this is important as pastors belong to the denomination – not the local church – and it is unhelpful for teaching and pastoral care in a local church to undergo massive changes whenever a pastor is transferred in or out of the local church. The Methodist Church has historically been Arminian in its stance – and our founders and their successors played a significant role in shaping this theology. We may have neglected this teaching in various local churches from time to time, but when we examine our beliefs as a denomination and draw upon our shared history and heritage, it would take a seismic and unforeseeable event to re-evaluate a position so core to our roots.

What does it mean for the Methodist Church to be Arminian? It does not mean that we exclude Calvinists from our community. It does, however, mean that preaching and teaching in the Methodist Church should be consistent with Arminian beliefs, and that those in preaching and teaching roles take care not to use their platforms to contradict these beliefs. These are rules and guidelines that enable church communities – Arminian and Calvinist alike – to function. We think it wise for Christians to seek church communities that they can be at home in. If a Calvinist finds his or her home in a Methodist church and can live with teaching and preaching consistent with Arminian theology, well and good! But, if an Arminian goes to a Calvinist church and finds those teachings difficult, they should either resolve to make the best of things without stirring up debate or seek out another church community that is a better fit.

Addressing Differences in Inter-Denominational Spaces

We have advocated that churches ought to teach theologies of salvation in spite of the controversy that can arise because on the importance of sound and biblical belief. It is an unfortunate reality that differences in doctrinal conclusions (among other factors) create denomination divides, and that while we recognize each other as brother and sister in Christ, we may need to work out our faith and practice in different spaces while we await Christ’s return. It is good for us to come and work together wherever and whenever we can. In these spaces, it is right and appropriate to de-emphasize differences. Inter-denominational spaces can be a good place to dialogue about different beliefs, but seeking to emphasize differences and win debates only serves to further fragment the broader church.

A particular inter-denominational space that we should seek to preserve are college and university Christian Fellowships (CFs). These are important both for Christians seeking to find fellowship in their place of study, and as a witness to the non-Christian community looking in. We have made the case for solid and robust teaching in local churches, and empathise with those CF leaders who would like to see the same in their organisations. We urge you, however, to consider the unique position you are in: the diverse theological back-

grounds represented in your midst, the visibility you have to non-Christians, and that most of your members are also part of a local church. We know of several CFs that have run into significant difficulties over Arminian and Calvinist theology. Do consider carefully what role you will play in advancing God's kingdom where you are, and what doctrinal essentials are necessary in that role, and who you include and exclude in the process. Short of splitting the CF, those Christians who cannot accept your essentials have no alternative to participate in.

Final Thoughts

Thank you again for accompanying us across these four articles. We hope that this will provide a helpful reference point for a difficult subject, and that it will serve as a guide not just for the debate, but how we ought to approach this subject with one another.

We have only sketched an outline of this topic. For some, that will be sufficient. Others may have a deeper interest in this subject, and will wish to read further. For the latter group, we include some suggested readings, many of which have had an influence on the authors' perspectives and understanding of this issue.

Further Readings

For those new to this subject, and would like an example of advocates for Calvinism and Arminianism interacting with each other Four Views on Eternal Security presents a dialogue by Michael Horton, Norman Geisler, Stephen Ashby, and Steven Harper.

Among contemporary theologians and preachers, John Piper is perhaps the most well-known advocate for Calvinism. There are many writings on this subject at the Desiring God website, including What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism. Michael Horton is another theologian who has written at length in support of Calvinist theology, including the book For Calvinism. Another influential Calvinist voice in the evangelical movement was J.I. Packer, who voices some of his views in the paper Arminianisms. Finally, the Gospel Coalition is an evangelical Calvinist network of churches. This network produces and disseminates a wide variety of resources, not limited to Calvinism. These resources are generally of high quality and well thought-through. We note, however, that the views espoused there are almost exclusively from the Calvinist/Reformed/Puritan wing of the evangelical movement (the other historical wing being the Arminian/Holiness/Pietistic wing). One article we recommend for its relevance to this discussion is an interview of the Wesleyan theological Fred Sanders by John Starke, in the article You're a Calvinist, Right?

