

**CONTEMPORARY
ISSUES ON**

*Malaysian
Religions*

TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN PUTRA
TAN SRI DR. TAN CHEE KHOON
DR. CHANDRA MUZAFFAR
LIM KIT SIANG



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DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda
Almutawakkil Alallah Sultan Iskandar Johor,
Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Malaysia

FOREWORD

I am pleased to learn that a Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism has been formed to represent the common interests of the respective religions in the country and that the proceedings of the seminar held on 7th April 1984 is to be published.

I note that this Council was formally launched in Kuala Lumpur on 7th April, 1984 by Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

I take this opportunity to assure my non-Muslim subjects that they will not be discriminated against in any way, in the practice of their religion. I expect every Malaysian to learn to live in harmony and respect each other's custom and religion. Let every Malaysian act responsibly and be a true practitioner of his own particular religion so that there will be peace and goodwill.

Lastly, I am sure the Consultative Council will make a positive contribution towards this end.



DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda
Almutawakkil Alallah Sultan Iskandar Johor,
Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Malaysia

Kita berasa sukacita mengetahui bahawa satu Majlis Perundingan Agama Buddha, Kristian, Hindu dan Sikh telah ditubuhkan bagi mewakili kepentingan bersama agama masing-masing di negara ini dan laporan seminar yang telah diadakan pada 7hb April 1984 akan diterbitkan.

Kita perhatikan bahawa Majlis yang tersebut telah pun dilancarkan dengan resminya di Kuala Lumpur pada 7hb April 1984 oleh Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

Kita mengambil kesempatan ini untuk meyakinkan semua rakyat yang bukan beragama Islam bahawa mereka tidak akan dianiayai dan dizalimi dalam apa jua bentuk tatkala mereka mengamalkan agama masing-masing. Kita berharap setiap rakyat sedia memahami dan mempelajari untuk hidup dengan aman serta saling hormat menghormati antara satu sama lain dan memelihara adat dan agama masing-masing supaya setiap rakyat di negara ini bertanggungjawab dan menjadi seorang penganut agama yang baik dan dapat mewujudkan keamanan dan muhibbah.

Pada akhirnya, kita percaya Majlis Perundingan yang tersebut akan memberikan sumbangan positif terhadap matlamat ini.



馬來西亞最高元首
柔佛蘇丹依斯干達

朕欣悉一個馬來西亞佛教，基督教，興都教，錫克教諮詢協會經已成立，以便代表各有關宗教間的共同利益。一九八四年四月七日該會曾舉辦一項研討會，如今將研討會之實錄刊印流傳。

又悉國父東姑亞都拉曼於一九八四年四月七日在吉隆坡為此協會主持開幕大典。

順此機緣，朕特為我非回教徒臣民保證，彼等可奉行各自之宗教而不受任何方面之歧視。朕期望每位馬來西亞公民知曉和平共處，並互相尊重各人之傳統習俗與宗教。讓每位馬來西亞公民的所作所為都富責任感，並且做一個自己教內的真正實踐者，這樣才能獲得真正的和平與親善。

最後朕深信馬來西亞佛教，基督教，興都教，錫克教諮詢協會必能朝向這理想，作出積極的貢獻。



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Our heartfelt thanks go to Duli Yang Maha Mulia Seri Paduka Baginda Sultan Iskandar Johor Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Malaysia for writing the foreword and YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj for officially declaring the seminar open. A special word of thanks must also go to Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon and all the political leaders and scholars for graciously allowing us to reproduce their papers which were delivered at the Inter-Religious Seminar, to form this book.

We are also grateful to Dr Ian Chia, Chairman of the Organising Committee for the seminar and staff of Catholic Research Centre for so tirelessly working to make the seminar a reality and all those who have contributed to the seminar;

Speakers

YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj
Archbishop Tan Sri D. Vendargon D.D.
YB Lim Kit Siang
YB Dato K. Pathmanathan
YB Dato Amar Stephen Yong Kuet Tze
Dr. Chandra Muzaffar
Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf

Tuan Haji Fadlullah Wilmot
Dr. Steven Leong
Rev. Hwa Yung
Mr. V. Harcharan Singh
Mr. Manjit Singh
Rev. Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing, S.J.

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Datin Paduka Rosemary Chong
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Dr. John Augustin
Encik Mohd Khir Johari
Ms P.G. Lim
Dr. S.M. Ponniah
Mr. Tan Teik Beng
Mr. Vijaya Samarawickarama
Mr K. Loganathan

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Members : Mr. Harbhajan Singh Gill
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Mr. Ng Hong Pau
Mr. M. Subramanian
Ms Theresa Ee
Rev. Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing, S.J.
Ms Agatha Bong

Finally, the committee would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr Bruce Gale, who helped prepare the manuscript for publication.

Rev. Seet Kim Beng
Vice-President of MCCBCHS

Preface

Our "Bapa Malaysia" had foresight and wisdom in establishing this country as a nation to make it a democratic society and, if I am not mistaken, a secular state as well. This is crucial as our society is multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious. It is a fact that cannot be ignored. It must be taken into account seriously by our leaders if we really want lasting peace and progress in this country.

We express, to our Government, our full support in its effort to uphold the wisdom of our "Bapa Malaysia" by keeping Malaysia a democratic country and a secular state so that greater unity may come about among people of our different races, cultures and religions. It is for this purpose of helping to promote greater religious harmony that the *Majlis Perundingan Malaysia Ugama Buddha, Kristian, Hindu dan Sikh* was formed.

This *Majlis Perundingan* was approved by the Registrar of Societies on August 6, 1983. Before this, there was a lot of work done to get the heads of the four religions together to agree on setting up this Council. The credit goes to none other than our beloved, the late Dr Teoh Jin-Inn, the former

Chairman of the consultative body of the Unity Board. It is, in fact, because of his untiring efforts that we were able to gather for the Seminar. We would like to express to his wife, Mrs Irene Teoh and her children our deep appreciation.

The theme of the Seminar was 'Common Religious Values for Nation Building.' Hopefully through this book, readers will be convinced that, although we come from different religious traditions, we have values common to all peoples. They are not only Christian or Hindu or Buddhist or Sikh or Islamic values. They are universal values and should be called as such. And because they are universal, they can be employed by all to form the future generation of all young Malaysians, strong and resilient, dynamic and moral, broadminded and understanding — a **MUST** in such a multi-faceted society. This does not mean that we have to sweep difficulties and differences among us under the carpet.

Truth must be faced squarely if we want real and lasting peace. But we can, in spite of the problems, work together for the good of all Malaysians. To achieve our dream of a harmonious and strong nation, we must be willing to stand for truth, justice and religious freedom. Besides our "Bapa Malaysia", we have also Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoo, who has been speaking out without fear or favour what he sees as the truth. To these two great men and others who dare fight for truth, justice and religious freedom so that there

may be greater unity amongst our people for real progress, we offer our special gratitude.

At this point of time when certain forces in our society are tending to polarize people of different faiths and races, when injustice is not uncommon, when freedom is being whittled down, we must rally round men who have the courage to take a stand for truth, justice, freedom and peace or harmony. It is hoped that through this book, our voice will be heard by our Government and by all people of Malaysia. To our Government and our people, we offer our assistance, in whatever way we can, to build a society that is just, free, strong, progressive and peaceful.

Tan Sri D. Vendargon
President of the MCCBCHS

INTRODUCTION

Paul Tan Chee Ing And Theresa Ee

In 1957, the nine Malay states and the two colonies of Penang and Malacca obtained independence from the British to form the Federation of Malaya. Then, in 1963, the colonies of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak joined this Federation which then became the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore left the Federation two years later. Malaysia is now composed of 13 states. The independent government was the ruling Alliance Party which consisted of a coalition of the United Malays National Organisation, the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Malaysian Indian Congress. Later the National Front was formed, incorporating other component parties.

According to the Government census report, an ethnic group is defined as persons bound together by a common language, dialect, religion and custom. In the 1980 census, the latest available, the population of Malaysia totalled 13,745,200. Peninsular Malaysia had 11,426,000, Sabah 1,011,000, and Sarawak 1,307,600. In Peninsular Malaysia, Malays numbered 6,315,600, Chinese 3,865,400, Indians 1,171,100 and others 74,500. Sabah's population comprised, Pribumis 838,100, Chinese 164,000, Indians 5,600 and others 3,300.

The term 'Pribumi' includes groups such as the Kadazans, Muruts, Kwijaus, Bajaus, as well as Malays, Indonesians, and Filipinos. Sarawak has a different composition — Malays 257,800, Melanau 75,100, Ibans 396,300, Bidayus 107,500, other indigenous groups 69,100, Chinese 385,200 and others 16,600. A veritable hotch-potch of languages, religions, cultures and traditions.

In the Malayan Federal Constitution of 1957, Islam is recognised as the official religion in a secular state. Included also are provisions for the freedom to practise other religions and their propagation. This is subject, however, to state law which may control or restrict the propagation of other religions among persons professing the religion of Islam. The Malay language, which forms the basis of Bahasa Malaysia, is also declared the official language in the Constitution with a special provision for the uplift and betterment of the Malay race. Thus the stage was set for the Government to coerce and create national consciousness and unity.

The three major ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia, Malays, Chinese and Indians, have had little social interaction with one another. There must be many reasons for this. Some of these reasons are historical. During the colonial period, indentured labourers were imported. Chinese worked in the mines and Indian labourers worked in rubber estates. The Malays were largely fishermen or *padi* growers living in rural communities practising Islam brought to them by the Arabs, although

their own special brand of Islam was tainted by their cultural traditions. For example, the Malay fishermen's habit of making offerings to propitiate the spirits of the sea. The Chinese brought their own religion, Buddhism/Taoism and the Indians, Hinduism. Christianity came to South-East Asia with the Portuguese in 1511. During the colonial days, Christian missionaries came and started a few mission schools. English was the medium of instruction and the colonial masters gratefully and quickly absorbed these English-educated youths into their civil service administration to help them run the country. Christianity, the religion of the colonial masters, was adopted by some.

By and large Islam, associated with the Malays who were mainly living "out there" in and around the jungle, was ignored. There was even a certain amount of suspicion in the attitude of non-Malays towards Islam. For over a century the three main races lived together in Malaysia and yet each race was equally ignorant or biased in its views of the others. For example, a common image of the Chinese is that they are materialistic; they concentrate all their efforts on worldly success and self-advancement and they immerse themselves in trade and business activities, keeping well away from public service or working in salaried jobs. And yet Chinese philosophy has never advocated that material gain and success were exclusively desirable. In fact, Buddhism teaches a detachment from all desires. According to the Chinese, a businessman is only a little

better than a soldier, who is at the bottom of the social scale. There are many other misconceptions. A Muslim believes that Buddhism has several deities whereas Buddhism is a way of life which enables a follower to attain *nirvana*.

Since the formation of Malaysia in 1965, five general elections have been held — in 1964, 1969, 1974, 1978 and 1982. Following the May 1969 elections, a racial riot broke out. Kuala Lumpur was ablaze. The army was brought in. Chaos reigned as Chinese and Malays fought each other with the pent-up distrust and ignorance which had culminated in open hostility. The rioting purportedly began after the opposition party held a victory parade. The Government established a National Operations Council to administer the country. In 1971 Parliament recommenced and constitutional amendments were passed to restrain public discussion of issues that would be inimical to racial harmony. The Alliance Party initiated action to form the National Front. In 1974, the National Front captured 135 parliamentary seats out of 154. However, communalism became more entrenched. The people did not easily forget the loss of friends and relatives in the riots. Emotions ran high and mistrust between the races became more firmly established. After a few years, an uneasy truce developed.

In 1966 the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970) was launched to combat socio-economic problems which were stated by the Government as (1) heavy dependance on two export products,

rubber and tin; (2) a high rate of population increase which posed the problem of finding productive employment for each year's entrants into the labour force; (3) an uneven distribution of income especially between rural and town dwellers and among various social groups; and (4) a relatively low level of human resource development which resulted in a shortage of many skills which were needed to carry out development. By 1971, after the May 13, 1969 race riots, the Government felt that while the First Malaysia Plan did serve to strengthen considerably the economy of the country, it did not deal adequately with the main social and economic imbalances characterising Malaysian society. It was felt that the needs of the poor and imbalances among racial groups would lead to growth without equity. Thus the New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched on 12th July 1971. Its main aim was "to promote national unity through the two-pronged objectives of eradicating poverty irrespective of race and of restructuring society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function." The next Five-Year Plan was 1971-1975. Now we are in the Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1981-1985.

Then came religious revivalism which seemed to have spread round the world, including Malaysia. The revival of Islam during the last decade has finally made an imprint here in Malaysia. Fanaticism, especially of the Iranian genre, took root. Model Islamic villages known as *Darul Arqam* (house of Arqam, who was a friend of the

Prophet Muhammad) now exist in several states. The occupants of these villages dress in green or white tunics and wear turbans. They hang pictures of Khomeini in their homes and generally have as little contact as possible with non-Malays. There are other Islamic groups like *ABIM* and *Jamaat Tabligh* whose common aim is to promote Islamic revival in Malaysia.

Where the Christians are concerned, there are Christian fanatical groups who hold strongly that only Christians can be saved. They try to preach their brand of Christianity to non-Muslims and to Muslims. In addition to this problem, there are also some Chinese religious groups, more Taoist than Buddhist, proselytizing.

And then in 1978, some Hindu Temples were desecrated by Muslim fanatics. During the clash a few people were killed. Religious leaders had the unenviable task of calming their followers. Added to this, the Hindus also resented proselytizing by some Christian groups who made use of films and slides to deride Hinduism. Another issue which spread mistrust and fear was the language issue. The Chinese and Indians felt that vernacular schools ought to be allowed to co-exist. But as early as 1963, Bahasa Malaysia was introduced in schools to replace English. The complete switch over came last year in 1983.

No one in his right mind would object to the noble two-pronged objectives of the New Economic Policy. What the non-Malays see as unjust and undesirable is the way the policy is implemented.

Malays were said to be the most oppressed race in Malaysia as the majority of the rural poor are Malays. A major resentment is the recruitment policy of government servants. For every five persons recruited, four are Malays. Today the majority of government servants in the administration are Malays and people in the top posts are also generally Malays. The Federal Constitution of Malaya states that only a Malay can become the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Many talented non-Malays left the Government service as hopes of promotion became dimmer. For some time non-Malays were already whispering their discontent, as their rights were being whittled away, slowly but surely. They feared and suspected that the Government policy was Islamization. However, the Internal Security Act which can be used to hold citizens indefinitely without trial, made open dissent impracticable.

The Act poses a threat to those who object publicly. Even when the Prime Minister in 1982 proposed setting up a consultative body comprising government officers, intellectuals and Islamic scholars to study how Islamic principles could form the basis for Malaysia's development programme, no one spoke up. And today prominent Malay leaders are openly advocating Islamization. In May 1984, for example, an Islamic Civilization Seminar was held in Kuala Lumpur and Islamic scholars from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world came to speak of the glory of Islam. The few non-Malays who were invited to sit on the panel were sadly inadequate, being un-

tutored in their own religions.

Everywhere mosques and *suraus* are being built by the Government to provide places of worship for the Muslims. However, Government bureaucrats make it difficult for non-Muslims to build their temples and churches.

The *Alkitab*, the Indonesian translation of the Bible, was banned because it contains certain Arabic terms like *Allah* and *imam*, which the Muslims feel would create confusion among persons professing the religion of Islam. They also feel that it is a subtle method employed by Christians, to proselytize Muslims. Some Christians, especially the Pribumis in Sabah and Sarawak, can only read Bahasa Malaysia, which is very close to the Indonesian language. Christians protested on this ground. Their leaders met the Deputy Prime Minister who is also the Home Minister. The ban was partially lifted. Now only Christians and churches are allowed to possess the books. Recently, copies of the *Alkitab* and *Perjanjian Bahru*, the New Testament translated in Malaysia but printed in Singapore, were confiscated. Notice was served that they would be destroyed. The Christian representatives appealed to the Deputy Minister in the Home Affairs and the books were finally released.

Burial grounds are also not provided in certain states for non-Muslims to bury their dead. In the area of education, Heads of schools were advised to remove crucifixes from their classrooms. Islam is taught during school hours to Muslim children

but other religions are not allowed to be taught by their school teachers. The Ministry of Education has worked out the syllabus for teaching moral education to non-Muslim pupils. 80% of the present teachers in the Teachers' Training Colleges are Muslims which means that many non-Muslim students will be taught moral education by Muslim teachers. Only Islamic Civilization is taught to all teachers so that they will understand Muslim students. "How about teaching other religions' civilization also so that Muslim teachers will understand non-Muslim pupils?", the non-Muslims complain. And so the list goes on.

On August 6, 1983, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism was formed. The aims of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism were:

- o To promote understanding, mutual respect and cooperation between people of different religions,
- o To study and resolve problems affecting all inter-religious relationships,
- o To make representations to the Government, when necessary, regarding religious matters.

Although dialogue was not explicitly mentioned in the aims of the body, it is one of the methods used to achieve these aims. Dialogue implies a conversation on a common subject bet-

ween two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow. (Leonard Swidler, *Ground Rules for Inter-religious Dialogue*).

It is with this in view, of promoting harmony between peoples of different faiths through dialogue, that the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism organised a one-day seminar, on 7th April, 1984, on 'Common Religious Values for Nation Building'.

It was hoped that the Seminar would highlight common areas where people of different faiths and races could work together to build a strong united nation. Although many common values were brought out, as it happened, more concentration was given to airing grievances, fears and frustrations. This can be seen especially in the questions posed. This is understandable in the light of our historical background. Prejudices, ignorance of each other's religion, frustration, a sense of injustice and bigotry – all these make true dialogue an arduous task. Nevertheless, we have taken the first step and we hope to continue courageously pursuing dialogue for the good of our nation.

