

## 13<sup>th</sup> Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (12-19 August 2013)

Theme: "Wesleyan Communities and the World Beyond Christianity"

Working Group: Wesley/Methodist Historical Studies Group.

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Topic: "Ye are the salt of the earth": The Methodists as the Channel of *Muhibbah* (Harmony) in Malaysia in Light of Wesleyan Theology of Grace.

### Introduction:

"Malaysia, Truly Asia! To know Malaysia is to love Malaysia---a bubbling, bustling melting-pot of races and religions where Malays, Indians, Chinese and many other ethnic groups live together in peace and *harmony*. Our multiculturalism has made Malaysia a gastronomical paradise and home to hundreds of colourful festivals."<sup>1</sup> This is how Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board advertises the country in conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2014.

Malaysia, with a population of 28,334,135, is indeed a unique nation of pluralistic community.<sup>2</sup> 14,191,720 Malays, who are all Muslim by the Malaysian Constitutional definition,<sup>3</sup> make up 50.1% of the population, plus 3,331,788 other indigenous ethnic groups (e.g., Negrito, Sengoi, Kadazan Dusun, Bajau, Murut, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, Orang Ulu), the total of "bumiputera" is 17,523,508 (61.8% of the Malaysian citizens).<sup>4</sup> The Chinese (6,392,636) comprises 22.6% of the country's population, while the Indian (1,907,827) make up 6.73% of the nation's inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, "About Malaysia" (accessed 27 June 2013); available from <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/Master/Web-Page/About-Malaysia/In-Brief>; Internet. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia, "Population by State and Stratum on Census Day," *Statistics Yearbook Malaysia 2011* (accessed 25 June 2013); available from [http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1824&Itemid=153&lang=en](http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1824&Itemid=153&lang=en); Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Article 160 (2): "Malay" means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and—(a) was before Merdeka [Independent] Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore." See: The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, *Federal Constitution* (Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, 2010, accessed 27 July 2013); available from [http://www.agc.gov.my/images/Personalisation/Buss/pdf/Federal%20Consti%20\(BI%20text\).pdf](http://www.agc.gov.my/images/Personalisation/Buss/pdf/Federal%20Consti%20(BI%20text).pdf); Internet.

<sup>4</sup> "Bumiputera" literally means "prince of the earth" or "sons of the soil." In Malaysia, this term is especially applied to the members of those "indigenous" ethnic groups of Malaysia who receive preferential treatment under the New Economic Policy (NEP) first announced in 1970 and launched in 1971 by the government. NEP sought to promote national unity through two-pronged strategy: (1) to raise income levels for all Malaysians; (2) to accelerate the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function and geographical location. See: Simon Barraclough, *A Dictionary of Malaysian Politics* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1988), 13, 60; "The New Economy Policy: Goals and Strategy," (accessed 27 June 2013), available from <http://www.epu.gov.my/epu-theme/rmk3/chapt%201.pdf>; Internet; Malaysia Tourism Board, "People" (accessed 27 June 2013) <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/Master/Web-Page/About-Malaysia/Culture-n-Heritage>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia, "Population by Age Group, Ethnic Group, and Sex, Malaysia, on Census Day," *Statistics Yearbook Malaysia 2011* (accessed 27 June 2013); *ibid.* The Chinese and Indian citizens are not regarded as "sons of the soil." They are often referred as "immigrant" who have just recently settled in Malaysia from such countries as India, China, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Most of them were brought here as labourers by the British when it occupied the country (19<sup>th</sup> century-1963 A.D.).

Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3%.<sup>6</sup> The other major religions embraced are Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%)<sup>7</sup> and Hinduism (6.3%).<sup>8</sup>

Abdul Malik Mujahid, an American influential Iman and the Board Chair of the Parliament of World's Religions, remarked that Malaysia "has achieved better minority-majority *harmony* and peace as compared to neighbouring countries, where economically stronger minorities have been persecuted as in Indonesia, suffering several violent attacks or against the poorer ethnic minorities as in Thailand, Myanmar and Philippines." He highly affirmed Malaysian "unique successful model of co-existence and respect for each other individually, as well as communally."<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that in recent years, racial polarization, issues of Islamization and two-party system in the politics of Malaysia have resulted in much tensions, disputes and hostility among Malaysians. To illustrate the point, just note the following two incidents:

1. In 2007, Malaysia' Ministry of Home Affairs forbade the Malay-language edition of the Catholic monthly the *Herald* to use "Allah" to denote the Christian God. The *Herald* launched a court challenge and, in 2009, Malaysia's High Court ruled that the word "Allah" is not exclusive to Muslims. Instantly, the Ministry aforesaid appealed to the higher Court of Appeal to overturn the ruling. Meantime, churches were firebombed amid Muslims' protests over use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims.<sup>10</sup>
2. Right after midnight of 5 May 2013 when the Election Commission announced the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (BN or National Front) coalition as winner of the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election by a simple majority, the Prime Minister

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<sup>6</sup> Article 3 (1): "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." See: The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, *Federal Constitution*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Although Christians number about 9.2% of the total Malaysia population, about two thirds of them live in East Malaysia where they comprise up to 20-30% of the local populations, and most of them are of indigenous backgrounds. Some villages in East Malaysia are almost 100% Christian. The more populous and urbanized West Malaysia only has an average Christian population which is as low as 1-2%. See: Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Statistics Malaysia, "Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010," *Statistics Yearbook Malaysia 2011* (accessed 27 June 2013); available from [http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1215%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010-updated-2972011&catid=130%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010&Itemid=154&lang=en](http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1215%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010-updated-2972011&catid=130%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010&Itemid=154&lang=en); Internet.

<sup>9</sup> Abdul Malik Mujahid, "The Malaysian Success Story of Communal Harmony," *Foreign Policy Journal*, 12 February 2013 (accessed 27 June 2013); available from: <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/02/12/the-malaysian-success-story-of-communal-harmony/2/>; Internet. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>10</sup> In Malaysia, besides Malay-speaking Christians (mainly the indigenous ethnic groups apart from Malay), the Sikhs also use the word "Allah" in their religious text. For further details of this issue, see: "Christians' fight to use the word 'Allah' is back in court," *Herald Malaysia Online*, 29 June 2013 (accessed 2 July 2013); available from <http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/Christians-fight-to-use-the-word-Allah-is-back-in-court-16063-2-1.html>; Internet; Baradan Kuppusamy, "Can Christians Say 'Allah'? In Malaysia, Muslims Say No," *Time*, 8 January 2010 (accessed 2 July 2013); available from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1952497,00.html>; Internet; "Malaysia churches firebombed" *Aljazeera*, 8 January 2010 (accessed 2 July 2013); available from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2010/01/2010181572087252.html>; Internet.