For further Arminian resources, we begin our recommendations with Ben Witherington. The Asbury Seminary where he lectures at has a You Tube channel, Seven Minutes Se-

minary, in which faculty covers a wide array of topics, including Witherington's Romans 9-11: Seven Minute Seminary. He also wrote The Problem with Evangelical Theology, in which he critiques weaknesses in prominent evangelical theologies, including the Calvinist perspective on predestination and election as well as the Arminian concept of prevenient grace. We previously referenced Roger Olson and his book, Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities in the third article in our series. He also has a blog at patheos.com, with many posts on this and other theological subjects. Another important theologian who passed on in December 2016 is Thomas Oden, who discusses God's relationship with human beings in The Transforming Power of Grace. There does not exist an Arminian counterpart to the Gospel Coalition in terms of its reach of audience, prolificness of writings, and scope of study. However, the Society of Evangelical Arminians will have solid and extensive resources on Arminian theology.

Those who wish to dig into the historical writings on this subject will have to begin with Calvin's Institutes. Translations of James (Jacob) Arminius' writings – which are the beginnings of modern Arminian theology are available at Wesley Center Online. The Wesley Center Online also hosts the sermons and other writings of John Wesley. His most famous polemic against Calvinism was Predestination Calmly Considered, which may have benefited from a calmer disposition! Among his many writings, the longest treatise he wrote was The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience.

One final suggestion for further reading. One reason why the Calvinism and Arminians debates have often become so fierce and acrimonious has been the frequent perception that the gospel truth itself is at stake. We have said earlier in this article that salvation is part of the gospel message but is far from the whole thing, and that at the centrality of the gospel is God's kingdom and rule. We do not have time and space explore this here, but recommend The King Jesus Gospel by Scott McKnight and How God Became King by N.T. Wright as good introductions to this subject. We hope that with a focus on what we share in common, other important but secondary differences can be put into perspective.

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First Impressions of Malacca

By **N. Koch**

Old Girl, A.C.G.S., Ipoh

When I first heard that I was to make my home in Malacca, I groaned and frantically wondered how one could possibly exist in such an antiquated hole. My mistake was due to not knowing what a charming little town Malacca really is.

My train arrived at a tiny station, and during the drive to Tanjung Kling, my spirits sank to zero at the sight of narrow dusty streets, and architecture that would cause Christopher Wren to revolve rapidly in his grave. On arriving at a friend's house, however, the sea cheered me considerably, and a good night's rest completely restored the spirit of adventure which the long journey from Ipoh had smothered.

Next morning I sallied forth on my tour of discovery, feeling infinitely superior to Columbus. How different everything looked in the morning! Every narrow street held a promise of adventure: the quaint buildings were delightful in their variety, every scrap of ruined wall or pillar breathed history, and the curious stares of pedestrians showed a friendly interest.

The journey to town in an aged bus was a revelation. Unlike Singapore where no one bothers about his neighbour, the passengers were friendly. Perfect strangers chatted amicably; several kindly hands were out-stretched to help a mother and baby into a seat, while all joined in such a friendly curiosity concerning me, that it was impossible to take offence. A general spirit of goodwill pervaded the bus. As we rattled down the streets, I was amazed at the low shop-houses, of which no two are alike; they vary in height, size, shape

and colour, giving the impression that Malacca was never "planned" but just "grew" like a crop of mushrooms. The bus finally stopped at the river, besides the Customs shed. The river bank is lined with the greenest of tumbled-down, moss-grown houses, from whose windows the shopkeepers indulge in fishing when business is slack.

I walked from there to the centre of the town, a cluster of fine buildings around a minute park (humourously called the Botanic Gardens) adorned by a really classic fountain, and then inspected the quaint red stone Post Office, Church of England, and the Stadhuys. The Stadhuys is an enormous rambling building full of the quaintest nooks and crannies; old rooms, cellars, terraces, galleries and long halls where formerly the old Dutch Governors lived in state. At present it is occupied by Government Offices, the Museum and the Library.