In dialogue, each individual will have to be aware of the issues and sensitivities that exist among all Malaysians, a polyglot of races, cultures, religions and languages. The papers delivered at the Seminar and the questions and answers

that ensued, offer a good start to awaken all to the enormous obstacles in the way of building a truly united Malaysia. Even among believers of the same faith, there are differences of interpretation. Can we not learn as a first principle that unity is not uniformity but that the heart of unity lies in mutual respect of differences (pluralism) working together, for the common good?

In such a multi-faceted society like Malaysia, uniformity can only be imposed by a totalitarian government; and yet in the end, true unity cannot be achieved by such a draconian action. History is our best teacher in this. As has been brought out by a number of speakers in the Seminar, "deep-seated differences" should not be swept under the carpet. Nor should we blow them up. Rather, it was generally agreed that we should zero in on the common areas where we could work together for the good of all. This does not mean that religious leaders should not voice their views clearly to the Government when religious rights are being violated. Neither does it demand that claims be made without considering the sensitivities of all parties concerned.

A balanced and mature approach to religious sensitivities is vital to harmony in Malaysia's multi-religious society. Religious polarization is to be avoided at all cost. Otherwise we will "only invite trouble." Religious conflict is far more explosive than either class or ethnic clashes because religion touches the core meaning of human existence.

ONE

**ROLE OF RELIGION
IN
NATION BUILDING**

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj

The aim of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism is to hold meaningful dialogue among people of all religions. This is a most commendable task which will create mutual respect and understanding among people of different religions and will give them the opportunity to discuss problems affecting not only religion but also their very lives. Such an organization will help to create good relations among people of all religions in a country with a mixed population and a variety of religions.

It is the duty of each and everyone of us, living in this country, to ensure peace for all time. What is happening here today among the politicians in whose hands the well-being of the country is entrusted is rather worrying. The political crisis in the ruling Party, the Barisan Nasional, is causing serious concern to good citizens. There have been clashes among Party men and leaders, the like of which we have never experienced before. At Party meetings many things have happened that have shocked the people. There have been fisticuffs, stabbings and shootings. The people at large can only watch without having any say in the matter, but deep in their hearts they realize that this trouble portends danger for the future of the country.

Something must be done to stop all these goings-on and bring sanity to our politicians who will be leaders of this country. We depend on them, and if they continue to behave in this man-

ner what hope is there for us? Men of religion must feel very concerned about all this. The Seminar on 'Common Religious Values For Nation Building' gave them the opportunity to discuss the situation from human and religious angles, and they did this with their hearts in it. It is the prayer of everybody in this country that there shall be trustworthiness and sincerity among the politicians entrusted with the care and well-being of our country. They must play the role expected of them by the people, honestly and conscientiously.

I have lived a very full life and this has been my proud boast. For 20 years I was a Government servant in Kedah doing all kinds of jobs – District Officer and Magistrate – and in Kuala Lumpur, a Deputy Public Prosecutor and President of the Sessions Court. Then I moved to politics and fought successfully for the independence of Malaya – a country which had been the subject of foreign rule for all the years of its existence. It was so divided with people of different races, different religions, different languages and cultures that it seemed impossible to see how best to ensure racial and religious harmony in such a mixed society. But past records were encouraging because we never had any racial or religious conflict in this country. The indigenous Malays were swamped, and the British did nothing to close the gaps among the people. They divided the country into three parts – The Unfederated Malay States, The Federated Malay States and The Colonies of Singapore, Penang and Malacca. Under

this arrangement, the Malays were given the privilege to manage their own affairs and life in the non-Federated States. Elsewhere we only existed in name. The country and people remained very divided.

After the war, the British Government decided to turn Malaya into a colony with one Government called the Malayan Union, with the Malay rulers as heads of the Muslim religion in their respective states. That was all that was left of the Malay identity in their own country. We saw the end was coming. So we had either to accept the situation and meet our end calmly or fight back. Datuk Onn took up the cry of *Hidup Melayu*. Then when I took his place I went all out for *Merdeka*. With *Merdeka*, and when the excitement died down, we sat down to the serious business of planning to make this country a home for all, irrespective of race or religion but with special rights for the Malays and the Bumiputeras because the Malays and Bumiputeras were the underprivileged race in their own country.

Our Constitution also provided for religious and social freedom for all, and this freedom we have all enjoyed for all these years. The people of Malaysia are free to choose their religion and follow it to their hearts' content. Though Islam is the official religion, to show our sincerity the Government gave public holidays for people of other religions to observe their religious obligations. What was most encouraging was that everybody joined in the joys of the festivals, exchanging

greetings, goodwill and friendship.

The Government contributed money towards the building of places of worship when asked for. So one can say that Malaysia is truly a good country and a nice place to live in. One is never denied a place in the society because of differences in race, colour or religion. Every man or woman is accepted on his or her face value. Unfortunately there have been isolated incidents of racial tension started by misguided youths, but these passed away like wind gathering no dust. It is our duty to keep this country peaceful for all time. It requires the cooperation and goodwill of men of all religions and races.

Religion can help so long as everyone can remember that religions are intended to work for the good of man. Islam even provides that every Muslim must break away from his daily routine and have communion with God at least five times a day, according to the movements of the sun. Unless a man is reminded of his duty to God he will never think of his fellowmen. Since World War II, a big change has taken place. Countries which have been ruled by super-powers and white masters began to fight for independence, and many have obtained their freedom. Then followed the winds of change as a counter to the communist threat to obtain mastery of the world. The communists claimed, to fight for the rights and equality of men, and this gained wide support from former subject races.

With the new found freedom a new world

order produced all kinds of disorder and turmoil. This was due to the lack of experience of the leaders and a lack of faith in God. Civil wars and violence took a heavy toll on lives and property. Some of these troubles are happening so near to us. Thousands of refugees fled their homes. Many died on the way and many lost their parents, brothers and sisters. We have in Malaysia refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. So we know the folly of religious, racial and political strife.

People are worried that such troubles can catch on here. Every precaution must be taken by good citizens to prevent such happenings from taking place. The world picture today shows that the super-powers are openly split into two big camps – those which believe in religion, and those which do not. Though the big powers are maintaining peace with one another, the danger of war breaking out is here and cannot be brushed aside. The small nations which support the ideologies of super-powers are showing growing signs of restlessness. Troubles are breaking out among them. The fear is that they may reach the top, and God help us if the two camps – pro-God and anti-God forces – decide on an all-out war.

The last two World Wars have shown that deaths were not confined to the battlefields, but many more innocent lives were lost in the shelter of their homes. Every effort must, therefore, be made to prevent the outbreak of such a war.

Preventive measures must be taken at home, and we must do our best to maintain peace in our own country. Action must be taken by men of peace and men of God to initiate the move. Every man must understand that we were not born of the same race or religion, and we are intelligent enough to know that unless we can learn to live at peace and respect one another, the result will inevitably be turbulence and turmoil. In all my writings and speeches, I have laid emphasis on peace and goodwill among men. I am always happy to support any movement working towards this end. I have taken to religion and find peace of mind in faith and in God.

I also realize that every religion thinks of itself as the best, and every man thinks of his race as superior, but if we continue with this line of thinking we will only invite trouble. We might as well be honest and say to ourselves "we are here today and gone tomorrow." So while we live we might continue to make life worth living. Above all, we must give this nation our absolute loyalty, and may it continue to give us shelter and protection for all time – God be praised.

DISCUSSION

Question: Could our Bapa Malaysia explain the point about Malaysia being a secular state?

Tunku Abdul Rahman: In a previous statement I made on religion I mentioned that this country is a secular state. It means that it is not a Muslim state. Islam is the official religion of this country, but other religions have a right to play their part as far as religion is concerned. That is about it – but it is not absolutely a secular state because if it were so, there would be officially no religion. So it is the state which gives freedom to all religions to carry out their worship. The Constitution has more or less set out the point.

TWO

**CONSTITUTIONAL
PROVISIONS FOR RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM IN MALAYSIA**

Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoon

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, our first Prime Minister, is the Father of our Constitution for it was mainly due to him that the Reid Commission was constituted. It comprised experts in constitutional law from the Commonwealth. Arising from the Reid Commission report, the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya was passed by our Parliament. We have it from the Tunku that although Islam is the official religion, Malaysia is a SECULAR State. I must confess that this surprised me, but we have the authority of the Tunku himself that this is the constitutional provision.

As I remember it, when the Reid Commission was in Malaya in the early fifties, the subject of freedom of religion did not attract much attention from either the Government or the Opposition. The important issues in those days were citizenship, education, race and jobs. Freedom of religion did not play an important part in the discussions. I remember in those days, there was no discussion on what my own church should present before the Reid Commission. The reason was that under the British there was a fair degree of freedom of religion; in fact, Christians in this country then enjoyed a favoured position.

Another reason was that the pastors in charge of the churches at parish level were mainly expatriates and, with due respect to them, we could not expect them to be involved in freedom of religion in a foreign land. Nevertheless, the lack of interest notwithstanding, the Reid Commission

took great care to see that freedom of religion was one of the Fundamental Liberties embodied in our Constitution. Article 11, which deals with freedom of religion, states and I quote :

- o "Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
- o No person shall be compelled to pay any tax, the proceeds of which are separately allocated in whole or in part for the expenses of a religion other than his own.
- o Every religious group has the right
 - (a) to manage its own religious affairs
 - (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and
 - (c) to acquire, own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.
- o State law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or policy among persons professing the Muslim religion.
- o This Article does not authorise or act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality."

We must remember that in five states in our country, namely Malacca, Penang, Kedah, Negeri

Sembilan and Trengganu, the state Constitution has built a *cordon sanitaire* around Muslims in that non-Muslims are prohibited by law from proselytizing among Muslims. The non-Muslim may well say that this law is unfair, but it can be found in the constitution of most other Muslim countries. In those states that do not have such legal and constitutional provisions, it is nevertheless understood that the Muslims should be left alone and no attempt should be made to convert them to another religion.

I was aware that many who were assembled in the hall the day of the Seminar, were prepared to defy this constitutional and legal provision. They would be acting out of conviction and I respect their views. However, I appealed to them to think more and pray hard for God's guidance before setting forth to defy the law. They might well start a fire which I am sure they themselves might not be able to control or put out. Even the Government might find it difficult to control. I knew that in making this appeal I might have appeared to be a traitor to the evangelists. But being called names has never deterred me from speaking my mind.

About three decades ago I spoke against this provision at an annual conference of my own church. I was much younger then and felt that it was unfair. But then at that time I did not quite realize I was playing with fire; today of course, the conversion of a Muslim by a non-Muslim is a

much more serious and sensitive matter. Whenever the question of freedom of religion crops up in our country some political leaders point to our constitutional provisions on the subject and proudly say that we do not practise religious discrimination. This may be true to a large extent but I wish to point out the gradual but inexorable whittling away of religious freedom in our country that has given grounds for concern to the non-Muslims.

First, let me refer to the statement made by His Royal Majesty the Sultan of Selangor at a recent investiture held in Shah Alam a few months ago. He took the opportunity to point out the absence of churches, temples, and other non-Muslim places of worship in the state capital. Mosques have been built there and a state mosque will be built soon, but why the absence of churches and temples? I know that two pieces of land have been set aside for religious purposes but for reasons known to themselves, both the Selangor State Government and the PKNS have not allocated the land to religious bodies who have applied for it. The Selangor State Government cannot plead that there has been a lack of applications, for I know for a fact that as soon as Shah Alam was started, my own church, the Methodist Church of Malaysia as well as the Catholic Church, applied for a piece of land for religious purposes.

I need hardly point out the dangers of a lack of places of worship for the residents of Shah

Alam. The non-Muslims living there may well become atheists, and even become communists! Hence it is in the interest of the various State Governments in approving applications for new towns, that they set aside land for religious purposes. I also made a plea for Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and other religious bodies. Before I leave the subject of lack of places of worship for non-Muslims, I wish to thank His Royal Majesty the Sultan of Selangor for highlighting the problem of the non-Muslims in Shah Alam. It is gratifying that the Head of the Muslim religion of Selangor has spared a thought for the non-Muslims of this state.

More than a year ago some Christians in this country imported Bibles translated into Bahasa Indonesia and printed in South Korea. When the Bibles arrived in this country they were held up by the Customs and the Special Branch. Later the sale and use of these Bibles were prohibited by a gazette notification. To say the least, the Christians in the know about this matter were aghast and non-plussed at this prohibition. The Government had encouraged the use of Bahasa Malaysia but why then should the sale and use of the Bibles in Bahasa Indonesia be prohibited? Representations were made to the Ministry to meet the Minister of Home Affairs. It was later explained to them that the Government was afraid that the Bible would be sold to Muslims. On being assured by the church leaders that there was no such intention, the prohibition was partially withdrawn.

Recently the Government set up a committee to look into the question of providing places of worship for non-Muslims. The discussion was all very hush-hush and not a word of it appeared in the press. Only the top leaders of the various non-Muslim religious bodies knew what happened. But what is well known is that it is increasingly difficult to find land to build places of worship. Here I relate what happened in Subang Jaya recently. A piece of land was set aside by the developer for a church but the land was "acquired" for a mosque. When the Christians proposed a swap with the land reserved for a mosque, this was turned down on the ground that the land that the Christians wanted for a church would be too close to the proposed mosque! The Christians then proposed another piece of land in exchange for the land that had been acquired but that too was turned down! To-date, more than two years after the acquisition of their land, the Christians are still without a piece of land to build a church. If they try to move into a developed area, for example into a housing area that has been developed, they are told by the local authority that the house cannot be turned into a house of worship. This surely is at variance with Article 11 (3) (b) which states "to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes" and (3) (c) which states "to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law".

Very often it is some petty bureaucrat who makes such important decisions, sometimes

without the knowledge or approval of his superiors. The non-Muslim religious bodies thus have to bear the brunt of such violations of the freedom of religion which is guaranteed to us under Article 11 of our Constitution.

In the past, some of the bigger hotels placed copies of the Bible in their rooms. This is for the convenience of guests who may want to read the Bible in their spare time. But recently some local authorities have stopped this practice and the hotels have been forced to comply. I have just recently returned from a visit to Indonesia and I found that in Jakarta, which has a much larger Muslim population than Malaysia, hotels have Bibles in their rooms for the convenience of their guests. I find that in Indonesia the degree of religious toleration, especially towards the Christians, is much greater than in Malaysia. Like Malaysia, Indonesia is a secular state, a legacy of the wisdom of Soekarno.

Although in recent years there has been great pressure by the Muslim parties to change Indonesia to an Islamic state, the government had been able to maintain the *status quo*. The people there are more relaxed over religion. This is very evident during the Christmas season. Long before Christmas Day, and indeed in November, Indonesian Television and Radio begins to put up shows with a Christmas theme, and in December, almost every night, there are shows depicting the birth of Christ. Here in Malaysia there are no programmes with a Christmas theme before

Christmas and on Christmas Day itself, the Christmas programmes are few and brief. In the past, RTM used to show the people worshipping at various churches throughout the country but now such programmes have been cut off. In Indonesia, churches have been allowed to be built side by side with mosques, especially in Sumatra among the Bataks. This is also the case in Cairo, Egypt, but in Malaysia such scenes are a pipe dream. What I have related regarding the experiences of the Christians during the Christmas season is also the experience of the Buddhists on Wesak Day and the Hindus on Deepavali and Thaipusam Day.

In Bali where 80% of the population are Hindus, one sees Hindu temples everywhere and mosques are few and far between. There has been no attempt to restructure the society there. Inter-marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims are fairly common in Indonesia and the common man does not have a hard look at such marriages. The common man probably refers to them as *bisa*. If a non-Muslim male marries a Muslim girl in Indonesia and remains a non-Muslim, he is not hounded and persecuted. At the most he is ostracized by Indonesian society.

A few years ago, a Cabinet Minister, Datuk Asri, then Minister of Land and Regional Development, stated that the Christians of this country posed a greater danger to the security of the state than the communists. It was a most irresponsible statement coming from a Minister of the Crown and

as far as I can remember he has not been asked to withdraw that statement nor has he been rebuked for making it.

What can the non-Muslim religionists do in the face of such an onslaught against non-Muslims in this country? They should not hold up their hands and ask "*apa boleh buat?*" They should be more positive and not be defeatist in their reaction. They should try to present a united front to encourage religious freedom. Among the Christians for instance, I know it is often difficult to take concerted action against any governmental action even on such an obvious issue as the prohibition of the import and sale of the Bible in Bahasa Indonesia. But non-Muslims must make their views known to the Government if they are unhappy over the actions of the Government. If they keep quiet the non-Muslims may give the wrong impression to the Government that they are happy with what the Government has done when indeed the reverse may well be the case. Hence I made a plea with the non-Muslim leaders assembled at the Seminar that they should speak out, loud and bold, if their fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution are eroded. By speaking out I do not mean that one should shout it from the roof top, but that one should write to those in authority and, if possible, follow it up with a personal meeting. That way, they can better serve those who have placed their hopes and aspirations in them.

DISCUSSION

Question: Enshrined in our Constitution is freedom of worship and Bapa Malaysia and Tan Sri Dr Tan's frank and fearless statements should provoke us to serious thought about achieving national unity which is a prerequisite for nation building. We have been blessed by Almighty God in this country of our birth and loyalty but we are gravely concerned for the future generations for whom we have a duty to build a progressive and peaceful Malaysia. My point is this, we cannot build a nation without the cooperation of the largest religious group, which is Islam. Unless we have constant dialogue with them and ensure that it is a continuous, harmonious and understanding relationship, we cannot create real inter-religious understanding. Common values exist in all religions including Islam. It is imperative that non-Muslim groups be vigilant against any erosion of any religions, obligations so that the common spiritual base so vital for integrating, assimilating and uniting a multi-racial and multi-religious people can be further consolidated. We appeal to the committee of this organisation to open themselves to dialogue with their Muslim brothers, especially when increasingly, Islamic values are being introduced in the government administration. In return all we ask for in upholding the Constitution and in ensuring our loyalty to this country of our birth, is a humble place under the sun, as His Highness, the Sultan of Selangor has

promised us — a place where we can worship in true faith to the God that we believe in — in temples, shrines or churches.