of Malaysia Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak made a controversial remark.<sup>11</sup> He branded the result on a “Chinese tsunami” (i.e., the Chinese community had voted overwhelmingly for the opposition) and warned that such “polarized” voting trends would be “dangerous” to the country. “Racial harmony,” he said, “is imperative for us.”<sup>12</sup> However, the analysts and opposition leaders promptly refuted such statements. The independent pollster *Merdeka* Center, for instance, pointed out that “urban Malays had also voted for Pakatan Rakyat [People’s Alliance, the opposition coalition],” plus, there had been a “middle-class and urban exodus from the [ruling] coalition.”<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, opposition-led rallies spread in Malaysia to protest the outcome of the election.<sup>14</sup>

Hwa Yung, Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, has rightly observed, “ethnic tensions continues to lie simmering beneath the surface, always waiting to erupt when sufficient pressure builds up.”<sup>15</sup> This paper will show that the people called Methodist in Malaysia may rise as significant channel of *muhibbah* (a Malay word which means harmony, goodwill, feeling of friendship and love) in the nation.<sup>16</sup> This is because Wesleyan theology of grace, one of the greatest heritages of Methodism, is able to inspire as well as empower the Methodists to spread scriptural holiness-as-*muhibbah* across this land. The writer would introduce, firstly, the current situation of the Methodist Church in Malaysia as well as the country’s socio-political and –economic condition. Then, the writer would put forward Wesleyan understanding of grace and discuss, finally, the ways in which the local Wesleyan communities can be the salt of *muhibbah* in Malaysia.

### **1. “The salt”---Methodist Church in Malaysia:**

The Methodist Church in Malaysia began 128 years ago. A Methodist missionary William Oldham was sent by the South India Conference to start missions work in Singapore and Peninsular Malaya in 1885. In East Malaysia, Methodist Church was

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<sup>11</sup> BN had held on to power despite losing the popular vote, where it took home 47.4 per cent of votes while the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalition took 50.9 per cent, the first time since 1969. For an official result of the election, see: Election Commission of Malaysia, “Keputusan PRU Ke-13” (accessed 28 June 2013); available from <http://www.spr.gov.my/>; Internet. Also see: “Malaysia GE13: Statistics show election result was not a ‘Chinese tsunami’, DAP says,” *The Straits Times*, 10 May 2013 (accessed 27 June 2013); available from <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/asia/story/malaysia-ge13-statistics-show-election-result-was-not-chinese-tsunami-da>; Internet.

<sup>12</sup> “Malaysia GE13: PM Najib blames polls results on ‘Chinese tsunami’,” *The Straits Times*, 6 May 2013 (accessed 27 June 2013); available from <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/asia/story/malaysia-ge13-pm-najib-blames-polls-results-chinese-tsunami-20130506>; Internet.

<sup>13</sup> Boo Su-Lyn, “GE 13 not a ‘Chinese tsunami’, says Merdeka Center,” 10 May 2013 (accessed 28 June 2013); available from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/ge13-not-a-chinese-tsunami-says-merdeka-center>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup> “‘Black 505’ Post-Election Rallies Spread in Malaysia”, *Global Voices*, 13 May 2013 (Accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/05/13/black-505-post-election-rallies-spread-in-malaysia/>; Internet.

<sup>15</sup> Hwa Yung, “Christians and Nation-Building: Reconciliation,” *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter*, 1 June 2012 (accessed 28 June 2013); available from <http://bhd.cornerstone.my/bhd/methodistchurch/index.cfm?menuid=6&action=newsview&retrieveid=475>; Internet.

<sup>16</sup> The write would like to acknowledge with thanks the book of S. Batumalai which has enlightened me for using *mihibbah* as the key word of this paper: Batumalai Sadayandy, *A Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah* (Kuala Lumpur: Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, 1990).

established when a Methodist lay preacher Wong Nai Siong from the Fujian province of China led 1,118 Chinese immigrants to Sibuluan from 1901 to 1902, and Methodist missionaries Paul H. Schmucker and Lucius D. Mamora from Batak of Indonesia reached out to the indigenous Ibans from 1937 onwards.<sup>17</sup>

Today, the Methodist Church has become one of the largest Protestant churches in the country. There are 400 churches and 634 preaching points with 552 pastors and ministerial staff. In 2011, the total membership is about 177,461, consisting of 114,065 confirmed members and 63,396 preparatory members (i.e., those children who have been baptized, but not confirmed, and are still under 16 years old).<sup>18</sup> More than 80,000 people worship in Methodist churches around the country weekly, and about 20,000 children are nurtured in the Sunday Schools every week. Interestingly, the composition of the Methodist Church in Malaysia reflects the racial composition of the nation. There are three mainly Chinese-speaking Annual Conferences, one English-speaking, one Tamil-speaking, one Iban-speaking, and one Sengoi-speaking Conference.<sup>19</sup>

To date, The Methodist Church still runs 75 mission schools, 5 private schools, and 2 private colleges in the country. Its theological education is done primarily through the Methodist Theological School in East Malaysia and Malaysia Theological Seminary in West Malaysia. The Church is also engaged in various social services through the local churches and Annual Conference organizations. For examples, the agricultural, educational, and medical works among the indigenous people; centres for the physically disabled and the mentally retarded children and youth; centres of kidney dialysis, counselling, and drug rehabilitation; outreaches to street people and prisoners.<sup>20</sup>

Since 2004, under the leadership of Bishop Hwa Yung, the Methodist Church in Malaysia has been using “Spreading Scriptural Holiness, Transforming the Nation” as its theme. Such theme was inspired by Wesleys’ statement found in the *Large Minutes* (1763): “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the preachers called ‘Methodists?’ To reform the nation, and in particular the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “How Methodism came to Singapore and Malaysia” (accessed 30 June 2013); available from <http://bhd.cornerstone.my/bhd/methodistchurch/index.cfm?menuid=10>; Internet. “The Methodist Church in Singapore: Historical Statement” (accessed 28 June 2013); available from <http://www.methodist.org.sg/index.php/home/our-heritage/868-historical-statement>; Internet.

<sup>18</sup> “The Methodist Church in Malaysia” (accessed 29 June 2013); available from <http://bhd.cornerstone.my/bhd/methodistchurch/index.cfm?menuid=8>; Internet.

<sup>19</sup> In East Malaysia, there are Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference (SCAC), Sarawak Iban Annual Conference (SIAC), and Sabah Provisional Annual Conference (SPAC), while in West Malaysia, there are Chinese Annual Conference (CAC), Trinity (English-speaking) Annual Conference (TAC), and Sengoi Mission Conference (SMC; Sengoi-speaking; Sengoi is an indigenous ethnic group or “bumiputera” in Malaysia).

<sup>20</sup> Hwa Yung, “Building Compassionate Communities,” *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter*, Jan/Feb 2012, 4-6. Also see: “Methodist Church in Malaysia” (accessed 29 June 2013); available from <http://www.klangwesley.com/about/methodist-church-in-malaysia>; Internet. In regard to Methodist missions school educational ministry in Malaysia, see an article written by the current principal of Methodist Pilley Institute in East Malaysia: Judy Wong, “Meducation,” (accessed 29 June 2013); available from <http://methodisteducation.edu.my/articles/2010/2010Meducation.pdf>; Internet. For ministry to the physically disabled, see: “Beautiful Gate Foundation for the Disabled,” <http://english.beautifulgate.org.my/about/>; Internet.