From there I toiled, panting, up St. Paul's Hill, which slopes up from the sea-front. On reaching the top (after I had got my breath back) I was enchanted with the wonderful view. All Malacca lay spread out around me. I could see the hills of Tampin in the distance; the coastline stretching away to Tanjung Kling on the right, acres of coconut trees and huts, and St. John's Hill Fort; the sea dotted with islands in front, the fine buildings of the Bank and Messrs Sime Darby and Company; the multi-coloured roofs of the shops, and the Residence with its beautiful garden just below the Fort. On entering the Fort, I was met by an interesting custodian, who was thoroughly conversant with Malacca history, and made every stone live. I saw the tombstones of old Dutch

and Portuguese settlers; the open grave where the body of St. Francis Xavier rested before its journey to Goa; the embrasures where the cannon rested, and the blocked up entrance to an underground passage. The building was originally a church, but was converted into a fort. At the foot of the hill stands the remains of the Old Gateway to the Fort. It was an unforgettable experience to stand in that ruin so rich in history, and listen to the stories vividly told by the guide.

Next I visited the shops lining streets so narrow that I could almost touch two sides. In the course of my wanderings, I came across the most fascinating curious, and shops where you could buy anything from a pin to an anchor for the proverbial "song." These shops were so crammed with genuine antiques, and mere wrecks, that it was difficult to move. It was a revelation of how much junk could be picked up at auctions. With the greatest difficulty, I tore myself away, and took a bus home.

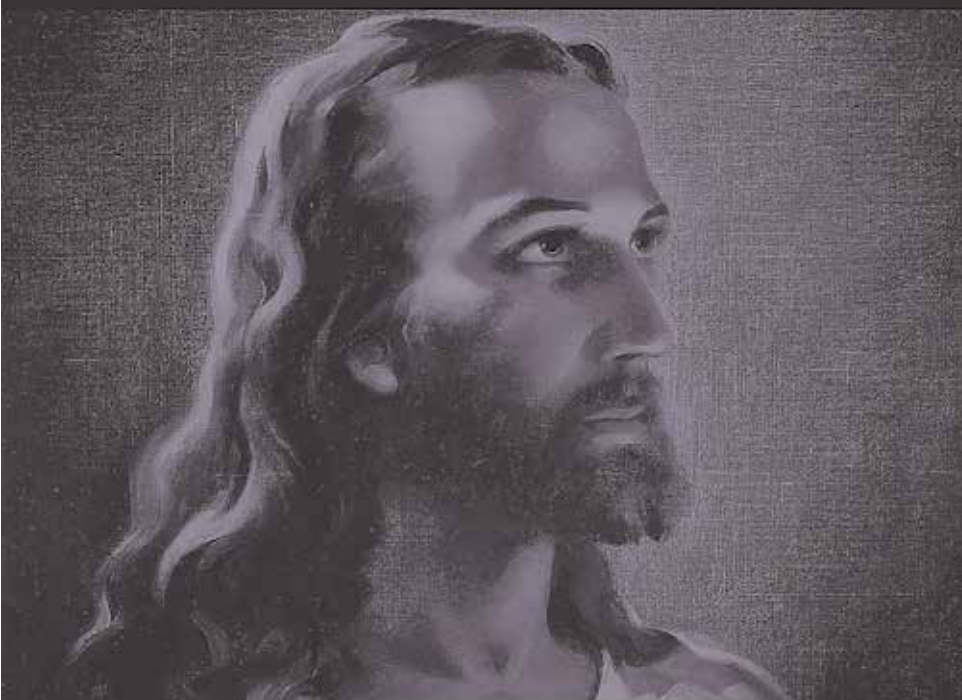
I have since learned that shopping in Malacca can be most exasperating, when you cannot find what you want in all the fine Bombay shops: when you try to buy a hat and find there are no hat shops, or long to see a play and there are no theatres. Nevertheless, we have two splendid Talkie Halls, a Cabaret, a Museum, a Library, an Amusement Park, plenty of ruins, three fairly wide streets, and the sea which is a never failing joy, so, all things considered. I am very pleased that I live in Malacca.

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