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: I completely agree that the non-Muslims of this country must have a better understanding of what Islam is. And to this end I am glad that (at least in the Christian groups I know) most of the seminaries have a course on Islam so that the people who are going to do full time work for the Church in this country know what Islam is and know how to tackle common problems of their flock. We do not know if the Government will allow experts in Islam and Christianity to come and teach in our seminaries because these experts are hard to come by in this country. I know of one gentleman who was one such an expert but was packed out of this country after two years because his work permit had expired. In the interest of religious harmony, I hope the Government will be more flexible in allowing such persons to remain and to tell us what Islam is so that the general population would have a better understanding.

Question: You have not said that the Government should also have a department to deal with non-Islamic religions. They already have one for Islam. Since 80% of the population is non-Islamic in Kuala Lumpur, would not this proposal be more in line with the freedom of religion as enshrined in the Constitution?

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: I agree that a non-Muslim

religious department would be useful to the Government in fostering understanding between the various religions, in particular Islam and the non-Islamic religions.

Question: Dr Tan said that disastrous consequences could easily arise if non-Muslims try to convert Muslims. From the theoretical point of view, is it fair that one side is allowed to convert and the other side is not allowed to do so?

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: I do not say whether this is fair or whether the constitutional provisions are fair. As a young man I spoke against this. But now that I am about thirty years older, and I hope wiser, I can see the reason for it. We are living in an Islamic state. Unless we are prepared to change the order of things and not win by blood and fire. Most of the Islamic countries also have such provisions and it is accepted by these countries. I do not say it is bad but I say as a fact of life, we must agree with it. As I pointed out before, there are more than enough non-Muslims in Malaysia for the non-Muslim religions to convert without having to convert Muslims.

Question: Dr Tan, you mentioned that there has been a whittling down of religious freedom and gave us a number of concrete examples. This is against the Constitution. When I go against the Constitution, I get arrested. What happens when the Government goes against the Constitution?

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: The Government is a law unto itself. All I can say is, we must not say, "*Apa*

boleh buat?" It is "*perbuatan Tuhan.*" We must say "what can we do to tell the Government that this is wrong?" I do not think we must shout from the corner of a street in Jalan Ampang. We should meet together and discuss the issue carefully and make representations to the Government. But I have asked some people to make the representations and they turn around and say, "No, you make the representation."

Question: Dr Tan there have been a number of times when after consultation and representations, things are not followed up and there is nothing much we can do about it.

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: Then, I would say, change the social order. As the Tunku has pointed out, power in this country lies on the politicians. Then the people should send their people to be politicians and bring a new social order to this country.

Comment: I would like to take up the point brought up just now about the infringement of our rights. I totally agree with the suggestion made by Dr Tan that we should speak up and seek an appointment/dialogue with the authorities who are in charge. We must not stop there. If our justified appeals are unheeded, we must use the judiciary, our law courts and law and order. The judiciary is one part and the most important part of the nation's structure which I am very proud of. I think we must have the courage, when the time comes, to take the mat-

ter to court. Our judges have been fearless and I sincerely believe that if we have good cause to bring to them, we will get satisfaction.

Question: I have a question on identity between race and religion. I see race and religion as both separate things. If I am not mistaken, in Malaysia, the Malay race and the Muslim religion is identified as one. I do not know if I am mistaken and like to get an answer for that. My other question is a question on religious freedom. In many concepts of freedom of religion, one is responsible to God alone and to no other for his religious beliefs. If that is true, then one is free to embrace whatever religion he believes to be the true religion with a clear conscience before God. Therefore he has a right to change his religion if he believes that the religion which he is in at present is not the true one. Hence, I see a sort of contradiction in that a person who belongs to any race or religion is prohibited from changing his religion because of the Constitution.

Dr Tan Chee Khoon: I do not claim to be an expert in this area, but I shall try to give a suitable answer. In this country a Malay by definition is a person who practises the Islamic faith, and if he does not practise the Islamic faith, he is not Malay but perhaps a Bumiputera like the Kadazans. Once a Malay becomes a Christian for example, (and there are very few of them in this country), he ceases to be a Malay. In this country it is true to say that Malays are identified with Islam. If you are a Malay, in fact, you are a Mus-

lim. But I do not think the reverse is true. Although there are many Chinese and Indians who become Muslim and claim to be Malays, whether or not the Malays accept them is another matter.

Regarding the second question, as I see it, in this country the Muslim has no choice. He cannot officially change his religion. On the other hand, in Indonesia, I see lots of them switching from Islam to Christianity. There is no fuss about it and it is accepted. This shows toleration and maturity, I would say. In this country we see a flavour of the influence of Iran – a bit of the fundamentalist influence in delivering Islam. That is why in this country, the State Governments have a ruling that Christians cannot preach to Muslims, or convert them. It is an offence in law.

Tunku Abdul Rahman: All I have to say is that the definition of a Malay is a person who practises Islam and habitually speaks the Malay language. Included are the Dayaks, Dusun and other tribes in Sabah and Sarawak. But because they are not Muslims they now go by the term Bumiputera. There are people also who habitually speak the Malay language but because they are not Muslims, are not Malays. As such, the definition of 'Malay' is quite decisive. Indonesia is a little bit different. They do not have what we have today. They have what we call the *Panca Sila* in the constitution in Indonesia, the five principles that make the Indonesian people,

I do not remember the five principles, but according to Archbishop Vendargon here, they must all have a religion and they must be loyal to Indonesia. That is about the two we can remember. Another thing is that the Government does not stop a Malay from changing his religion. He is free to follow any religion he wants to. The only thing is that he cannot call himself a Malay or enjoy the reserved rights that are enshrined in the Constitution.

THREE

**COMMON RELIGIOUS
VALUES FOR NATION
BUILDING**

A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf

One day fourteen years ago, while I was sitting at my desk at the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the telephone rang. The Head of the Delegation of one of the South American countries to the United Nations was at the other end. He said that the Ambassador of Indonesia in his address to the General Assembly the day before, quoted a beautiful verse from the Quran which impressed him deeply. It expressed, he added, the unity of humankind most eloquently. He then told me that he was holding a copy of the translation of the Holy Quran in Spanish but could not trace that verse. He asked me whether I could help him locate the verse. I told him to look for it in Chapter 49, and it should be verse 13. He fumbled with the sheets and I could hear the rustle of papers. He then excitedly said: "Here it is," and began to translate it for me from Spanish into English as follows: :

"O you people! We have created you all from one male and one female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know each other. Indeed, the noblest among you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in con-

duct.”

The significance of this verse lies, not simply in the statement of the principle of human unity based on having a common origin. There is also a Quranic hint at the fact that man is a social being, created with a basic need to aggregate and co-live with fellow human beings, his need of companionship, the necessity to fulfil his basic biological, emotional and other needs in a social order. God inspired man to form social groups, as this verse hints at, based on consanguineous relationships and on territorial neighbourhood. Yet, these two considerations must be overshadowed by a common religious bond. This religious bond based on common beliefs must transcend all racial, national and geographical factors. The allegiance of a Muslim should first be to Allah and to his fellow believers.

“Allegiance and loyalty should only be to Allah, the True Existing Reality.”

“And the believers, men and women, are loyal and friends of one another.”

This does not mean that Islam ignores the mutual rights and obligations arising from blood ties or from living in a neighbourhood, but it has harmonized those rights and obligations to those arising from the religious tie. Islam emphasizes parental duties, filial duties and duties due to one's kin. It also teaches good neighbourliness. In a number of Quranic verses, Muslims are urged to do good to their parents, to their relatives, to

their neighbours who are relatives, and to neighbours who are not relatives. The Prophet said:-

“Whosoever believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement, let him do good to his neighbours.”

He also said,

“Gabriel repeatedly urged me to do good to my neighbours so much so that I thought he was almost to be made an heir.”

He also said,

“On the Day of Judgement a person will complain to God about another related to him through their fortieth ancestor (for failure to do his duties toward him).”

Nevertheless, these qualities of brotherhood and good neighbourliness should not conflict with one's commitment to Islam. If they do, commitment to Islam should prevail. The Holy Quran reads:

“Say: If your fathers, and your sons, and your brothers, and your spouses, and your tribe, and the wealth you have earned, and a trade about which you are concerned, and dwellings you like, . . . (if any or all of these things) are given preference by you before Allah and his Messenger and striving in His way . . . then wait for the consequences from God.”

“You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement, extending loyalty to those who oppose Allah and His

Messenger, even though they might be their own fathers or their children, or their brothers or their clan."

And the Prophet said:

"Believers to each other are like a building, the parts of which support and strengthen each other."

The state of Islam was based on that common religious bond, the common belief in Allah the Almighty God, the One and only God unto Whom there is no partner, and Who has no resemblance. It was first born in Madinah, and within the life of the Prophet, it expanded and incorporated the entire Arabian Peninsula. Within a few decades, it incorporated territories extending from Spain to the confines of China, establishing justice and spreading literacy, enlightenment and the Islamic simple monotheistic belief. It was all looked upon as the one Muslim *Ummah*. Although at times, the political unity was broken by rivalry among political leaders, yet below the political division existed real unity throughout the Muslim world. Muslims continued to move and travel from North to South and from West to East unhindered by official, social or linguistic difficulties. Their visa was *shahadat an la ilaha illa'Allah*, and Arabic was the *lingua franca* of the Muslim world. At every port in the world of Islam, there were professional guilds who sent their respective representatives when ships anchored from abroad to welcome Muslim passengers, hosted them at special guest houses and

introduced them to their counterparts in their professions.

Records of some great Muslim travellers survive to witness these truths. An example was the 14th century great traveller Ibn Battutah, who came to this part of the world and described the conditions of Islam at Aceh at the time. He had a long stay in India and was engaged in different jobs including that of a senior judicial position in the court. He was also sent on a diplomatic mission to the Emperor of China. Of course, Ibn Battutah was ignorant of the Indonesian, Sanskrit or Chinese languages, but was obviously able to converse in Arabic.

It was only during the period of the European invasion and colonization that the Muslim world became fragmented; and cultural, social and linguistic barriers were erected to isolate completely the fragmented parts of the Muslim world from each other.

Apart from this powerful religious bond which unites all Muslims into one single *ummah* no matter where they may live, there are other principles or values which extend beyond the domain of Islam. One is the principle of human unity spoken of at the beginning of this address. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, further emphasizes this concept in the following words:

“You are all descendants of Adam, and Adam was created from dust.”

And said:

“All people are equal, as equal as the teeth of a comb. There is no merit that may be claimed by an Arab over a non-Arab except through righteousness.”

Another is the teaching of human dignity due to every person, alive or dead. The Quran reads:

“We have honoured all the children of Adam with dignity.”

One day, while the Prophet was sitting with a group of his Companions, he saw a funeral procession passing by, carrying the bier which contained the body of a dead person. The Prophet stood up to show respect for the dead. His Companions followed suit. When the procession had passed by, one Companion remarked: “This was a non-Muslim!” The Prophet retorted: “Even so. Whenever you see a funeral, you should rise to show respect.”

Islam, from the time of its inception in Mecca in 610 A.D., declared with all emphatic measures, that universal human rights were due to all persons of any root, of any place, of any colour and of any religion. These included the right to live, the right to learn, the right to earn, the right to work, the right to speak and the right to worship. These rights prevail as long as they do not encroach upon the rights of others.

The Holy Quran reads:

“There should be no coercion or compul-

sion in the matter of religion."

"Whosoever wishes to believe let him do so, and whosoever wishes not to believe, let him do so."

And the Prophet said:

"Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon all believing men and women."

In the treaties concluded with non-Muslims by the Prophet and by his successors, the Caliphs, the non-Muslims living within the Islamic state were guaranteed freedom of worship, protection of their lives, property and places of worship, and even the safety of their crucifixes.

When Jerusalem capitulated to Islam and while the Caliph Umar was inside the Church of The Sepulchre, the time of prayer came. The Patriarch offered him a prayer mat to pray inside the Church. The Caliph, fearing that succeeding Muslim generations might claim the Church if he made it a site for his prayers, declined and worshipped outside on the steps and then returned. It was he who sought to trace, and search for the site of the Temple of Solomon which had been obliterated and lost for centuries. It was he who, at last, found it under high heaps of dirt. With his own hands, assisted by his men, the dirt was removed. The place was then fenced off on his order. Only after three rain falls did the place become clean for prayers. Later a mosque was erected on the site.

In another incident, the son of the Muslim ruler of Egypt struck an Egyptian child. His offended Christian father travelled all the way to Madinah to complain to Umar. As a result, the Egyptian ruler was summoned by the Caliph who saw to it that the victim was duly avenged. He then told that ruler: "How could you treat people as if they were slaves, when they were born free?"

I have cited all these instances to demonstrate the fact that these principles or values which extended beyond the members of the Muslim community were not mere theories or just a philosophy but principles of practical application. These principles or values: namely the belief in a common origin of humanity, the belief in human equality, in human dignity, in universal human rights due to all people, constitute a solid foundation for building a nation of various races and creeds. Such a nation could expect from its Muslim compatriotes peace, understanding and cooperation. This was the actual situation which existed in the Muslim world when the guiding force of Islam was the dominant factor prior to the advent of European colonialism.

There was no question of first or second class citizenship or minority or majority. These are, indeed, modern political terms, alien to Islam. They were only introduced by the Western powers to disturb the peace and provoke the non-Muslim members of the state against

the Muslim authorities. In fact, in the early stages of the Muslim empire, Muslims were in the minority, to use this modern term, and remained as such, probably for centuries, until the number of Muslims increased and they became the majority in many localities. Yet, they never became the majority in the Muslim sub-continent inspite of eight centuries of Muslim rule. The spirit which dominated the Muslim rule was *tasamuh*. That is, active, mutual respect and understanding. Non-Muslims enjoyed not only full freedom of action but were trusted with senior official responsibilities. They were the Caliph's physician, scribes and even ministers. And even modern Egypt had a non-Muslim Prime Minister earlier this century, Nubar Pasha, after whom a street in the heart of Cairo is named. And now, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs is a non-Muslim.

I should like to add an important observation. I hope that here I shall not be misunderstood. It is to be emphasized that I speak on my own behalf, not on behalf of any other person or group of persons or authority, not even on behalf of the institution I now serve. I speak as a student of Islam and as a Muslim committed to his faith. It is this: In a multi-religious, multi-racial situation like that which exists here in Malaysia, the Muslim components of the population, who are the indigenous children of the land, have demonstrated to the world in a very eloquent manner how Islam can be a major factor in promoting

peaceful co-existence. Those of us who have decided in recent years to make this blessed country their own home have not only been offered warm refuge by their Muslim hosts, in spite of their great numbers, but have also been extended an equal legal status.

I prefer not to call it "tolerance." In my view, this term suffers from two weaknesses. On the one hand, it has the connotation of the idea of "acquiescing in yielding to a disagreeable or resented situation." Moreover, it describes a one-sided attitude. But the Islamic term, *tasamuh*, a pleasant sounding word, is not merely tolerance on the part of one party and indifference or provocation by another, it is also a term which means mutual and reciprocal respect. If the indigenous peoples of the nation have demonstrated understanding and hospitality, those of us who have decided to share the blessings of their land and make it their own home should reciprocate by at least refraining from acts and practices which could be provocative or offensive to the religious conscience of the indigenous host group.

In this regard we have to bear in mind that Islam is a total way of life, and cannot be fractured or fragmented. Like a building or a structure, weakness in any part can threaten the fabric of the total structure. Islam promotes decency, decent dress, sobriety and honour. Public exposure of female bodies, places of open consumption of liquor and gambling houses should not be

encouraged to spread in a country whose state religion is Islam. These practices could have a damaging effect, and are not in the best interests of any of the racial or religious groups in the country. Look and see what is happening now. Our hearts sank to hear that the second largest number of drug addicts in the world is to be found in Malaysia. It was also unbelievable that the immoral practice of having a boyfriend or a girlfriend is common and openly talked about among Muslim youths here, something unthinkable in other Muslim situations. Of more serious consideration, and here I beg your indulgence, is the outdoor display of things opposed to the Muslim monotheistic belief, *tawhid*, please forgive me, a serious provocative offence against our Muslim conscience. For the sake of lasting peace and real harmony, I appeal to our friends, the leaders of the non-Muslim sectors of the nation, to do something to avoid this unnecessary offensive display.

In summary, the common basic Islamic beliefs and ideals upheld by the adherents of Islam are and should be the most sound foundation for building a united Muslim *ummah* which transcends all racial and natural boundaries. Yet, Islam inspires neighbourliness, sympathetic understanding and sentiments which promote values, ideals, unity and cooperation that should extend beyond the Muslim brotherhood to those who are brothers in humanity, especially those who share territorial boundaries with Muslims. These significant ideals have served and continue to

serve as a foundation for nation building. Yet, stability and durable peace will depend on the exercise of the Islamic concept of *tasamuh*, mutual consideration for the feelings of the rights of each other.

I was extremely inspired by the speech of our great beloved leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. I was glad indeed that the Tunku defined the term 'Malay' as a person whose tongue is the Malay language and whose religion is Islam. Therefore, to equate the term 'Malay' with Islam is quite valid, although Islam is a wider term. There are many people who are not Malays but are Muslims and belong to the world of Islam like myself. Yet I do not agree that a country which professes to be Muslim and Islamic, should be described as secular. The word 'secular' does not exist in the dictionary of Islam. It has no equivalent in the language of the Quran. It is difficult for us to comprehend this term. In Islam there is no compartmentalization or division between a spiritual world and a mundane domain. Islam is not merely a theology. It is a complete way of life. Islam is also sociology, psychology, and economics. It is everything. We cannot cut Islam off from these other aspects at all. Islam to us is a complete and total way of life. It does not make a difference between the physical and spiritual aspects.