<sup>21</sup> Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 10: The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 845.

In 2010, a “Road Map” for the entire Methodist Church in Malaysia was officially launched at the church 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. It aims to enlighten and spur all the Methodists to go *together*, as the salt, with great zeal, for the next 10 to 20 years, focusing on “Evangelism and Church Planting,” “Discipleship,” “Church and Society,” and “Missions.” The concern and passion of Bishop Hwa Yung was, in his own words, “Revival and vital Christianity is a possibility.”<sup>22</sup> He remarked,

Wesley went on to lead the revival for another 52 years until his death in 1791. The revival was sustained for the next hundred years or so, both in England and in America. In England, Methodist membership grew to almost 5% of the adult population in the decade of 1840-50 and impacted the whole of church life in the country as well. Other churches, especially the Congregational and Baptist, benefited from the revival and grew in tandem...In America, it grew even faster in absolute numbers than in England, and outstripped almost all other churches in the 19th century. It would be good if God in His goodness would do something similar in our midst once again.<sup>23</sup>

The new bishop Rev. Dr. Ong Hwai Teik shares such conviction too. In his very first address this year, he stressed, “let us personally and communally, as individuals, local churches, Annual Conferences---as a people called Methodists in Malaysia, remember our Methodist Church in Malaysia Road Map...Let us together respond to the Lord as David did, of whom God testified and said, ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man *after my own heart*; he will do everything I want him to do.’” (Acts 13:22)<sup>24</sup>

## **2. “The earth”---The present socio-political and -economic condition and challenges in Malaysia:**

The Federation of Malaysia was formed in 1963. Singapore was originally part of the Federation but ceased to be a member in 1965. Thereafter, Malaysia is composed of two noncontiguous regions, that is, the peninsula of West Malaysia and the two East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, located in northern Borneo. Prior to *merdeka* (independence), all the regions aforesaid were British colonies. Thus, it is little surprise that Malaysia is a secular democracy modelled after the British parliamentary system. It has a constitutional monarchy represented by the *Agung* (King) as its figurehead. But the governance of the nation is carried out by the prime minister and a federal cabinet.<sup>25</sup>

### **2.1 Malaysia in the eyes of the world:**

The “globalEDGE,” a knowledge web-portal created by the Centre for International Business Education and Research at Michigan State University, states that Malaysia's economic record has been one of Asia's best since it became

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<sup>22</sup> Hwa Yung, “What’s right with Methodism (1)?”, *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter*, April 2007, 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ong Hwai Teik, “A church after God’s own heart,” *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter*, January 2013, 4. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Barraclough, *op. cit.*, 48; Peter C. Phan, ed., *op. cit.*, 77; *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, s.v. “Malaysia,” by Daniel K. C. Ho.

independent in 1957. Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by an average of 6.5% per year from 1957 to 2005 and grew 7.2% in 2010, 5.1% in 2011.<sup>26</sup>

According to the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group, Malaysia is regarded as the 12th most business friendly country in the world in 2013; first in terms of ease of getting credit, fourth in protecting investment, and eleventh in trading across borders. It is better than Taiwan, Canada, Thailand, Japan, and Germany.<sup>27</sup>

In June 2013, the *Economic Premise*, produced by the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network of the World Bank, published a paper that affirmed Malaysia's structural transformation from low to middle income. It said that such change has made Malaysia one of the most prominent manufacturing exporters in the world. The paper also commented, nevertheless, that Malaysia must tackle the "middle-income trap" wisely in order to move on to attain the status of a high-income country. It cautioned Malaysia against overlook of critical issues like distribution, social cohesion, and poverty in the country.<sup>28</sup> Or the critique of Michael Backman in 2006 is not without its relevance:

MALAYSIA'S been at it again, arguing about what proportion of the economy each of its two main races — the Malays and the Chinese — owns. It's an argument that's been running for 40 years. That wealth and race are not synonymous is important for national cohesion, but really it's time Malaysia grew up.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Malaysia: Economy" (accessed 30 June 2013); available from <https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/malaysia/economy/>; Internet.

<sup>27</sup> In the report, a high ranking on the ease of doing business index means the regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and operation of a local firm. This index averages the country's percentile rankings on 10 topics, made up of a variety of indicators, giving equal weight to each topic. See: "Economic Rankings" (accessed 30 June 2013); available from <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>; Internet. Abdul Malik Mujahid pointed out that Malaysia is also the only Muslim country in the top ranking. And, more interestingly, it is the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that Malaysia defied under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to protect its national interest during the financial crisis of Southeast Asia in 1997. See: Abdul Malik Mujahid, "The Malaysian Success Story of Communal Harmony," op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Aaron Flaaen, Ejaz Ghani, and Saurabh Mishra, "How to avoid middle-income traps? Evidence from Malaysia," *Economic Premise*, June 2013 (accessed 25 June 2013); available from [http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/06/20/000442464\\_20130620140630/Rendered/PDF/786510BRI0EP12000Box377349B00PUBLIC0.pdf](http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/06/20/000442464_20130620140630/Rendered/PDF/786510BRI0EP12000Box377349B00PUBLIC0.pdf); Internet. The authors define "middle-income trap" as "a development stage that characterizes countries that are squeezed between low-wage producers and highly skilled, fast-moving innovators." They pointedly remarks that "there are as many poor people in middle-income countries as in low-income countries."

<sup>29</sup> Michael Backman, "While Malaysia fiddles, its opportunities are running dry," *The Age*, 15 November 2006 (accessed 25 June 2013); available from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/business/while-malaysia-fiddles-its-opportunities-are-running-dry/2006/11/14/1163266550487.html?page=fullpage>; Internet. To understand Michael Backman's critique, one must realize that one of the greatest challenges of the Federation of Malaysia formed in 1963, as articulated by the report of the New Economy Policy (NEP) then, was: "the fact that average incomes between the major social groups very widely. In terms of *per capita* income, the Malays received \$34 per month or one-half that of Chinese at \$68, while the Indians obtained \$57 or some 70% more than the Malays. Of all poor households, about 74% were Malay, 17% Chinese and 8% Indian." In employment, the Malays concentrated in agricultural, while the Chinese in mining, manufacturing and construction. The report continued: "With respect to the ownership of wealth, available data indicate only small amounts of share capital owned by Malays and Indians compared to the holdings by Chinese with dominance exercised by foreign interests. In 1970, Malays and Malay interest owned 2.4% of equity capital, while Indians held 1.1%. The Chinese, on the other hand, accounted for 27.2%,"

In 2013, Malaysia is accorded a place among the top 18 per cent of nations worldwide (29th out of 162 countries) in a survey by the Institute for Economics and Peace, revealed in its seventh edition of the Global Peace Index (GPI).<sup>30</sup> Comparing to the index last year in which Malaysia was accorded a place among the top 13 per cent of nations worldwide (20th out of 158 countries),<sup>31</sup> the country has become less peaceful. Malaysia's overall index score also dropped from 1.48 in 2012 to 1.57 this year (a lower score indicates more peacefulness).<sup>32</sup>

In the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2012, Malaysia ranks in the 54th position out of a total of 176 countries surveyed, better than China (80th), Thailand (88th), Philippines (105th), and Indonesia (118th), but below Singapore (5th), Hong Kong (14th), Japan (17th), Taiwan (37rd) and South Korea (45th).<sup>33</sup> Hwa Yung, Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, observed, "Malaysia has been ranking in a middling position in the last 15 years... Unfortunately, compared with places Hong Kong, Korea and even Indonesia, all of whose scores have improved over past 10 years, Malaysia's score has declined somewhat in the same period!"<sup>34</sup>

## 2.2 Malaysia in the eyes of the nation's scholars and leaders:

In 1960s, many political scientists in Malaysia perceived that the nation "most important division was that between an 'indigenous Malay community' which possessed political power, and an 'immigrant non-Malay community' which controlled the economy."<sup>35</sup> As a result, Khoo Boo Teik comments,

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Others 6.0% whilst foreigners held 63.3%." In light of this, one of the NEP's main purposes was to help the indigenous ethnic groups (mainly Malay) achieving the 30% *bumiputera* equity target by 1990. See: "The New Economy Policy: Goals and Strategy," op. cit.. For a heated discussion on equity ownership issue in 2006, see: "Asli welcomes discourse on *bumiputra* equity ownership," *The Sun Daily*, 29 September 2006 (accessed 1 July 2013); available from <http://www.thesundaily.my/node/172587>; Internet.

<sup>30</sup> The Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Peace Index 2013" (accessed 25 June 2013); available from [http://www.visionofhumanity.org/pdf/gpi/2013\\_Global\\_Peace\\_Index\\_Report.pdf](http://www.visionofhumanity.org/pdf/gpi/2013_Global_Peace_Index_Report.pdf); Internet. GPI is composed of 22 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources, which gauge three broad themes: the level of safety and security in society; the extent of domestic or international conflict; and the degree of militarisation. GPI defines peace as "the absence of violence and the absence of the fear of violence." The 2013 GPI was released on 11 June 2013 at Washington, D.C.. It has been expanded to rank 162 independent states. Countries that are ahead of Malaysia include Japan (6th place), Singapore (16th), and Taiwan (26th), while those that are after Malaysia include Laos (39th), Vietnam (41th), Indonesia (54th), Philippines (129th), Thailand (130th), and Myanmar (140th). See also: "2013 GPI Findings" (accessed 15 June 2013); available from <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/our-gpi-findings>; Internet.

<sup>31</sup> Datuk Dr. Zakri Abdul Hamid, "Malaysia in the eyes of the world," *New Straits Times*, 2 May 2013 (accessed 25 June 2013); available from <http://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnist/malaysia-in-the-eyes-of-the-world-1.269245#ixzz2XDYIvuLT>; Internet.

<sup>32</sup> Alyaa Azhar, "Study: M'sia a less peaceful nation," *Free Malaysia Today*, 13 June 2013 (accessed 25 June 2013); available from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/06/13/study-msia-a-less-peaceful-nation/>; Internet.

<sup>33</sup> Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index 2012" (accessed 25 June 2013); available from <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>; Internet.

<sup>34</sup> Hwa Yung, "Christians & Nation-Building: The Challenge of Corruption and Moral Reformation," *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter*, 1 November 2011 (accessed 25 June 2013); available from <http://bhd.bz/MethodistChurch/index.cfm?menuid=6&action=newsview&retrieveid=440#>; Internet.

<sup>35</sup> Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An intellectual biography of Mahathir Mohammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xvii; Edmund Terence Gomez, ed., *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, equity and reform* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 50.

Much of Malaysian politics may, therefore, be viewed as a process of managing inter-ethnic divisions, tensions, and conflicts amidst the efforts of avowedly ethnic-based political parties to advance the interest of ‘their’ communities. To the extent that these parties co-operate, compromise, and bargain, the inter-ethnic differences may be contained at non-dangerous levels. Where they cannot, or where they clash, inter-ethnic polarization may escalate and undermine political stability.<sup>36</sup>

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the condition aforesaid seems to remain. Sumit K. Mandal critically remarked, in his article “Transethnic solidarities,” that “The absence of a critical examination of race has meant that it assumes a murky space in society with potentially harsh social and political consequences.” He further elaborated:

Racialised, and even racist, instruments of state and politics find their place in the public spaces of Malaysia without much sustained and rigorous criticism... [T]erms such as ‘race’, ‘stock’, and ‘breeding’ remain in use. Notable examples of racialised language are the primordialist terms *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) and *pendatang* (newcomer) used by chauvinist elements in the Malay leadership to assert an inherent difference between their ‘own’ and ‘migrant’ others. In recent decades, these chauvinist terms have come to the fore during elite political crises in order to galvanise groups along racial lines. As a consequence, citizens long established in the country suddenly find themselves in a disturbingly uncertain state.<sup>37</sup>

In 2007, as Malaysia celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of national independence, Mavis Puthuchery, in her critical reflection of the state 50 years after independence, also put forward the same concern. She observed, “The dichotomy of Malay and non-Malay had shifted from denoting simply the distinction between Malaysians of “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” local origins.” The senior Malaysian political scientist clarified:

It was now taken to *another level*, to suggest a difference, and an unequal relationship, between people of the homeland and immigrants...[This difference] produces a different psychological orientation, one that accentuates marginalization and even exclusion, that has important implications for ethnic relations...This added status as “people of the homeland” thereby claimed by the indigenous, ethno-national group makes it difficult, even impossible, for the immigrant communities and their members ever to shed their immigrant status, no matter how long their descendants may have lived in Malaysia and regarded it as their home. It branded them with a stigma, an indelible mark as eternal outsiders.<sup>38</sup>

Mavis Puthuchery also analyzed the subtle relation between Malay ethno-nationalism and Islamic supremacy which disquieted many non-Malays. She commented that many Malay politicians “promote notions of Malay primacy not overtly and explicitly, in which form they may perhaps be a little more easily

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.. For Khoo’s detailed profile, see: <http://wwwarc.murdoch.edu.au/researchers/staff/teik.html>; Internet.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Terence Gomez, ed., op. cit., 57. Sumit Mandal’s biodata may be seen in: <http://iaaw.huberlin.de/southeastasia/history/staff/current/mandal>; Internet.