My presence in front of you is spiritual, is religious, it is Islamic. Anything that I do, I do it within the Will of God and within His commands

as revealed by Allah *Subhanahu wa-ta'ala* (the Almighty God), as revealed to our Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. When we walk, when we talk, when we eat, when we work or do anything, when we pray in the mosque, we are still worshipping God. There is no secularism in Islam. Therefore if the state is Muslim or Islamic, it has to be Islam. And so what are we afraid of if Malaysia should turn into a Muslim state? I sense a tone of fear, especially in the speech of the respected honourable Tan Sri Dr Tan, and also some of the questions that were subsequently raised. What is Islam? Something frightening? No. Islam means peace, love, cooperation, honesty, punctuality, hard work, honour and abstinence from licentious behavior. Islam stands for complete understanding between all people and all races. I began with a Quranic verse which reads:—

“O you people! We have created you all from one male and one female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know each other. But the noblest among you is the most righteous.”

Here in this verse, the Quran, our holy book which was revealed from God directly to Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel, starts with the words: *Ya ayyuha 'nnas*, which mean: “O you people!” It did not say, “O you Muslims!” Islam looks at all humanity as one Family of families coming from the same root, from the same origin.

One could quote many other instances, especially from the Quran which form the basis of our religion, a religion which was not made up of what we sometimes call 'religious experiences' or 'human experiences' or made up of decrees issued by a Church leader who can make new doctrines. No. It was revealed by and from the Creator God from beginning to end over about 22 years beginning in 610 and ending in 632 A.D., when Muhammad, peace be upon him, passed away. This Holy Quran, both in diction and sound, was revealed to Muhammad and he had nothing to do with it. He just delivered it directly to his generation who all memorised it and transmitted it to the succeeding generation and then to the next and so on until today. Millions in each generation memorised it from the beginning to the end. Therefore, there can be no change or corruption in the Quran, and consequently 'no change or modification in the teachings of Islam.

Someone in the audience asked the Tunku, "What could be done to modify Islam in order that it would suit modern requirements?" Islam cannot be changed, it was not man-made. Its values and all its details were indeed given by Allah, directly in the Quran or as commented on and expanded by the records of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, who in matters of religion did not say or do anything by himself, but followed what was revealed to him by Allah *subhanahu wa-ta'ala*. It was he himself who said, "Whoever hurts a non-Muslim living in our community, I myself shall be the one who takes him to task

before God on the Day of Judgement." When the prophet Muhammad emigrated to Madinah in 622 A.D., he concluded a treaty in Madinah as soon as he arrived and started there an autonomous Muslim community and a new small Islamic state within which its members could freely breathe and worship. He concluded a treaty granting all sections living in the town including the Jewish tribes, freedom of worship, protection of life, protection of houses of worship and protection of property; a tradition which has been respected and safeguarded throughout the centuries of Islam.

Islam, as you can see now, advocates mutual understanding and respect for all human beings. Within its state, there should be protection of all, freedom of all peoples and all religious groups, and protection of churches and temples. This is also true of crosses and crucifixes as was stipulated in all treaties concluded by the Muslim rulers succeeding the Prophet.

But one has to get true knowledge about Islam, not from the mouth of a non-Muslim. Tan Sri Dr Tan, in his speech regretted the fact that a visa for some non-Muslim teacher of Islam was not extended. Since he was a non-Muslim, he should not be teaching Islam. Our religion has been distorted very badly by non-Muslims, especially those called Orientalists. Those who teach Islam that way do great damage not only to Muslims but also to those who are taught by them.

What are those values which are now being advanced and encouraged by the Government here? It may be asked: "How much are these Islamic values going to hurt the other sections of the community?"

Simply stated, Islam consists of a theology and a set of values which are basically a framework of moral teachings. As for the basic theology of Islam, it rests upon a pure, and uncompromising concept of monotheism. That is, there is only one God who cannot be divided, who has no partner, who has no parent or a child, and who cannot be represented by any symbolic thing. To do so would amount to disbelief in God. A Muslim cannot even tolerate the scene of such representation. So Islam consists of this simple belief and of some other things which you, the adherents of other religions also believe, such as the belief that there is another life to come when Allah, the Almighty God, my God and your God, will call everyone to task and reward each according to his or her deeds. We Muslims, unlike most of you — forgive me if I say that — believe in all Prophets. We love the Prophets of other religions. We love Jesus Christ and respect Him. We believe in Him. No Muslim can be counted a Muslim unless he believes in Jesus, in the Gospel, the Torah and in Moses.

We believe in Mary, no less than any Christian. We even respect her more. We believe she was pure. She gave birth to Jesus when she was a Virgin. She was the most pure and virtuous and

righteous woman that has been created and would have been created until the Day of Judgement. This is stated in our Holy Book in which God addresses Jesus: "I am making those who believe in you have the upper hand over those who reject you until the Day of judgement!" We indeed believe in Him. We are Muslims but also Christians at the same time. We are not allowed to disrespect the Gospel or the Bible even though we do not believe that the Gospel or the Torah have survived as taught by Jesus or Moses. You can see even today that there are many versions or editions of the Bible coming out and published in America and elsewhere. In the past, corruption of the Bible was even more serious. But the Quran has remained as it was delivered from the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad until today.

Aside from the Islamic belief in God and in a life to come, there are in Islam, teachings of ideals and values which stretch outside the circle of the Muslim brotherhood. They include belief in human equality. I do not think any religion emphasizes this human equality as much as Islam has done, as taught in the Quran, and the words of Muhammad and his model action, as well as the examples of the Caliphs. Muhammad said that there can be no merit to be claimed by an Arab because of origin. Only through good deeds people are measured and are assessed. Islam insists on giving everybody his rights and respecting all houses of worship.

The Sultan of Selangor who is a Muslim was quoted by Tan Sri Dr Tan as encourag-

ing the building of non-Muslim places of worship. But do we need to hurt the heart of our Muslim brothers by insisting that we must have our Church or our Temple too close to a Mosque, as was voiced by a member of the audience? Is that necessary? Why can you not seek a more suitable place? Why do we seek to stir the Muslims' conscience and disturb their prayers by the tolls of the Church bells? Muslims pray all the time, not only once a week, but everyday, every morning, every evening and at night. Again Dr Tan, with due respect, praised the example of the Indonesian tolerance. Is Indonesia an ideal example to be imitated or emulated in that context? Frankly, while assuring you that I am not prejudiced at all, we all know what the Church has been trying to do against Islam both in Nigeria and in Indonesia, in the two countries with the largest Muslim population in both Continents. We cannot, in our Muslim conscience, agree with Dr Tan's praise of Indonesian tolerance of missionary activities and of a Muslim girl's marrying a non-Muslim youth. This is against our religion. It is unfair to accuse Malaysia of being a country less tolerant. Please forgive me if I state this categorically. Muslims in Malaysia have been tolerant, more than enough. To say that adherents of other religions should go to court, as someone suggested, for claimed discrimination, is too serious. I would like to appeal to those who entertain such move to think and reflect more soberly. I appeal to those whom I regard to be my human brothers and sisters and whom I love and respect

as such, not to disturb the Muslim conscience, by word or by action. We can have our temples or houses of worship, and we can have whatever we want inside them. But it is not necessary to insist on having outdoor representations which are inconsistent with the basic doctrine of Islam, the *tawhid*, namely the monotheistic belief.

Islam is for equality. Islam is for hard work. Islam is for respect for all human creatures and their rights. Islam is for good neighbourliness. Islam is for honesty in work. Islam is sympathetic to the weak and orphans and even to animals. While it respects the rights of the adherents of all religions, it expects them to respect the conscience and the sentiments of its own adherents.

In short let me say that the so called Islamic value system is nothing to be feared. I believe that we all share most of the fundamental Islamic values. To promote these Islamic values will be in the best interest of all sections of this society which is multi-religious and multi-racial. If these Islamic values are adhered to, they will promote peace, goodwill and understanding. I speak for myself, making an honest presentation as a student of Islam and as a Muslim committed to his faith, who at the same time respects the people of other religions.

A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Tan Teik Beng

As is widely known, Malaysia is now undergoing development in all spheres at a fast rate. The main objective of the various five year Malaysian Development Plans is the promotion of national unity through the two-pronged strategy involving the eradication of poverty irrespective of race, and restructuring society so as to reduce and eliminate the identification of race with economic functions.

In Malaysia, we are fortunate that the Government is aware of the social and environmental problems that result from very high standards of living, as can be seen in the highly industrialized countries of the world. Measures are taken to strike a balance between material advances and spiritual values so as to curb moral and spiritual degeneration. Religious and moral education are given to our pupils in schools. In this matter, religious bodies and organizations can play an important role. While the Government and its agencies are involved in the economic and material aspects of national development, religious bodies can complement the efforts of the Government by guiding the people along the right

path so that the country will not experience the social and environmental problems prevalent in developed countries, resulting in moral and spiritual decline.

An important aspect of national development is what may generally be termed 'nation building.' In nation building, the most important task is to foster national unity or national integration without which the people will not be in a position to enjoy the benefits accruing from economic development which seeks to give them a higher standard of living and a more comfortable and happy life. In Malaysia, nation building is indeed a gigantic task, because we are encountering a diversity of sensitive issues owing to the multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural nature of our population. Hence, to mould this diversity of ethnic groups into a united nation with common goals requires a great deal of patience, tolerance and mutual understanding. However big the task may be, success can be achieved if all play their part well and are willing to adopt a give-and-take policy. In nation building, religion can play an important role by, as mentioned earlier on, guiding the people along the right path in their moral and spiritual development. Here I attempt to present a few important values for consideration.

I think the majority of people agree that religion can play the role of suppressing man's animal nature, cultivating in him humane qualities and helping him to attain moral perfection. Therefore,

when we talk of religious values in nation building, I am of the opinion that these values should help people attain those objectives. Values such as moderation in gratifying one's sensual desires, loving-kindness and compassion, good manners and morality, when cultivated, will go a long way towards the development of man. This in turn fosters patience, tolerance and understanding, which are imperative in the process of nation building.

In any country where economic development proceeds at a fast pace, resulting in affluence for the people, there is ever present a tendency for the people to over-indulge in sensual pleasures, owing to the easy accessibility of facilities served to arouse the passions, thus leading to moral and spiritual degeneration.

The menace of drug addiction among young people has been declared the number one problem facing the nation today. Striking a proper balance between the material and spiritual development of the people should constitute a major duty of all religions. The Middle Path taught by the Buddha forms an important part of His teachings. Moderation in all life's activities is also found in the tenets of other religions. Craving for sensual gratification springs from greed which is one of the immoral roots condemned in Buddhism. Greed will breed vice and envy which, if not curbed, will lead to a collapse of intelligence. This poses a serious threat to the process of nation building. A man driven by greed

or envy loses the power to see things as they really are, of seeing things in their roundness and wholeness. His very success becomes a failure.

In addition to this, reference should also be made to the two mental states of 'shame' and 'moral dread', since these may be regarded as the two guardians of moral conduct. A person with a sense of 'shame' will develop humility and modesty, thus knowing how to restrain himself in his relationship with others. The virtue of 'moral dread' is that it prevents a person from performing evil actions, having observed the visible results of such actions. He does not resort to violent behaviour and leads a way of life that is conducive to both his happiness and that of others. In Buddhist teaching one highly prized gift someone can give others is to avoid causing them harm so they can live happily and without fear. The path of non-violence taught by the Buddha can be followed by anyone who has absolute faith in moral and spiritual values, for only a man of this kind can calmly and deliberately risk the loss of his earthly life rather than do harm to another living being. Thus, in the final analysis, all planning for national development must go beyond pure 'maximum production' to 'optimal human development'.

Loving kindness and compassion are two of the divine abodes or sublime states taught in Buddhism. According to the Buddha, the basic factor that separates man from man is the spell of egoism. Once this is broken down, healthy human

relationships are possible. On the more positive side, the doctrine of compassion, the emphasis on loving-kindness, charity and mutual respect can bring about healthy interpersonal relationships. Eric Fromm, the well-known German psychoanalyst, said that the essential teaching of all great humanistic religions can be summarised in one sentence: "It is the goal of man to overcome one's narcissism (morbid self-love or self-importance)." He concluded that if man shed the illusion of his indestructible ego and the other objects of greed, he could become totally open, awake and fully related to others.

If we examine the basic human relations presented in the *Sigalovada Sutta* (Discourse on the duties of a lay Buddhist), it will be clear that in relevant social situations, the Buddha advocates mature human relations which deny any symbiotic attachment, abnormal domination or dependence. A factor which obstructs mature human relationships is the factor of conceit. A superiority complex or an inferiority complex leads to unhealthy human relationships, divisive group conflicts and fanatical nationalism. Without being selfish or the victim of self-conceit, a man can promote his own development. In the same way, without being a fanatic, one can identify oneself with a group. Thus, if nation building is to achieve the desired success, greater emphasis should be laid on loving-kindness and compassion. These may be commended as core values. They will provide a philosophical outlook which re-

commends respect and tolerance towards religions other than one's own.

The practice of good manners and morality has been enshrined in the fifth principle of our national ideology, the *Rukunegara*. This is related to character-building which is essential for the training of good citizens and consequently helps in the process of nation building. In this respect, it is gratifying to note that moral education has now been introduced into the curriculum of all schools. Though belated, this will definitely make a considerable contribution towards the building of a strong and united nation. Good manners comprise such values as respect for elders and filial piety. These are age-old values found in the teachings of all eastern religions.

The Prime Minister was undoubtedly aware of the importance of these values when he said in his speech on the 'Look East Policy' last month: "Learning Japanese politeness and respect for elders will temper the strong individualism aped from the West. The 'Look East Policy' considered the Japanese way of life and its code of ethics to be equally important to Japanese technology. We must pick what is appropriate to bring strength to ourselves." Further in his Mid-Term Review speech, the Prime Minister said that the 'Look East Policy' embodies attitudes and values which should be adopted. These incorporate aspects relating to individual behaviour and way of life which will assist us in facing the challenges of progress. It is these aspects which give rise to

the spirit of diligence, dedication and self-reliance.

Rules of moral conduct are to be found in all religions. Such rules are formulated to guide man to behave in a way that promotes orderly and peaceful existence in the community. In Buddhism, there are the five *Silas* or Precepts which are the basic principles for Buddhists to observe daily. Buddhist morality, as embodied in these five Precepts, is a code by which men can live together in civilized communities with mutual trust and respect. These *Silas* or morals are no doubt also found in other religions. I think in our effort to restructure society with the ultimate aim of achieving national unity, it is essential to look for similarities in our religious values which can help us to contribute to nation-building. With national unity achieved, coupled with the moral and spiritual development of the people, we will all be able to enjoy fully the fruits of national development.

Notwithstanding the common religious values for nation building which I have already mentioned, there is no denying the fact that success can only be achieved by the practice of patience, tolerance and understanding by everyone at all times. To emphasize the importance of these values, permit me to quote a passage from His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's speech on the occasion of the opening of the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament in March, 1984: "If we are not vigilant, the sovereignty of our nation will be

threatened. If we forsake mutual understanding and tolerance, we will breed disunity. If we shun hard work, we will be left behind." And should not we also take a hint from the latest slogan introduced by our Prime Minister – *Kepimpinan Melalui Teladan* (Leadership by Example) and the concept of *Bersih, Cekap, Amanah* (Clean, efficient and trustworthy)? As leaders of our respective religious organizations, let us at all times practise patience, tolerance and mutual understanding towards each other in our efforts of nation building so as to be shining examples to those who look to us for spiritual guidance and leadership.

A HINDU PERSPECTIVE

Dr. S M Ponniah

In spite of the scientific progress and threat of nuclear disintegration, impending star wars, societies deeply torn by inter-religious strife in Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Iran, India and Sri Lanka and elsewhere almost 40 years after the end of the Second World War, we Malaysians have been able to live in peace and harmony, both before and after independence, as a model nation a miniature United Nations – to the envy of the rest of the world. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to travel outside Malaysia are better positioned to realise the uniqueness of Malaysia and Malaysian society. Malaysia is a nation which is a melting pot of all the cultures of Asia and of the West. This is due largely to its geographical position and historical past, as well as to the political wisdom of its leaders – leaders who in their maturity have chosen to exclude extremism, both political and theological, and to run the government of the country on parliamentary democracy based on the ballot box. As a result, Malaysia has been hitherto able to attain political stability, economic progress, inter-racial and inter-religious harmony in spite of its manifold diversities.

It is to maintain and retain this uniqueness of Malaysian society that the Consultative Council has been formed so that the nation's various religions can also join hands with the Government to ensure that inter-religious harmony and understanding will remain the corner-stone of national unity. Forging national unity has been the paramount purpose of the Government and the people of this country. Towards this end the national heads of the diverse religions of this country gathered — not as politicians but as leaders of their respective religions — to discuss and to debate the issues of the day that seemed likely to endanger national unity or force drastic change.

The major issues before us today involve prevailing misconceptions related to the role of religion in nation building. These are issues that deserve to be examined by all Malaysians with dispassionate minds.

All Malaysians, whatsoever their racial origin, cultural background, or religious faith, must recognise the fact that diversity is a reality that cannot be ignored. National unity needs to be developed by patient endeavour. There must be a united effort on the part of everyone concerned, be he an official of the Government or an ordinary man in the street. The ultimate, desirable and truly Malaysian aim should be unity in diversity — not uniformity.

The second reality that needs to be recognised by one and all is that Malaysia is a secular state,

committed to a democratic form of government based on adult franchise and to a parliamentary government with the Monarch as Head. This is a reality that cannot be ignored or altered, if our uniqueness is to be maintained.

The third reality is the resurgence of Islam and Islamic Solidarity. Although the Reid Commission had advocated a secular state, the special position of Islam as the religion of the majority community was given due recognition by the acceptance of Islam as the official religion of the country. The Chinese and Indian representatives accepted this amendment to the Reid Commission Report in good faith. This clause needs to be correctly interpreted if misconceptions are to be removed.

Long before the Revolution in Iran came to pass, Tunku Abdul Rahman initiated the National and International Quran Reading Competition which has become an annual feature in Malaysia. This annual gathering of Muslims from all over the world has greatly helped to give Malaysia a special place in the Islamic world. The Second World War was a tidal wave before which the French, British, Italian, Dutch and American Colonial empires crumbled. New nations were born in Africa and Asia, adding to the Islamic kingdoms and republics in the world. The partition of India eventually gave birth to two new Islamic nations.