<sup>38</sup> Norani Othman, Mavis C. Puthuchery, Clive S. Kessler, *Sharing the Nation: Faith, Difference, Power and the State 50 Years after Merdeka* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2008), 15-16. Emphasis is mine.



challenged, but indirectly and covertly, as measures necessary to uphold the status, dignity and constitutional entitlements of Islam itself.”<sup>39</sup>

From January to April, 2010, the independent pollster Merdeka Center carried out “Malaysia Political Values Survey 2010.” The poll showed that Malaysians were split over the direction of national unity: 48% of the people interviewed said that Malaysians were more united today; on the contrary, 43% said Malaysians were more divided. The top ten issues that divided the citizens include bickering among politicians and parties, lack of understanding or respect and unity between races, political differences (ideology and affiliation), usage of “Allah” by the Christian community, racial inequality, lack of understanding between different religions, racial or religion issues being politicized, and national policies segregating and discriminating against certain groups.<sup>40</sup> Even Tan Sri Professor Emeritus Dr. Khoo Kay Kim, who is dubbed “The Last Historian” of Malaysia, observed, “Now Malaysians are being torn apart by the politicians.”<sup>41</sup>

In 2011, Ragayah Haji Mat Zin, in his paper “Measuring and Monitoring Poverty and Inequality: The Malaysian Experience” presented in UNDP-IDRC-ISEAS Regional Policy Dialogue, showed that 3.8% of Malaysian citizens were classified as “poor” (i.e. households with monthly incomes below Poverty Line Income, which is Ringgit Malaysia 800) and of these, none was “hardcore poor.”<sup>42</sup> Malaysia’s permanent representative to the United Nations Datuk Hussein Haniff declared, therefore, that the state was confident in meeting the target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty eradication by 2015.<sup>43</sup> The local seasoned social activist, however, had questioned such statistics as well as the politicians’ optimism. A Jayanath pointed out that if the country’s poverty line benchmark was set at around Ringgit Malaysia 1,500 per household (which was about two-thirds of the median income of Malaysia’s households), about 21.6% of total households in Malaysia are still poor.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 17. In 1990s, a Christian scholar in Malaysia had already said, “There is a need for Christians to be aware of the pervasive influence of the state-sponsored ideology and Islam in the educational system. Islamic values are subtly pushed to our children and less than subtle attacks on the Christians faith are not uncommon.” See: Goh Keat Peng, *Readings in Malaysian Church and Mission* (Petaling Jaya: Pustaka SUFES, 1992), 72.

<sup>40</sup> Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, “Survey: Malaysians split over the direction of national unity” (accessed 2 July 2013); available from [http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02\\_research.html](http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02_research.html); Internet.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Khoo was involved in the formulation of the country’s *Rukunegara*, that is, Malaysia’s official national ideology which was formulated to generate public consensus on the fundamentals of Malaysian statehood. Its general principles consist of: (1) Belief in God; (2) Loyalty to King and Country; (3) Upholding the Constitution; (4) Rule of Law; (5) Good Behaviour and Morality. See: Simon Barraclough, op. cit., 78; “Tan Sri Professor Emeritus Dr. Khoo Kay Kim,” *Perdana Magazine 2012-2013*, 31 [magazine on-line] (accessed 2 July 2013); available from [http://www.perdana.org.my/images/attachments/896\\_Perdana%20Magazine%202013%20web.pdf](http://www.perdana.org.my/images/attachments/896_Perdana%20Magazine%202013%20web.pdf); Internet..

<sup>42</sup> Professor Dr. Ragayah Haji Mat Zin, “Measuring and Monitoring Poverty and Inequality: The Malaysian Experience” (presented at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore), 28 July 2011 (accessed 7 July 2013); available from [http://www.undp.org.my/uploads/Session%202-2\\_RHMZUNDPIDRCISEASPresent28July2011Final.pdf](http://www.undp.org.my/uploads/Session%202-2_RHMZUNDPIDRCISEASPresent28July2011Final.pdf); Internet.

<sup>43</sup> “No poverty in Malaysia by 2015,” *New Straits Times*, 3 November 2012 (accessed 5 July 2013); available from <http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/no-poverty-in-malaysia-by-2015-1.165803#ixzz2Y95E6B1b>; Internet.

<sup>44</sup> A Jayanath was Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM) representative. See: G. Vinod, “Review unrealistic poverty benchmark,” *Free Malaysia Today*, 22 August 2012 (accessed 7 July 2013);

### 3. “The saltiness”---Wesleyan theology of grace:

Albert C. Outler writes, in his article “Wesley Evangel,” that “Wesley rules out any notion of authentic self-acceptance apart from the perception of faith. We are who we are because God made us so, because God keeps us so, and because it is God, not we, who holds open the future for our destiny – *all of it by grace*, unmerited, prevenient, justifying, sanctifying.”<sup>45</sup>

Thomas C. Oden highlights that “Wesley celebrates the grace that comes before and leads to justification, the saving grace that converts the soul through God the Son, and the sanctifying grace that perfects the broken life through the constant care of God the Spirit.”<sup>46</sup>

Grace, is indubitably a crucial theme in Wesleys’ thoughts and teachings. Charles Wesley, in 1740, published a hymn entitled “Jesus, lover of my soul” in which he wrote, “*Plenteous grace* with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sin; Let the healing streams abound; make and keep me pure within.”<sup>47</sup> Later, in 1741, he published another hymn called “Father, whose everlasting love” in which he penned, “Thy undistinguishing regard, Was cast on Adam’s fallen race; For all Thou hast in Christ prepared, *Sufficient, sovereign, saving grace*.”<sup>48</sup>

John Wesley, in his first Standard Sermon “Salvation by faith” (1738), accentuated that “Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.”<sup>49</sup> He further proclaimed:

This then is the salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin, and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word justification; which, taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ formed in his heart. So that he who is thus justified, or saved by faith, is indeed born again. He is born again of the Spirit unto a new life, which “is hid with Christ in God.” And as a new-born babe he gladly receives the ἄδολον, “sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby;” going on in the might of the Lord his God, from faith to faith, *from grace to grace*, until at length, he come unto “a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

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available from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2012/08/22/review-unrealistic-poverty-benchmark/>; Internet. See also: Sheridan Mahavera, “How poor are we, really?” *Malaysia Insider*, 21 July 2010 (accessed 5 July 2013); available from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/how-poor-are-we-really/>; Internet.

<sup>45</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 33. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Teaching, vol. 2: Christ and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 137.

<sup>47</sup> G. Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (Reprinted, London: Wesley-Methodist Conference Office, 1868), 1:260. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>48</sup> G. Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (Reprinted, London: Wesley-Methodist Conference Office, 1869), 3:3. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; Reprinted Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 5:8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:11-12.

In John's another sermon "Working out our own salvation" (1785), he painstakingly articulated his theology of grace:

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) *preventing grace*; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by *convincing grace*, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, "through *grace*," we "are saved by faith;" consisting of those two grand branches, *justification and sanctification*. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as "a grain of mustard-seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds," but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed, from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we "grow up in all things into him that is our Head;" till we attain "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."<sup>51</sup>

In the *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (produced between 1754-1765), John Wesley put forward his eschatological understanding of the grace of God as he explicated the Lord's prayer:

*Thy kingdom come* – May thy *kingdom of grace* come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth: may all mankind, receiving thee, O Christ, for their king, truly believing in thy name, be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy; with holiness and happiness, till they are removed hence into thy kingdom of glory, to reign with thee for ever and ever.<sup>52</sup>

It must be noted that Wesleyan theology of "grace-upon-grace" put much emphasis on restoration of the image of God *in* fallen humanity (pertaining to inward and personal aspect) and *among/between* the whole of mankind and creation (concerning the corporate or social dimension). In other words, Wesleys' desire was nothing less than realization of Christlikeness and holiness within human *heart* and throughout human beings' *lives*, redeeming both arenas from sin and distortion, and furthermore filling them with pure love, justice, mercy, and truth. Note the words of John Wesley found in his sermon "The New Birth" (1743/1760):

Gospel holiness is no less than the *image of God* stamped upon the heart; it is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus; it consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one. It implies such a continual, thankful love to Him who hath not withheld from us his Son, his only Son, as makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6:509.

<sup>52</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.), 25. Emphasis is mine.

child of man; as fills us “with bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering:” It is such a love of God as teaches us to be blameless in all manner of conversation; as enables us to present our souls and bodies, all we are and all we have, all our thoughts, words, and actions, a continual sacrifice to God, acceptable through Christ Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy that John Wesley elaborated, in his sermon “The New Birth,” that the image of God consists of natural image (endowment of understanding, freedom of will, and various affections), political image (having dominion over the fishes of the sea and over the earth), and “chiefly” moral image (righteousness and true holiness).<sup>54</sup> After the Fall of humanity, the natural image was greatly marred but not utterly obliterated (the understanding was often in error, the will was overrun with devilish passion and idolatrous affections); the political image was not lost too but became dysfunctional (throwing the whole creation connected with mankind into disorder, misery, death); the moral image nevertheless was totally lost (full of sin, full of guilt and tormenting fears).<sup>55</sup>

So understood, for John Wesley, restoration of the *imago Dei* by the Triune God’s grace-filled ordering of salvation comprises, first, “resurrection” of the lost moral image through the blood of Christ and works of the Holy Spirit, and consequently, the renewal and reestablishment of the marred natural and political images so that they may function rightly in accordance with righteousness and true holiness.<sup>56</sup> The outcome is none other than a holistic *shalom* and reconciliation. Theodore R. Weber put it well:

[T]he natural and political images depend on the moral image for their proper functioning, the moral image – as a reflection of God – works only in and through the natural and political images. Therefore the recovery of *wholeness* is an integrating project involving all three images and their reciprocal relationships.<sup>57</sup>

As such, Weber concludes, “go on to Christian perfection” is but a call to political involvement – “to participation in the common human responsibility for the care of creation, that is, to the imaging of God in our shared, interactive, public existence.”<sup>58</sup> No wonder, Randy L. Maddox remarks that John Wesley has an “eschatological vision of spreading the Reign of God in individual lives, social structures, and creation at large.”<sup>59</sup>

The forgoing analysis demonstrates that Wesleyan theology of grace, that is, graces of the Three-One God, is precisely the “saltiness” which had made, and will continue to make, the Methodists high-quality salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). As John Wesley himself proclaimed in “Upon our Lord’s sermon on the mount (Discourse IV)”: “The beauty of holiness, of that *inward* man of the heart which is

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., 6:71-72.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:66;

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 51-56, 59-64; Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethnics* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 392-395.

<sup>56</sup> My understanding of God’s grace-filled ordering of salvation has profited much from reading the books of Kenneth J. Collins and Theodore R. Weber.

<sup>57</sup> Theodore R. Weber, *op. cit.*, 414. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>59</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 243.

renewed after the image of God, cannot but strike *every eye* which God hath opened.”<sup>60</sup> John further stressed,

“Ye” (Christians, ye that are lowly, serious and meek; ye that hunger after righteousness, that love God and man, that do good to all, and therefore suffer evil; ye) “are the salt of the earth:” It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is *in you*, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, *to all* those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever *grace* you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper, and word, and work of yours, may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4. “Ye are the salt of Malaysia”---Methodists as the channel of *Muhibbah*:

In his hymn “A charge to keep I have” (1762), Charles Wesley challenges all the Methodists to determine: “To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill, O may it all my powers engage, to do my Master’s will.”<sup>62</sup>

The Methodist Church in Malaysia has a charge to keep, that is, to rise as the salt of *muhibbah* in the nation. In light of the Church’s Wesleyan tradition of strong belief in God’s abundant grace which would bring along restoration of the image of God and hence realization of true holiness and holistic *shalom*, the local Wesleyan communities apparently may season the country as salt of pure love and mercy (*kasih sayang*), truth (*kebenaran*), and justice (*keadilan*), for John Wesley underscores in his sermon “The New Birth” that: “man at his creation was full of love...full of justice, mercy, and truth.”<sup>63</sup>

First, the Methodist Church, through its 400 churches and 634 preaching points may be the salt of pure love and mercy in this land. Although Malaysia has no devastating earthquake, widespread famine, severe war or tsunami, thousands of households and millions of lives here are facing the crisis of “middle-income trap,” issues of distribution and poverty, hurts and depression due to either ethnic tension or religious conflicts or national policies, affliction related to sickness or debts, and distressing days because of personal as well as corporate sins that take place in and around them. As Bishop Hwa Yung rightly observes,

The media regularly reports of neglected parents, homeless old folks, children battered or even chained like dogs by thoughtless parents or relatives, deserted single mothers and children, and the like. These are rarely the product of criminal activity. Rather they are generally the result of people who just *don’t care*, even when the sufferings are their own children, spouses or parents.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op. cit., 5:294. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5:299. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>62</sup> G. Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (Reprinted, London: Wesley-Methodist Conference Office, 1870), 9:60.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op. cit. 6:66.

<sup>64</sup> Hwa Yung, “Building Compassionate Communities,” op. cit., 5. Emphasis is mine.

Malaysia is in need of *agape* and charity, kindness and generosity. The Methodists, therefore, having experienced God's favour and grace-upon-grace, can be the channel of *muhibbah* in this nation, especially by being Christlike compassionate friends of all and building caring communities with wise-planned outreach ministries. Following the instructions of John Wesley stressed in his General Rules – by avoiding evil of every kind on the one hand, and doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men on the other hand<sup>65</sup> – the Methodists in Malaysia may become instrument of the Father who loves unconditionally,<sup>66</sup> of the Son who heals holistically,<sup>67</sup> and of the Holy Spirit who comforts as well as counsels profoundly.<sup>68</sup> As such, various needy groups in the society shall encounter God of holy love and unfailing mercy through the Wesleyans, because “The loving knowledge of God, producing uniform, uninterrupted holiness and happiness, shall cover the earth, *shall fill every soul of man.*”<sup>69</sup>

Second, the Methodist Church in Malaysia may season the country as the salt of truth. In view of the state's declining score in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index and arguing about what proportion of the economy the *bumiputera* and the Chinese own respectively, Malaysia is apparently struggling much with truthfulness. Just note one more example.