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However, the Revolution in Iran has let loose a new tide of fundamentalism which seems to

have also affected the Malaysian Government and its outlook. In its eagerness to find identity in and solidarity with the Islamic community of nations Government policy and outlook seems to be moving towards new directions – where one's religion becomes a divisive factor in the context of Malaysian society.

Various forces in the country are attempting to change the present democratic form of government and the principle of freedom of worship. New restrictive policies towards non-Muslim religions are beginning to give cause for concern and disquiet. Two opposition parties have clearly stated the setting up of an Islamic state in their respective political manifestos. At least one senior officer of the Government has expressed the view that it is the Government's ultimate aim to turn Malaysia into an Islamic state. The Government, for its part, has embarked on an Islamization Policy without consultation with the leaders of the other communities. A Government-sponsored seminar on Islamization was held in Kuala Lumpur in May 1984. These straws in the wind are causing alarm and disquiet in our minds – particularly in the minority groups who profess different religions. If this trend is not corrected, our democratic system of government will eventually give way to a theocratic one in which the state and religion become one and indivisible. Malaysia as a secular state will cease to be.

I recall the words of the Tunku on his 80th Birthday that Malaysia is a secular state. To quote

the Tunku's words in another context, "we have accepted a form of government for this country – a democratic state with a Constitutional Monarch."

We, the representatives of the other faiths, wish to pledge our loyalty to the King and the democratically elected Government of Malaysia. We do not and will not support any opposition party which desires to turn Malaysia into a republic on the Pakistani, Iranian or Libyan model. We pledge ourselves to the five-fold principles of *Rukunegara* – agreed to and accepted by the Government and people of this country as the foundation and bed-rock of national unity. These five-fold principles are worth repeating:-

- o Belief in God
- o Loyalty to King and Country
- o Upholding the Constitution
- o Rule of Law
- o Good Behaviour and Morality

Those who are deviating from these principles in the implementation of policies, or those who are deliberately attempting to by-pass them, must be stopped. They are acting against the interests of national unity and national survival.

It is indeed relevant at this point to draw at-

tention to an editorial of the *New Straits Times*, on March 12, 1984. It referred to the Government's intention "to make racial unity a national ideology with perhaps a new Federal Ministry responsible for it." I would like to quote in full, points of the editorial as the editor puts his finger on the national pulse and draws our attention to the need of the moment — national integration.

"There is the necessity to tread softly and to allow viewpoints to be expressed before this national ideology is formulated. To erase ethnic barriers and thence build anew, what is needed is not rules but an honest examination of how past policies have, however unintended, served to distance the communities.

Race relations essentially concern feelings. There is a need, every time a decision is made, to put oneself in the shoes of the affected communities and ask how they would feel and react in such a situation. Integration will come only after people are prepared to be in touch with each other's cultures and religions, to understand the reasons for fears and expectations, and to realise there has to be taking without depriving."

The editor concludes:

"Such a committee must probe deeply and honestly into the reasons why the races are not integrating as well as they should. For there to come a time when everyone will think himself Malaysian first and last, the

committee must gear its efforts towards healing where there is hurt, repairing where there is damage. Patience and understanding must underscore all its deliberations."

We welcome this timely piece of pertinent advice by the editor of the influential *New Straits Times*, to the Government, on the need for national integration.

In the interests of national unity it is essential to acknowledge without reservation the uniqueness of every religion. No religion can be more equal or less equal than another. Every religion is unique. At the same time it must be acknowledged that every religion is universal in its concepts. If Malaysians are to survive as a nation, we must:

- o accept the fatherhood of God; and
- o the brotherhood of man.

God is one and universal and all men are equal before God. One's perception of God, man and the universe may differ, according to the geographical environment. We must be magnanimous enough to accept the oneness of God and the diversity of approaches to God, and not try to impose one's religious views on another, as the chosen people of God. Let me quote the poetry of Jallaludin Rumi, in which he illustrates the point that religions are many but God is one:

The One True Light

"The lamps are different, but the Light is the same;

it comes from beyond.

If thou keep looking at the lamp, thou art lost;

for thence arises the appearance of number and plurality.

Fix the gaze upon the Light, and thou art delivered from the dualism inherent in the finite body."

As diversity is inherent in Malaysian society, let us accept different approaches to God for the attainment of perfection and ultimate surrender to Him. Once again I venture to quote a poem of Jallaludin Rumi, entitled the Shepherd's Prayer – whose theme is pertinent to our theme of national unity.

The Shepherd's Prayer

Moses saw a shepherd on the way, crying,
"O Lord who choosest as Thou wilt,

Where art Thou, that I may serve Thee and
Sew Thy shoon and comb Thy hair?

That I may wash Thy clothes and kill Thy lice
and bring milk to Thee, O worshipful One;

That I may kiss Thy little hand and rub Thy
little feet and sweep Thy little room at
bed-time."

On hearing these foolish words, Moses said,
"Man, to whom are you speaking?"

What babble! What blasphemy and raving!
Stuff some cotton into your mouth!

Truly the friendship of a fool is enmity: the
High God is not in want of suchlike
service."

The shepherd rent his garment, heaved a sigh,
and took his way to the wilderness.

Then came to Moses a Revelation: "Thou
hast parted My servant from Me.

Wert thou sent as a prophet to unite, or wert
thou sent to sever?

I have bestowed on every one a particular
mode of worship, I have given every one
a peculiar form of expression.

The idiom of Hindustan is excellent for Hin-
dus; the idiom of Sind is excellent for
the people of Sind.

I look not to tongue and speech, I look at the
spirit and the inward feeling.

I look into the heart to see whether it be
lowly, though the words uttered be not
lowly.

Enough of phrases and conceits and meta-
phors! I want burning, burning: become
familiar with that burning!

Light up a fire of love in thy soul, burn all
thought and expression away!

O Moses, they that know the conventions
are of one sort, they whose souls burn
are of another."

The religion of love is apart from all reli-
gions. The lovers of God have no religion
but God alone.

Let me conclude by stressing that every reli-
gion now practised in Malaysia has a role – a sig-
nificant role to play in nation building, through
the development of a deeper understanding of
each others beliefs, value systems and thinking
processes. This must be done not by tolerance.

More than mere tolerance is necessary if we are to build national unity. It involves a search for unity in diversity, by making human brotherhood a practical reality.

In the context of Malaysian society we cannot be exclusively Muslim, Hindu, Christian or Buddhist. Malaysians must continue to attend each other's social and religious functions, marriages and deaths; study in the same schools; work in the same offices, labour in the same factories and play in the same fields without allowing their religions to become a divisive force. Another important dimension of national unity is that all religions in the country join hands with each other to fight the common enemies of all Malaysians, irrespective of race or religion. These are ignorance, poverty, disease, immorality, irreligion, irresponsibility and insensibility to suffering. Instead of pitting ourselves against each other, let us work together for national unity and national survival.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Rev Hwa Yung

In a country like Malaysia, the theme 'Common Religious Values for Nation Building' is indeed a most pressing issue for at least two reasons. Firstly, in a world of gross inequalities and injustices, we are rightly concerned with building a just, strong, prosperous and harmonious nation. Secondly, human history has repeatedly shown us that in a multi-racial and multi-religious country such as ours, unless a determined search for common values is made for nation building, the chances are very high that our diversities will lead to intolerance, a lack of mutual respect and, consequently, to open antagonism and mutual destruction. This is clearly illustrated today in countries like Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Iran. If this is the case, where then do we begin?

The first question we must ask is this: Is it possible to find common values among the many different religions in our country? I think, if we are honest, we must begin by admitting that there are indeed deep-seated differences in our beliefs and traditions. But this does not mean that we have no values in common. To put it in another way, there are many things which we agree

to be right or wrong even though our reasons for so believing may not be the same. Thus a Buddhist may disagree with a Christian in how we understand God or the Ultimate Reality, but they can both affirm the sacredness of human life. Similarly, whilst a Hindu or a Sikh would agree on the doctrine of transmigration, the cycle of birth and rebirth, both would not agree with the Muslims on what happens to man after death. Nevertheless, all three would generally agree that refraining from immoral living is right and good. Thus it can be recognized from the outset that we in Malaysia share many common values, and these are not the values of any one religion but are universal both in scope and in origin. Having accepted this, we are now in a position to examine more specifically areas where we share common values with regard to nation building.

Firstly, most of us would agree that we share a common concern for individual character development and moral growth. This is particularly clear in Confucianism, one of the moral-religious traditions of the Chinese. Here the *chun-tzu* is the princely or superior man who has arrived through education and devotion to moral ideas. And only when a man possesses personal integrity can he effectively contribute to the welfare of society at large. Similarly the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that man must be holy because God is holy. This stress on the need for high moral standards in personal life without which we cannot be of much benefit to others

has always been understood by Christians. I think few would disagree with this fundamental principle of life.

Secondly, owing to excessive individualism and loose sexual morals, we live in a time where in some parts of the world, almost one in every two marriages break up. This same disease is fast catching up in our own society as well, especially in the urban areas. Against this sad state of affairs we would all agree that the family is the fundamental social unit of our society and must be protected by reaffirming the age-old values of respect for parents, genuine care, love for the children by parents, and strict sexual morals.

Thirdly, all the great religious traditions stress the importance of social concern for the needy. Thus the Quran emphasizes the importance of almsgiving to the poor and in fact contrasts it with usury which is strongly condemned. Buddhists stress among other things, *karuna*, (compassion or love), as the basis of morality; Hindus, like Sir S. Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi, have championed social reforms in modern India; Jesus taught that we must love our neighbours as ourselves; and so on. Here again, our reasons for stressing these may be different. For example, Christians stress love for our neighbours irrespective of race, class or religion because we believe in a God who loved men so much that He Himself became Man, suffered and died like man to give us eternal life. Because God loves us with such an immeasurable love, the Christian finds himself

almost compelled, as it were, to share that love of God with all men. "We love because He first loved us." No other religions believe this but that does not mean that we cannot join together to care for the underprivileged, the underpaid, the squatters, and the poor of our nation.

Fourthly, with respect to the question of loyalty to our nation, all of us would wholeheartedly support the *Rukunegara* and work towards making our country united, democratic, just, prosperous, strong and progressive. Christians, on our part, would be very happy to do what is required of us because all these are in principle taught in the Bible as the proper way of living out our faith in Jesus Christ. The only exception to this is when obeying the law of the land means disobeying God. For example, in cases of gross injustices and evil. Then the Christian will sadly, and most reluctantly, have to take a stand in defiance of the law of the land. This is not out of disloyalty to the nation but precisely because he is loyal to the nation. A good example of this was in Nazi Germany where Christians were martyred for plotting against Hitler during the Second World War. But here too, sincere adherents of other faiths would have almost certainly taken the same stand.

Lastly, whilst it is unfortunately true that every religious group has its own fanatical wing, and that these have often given rise to religious strife, nevertheless it would be true to say that none of the religions represented, encourage in-

tolerance and forceful imposition of our own beliefs and values on others who do not share them. The Quran, for example, clearly states that "There is no compulsion in religion." It cannot be emphasized enough that this principle, which is also recognized by Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians, as well as by our National Constitution, must be stressed repeatedly and practised sincerely to guard our society from slipping into the kind of inter-religious strife that is destroying so many nations around the world today.

In the *Rukunegara* we read the following: "Our Nation, Malaysia, being dedicated to achieving a greater unity of all her people; to maintaining a democratic way of life; to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared; to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions; to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology . . ."

There is little doubt that all of us share this common vision. But this vision will not, and indeed cannot, come to pass unless our nation is built on the solid foundation of high moral standards and universally recognized values shared by the national community in common. It has been pointed out that such values exist. These include among others, personal integrity, strong and sound family bonds, a common concern for the social needs of the underprivileged, loyalty to the nation, mutual respect and tolerance.

Human nature is such that none of us find it easy or natural to put these into daily practice. But is it too much to say that if we are to succeed in nation building, we cannot afford to neglect these, and that these values must be worked at because they are worth working at?

I would like to raise one last matter which we are facing right now in our country. Those of us who read the *New Straits Times* would know that there have been a number of articles recently written on the issue of moral education, a subject in which we share a common concern. Mr David Boler was the first to raise this in his article 'Moral education: How clear the consensus' (9th February 1984). Let us first congratulate the Government for taking a step in the right direction in rectifying a modern educational heresy. Ancient education in almost all societies had a distinctive moral emphasis which was often coupled to a religious basis.

Much of modern day education has sadly neglected the moral as well as the religious aspects. There is therefore no doubt that our Government, in introducing moral education for non-Muslims side by side with *ugama* classes for Muslims, is heading in the right direction — at least in principle. But the real value of Mr Boler's article in the present context appears to be this: It raised the fundamental question of whether in a multi-religious community like ours, the Government is going far enough with regards to the non-Muslim students. Let me explain. Atheistic philo-

sophers have long pointed out that if we reject belief in God or some form of Ultimate Reality, there can be no adequate basis for moral values. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre, the most well-known existentialist philosopher said: "If I have excluded God the Father, there must be a somebody to invent values." Another philosopher, D. Kalish, in an article in *Time* magazine said of moral philosophy, "There are no ethical truths . . . You are mistaken to think that anyone ever had the answers. There are no answers. Be brave and face up to it."

Therefore, if we are to have moral education without giving it a religious basis we will merely be moralizing without adequate reason. The long-term consequence of all this will be that students will not only turn increasingly away from religious beliefs but also from moral values. Is it too much for us to ask our Government, humbly and respectfully, to think again on this crucial issue and to consider going to one logical step further, viz to make provisions for religious education for all students in their own religious traditions and beliefs? This is being practised in another Asian Islamic nation, Bangladesh.

If the Government should find that this is too difficult a step to take, can we request that they consider seriously at least Mr Boler's proposal that, because ethical values must be taught within a religious context, the non-Muslim students be provided moral education in 'homogeneous' classes where all the students and the teacher con-

cerned share the same religious faith? Without such freedom in our educational system, it is almost certain that the good intentions of our Government will not produce the results hoped for, and this will only lead to increasing moral poverty as a nation. On the other hand, if this freedom to learn moral values within one's own religious tradition is given, the task of nation building in our nation can only be advanced for the blessing of us all.

A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

V Harcharan Singh

This book is the first of its kind in Malaysia in which the role of religion as the basis for nation building is being considered. As a developing country we have made quite rapid advances in many fields and have borrowed technology from wheresoever it was available .

The uppermost thought in the mind of today's worldly man is economic survival, not spiritual development. Religion is a last priority, if at all. In fact very often it is considered irrelevant in our present day world of electronics. We must examine how we can find common religious values when the world is facing so many inter-religious as well as intra-religious conflicts.

By the grace of God, Malaysia has been following a path in which religion has been given a prominent place in our society. Our society is progressive yet not forgetful of the role of religion in reminding mankind that everything which we enjoy today is not just the result of our own efforts but is actually due to the benevolence of merciful God who has blessed our country with so many natural resources for us to draw from. Grateful-

ness is a value which I am sure is common to all religions. Therefore, let us be grateful to Him for His bounties.

The primary object of religion is spiritual development of the individual. This development is, according to Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first *Guru* of the Sikhs, not possible unless one first acquires and practises good qualities such as selfless service to others, truthfulness, compassion, and equality. One must also overcome certain passions such as anger, greed and arrogance. These are actually the sources of conflict and not religion *per se*.

Each religion in fact preaches that one's earnings should be shared among others who may need help. That is why we have the institution of giving tithes among the Christians, *Zakat* among the Muslims and *Daswand* among the Sikhs and similarly in other religions.

These religious values are not unique to Sikhism, to say the least. We cannot deny that these are common religious values and are recognized as such by all other religions. It is these values that distinguish the good from the bad. Let us not therefore reduce and compartmentalize what is good to any particular group or race. That would be to create illogical barriers and divisions. Let us rather build bridges to reach out and consolidate our strength, happiness and harmony as a country rich in its tradition of equality, to pursue the ideal path of the greater good, better life and happiness of our citizens.

It is a good policy of our Government to introduce moral teaching in schools so that the coming generation of Malaysians will be fully aware of its responsibility to itself and the older generation as well as to the society and country as a whole. All moral values are born out of religious teachings and are therefore common to all religions. These moral values should not be given a name that would imply that they were exclusive to a particular religion. It is undesirable because it can give feelings of superiority, fanaticism and extremism on the one hand and on the other, resentment. These feelings clearly should find no place in Malaysian society which has hitherto been thriving on mutual respect for other religions.

Throughout history, religion has exercised a strong influence on society. This is equally true today and it is therefore important that care be taken to avoid the exploitation of sensitive religious sentiments by undesirable elements as this may lead to the destruction of our nation which we cherish.

Material progress is necessary for everyone, but without the discipline of religion and moral values, the race for wealth and possessions can lead to greed and hence deprivation of some at the expense of others, and sow the seeds of trouble. This is what we want to avoid because it would destroy the splendour that is Malaysia today. As Malaysians we walk tall in the world community because of our unity in diversity.

I am not saying that things are perfect. Some obstacles and problems will always be present in every situation.

Even a husband and wife have misunderstandings and even the most happy family can have its little squabbles. This we must accept. As men we are not perfect. Perfection is God's attribute, not man's. But we must, as individuals and as a nation, continue to strive to improve ourselves to be more loving, more considerate, more generous, kinder, more truthful and compassionate. If all of us do our bit we will lay the foundations of a very happy and prosperous society. That is what all religions teach and hence the relevance of religious values in nation building.

Harmony in diversity has been and continues to be the corner-stone of Malaysian living. It ought to be cherished and pursued further. There have been disturbing calls by some over-enthusiastic and opportunistic individuals and groups, propounding the idea that one religion and one culture leads to a united nation. It is my humble opinion that this is not necessarily so. One look around the world will bear testimony that nations which have only one religion are not as united and peaceful as Malaysia is in diversity.