On 7 January 2013, the President of Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) Abdul Hadi Awang stated that Islam did not prohibit people of other faiths from using the word “Allah.”<sup>70</sup> He even cited Quranic verses like Surah Luqman 31:25-26 and Surah Az-Zumar 39:38 to verify his stance. However, seven days later, the Ulama Syura Council (USC) of PAS released a statement that maintained: “translating ‘God’ or ‘Lord’ from any non-Muslim religious books into the word Allah is forbidden because it is wrong in meaning and use.”<sup>71</sup> Ng Kam Weng's comments were noteworthy:

[I]t would be inappropriate to rely on public pronouncements, fatwas and press statements to help believers from both sides [Muslims and Christians] to arrive at *mutual understanding*. Indeed, the brevity and generality of such pronouncements means they are easily misunderstood...Leaders from the

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<sup>65</sup> Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 70-73.

<sup>66</sup> 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?” (TNIV)

<sup>67</sup> Isaiah 53:5-6: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (TNIV)

<sup>68</sup> John 14:16: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” (TNIV)

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op. cit., 6:279. Emphasis is mine. John Wesley said so in his sermon “The general spread of the Gospel” (1783).

<sup>70</sup> Martin Carvaho, “PAS and allies: Anyone can use ‘Allah’, just don't misuse word,” *The Star*, 9 January 2013 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/01/09/PAS-and-allies-Anyone-can-use-Allah-just-dont-misuse-word.aspx>; Internet.

<sup>71</sup> “Resolving the Allah controversy: Going beyond polemics – Ng Kam Weng,” *The Malaysian Insider*, 17 January 2013 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/resolving-the-allah-controversy-going-beyond-polemics-ng-kam-weng>; Internet. Rahmat Khairulrijal, “Muslim NGOs protest against DAP, Pakatan allies over ‘Kalimah Allah’ issue,” *New Straits Times*, 5 April 2013 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.nst.com.my/latest/muslim-ngos-protest-against-dap-pakatan-allies-over-kalimah-allah-issue-1.248991>; Internet.

Malaysian church would readily welcome dialogue with Muslim leaders. Hopefully such dialogue would restore good will and *harmony* to our beloved nation.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, truthfulness will pave the way for *muhibbah*. No wonder, Bishop Hwa Yung once earnestly urged the church to “challenge the nation to take seriously the importance of truth telling...and gets our facts right and clear.”<sup>73</sup> This was because many difficult and painful issues had been labeled sensitive or seditious and hence “swept under the carpet in polite conversation and in public discourse.”<sup>74</sup>

The Wesleyan communities in Malaysia, with their *moral* image of truth restored by the graces of God, can surely become “children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...appear as lights in the world.”<sup>75</sup> By applying self-criticism candidly, accountability with fellow Christians in small groups conscientiously, anti-corruption wholeheartedly, addressing civil issues constructively through public space (print, broadcast, internet), acting with integrity at home as well as in workplace and virtual space, admitting guilt honestly, asking for forgiveness and initiating dialogue or reconciliation genuinely,<sup>76</sup> the Wesleyans would become salt of *muhibbah* in their social circle, no matter how small, then “spreading from one to another, and so gradually making its way into the world.”<sup>77</sup>

Third, the Methodist Church in Malaysia may season the country as the salt of justice. As described above, the principles of secularism of the country which underpin the multi-cultural social character of Malaysia are being corroded, as scholars point out, “by a combination of Malay nationalism and new, and in the Malaysian context unprecedentedly ambitious, claims of Islamic supremacy.”<sup>78</sup> Many non-Malays have deepening disquiet with such situation and it jeopardizes the citizens’ harmony. Two specific cases may capture this clearly.

First, in December 2005, a Malaysian Indian born man and the Mount Everest climber named Maniam Moorthy was buried as a Muslim by the Islamic Religious Affairs Council after the Syariah High Court made an order that Moorthy had embraced Islam a year before. The order was based on some documents which had not been sighted by Moorthy’s wife because she, as a Hindu, was not named as a party to the suit in the Syariah Court. As Moorthy’s wife filed the above case in the Kuala Lumpur High Court asking for declaratory and injunctive relief related to her

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Emphasis is mine. Ng Kam Weng had written a good article that put forward the same principles in 1990s entitled “Religious Freedom: A prerequisite for national harmony.” See: Ng Kam Weng, ed., *Modernity in Malaysia*” *Christian perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 75-84.

<sup>73</sup> Hwa Yung, “Christians and Nation-Building: Reconciliation,” op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Just another example, in 2012, a paper entitled “Locating ‘Mixed’ Identities in a Racialized Society” had pointed out the necessity for Malaysia to think seriously about “racialization of Malaysian citizens.” That is, “being Malaysian entails first an affiliation to an officialised ethnic identity through the narrative of multiculturalism.” See: Julian Hopkins and Julian C. H. Lee, eds., *Thinking Through Malaysia: Culture and identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2012), 11-30.

<sup>75</sup> Philippians 2:15 (NASB).

<sup>76</sup> I owe these insights to Bishop Hwa Yung’s articles in *Pelita: The Methodist Church Newsletter* and books such as: Joshua Woo and Tan Soo Inn, ed., *The Bible and the Ballot: Reflections on Christian Political Engagement in Malaysia Today* (Singapore: Graceworks, 2011); Goh Keat Peng, *Readings in Malaysian Church and Mission* (Petaling Jaya: Pustaka SUFES, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op. cit., 5:42. John Wesley said so in his sermon “Scriptural Christianity.”

<sup>78</sup> Norani Othman, Mavis C. Puthuchery, Clive S. Kessler, op. cit., 22. For a detailed discussion of Islamic revival in Malaysia starting from early 1970s, see: Bruce Gale, ed., *Readings in Malaysian Politics* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1987), 75-188.

claim that Moorthy professed Hinduism as his religion and that his body should be released to her to be cremated in accordance with Hindu rites, the High Court finally dismissed her suit stating that the civil High Court had no jurisdiction to review, nullify or ignore the order of the Syariah Court.<sup>79</sup> The erosion of the civil courts' constitutional power was plain.<sup>80</sup>

Second, in September 2001, the nation's Prime Minister then Dr. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed announced in his address at *Gerakan's* 30th national conference:

UMNO wishes to state loudly that Malaysia is an *Islamic country*...based on the opinion of ulamaks who had clarified what constituted as Islamic country. If Malaysia is not an Islamic country because it does not implement the hudud, then there are no Islamic countries in the world. If UMNO says that Malaysia is an Islamic country, it is because in an Islamic country non-Muslims have specific rights. This is in line with the teachings of Islam.<sup>81</sup>

Last year, Dr. Malik Munip, who taught history at the University of Malaya, still pointedly remarked that, "In Malaysia, religion [Islam] is not separated from the state but entrenched, empowered, enforced, expressed and elevated." Therefore, he maintained: "Malaysia disqualifies from being a secular state."<sup>82</sup>

Fortunately, the Malaysian Bar published an explicit and well-researched article that concluded:

[E]veryone concerned from the British, the Alliance Party, the Malay Rulers and the majority in the Reid Commission and, in particular, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the chief architect of Merdeka, was at pains to expressly declare that Malaya is a *secular state*...Dr. Mahathir's statement on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2001 was not based on the Federal Constitution or the law; his statement was made solely for political purposes...In the words of Article 3, Islam is the religion of the Federation, which means an altogether different thing; and having regard to the delicate and sensitive nature of this issue in plural Malaysia, one hopes that it will not be resurrected, that the social contract agreed to in 1957 and

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<sup>79</sup> National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia, "Press statements and articles: Courts and contested conversion," 30 December 2005 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=675>; Internet.

<sup>80</sup> There was also incident wherein a person converting into Islam can annul their civil marriage, automatically gain custody of the children and convert them to Islam without the consent of the non-Muslim partner as in the case of Subashini in 2006 whose husband embraced Islam and converted their eldest son who was four years old at that time. Conversion to Islam is therefore used as a drastic measure by husbands who are afraid that the civil courts would give custody of their children to their wives in the event of a divorce. See such discussion in an article written by Professor of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia: Hew Cheng Sim, "Praying together, staying together: Islamisation and Inter-ethnic Marriages in Sarawak, Malaysia," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 36 (Autumn 2010). n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Tommy Thomas, "Is Malaysia an Islamic State?" *The Malaysian Bar*, 17 November 2005 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/constitutional\\_law/is\\_malaysia\\_an\\_islamic\\_state\\_.html](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/constitutional_law/is_malaysia_an_islamic_state_.html); Internet.

<sup>82</sup> Malik Munip, "Is Malaysia an Islamic or secular state?" *New Straits Times*, 16 November 2012 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from [Is Malaysia an Islamic or secular state? - Columnist - New Straits Times http://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnist/is-malaysia-an-islamic-or-secular-state-1.171584#ixzz2YGBAoQps](http://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnist/is-malaysia-an-islamic-or-secular-state-1.171584#ixzz2YGBAoQps); Internet.



reaffirmed in 1963 would continue to operate for generations to come, and Dr. Mahathir's 2001 statement consigned to historical oblivion.<sup>83</sup>

Malaysia is in need of justice, which is indispensable for *muhibbah*. The Wesleyans in the country, with its moral *and* political image restored by the Creator, can be responsible salt – voice as well as actor – of lawfulness and equity in this nation. John Wesley's political thoughts and ethics – constitutional separation and balance of powers, subordination of power and office to law, the guarantee of rights and liberties, and the vocation of peacemaking<sup>84</sup> – are precious principles for the Methodist Church in Malaysia.

The passion of the Wesleyan communities, of course, is not to *Christianize* the state as some had accused,<sup>85</sup> nor about “putting God into politics,” but rather, to attain “My [God's] justice will become a *light* to the nations” (Isaiah 51:4): “to see the fruits of the imaging of God in political vocation: tendencies toward the universalizing of political responsibility, more sensitive care of the environment and less exploitation, increased reliance on consent and less on force in the uses of power, the progress of justice over injustice, the protection and enhancement of rights and liberties, the feeding of the hungry and the clothing of the naked, the restraint of irresponsible political and economic power, reliable protection for the weak and vulnerable, small and large victories for liberation from the various forms of oppression, and the mutuality of peace over the hard self-interest of war.”<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion:

Malaysia is truly beautiful and ethnically, culturally rich. Nevertheless, the Malay proverb rightly states: “*Bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh*” (solidarity makes us strong, split up makes us fall). Religious, racial, moral, political, and economic issues that have resulted in tensions, disputes, and hostility among Malaysians, and hence crises for the nation, should not be overlooked. They must be handled timely, openly, and reasonably, in the spirits of love and mercy, truth and justice. Otherwise, as Professor Hew Cheng Sim said, “Malaysia's tagline of ‘Unity in Diversity’ is fragile at best.”

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<sup>83</sup> Tommy Thomas, op. cit. What is the significance of recognizing Islam as “the religion of the Federation” then? According to a monograph entitled “*The Constitution of Malaysia, Its Development 1957 – 1977*” which was published on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Merdeka* (Independence) Constitution, one of the papers – “The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia” by Professor Ahmad Ibrahim, one of the nation's foremost Islamic law scholars – pointed out that: “...it was explained by the Alliance Party to the Malay Rulers that having a state religion was not intended to interfere with the position of the Rulers as Head of Islam in their own states and that the intention in making Islam the official religion of the Federation was *primarily for ceremonial purposes*, for instance to enable prayers to be offered in the Islamic way on official occasions such as the installation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong [king], Merdeka Day and similar occasions. This explanation was accepted by the Rulers and accordingly Article 3 enacts that Islam is the religion of the Federation.” Emphasis is mine.

<sup>84</sup> Theodore R. Weber, op. cit., 409, 416.

<sup>85</sup> Iskandar Dzulkarnain, “Beware! A Christian conspiracy. Really?” *Free Malaysia Today*, 27 October 2012 (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2012/10/27/beware-a-christian-conspiracy/>; Internet.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 419.

The Methodist Church in Malaysia, with strong conviction of Wesleyan theology of grace and deep experiences of divine grace-upon-grace, can be the salt of *muhibbah* in the country. “God works,” therefore the Methodists whose image of God are truly restored and renewed daily by divine goodness *can* work – become “social, open, active Christians”<sup>87</sup> that effectively relate to people in their communities and become “means of grace” in their midst, bringing along happiness and holiness. Now, the key concern, as observed by John Wesley in his Sermon “The More Excellent Way,” is whether the Wesleyan communities would regard this as their priority: “to walk therein, to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way, to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness, – after the *entire* image of God.”<sup>88</sup>

“God works, therefore, we must work.”<sup>89</sup> May Malaysia see the wonderful and dynamic correlation between Methodism and *muhibbah* in the holy graces of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op. cit., 5:303.

<sup>88</sup> John Wesley, “Sermon 89: The More Excellent Way” (accessed 6 July 2013); available from <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-89-The-More-Excellent-Way>; Internet. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Jackson, ed., op.cit., 6:511. John Wesley’s saying “God works; therefore you *can* work...God works, therefore we *must* work” can be seen in his Sermon “Working Out Our Own Salvation.”