It is my hope that the goodwill of our people of various races will continue to flourish in the future as it has in the past. I am confident that our enlightened leaders will not be swayed from their resolve to have a peaceful, united, prospere-

rous, happy, multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society which is the Malaysia we know and love.

Allow me to end by saying *Sarbat da Bhala*, which literally means "May God bless everyone." This is what a Sikh recites daily in his prayers.

DISCUSSION

Question: In connection with Islamic values, Prof Dr Muhammad Abdul Rauf mentioned that monotheism is central to it. I do not know of any religion which says that there is more than one God and therefore I do not see how monotheism can be singled out as something peculiar to Islam; so I would like to have some explanations on that.

He also mentioned that under Islamic values, there are no symbolic representations or symbolic representations are not allowed. Now in this connection I would like to seek some clarification of the respective meaning of symbolic representations. One is plastic forms in which we have in Hinduism and so on . . . those kinds of symbolic representations are in terms of words and letters. Therefore you find that symbolic representation if it is interpreted to mean words and letters, is common to all religions. You also find that the idea of going beyond symbolic representation is also available at higher levels of Hinduism. Again here I find it difficult to say in what sense this prohibition against symbolic representation is peculiar to Islam.

The third question is, in his speech he mentioned that Muslims in a sense are also Christians because they accept the revelations in the Bible and so forth. Now this is a very interesting observation and therefore I would like to ask Prof.

Rauf whether he would also include the Buddhists and Hindus.

Prof Rauf: I did not claim in my statement that monotheism was peculiar to Islam. What I meant was pure monotheism which we call *tawhid*, that God is one and undivided. We cannot attribute to Him a child or a parent or a concept of Trinity. Again, He could not be conceived of as something to be worshipped concretely. This we call idol-worship which is very inconsistent with Islam and which Islam, when it first came, struggled to fight and eradicate. It has done so in Mecca. That is, the representation of God in the shape of human beings, on trees or stones, whatever, anything we believe to have value or to help us with God. This we call disbelief.

So the concept of monotheism, pure monotheism, is the Islamic concept of God, that is Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*. If other religions would share with us this, I have no objection. But we do not believe in representation and also would not like to have it seen around us outdoors, because that is to us, very inconsistent with our basic belief. The Quran convincingly and repeatedly argues against it. Widespread use of these representations disturb peace in the country; therefore I call for restraint in this regard. We can have it inside our own homes if we wish to, but not outside. Islam is tolerant and even more than that; but we should not outstretch the meaning of the term 'tolerance'. There are always some limits. It is nice to be here today within these

walls and listen to some beautiful inspiring poetic words, but we Muslims tend to be more factual and down to earth.

See how Muslims are suffering in most of the places where they are in the minority these days, like in Africa and elsewhere. I do not like to cite examples. So if we wish to be fair to our hosts in Malaysia who belong to this faith, Islam, then we shall be understanding. We shall appreciate their attitude which we call *tasamuh* in Islam, not merely 'tolerance'. *Tasamuh* means to give and take, not only to expect one party to give, and the other be negative. Our Muslim brethren have been *mutasamihin*, forgiving, accepting, offering, playing hospitable hosts. But then, we should not accept too much of them as to suppress our feelings aroused by things which we know to be against our religion. So pure monotheism is that which is opposed to symbolic representations in the form of shapes of things claimed to be gods or representing God or intermediaries between Man and God.

If I say I am a Christian or a Jew, it is in the sense that I believe as a Muslim, in Moses, Solomon, Abraham and Jesus who also taught the pure monotheism of Allah. We believe that these prophets came with the same principle of *tawhid*, the same concept of monotheism. I am a Christian in the original sense of Christianity and also a Muslim. There is no inconsistency between the original Christianity and the original Judaism and the teaching of many other prophets as Islam is

understood today and also understood at the beginning of its birth in Mecca in 610 A.D. I would not mention other religions because I do not know enough about them. I am not a Christian in the sense of the doctrine of Trinity but in the original sense of Christianity. The Quran says, do not pretend that Jesus is the Son of God. He is only the servant of Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* and the son of Mary.

Comment: After hearing the excellent presentation made in this morning's session, I was reminded of the experience I had when I was a civil servant. One of my functions was to invite tenders. In a particular instance I had to invite tenders for petroleum products and it happened to be lubricants. Every tender submitted by every oil company and every price from every oil company was very similar. So I invited representatives of each company and I said, "Look here, your price is similar to that of Shell, Esso. What is the difference?" Then the Shell representatives said "My viscosity is this . . . my giving hours is this . . ." I tend to believe, sir that there is a lot of commonality in religions as in lubricants and much depends on the way religion is taught and practised. And here probably those who teach religion must be men of wisdom and talent. This is not my purpose of coming here, sir. The primary objective of this conference is to make some firm resolutions or considerations by the public and by the authorities, if possible. Here, let me say this . . . the Harvard Business School gave us the well-known case study approach. A

change is now being contemplated and they are now moving away from the case study approach and putting more emphasis on issues like culture, religion, ethics, morals and so forth Teaching religion in schools not only in schools sir. I would like to see that in every profession — engineers or doctors or lawyers. I think this should be a must. Another proposal which I would like to advance for consideration is to see whether we can create a chair of comparative religion in one of our universities so that an indepth study is made so that everyone would have a better appreciation of the religions, the virtues and benefits of different religions.

Comment: I would like to pick up one point which I think is very fundamental. That is, the fact that although we are here from all different religions, unless we pay attention to the fundamental principle of secularism I think we are in serious trouble. It is very gratifying to see people from different religions coming here today. Real tolerance can only come about if there is genuine adherence to the principle of secularism. Let us not forget, when we are talking about tolerance, that we are gathered here only with the representatives of monotheistic religions like Islam, Christianity, transcendental religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. But if one was really tolerant, would have enough tolerance for the animism of the Ibans and the Dayaks or the beliefs of people like my dear mother who does not belong to any of these religions.

All the same, one's tolerance has to be stretched that far. Let us not forget that tolerance is something that has been espoused from the early days of feudalism. But why is it so important that the shambles of feudalism, the exploitation and bankruptcy of feudalism is now superseded by our more enlightened era? Why has the United Nations come to entrench fundamental beliefs, of which the most important is the freedom of belief?. Therefore let us not forget that if one is a minority, secularist principles are more universal than any of the other principles that one can think of.

A very interesting development happened last year in the United States of America, when Ronald Reagan was trying to put through in the United States, some rule about introducing a Bible-reading day in the schools; he was opposed by, amongst other people, Christians. That was a very clear illustration of what is involved when religious principles are just as religious as secularist principles. The justice of the Palestinian case rests not because the Palestinians are Muslims but because of the violation of their democratic rights.

Comment: Prof Rauf has given us great insights into the Muslim religion and he also expects great tolerance among the religions of this country. I am sure through his experience in this country, he knows that Malaysians are by far the most tolerant people in any part of the world because we are a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society and tolerance is a must in our

lives. And we have seen this throughout our living in this country. He also has asked us a question, "What is the fear in you today?" The fear is not in us today.

The fear has been in us for several years. When this nation was built and when we had independence we had no such fears of religious freedom. But today, we have fears because we see so many incidents of fanaticism being introduced to this country. We have been tolerant of these practices but today there are so many things happening in this country. We read in the papers everyday of things happening and these have led us to fear the things that are forthcoming. Therefore, while you told us to give and take, this same practice must also be observed by everyone and not just one party while the other party is only taking. This Dewan has laid foundations for unity in this country on many occasions. I hope that this seminar will also lay such foundations. As one speaker has said, a resolution should be taken — that no one common religion be accepted in all Government activities.

Question: Prof Rauf said that a person who wishes to speak about Islam should be a Muslim and should not be a non-Muslim. I believe it is a matter of interpretation. While I quite agree with him on that, at the same time, I wonder sometimes whether Muslims have understood the Quran in its purity when they interpret Islam. Because to be able to interpret the Quran, just as if one were to understand Shelly and Keats, one has to be a

Shelly and Keats himself to be able to understand the true spirit of the poetry. In the same way, the Quran is a divine revelation and to be able to understand Islam in its true perspective, can all Muslims, just because they are Muslims, be able to speak on the Quran? Or do you think that he must come up to that spiritual and mental level of the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself before he is able to do so?

Another question on the introduction of Islamic values in the country and Islamic law, which is the legitimate right of the country because Islam is the official religion of the country: there is such a law (I may be wrong) about the stoning of women and men who commit adultery and the cutting off arms of those who steal. This I read from the papers but the papers may sometimes be distorted. Here again, Islam advocates sympathy and love for all fellow beings. Now if a man or woman committed adultery (that does not mean I condone it) or if he does steal, who is to blame? Is not the education system of the country as well as the people at top levels of the country to be blamed for not promoting the true spirit of education, so that these things could be avoided in society?

Comment: All religions talk about religious tolerance or teach tolerance as a very important precept. But never has it been made so clearly as in Islam where it states (forgive me if I am wrong) "do not condemn the Gods whom others pray to besides Allah lest they in their ignorance

condemn Allah." I think this perhaps should be the basis of all our thoughts. The moment we try to talk in a negative sense about other religions, we invite reactions, rational or irrational.

Prof Rauf: The first brother talked about the concept of tolerance. I would agree with him if we use it in the sense when tolerance means the attitude of one side. But in Islam *tasamuh* means mutual tolerance. And I say this in the context of Muslims here. I think they have been tolerant enough and I call upon those who came to share the blessings of this country, like myself, to also reward this tolerance by being tolerant and abstain from doing things that would offend the Muslim sentiment of *tawhid*.

As to the person who raised the question of the competence of non-Muslims to teach Islam, of course I would not let Islam be taught by a non-Muslim because he would not be acquainted with the literature and would distort Islam. I can quote you many instances of writings by non-Muslims, which in fact stand against the fundamental teachings of our religion. But Muslims can convey what they understand of their own religion. It is true that the Quran is the word of God. It asserts an explanation of the truth, and therefore is coached in a language which is clear-cut. Muslims can understand this, although the understanding of the Quran is a matter of degree. There are people who devote their lives entirely to the study of the Quran. There are those who spend a lesser time, those who

flicts. Every misdeed that has happened in other religions has also taken place in Islam. Yet in spite of all this, there have been great human beings and great deeds in the history of Islam. The same is true of every religion.

It is only with this criterion of human behaviour that we can understand the role of religion. If we agree that deeds are important, the next question to ask is, "How do we decide on what constitutes a good deed?" Looking at all the religions in great depth, we find that there is a certain unity in terms of common universal ethical values. This is the foundation of good deeds. It is indeed remarkable that as far as the eternal, spiritual values are concerned, all the great religions have a lot in common. It is not just a question of each religion believing in truth, justice, freedom, equality, dignity, love, restraint and other such values. Even in more specific areas like the concept of unity in the universe, the idea that Man has a spiritual origin and a spiritual destiny, the view that the human being is a single, integrated entity, the attitude towards Nature, the repugnance of unbridled materialism, the emphasis on moderate living, the importance given to the development of moral values in the individual, and the significance attached to the family – in all these there are many outstanding similarities among the various religions. Equally important, all religions perceive ethical principles as transcendental.

How do we enforce these values? How do we

FOUR

**THE QUESTION
OF RELIGION IN NATION
BUILDING**

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar

Does religion have a role to play in nation building? Religion does have a role; but there is a condition that must be fulfilled. We must all realize that if religion is to mean anything at all in nation building, then it is the deed that we perform and not the faith that we profess which should be the basis of determining our goodness. If this is the basis, then the labels and the symbols, the rituals and the ceremonies will become secondary. This is the fundamental teaching of all the great religions. In Islam there is a beautiful verse,

“And show him the two highways?

But he hath no haste on the path that is steep,

And what will explain to thee the path that is steep?

It is freeing the bondman;

Or the giving of food in a day of privation,

To the orphan with claims of relationship,

Or to the indigent in the dust.

Then will he be of those who believe and enjoin patience (constancy and self-restraint) and enjoin Deeds of kindness and compassion.

Such are the companions of the Right Hand.”

(*Sura Balad* 10-18)

The prophet Muhammad once said, “All human beings are dependent upon God. But of all those persons the one that God loves most is he who serves human kind best.” The Buddha in his

wisdom once said, "No man is noble by birth. No man is ignoble by birth. Man is noble by his deeds; Man is ignoble by his own deeds." I am sure the same can be said of all other religious teachings: Christian, Hindu, and Sikh. The criterion is not one's religion. It is one's deeds. The fact that we wear the label of a Muslim, a Christian, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or a Sikh is secondary.

Why does religion place stress on deeds and not on one's affiliation *per se*? To understand this, we must see what is happening around us. For all the great moral ideals which religion has preached right through the ages, we find human behaviour falling far short of these ideals. This is why we must be concerned about human behaviour, because religion, in the ultimate analysis, is concerned with what people do. It is the ultimate test of religion: to focus on deeds and not upon beliefs.

There is a tendency in our country to see what we believe (the mere act of professing a particular faith *per se*) as a guarantee of the faith being practised in reality. This is a fallacy. Because there is a gap between religious belief and reality, no community and no human being has a right to believe that the religion professed is something that frees him from the laws of human behaviour. We are not free from them. Let me give an example from Islam. Shortly after the time of Prophet Muhammad, there was dissension, there were cliques, and there were con-

know that these values are important?

Permit me to make a short digression. If we compare the ideals of our religion with the negative deeds of other religions, we will get nowhere. To start with, it is a wrong way of comparing. We must compare ideals with ideals. We must compare the gross injustice committed in the name of another. This is a principle in physics. We cannot cheat in this way. The comparison must be on the same plane, especially if you are doing it in the name of religion and in the name of God.

Coming back to enforcing values, we ourselves must be convinced that the values we glorify are common ones. To reinforce faith in these shared values, it is crucial that religions establish constant dialogue. Sincere dialogue between the different religions is one of the most urgent challenges of the day. In this society, given the role of Islam as the official religion, as the religion of the majority, it is incumbent upon Muslims to initiate the dialogue. If Muslims do not initiate dialogue, we cannot blame Islam. We must blame the bigoted and the perverted advocacy of false Islam that has become rampant in this society.

Islam has never been adverse to dialogue because the Quran is clear that sectarianism is wrong. Why are they adverse to dialogue? Why are they adverse to communicating? Why do they not take part in inter-religious meetings? We have to look at the followers and the practices of the followers of Islam in this society because in Islam the

search for common principles is a duty of Muslims. In a well-known dialogue with Christians and Jews, Prophet Muhammad asked them to cooperate on the basis of a common principle derived from the fact that all of them owe allegiance to Abraham. No one can argue in his naivety that because we have Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, the dialogue between Christians and Jews encouraged by the Prophet does not apply here. If we look at the history of Islam it is clear from what Said Ramadhan has written that this principle of dialogue was extended to all people. What is important is that we Muslims do not lose our identity – ultimately our identity as human beings – which is precious to us.

Apart from inter-religious dialogue, a common foundation for action is vital. As different religions discover their common values, it is only logical that they examine their social environment to find out why these ideals have not been translated into realities. All the values that we know of – moderation, kindness, sacrifice, self-reliance – are common values to all of us. Whatever our religion, we must be able to face squarely certain questions. If religion believes in the dignity of Man, why is there so much poverty, hunger and oppression? If religion is the freeing of human beings, why is there so much violation of human rights? Should religion keep quiet in the face of these things? If religion is for honesty and righteousness, why is corruption so rampant? Why does religion keep quiet in the face of corruption? Are we more religious by keeping quiet,

performing our daily prayers, going to a mosque or church or doing our *pujas*? Is this religion? Why do we not take a stand against corruption and injustice if this is what religion means and if we believe in the integrity and dignity of Man?

Religion believes in the unity of the Universe, in the unity of all creation. Why are we so afraid to speak out against chauvinism and communalism in our society? We talk about our religiousness. How do we measure this? Through the number of mosques or churches or temples that we build? Is this religion? There are people who, while believing in the truth of religion, condemn every religion other than their own religion. It is these very people who destroy religion. This is why I believe we must have common values as a platform for common action: to work together against corruption, against communalism, against poverty and against injustice; common action means helping the down-trodden fishermen, the poor in the urban areas, thousands of whom live in miserable conditions. If we all work together to improve their social conditions, all other differences will become secondary.

Shared values through dialogue, and social action through committed programmes, will in the end lead to a change in our perception of who God is, what God means to us. As long as religion remains a proclamation of ideals not related to social reality and action, we will see God as the

God of this or that tribe; we will continue to see truth as belonging to this or that community. This is wrong. God is not the property of this or that people. He is the God of all creation, of all peoples. His divine message is never meant for a group or a community. The Quran, for instance, points out that a messenger had been sent to every people. It is meant for everyone.

Once we realize that God is the God of all and that His message is eternally the same for all, then, I think our notion of God will change. He will become the God of all humanity; His message will be for the whole humanity. It has always been so from the beginning of time and will always be so till the end of time: the same God, the same Light and the same Truth. We are the ones who have created divisions and have made divisions the "Be all and end all" of our existence. Let us restore the true meaning of religion and of God. Although we realize that differences will always be there, our primary task will be that of service to humanity and the oneness of God related to the oneness of action.

(Indeed, if religion becomes truly universal, it will be regarded as a spiritual consciousness which pervades and permeates all spheres of society. It will become a consciousness that influences thought and action, that conditions all our relationships. Every word and every deed of ours will manifest this spiritual dimension. And yet it will not be visible in the sense that there will be no symbols, no institutions, no

rules, no ceremonies derived from a particular tradition presented as the characteristics of a national religion. In other words, religion in society should be like sugar in water. It reveals itself through its taste but it cannot be seen as such.

When religion becomes a separate institution defined in conventional religious terms, it loses its vitality and dynamism. It is susceptible to manipulation for political ends. It breeds unnecessary antagonism among those who cannot identify with that religion. This is why an underlying spiritual consciousness which guides human affairs is preferable to outward religious institutions. The actions of our policy makers and of those in power must reflect this spiritual consciousness. It does not matter what label they use. If that consciousness is reflected, then there is hope for religion in the nation's building process.

An underlying spiritual consciousness implies that there is an alternative to both the secular state spawned in the West and the state based upon a particular religion that some in the East yearn for. The problem with the religious state is that it is often trapped by a particular dogma that is sometimes impervious to reason. A state based on one religion will reflect the dominant dogma within that very religion. For example, the dominant dogma within Islam in this country, the dominant dogma within Buddhism in Thailand and the same goes for Christianity in other

parts of the world. There are four different states Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Pakistan — all of which claim to be Islamic states. Yet there are vast differences between them in matters pertaining to politics, to the economy, and to cultural policies. This is because each state advocates a particular type of Islam that has become its dogma.

If Malaysia were to become an Islamic state, the Muslims will be shackled to a single dominant dogma within Islam. This applies to any country that opts for a state based on any one religion, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism or Hinduism. Besides, a state based upon a particular religion will create a certain degree of alienation among those who do not belong to that religion. This is a highly relevant point since most societies today are multi-religious. However universal the ideals of a religion, the very act of creating a state in the name of that religion is bound to divide the nation into an in-community and an out-community. This will become all the more obvious when certain functions and roles are reserved for followers of the national religion - as it will be in any religious state.

In a multi-religious society, even if the ideals of a particular religion are pure and pristine, we cannot run away from the fact that the people who are implementing them are human beings who are inevitably influenced by various vested interests and their own personal inclinations. It is true of all human beings everywhere. How are

we to create a united nation when somehow those of religions other than the state religion feel alienated: when somehow they feel they cannot share, they feel they cannot participate fully in the administration and building of the society because certain positions are reserved for members of a certain community? Is it right for members of other religions to feel this way? Even from a selfish point of view, what about people from our own religion in other parts of the world where they are in the minority? What will be the position of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Hindus in Burma or in Thailand or in Sri Lanka if tomorrow they are proclaimed Buddhist states? An ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, once said: "The greatness of any human being is his capacity to put his heart where the other person's heart is." If we can do this, we will understand why I do not advocate the idea of a state based on a particular religion. Aliran will never support such an endeavour.

While we are opposed to a state based upon a particular religion, all of us, all religions will agree that the secular state of the West has many weaknesses. One of the major weaknesses of the secular state in the West is that it is undergoing a crisis in its institutions from the family to the economy because it is not guided by a set of perennial values, values that transcend Man's immediate existence. The crisis in the family - in the rights of its different members, in the relationships among them - is an outstanding example of this.

It can be argued that this has come about partly because of a decline in the sense of sacredness in the relationship between man and woman, between children and parents. Indeed, even the desire to dominate and conquer nature is also the result, to some extent, of this loss of faith in the sacred. And yet sacredness as a value can be sustained only if one believes in a transcendental reality, in an eternal spiritual existence. Once this notion of transcendence is removed from one's world-view, one's sole preoccupation becomes the immediate, the here and now. It is one of the factors that has led to the growth of a system of production and consumption that is geared towards fulfilling insatiable materialistic desires. For if this material world is all there is to life then there is no need to limit one's desires, to exercise control and restraint in the quest of wealth and power. This is why the idea of transcendence — of an eternal spiritual existence — is so crucial in cultivating those moral values which can serve as signposts in a nation's political, economic and cultural development.

If neither a secular state nor a state based on a particular religion is the answer to the woes of mankind, what is the alternative? It is to create a society inspired by a universal spiritual world-view where laws and policies are founded upon universal ethical values that everyone can identify with. It is to nurture a spiritual notion of Man and his existence: to know that our existence is not just based upon this material world, that it has its transcendental purpose, and that it has a

lot of meaning. Permit me to give a concrete example. If we believe that life is transcendental and goes beyond our immediate existence, then we will have policies which take into account the Man-Nature relationship. We will not destroy the environment simply because it is expedient to do so, as it is happening in many places. Lao Tzu was a great thinker who believed in the Man-Nature relationship. St Francis of Assisi spent his whole life singing praises to Nature. Islam also believes in the harmony of Man and Nature. One of the first injunctions of Prophet Muhammad in Mecca after his triumphant return was to ask people to protect the trees. The Buddha's great enlightenment was linked to the shade of a particular tree.

Let us try to build a state guided by universal ethical values and a spiritual consciousness, a state that uses reason, a state that does not subvert reason and regards reason as an enemy of Man, a state that does not condemn those who advocate a certain policy based on rational analysis. After all, what is important are the values that guide reason. If our values are right, then our rational process, our rational faculty, will also be right.

We had a chance to build such a state fourteen years ago. That chance lay with the *Rukunegara*. We missed the chance. The first principle of the *Rukunegara* 'Belief in God', could have been developed into an all embracing philosophy. What does belief in God mean in

terms of actual social living? We could have translated this belief into a programme for social action; a programme based on God consciousness. If we had done that, we would have been able to unite all our people because the idea of God in the *Rukunegara* is not associated with any particular community and therefore is acceptable to all, even to those whose notion of God may be a little different from the way it is seen in conventional terms. We failed to do that. Instead, what have we done? Over the last eight years, a new trend has developed: religious polarization. It is manifesting itself in every area of our society. We see it in the work place, in schools, in the kindergarten (believe me, it is at the level of the kindergarten), and we see it at the highest levels of our society.

I am convinced that in the long run, religious polarization is going to be far more dangerous than class or ethnic polarization for the following three reasons:

- o The religious polarization that is taking place now has a certain superficial ideological basis which emerges from blind unquestioning faith. It gives one the strength that simple ethnic polarization does not because it is a way of rationalizing everything and it presents itself as if it were an entire world-view. This has a total effect on people. That is why it is dangerous. It is wrong because it is based on blind unquestioning faith which is not encouraged by any of the religious traditions. In Islam, for instance, faith in God

is the product of deep reflection upon all the works of God in Nature and in Man.

- o Religious polarization is going to be more dangerous because it is essentially a channel for reinforcing ethnic identity. After the politics of language of the 60's and 70's, religion is being used to propagate ethnic identity in the new atmosphere. Religion has become the new channel, the new conduit for transmitting ethnic fears and insecurity. Islam as a world civilisation in its earlier period, was a religion that exuded confidence. It was not a channel for insecurity.

Today, in our country, it is mainly a channel for insecurity among the adherents of this particular revivalism. And it is sad because it will affect relationships at the level of human beings. These revivalists stay away from certain places because they feel that it makes them purer than other persons. They do not mix with people who do not belong to their faith. Even within their own religious faith, they divide. They divide those who are pure from those whom they regard as impure. It is happening in our country. All Malaysians know what we are talking about. It has manifested itself in every area of life. That is dangerous because its effect is total, it affects social relationships, it affects the most basic elements in human nature.

What would you tell your daughter who comes back from school and complains that she cannot mix with a person of another religion because the religious teacher

told her that it was a sin to do so? Is not this and related problems the thing that we should be concerned about? We may be obsessed with retaining our political power. We may be obsessed with the fight for power within the parties that constitute the establishment. But we should not forget that, in the long run, the little child with her perception, is going to have a more far-reaching effect on the future of this nation, than who is the President or Deputy President of UMNO or of MCA or of MIC.

- o I think religious polarization is far more dangerous because the most vocal advocates, the unthinking advocates, come from the younger generation and not from the older people. They, the representatives of the future in some sense, are talking along these lines. They shout others down. They abuse others because they believe that they are the holders of the holy grail: they have the truth. They have the only unblemished truth which no one also has. This is going to affect the future because it comes from the younger generation.

Given all these reasons, there should be a more determined effort to check religious polarization. Of course, religious polarization itself is, to a great extent, the consequence of other developments. Nonetheless, we, who believe in God, would be making some contribution towards the resolution of the problem if we began by communicating with one another.

We must begin by talking to one another before it is too late. We must realize a very simple truth which needs to be repeated over and over again in this land of ours as the years go by: that when all is said and done, we are all human beings. I do not doubt for a moment that the reaction of a Pakistani mother whose child is hit by a tragedy is any different from that of a Chinese mother or a Hindu mother or a Sikh mother or a Buddhist mother. The joy that comes from seeing the success of one's loved one will be the same for everyone irrespective of religion. This is a common human factor. This highest point of religion was recognised by all the great mystics, whatever their tradition. Look at what the mystics had to say. They represent the highest point in each religion. In this connection, it is interesting that modern science, quantum physics, sub-atomic physics, is beginning to verify some of the truths that mystics held to. One such mystic was Jallaluddin Rumi.

Rumi, perhaps, the greatest mystical philosopher in Islam, made a point about our common humanity when he said, and I quote :

“I searched for God among the Christians and on the cross but therein found him not. I went into the ancient temples of idolatry; no trace of him there. I entered the mountain cave of *Hijra* (where the archangel Gabriel appeared before the Prophet) and then went as far as Qandhar but God found I not, neither in low of high places. With set purpose I fared to the summit of Mount

Caucasus and found only anka's habitation. There I directed my search to the *Ka'bah*, the resort of the old and young; God was not there either. Turning to philosophy, I inquired about Him from Ibn Sina but found him not within range. I fared then to the scene of the Prophet's experience of a great divine manifestation only a "two-bow lengths distance from him" but God was not there; even in that exalted court. Finally I looked into my own heart and there I saw Him: He was nowhere else."

This is what humanity means: God is in the heart of everyone.

DISCUSSION

Question: After listening to you and Professor Abdul Rauf, it seems that both of you have contradicted one another on a number of points, which you have substantiated from the authority of the one and the same book. Which of you is right?

Dr. Chandra: Your question in fact highlights the dilemma in all religions. I think all religions have different trends and tendencies. You cannot say, "Look, these differences do not exist". Ask rather why they exist. It is because it is human beings who are interpreting universal truths. As long as it is we, human beings, who are interpreting universal truths, there will be different ways of looking at them. Take the example of the concept of *Zakat* in Islam (which is the "poor tax" as it is sometimes called). A person can say, "Look, as long as we are prepared to help the poor it would be sufficient to fulfil the law of *Zakat*". Another person may argue that the *Zakat* also illustrates something deeper in the Islamic conception of justice. It is the underlying meaning that is important – that the poor have an automatic claim upon the wealth of the rich and of the community.

According to this interpretation, the underlying spirit aims at creating a social system where wealth is equally distributed so that there will be neither the rich nor the poor. This will be related

to other verses in the Quran about distribution of wealth and the meaning of man's real needs. The same principle can be interpreted in different ways. And this goes for so many other things in Islam and in other religions, as can be seen in their histories. One of the companions of Muhammad, Abu Dhar Al-Ghiffari, stood up and fought against accumulation of wealth and property of the ruling class of that period, using arguments from Islam. There is a big difference in the interpretation of the Quran between a Muslim like Ali Shariati and conservative Muslims like Maudoodi. We have to accept this as part of the reality.

My view is that the differences come from the way we interpret Scriptures. We can attach ourselves to the literal meaning of the words, of Scriptures or we can go behind the words to their underlying spirit. Of the two ways of interpreting Scriptures, I choose the latter because, if religion is for all times we cannot confine our interpretation to the literal meaning of the words. It is the spirit of the Scriptures that is perennial, not the words.

Question: I am sure that Dr. Chandra has gone through history, studied it very thoroughly and decided that a secular state or regime is the best. May I ask him if he has studied the case of Turkey after being a major power? What is the situation now in Turkey? Is it one of the major powers in the world? Is it accepted as a European country? Is it accepted in the EEC on equal footing with the other European countries?

Look at its economy. It is in shambles. Its debt is around 20 billion US dollars. Like many third world countries, it cannot pay its debts. This is because of its secular regime.

The Quran, according to you, can be interpreted differently. But Allah said that if you are in doubt or in dispute, you must come back to the Quran which is the Rule. It is very clearly understood by everybody that you must accept the law of Allah. If you do not, then you are on the wrong side.

Dr. Chandra: I did not say that the secular state was the best. I am sure all those who have listened will attest to this. In fact I said that the secular state has weaknesses. I talked of an alternative to both a state based on a particular religion and a secular state as found in the West. I do not think this point needs any further elaboration because I do not advocate a secular state. Nonetheless, your example of Turkey itself proves the point I was making. You quote Turkey as an example and say, "Look, here is Turkey, the state that chose secularism. Look at the mess it is in." This is one of the wrong ways of analysing society. We have to find out why Turkey is what it is today. It could be because of its secularism. It could be because of a variety of other reasons. It is this sort of analysis that we need. Is Turkey in the situation it is today because it became secular? If it were, then Pakistan must be one of the best countries in the world because since 1947, Pakistan has continuously advocated an

Islamic State with an Islamic constitution. It has had assemblies after assemblies talking about this.

Saudi Arabia says that its political system is based on the concept of *syura*. Is it an example of a good Islamic state? Can one say that Saudi Arabia is successful? This is the problem. You use the example of Turkey to prove that a secular state leads to a mess. I can give examples of countries which adhered to Islamic law which are in a mess. Libya is an example. Its laws are derived from the Quranic tradition as interpreted by its leaders. Is it an example of a good state? This sort of reasoning I think is a bit faulty. Let us analyse situations in greater depth. I can think of secular states (and I am not advocating secular states) which have done more for the sufferings of their people than many other states which claim to be based upon Islamic laws. If arbitrariness in the use of power, if ignoring the poor and the downtrodden, if corruption are the things that Islam condemns, then countries like Sweden, Austria or Denmark which really look after the human being would be better examples of countries practising "Islam" than many of the so-called Islamic States. Corruption is institutionalized in some of them to such an extent that it has become a pervasive way of life. In a neighbouring country that has a very large Muslim population almost everything has to be obtained through corruption. Ultimately you must analyse human behaviour as it is. To bring ideals to the level of reality, begin by analysing social realities.

Fadlullah Wilmot: Dr Chandra Muzaffar has his own point of view of the interpretation of Islam. His point of view should not be taken as the view of most Muslims. Not all Muslims share his views on the existing Islamic states. I think it would be helpful also for non-Muslims to try at least to understand the feelings and thoughts of people who wish to establish an Islamic state. I agree with him that we have to analyse the social phenomena by comparing realities with realities, ideals with ideals. I also agree that there are black pages in Islamic history as there are in other religious histories. But I think from history, Islam has implemented its values more perfectly than other religions. There were periods in Islamic history where all the poor were taken care of. All I want to say is that Islamic ideals have been implemented and you should try to understand the motivations and ideals of people who do wish to establish an Islamic system.

I do not think Dr. Chandra was brushing it off, but his views should not be taken as representative of mainstream Islamic thought. The ideas of Professor Rauf are more representative of mainstream Islamic thought. This does not mean that Muslims reject the use of reason and are intolerant. Although I agree with Dr. Chandra on questions of rigid interpretation, the need for research, and knowledge, I do not think the answer lies in denying Muslims their desire for an Islamic state which would guarantee social, economic and religious justice for all.

Dr. Chandra: I agree with Fadlullah Wilmot that what I said is not mainstream Islam. But what is mainstream Islam? It is the Islam that is dominant, that is controlled by the dominant sources of power. Of course these dominant sources of power all over the world support Islamic scholarship of a certain type, set up Islamic universities of a certain type and employ Muslims of a certain type to run Islamic Universities. Now, these dominant centres of Islam all over the world would not agree with the kind of interpretation that I have proposed here because it challenges the existing power structure. It challenges the way in which things are done in Muslim countries. My point is this and it is very important. I hope that Fadlullah Wilmot will be able to empathize with me on this point.

Although a number of Muslims may not concur easily with what I have said, it is nonetheless a legitimate approach to Islam. It is legitimate because I can quote a number of Muslim thinkers who do not agree with an Islamic state as advocated by some Muslims. Yet they are good Muslims. They believe in the underlying values of the religion. For them, these are immutable values. They make a distinction between the contextual and universal laws, the peripheral and the perennial. And their lives (I come back to the question of deeds) may be better in some instances than the lives of those who shriek their heads off on behalf of Islam, who will talk of the great Islamic past which they want to revive, and yet do not understand what this really entails.

Let me quote one of the greatest authorities of Islam to show that the Islamic state, which you suggest as something that every Muslim has to support, is not necessarily the type of state with which certain Muslims would agree. You have all heard, (those who have studied history and sociology), of the name Abdul Rahman Ibn-Khaldun. Ibn-Khaldun produced a massive work called *Muquaddimah* which Arnold Toynbee, the great British historian, described as the greatest work produced by any mind at any time. Ibn-Khaldun argued that it was not necessary for a society, an administration, to be based upon Divine Laws. A state could be based upon reason and social solidarity as long as it upheld ethical values. Ibn Khaldun was recognised by both Eastern and Western scholars as perhaps the first social scientist. He lived in the 14th century. Why was such thinking acceptable then? Because there was a tradition of thinking and analysis that characterised the Islam of that age, a characteristic which the mainstream Islam that you talk about lacks since it became ossified from the 15th and 16th century onwards. It is this ossified Islam that has emerged now after long periods of domination by colonialism and imperialism.

Today, in the so-called mainstream Islam, if a thing like cornea transplant is advocated, it become an issue; and yet in the early Islamic period it was possible to perform autopsies without having to refer to the opinion of any *Mufti* or *Ustaz*. This spirit of openness, dynamism, and discovery is what is lost now, yet it is also a part

of Islamic tradition and Islamic history. I subscribe to this particular tradition because I believe in a famous saying of Prophet Muhammad "The greatest gift of God to man is his reason." Is this not true? I do not believe that God would have given us this capacity to reason if He wanted us to put it in cold storage.

Of course, as Fadlullah suggested, non-Muslims must try to understand the feelings and thoughts of the advocates of an Islamic state. But first these advocates must understand themselves; what is the nature, the structure, the content of the Islamic state they want? I present this challenge to these advocates. When one advocates a state, one should have a certain conception of what it means. A state has a number of attributes. Whether you are talking of an Islamic state or of any other type of state, it must have certain attributes. Because a state is related to the lives of people, one must be able to explain how the economy is to be organized, what the structure of administration and politics would be, what sort of characteristics the system of production would have, what would be the relationship of labour to capital, what would be the role of entrepreneurship, and other factors. What are the values, principles, injunctions and prohibitions found in the Quran upon which we can establish a political, economic, social and cultural system that is meaningful and worthwhile?

But the tragedy of the advocates of an Islamic state is that they cannot distinguish between

these values and principles and an actual social system. A system must be able to provide clear ideas on what the basis, the means of production would be since it affects all our lives. If one asks, for instance, what is the system of production in Saudi Arabia or in Iran, what are its characteristics, one has to analyse the system in terms of the knowledge that we have today of economics. One has to garner, one has to make use of all the knowledge one has of things studied from modern economics and sociology. No one can run away from it. This is the major intellectual weakness of the advocates of an Islamic state. Besides talking about and propagating the ideals of an Islamic state, they have never been able to explain an Islamic state in terms of specifics. And for human beings, specifics count because they determine from where our food, our sustenance comes.

Prof Rauf: My name was mentioned and it appeared that I was in contradiction with the last speaker. I have great respect for the speaker and admire his abilities. In fact I have learnt a lot from him. However, what he has said is an interpretation that I have not heard. We Muslims have the Quran which is for everyone. Islam is not a matter of vague statements or sentiments. I would like to say that what I have presented is the truth of Islam as we, Muslims, believe according to the Quran. Ibn-Khaldun was certainly a great scholar. His concept of a state is no different from that of other Muslims. He did not advocate the theory, as suggested by the speaker, of an Islamic system

isolated from Islam and its values.

Dr Chandra: There are two points in your comments to which I would like to respond. Are there different interpretations? Professor Abdul Rauf implied that there is no difference in interpretations. We are not talking of areas of pure theology. We are talking of Islam as applied to social reconstruction. There are bound to be different interpretations. Let me give you a few contemporary examples. In the disagreement between Bani-Sadr and Imam Khomeini, did not their differences emerge from their interpretation of fundamental issues in Islam? With regard to issues on women and on land and its distribution, they differed in their understanding. No one can ignore this fact. Within the Muslim brotherhood, the *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimin*, in Egypt there have been differences of interpretation. Similarly Mahmud Shaltut interpreted social justice and redistribution of wealth differently from Assyahid Sayyed Kutb. How can one say that one's interpretation of Islam's social message is the truth of Islam?

It must be recognised that one's presentation is at best a certain perspective on Islam's role in social reconstruction. There will be other perspectives and other interpretations. Different interpretations exist not only in Islam but also in all religions. We cannot eradicate these differences. My plea is this and only this: that those in control of Islam at this moment should not use their position to illegitimize, to destroy other interpretations. After all, these interpretations may be

based upon greater feeling for human beings, for the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed. Concerning Ibn-Khaldun's theory, I am surprised that Professor Rauf misunderstood a most obvious point in that great man's writings. Ibn-Khaldun was aware that a state based upon divine laws was not an absolute necessity — from the examples in history. He was convinced that a state could be built on other bases.

Quite apart from all this, it must be remembered that when one talks of an Islamic state there is a whole area of activity which any state undertakes which has no political, administrative or legal relationship with the revealed verses of the Quran and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad. For example, when a leader has to decide whether to go to war or not, whether to raise prices of goods or not, whether to control dissent or not, whether to decentralize or not, what are his considerations? Like all other leaders everywhere he makes decisions based on a variety of factors — social and economic considerations, the political situation and personality inclinations. One hopes that decisions will also be guided by ethical values, by a spiritual world-view as I have explained before. But the point is this: we cannot run away from the use of reason. Neither can we ignore how Islamic leaders, like other leaders, are also influenced by self-interest, how ideas and ideology are dictated by self-interest. This may be in contradiction to underlying spiritual values, but it does happen.

FIVE

**PROBLEM AREAS THAT
HINDER INTER-RELIGIOUS
HARMONY**

A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Fadlullah Wilmot

Hinderances to inter-religious harmony are at least in part the product of the following: Inadequate knowledge, misunderstanding, insensitivity, intolerance, bigotry, the misrepresentation of history, the legacy of history, institutional pride and bigotry, political conflicts, socio-cultural differences, the rise of secularism and the impact of the mono-cultural concept of the modern state. Particularly relevant to Islam is the anti-Islamic bias of the media and the Orientalists as well as the inability of Muslims to communicate their ideals and points of view, in a language both intelligible and appropriate to non-Muslims. Another factor has been the prominence given to statements about Islam by Muslims who do not have an adequate intellectual grasp of the principles of Islam.

The problem of inadequate knowledge about Islam is still a major problem for many non-Muslims. For example, Grant C. Butler in his book *'Kings and Camels'* refers to answers given by American oil executives at Aramco School about Islam. Some thought it was a game of chance, some said it had something to do with

the Ku Klux Klan. Others said Muhammad wrote the Arabian Nights and another said either a mountain came to him or he went to a mountain. However, the problem is not only one of inadequate knowledge; it is one of negative stereotypes. This is well portrayed by Godfrey Jansen in his book *'Militant Islam'*. He refers to "The image of bearded men with burning eyes, hieratic figures in robes and turbans, of blood dripping from the stumps of amputated hands and from the striped backs of malefactors and piles of stones barely concealing the battered bodies of adulterous couples."

However, even Jansen contributes to this misunderstanding by referring to the supposed Iranian influence in Malaysia resulting in the throwing of television sets in rivers and the ripping out of seats in cars and replacing them with wooden ones. Even among non-Muslims living in Muslim countries, there is a lack of knowledge about the real teachings of Islam. Nowhere is this more apparent than when the concept of Islamic law and the Islamic state is discussed, particularly with regard to the treatment of non-Muslims in the Islamic state.

In his speech last year at the opening of the RISEAP General Assembly, the Prime Minister said:

"It is wrong for these biased critics to imply that the fostering of an Islamic way of life would endanger the rights of non-Muslims. An objective reading of history indicates

that the Islamic system really guarantees the protection of the rights of minorities. Islam, since the days of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) has recognized non-Muslims as an *ummah*, or community . . . on par with the Muslim community, with the full rights to realise themselves according to their own legacy and genius. In history we can see that the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists were included in the Islamic state as *ummahs* on par with the *ummah* of the Muslims. The Islamic system was their guarantor and protector, whose duty, as defined by its own constitution, was to enable each group to live in accordance with its own religion, society and culture and to perpetuate itself through generations in perfect freedom. The Islamic state thus enables those of different religions and cultures to live harmoniously and in peace with one another. This is a unique phenomenon on earth and history knows no parallel."

To quote Jansen again, "Islam is not a religion and Muhammad is not the founder of Islam." Islam does not confine itself to the private life of man. As stated by Kurshid Ahmad it provides guidance for all walks of life – individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. Because of this, Jansen states that:

"it cannot be repeated too often that Islam is not merely a religion. It is a total and unified way of life, both religious and secular; it is a set of beliefs and a way of worship; it is a vast and integrated system of law; it is a culture and a civilisation; it is an

economic system and a way of doing business; it is a policy and a method of governance; it is a special sort of society and a way of running a family; it prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress and etiquette, food and personal hygiene. It is a spiritual and human totality, this worldly and other worldly. Consequently, religion and politics are the two sides of a single coin in Islam."

If we want to have real inter-religious dialogue we must study the other faiths in their true light. The polemic against Islam continues today although in most cases the scurrilous attacks against Muhammad have ceased. We have statements like that of L. Levonian in Beirut who said "Christianity is essentially non-spiritual." This is found in his book 'Studies in the Relationships between Islam and Christianity'. He also stated that Muslims are generally lazy, selfish, sensual and dishonest. Misunderstandings about divorce, marriage and the Islamic *shari'ah* are still wide-spread even though the aim of the *shari'ah* is to ensure justice to all, irrespective of race or religion. The Chambesy Dialogue Consultation between Muslims and Christians recognised the right of Christians as well as Muslims to order their corporate lives in accordance with the injunctions of their own religious principles and laws and to have and maintain all requisite institutions in accordance with their religious principles and laws as equal citizens.

The historical record is often distorted and an incorrect picture of Islam is created. It is strange

that scholars who are prepared to study sympathetically the history of different groups and nations, immediately become negative when talking about Islamic history. Henri Pierenne suggests that in the whole-history of the world there has been nothing comparable in the universal and immediate nature of its consequences with the expansion of Islam in the 7th century. However, no other civilization comparable in size, distinguished past and religious significance as Islam has been so thoroughly discounted. The past needs to be seen in its own right. For example, when discussing the aftermath of the Muslim conquest of Constantinople, Sir Edwin Pears talks of "six centuries of barbarism in Constantinople and the Balkans." Is this an accurate picture of the Ottoman Empire? The history of Islam in India has been deliberately distorted in some recent books. The history of Islam in the Malay world has been minimised by Western scholars. In fact, as has been demonstrated by Prof Syed Nagib Al-Attas, the coming of Islam was probably the most momentous event in the history of South-East Asia and the Malay language is a result of the Islamic impact.

The legacy of history has caused problems in inter-religious harmony. The Muslim world from the start of the 19th century came under the full control of the Christian West. However there were about 350 years of Christian missionary endeavour in the Muslim world and 150 years of colonial conquests. The biggest impact of colonialism was on education where the West-

ern powers destroyed or ignored the indigenous educational systems and the intellectual elite of the Muslim world underwent a thorough, if subtle, brainwashing; making them aliens in their own countries of which they became the rulers after independence. The French followed a methodical policy of deracination and deculturalization. The British and Dutch did the same thing in the Malay world. The role of Christian mission in the Muslim world in the past and in some places at present, causes some tensions. Institutional pride and bigotry also cause problems hindering inter-religious harmony. In fact this institutional pride and bigotry is really an institutionalization of human passion. There is an unwillingness to give and take or admit mistakes, excesses or wrongs committed. The vested interests of institutions often stand in the way of understanding.

The rise of secularism causes problems, because for Muslims, the concept must be rejected as Islam is, in fact, the complete antithesis of secularism. Here Muslims disagree with Paul Tillich who said in his book 'Dynamics of Faith' that secularists should not be excluded from "the community of the faithful." Secularism resulted in the separation of church from state, public from private conduct and national from international conduct. It was the last one that allowed unjust laws to be administered by the colonialists with complete justice. In the words of Syed Hossein Nasr, Muslims view "Secularism as everything whose origin is merely human and therefore non-divine, and whose metaphysical basis lies in this

ontological separation between man and God.”

Political conflicts have also hindered inter-religious harmony. The creation of the illegal Zionist entity in the land of Palestine, which had been an Arab and Islamic land for 1,200 years, has caused much misunderstanding. The French have supported the Maronite Christian minority in Lebanon, denying the Muslim majority the Presidency and a majority in the parliament. The fact that the wealthy Western world is mainly Christian and that many of the countries in the Third World are Muslim, creates problems. The unwillingness on the part of India to concede the right of Muslims to have their own state causes problems. The problem of the Muslim minorities has led to a situation where of the world's 12 million refugees, almost 75% are Muslim.

Orientalists must take much of the blame for the way Islam is misunderstood. Western orientalist have mounted a special type of offensive against the Muslim world. For example, Gibb, the author of numerous works on Islam, still calls his book by the offensive title of 'Muhammadism' even though he knows it is offensive. He says the absence of clergy in Islam is "a lack of organization related to the atomism of the Arab mind." Bernard Lewis is a passionate defender of the Zionist entity.

The impact of the mono-cultural concept of the modern state tends to hinder inter-religious harmony. If the state demands that there be

complete assimilation and a levelling of cultural differences, then conflicts will occur. This does not mean that there should not be a national language and culture but that the linguistic and cultural heritage of the minority should be guaranteed the right to exist. In Britain for example, Muslims have run into difficulty in establishing their own schools. Now there is a problem over the supply of *halal* food to Muslim pupils. In Greece, Muslim Turks are denied the right to be different as are Muslims in some states in South-East Asia. The Islamic concept is that there should be permitted a variety of cultures, languages, religions and even laws for the various religious groups.

Socio-cultural differences can cause problems if there is no effort to attempt to understand the socio-cultural world-view of others. For example, the system of worship of Islam is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. The Muslim's need for *halal* food, the non-taking of alcohol, the forbidding of gambling, the prohibition of contact between unmarried members of the opposite sex, the system of Islamic punishments, the modest dress of Muslim women and the totalistic world-view of Islam often cause problems.

Unfortunately, the mass media which should help to overcome lack of understanding, often aggravates it by its bias. This has been mentioned by the Prime Minister who said:

“Unfortunately, the attention given to the

Muslim world, especially by the Western media, is far too often biased, presenting a picture of the efforts of Muslims to inculcate proper Islamic values and practices by the teachings of Islam as something to be feared. The efforts of Muslims to make the principles and ideals of their faith play a more meaningful role in the development of a just and prosperous society is portrayed as the work of a strange group of people whom they refer to as 'fundamentalists'. This term, which is borrowed from Western terminology and religious experience, according to the dictionary, means 'an extreme Protestant position characterized by the belief that the Bible is a verbally accurate recording of the word of God' or 'adherence to traditional beliefs of any kind.' In this connection all Muslims must be fundamentalists of the first type. We know for certain that the Quran revealed to Muhammad 1,400 years ago is the direct revelation of God to mankind and is of universal applicability. As far as tradition is concerned, 'Islam is wisdom that withstands all falsehood.' "

The Prime Minister also said that:

"The current revival of Islamic awareness comes at a time when the dominant ideologies of socialism, capitalism and communism are being questioned for failing to deliver the goods. It is equally necessary for non-Muslims, just like the Muslims, to examine the message of Islam with openness and without prejudice. If Islam has nothing to offer, why worry about it? If it has something to offer, why deny it to ourselves? The efforts of the Malaysian Government to establish

an Islamic Bank and an International Islamic University, and to foster positive values in accordance with the teaching of Islam, have been criticized and misinterpreted by the international media and certain correspondents of international journals and magazines. The deliberate alarmism and sensationalism of these ignorant and biased critics, who have made no effort to understand Islamic principles, has created an image of Islam as a religion which does not need to be understood but only to be feared. Their malicious distortions and ignorance have created a climate of fear. It is unfortunate that the sophistication in communications technology is not being applied to creating better understanding of Islam, the religion of a thousand million people, but rather to create unnecessary fears and prejudices against Islam and its followers.

Sometimes the concept of tolerance is misunderstood. It should not be seen as an effort at syncretism — making all religions the same. It is not tolerance to ignore differences. Tolerance lies in the willingness to accept differences and acknowledge the rights of others not only to believe differently but to order their lives according to that belief.

One hinderance to inter-religious harmony has been the inability of Muslims to communicate adequately their ideals, feelings and requirements in a language relevant and understandable by the modern world. Some Muslim scholars have been too conservative in their approach and there has been little attempt to have a creative understand-

agree that human existence is far from satisfactory and each provides a set of possible ways of escaping from it. Some preach the existence of heaven, others of *nirvana* yet others of identification with Brahma and so on. But the essential fact is that all religions recognize the unsatisfactoriness of life and the possibility of an escape from it. All religions have also contributed substantially to human civilization in art, architecture, education, music, poetry, medicine and so on. If we accept these truths then perhaps we can go a long way towards respecting other religions, accepting that there is more than one way to skin a rabbit, that other people may be happy with their own peculiar perceptions and answers to the world's problems. A great deal of religious intolerance exists because too many people seem to think there is only one way of doing things. Here again, PRIDE and IGNORANCE play a prominent role. Ignorance about the true teachings of other religions gives rise to a sense of superiority about one's own religion.

In order to eradicate this state of affairs Malaysian society has to be taught formally all religions. This should be done expressly without the intention of seeking converts but with the intention of eradicating false interpretations and of inculcating a respect for another's beliefs. In short, the religions should be taught intellectually and devotionally, not emotionally. Education must be carried out at two levels. First, a person must learn his own religion deeply so that he truly understands how to practise it. Secondly,

A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Vijaya Samarawickarama

If we study the great world religions in any depth at all we will readily discover that each one of them preaches love, tolerance and understanding. And yet, perhaps next to territorial claims, the largest number of wars, persecutions, martyrdoms or crusades have been perpetrated in the name of religion. Surely, we cannot blame the teachings of any religion for this unhappy state of affairs. The cause must lie elsewhere. To my mind religion has been exploited by unscrupulous people who have used fear and ignorance to make others follow them and to keep themselves in power. The teachings of the great religious teachers have been deliberately twisted for their own selfish ends.

The function of religion in any society is to raise man from his base animal nature into a noble being – a being capable of self-sacrifice, love, kindness, and concern for the well-being of others. While every religion has been able to inspire certain individual beings to great heights of humanity, none can claim to have had the same success with every one of its adherents. For every white sheep in the fold there are probably thou-

sands of black ones which give their religion a bad name. Why does this great paradox exist?

From a Buddhist point of view, the root cause of all unhappiness is IGNORANCE. It is ignorance about their true teachings of any religion which causes its adherents to think that their religion is superior to others. It is ignorance about their own natures that causes man to fight for the success of their own religions against the beliefs of others. And it is ignorance about the true teachings of their own religions which make men live in fear and guilt and which allow men to follow unscrupulous leaders blindly. When man can acquire enough wisdom and knowledge to transcend his own narrow racial, political and religious barriers, only then can he rise above the petty bickering and false sense of superiority he has regarding his own beliefs.

Ignorant people cannot believe that there is no religion in the world which automatically guarantees salvation to anyone who merely belongs to that religion. No one has yet invented a credit card system for religion whereby one can be saved merely by flashing it at the appropriate time. All religions teach that men must conscientiously practise virtue and morality in order to be saved. No one is exempt from this universal law. So how can the adherents of one religion claim to be superior to the adherents of another?

Religions differ only in the manner in which they claim to hold the answers to the baffling questions about man's existence. All religions

a person must learn the teachings of other religions so that he learns to respect other beliefs. Our system of education must teach our young to respect others not out of fear, but out of a deep understanding of the needs and beliefs of others.

All of this is not to say that we deny the right of different religions to seek converts. It would be very impractical of me to hope for such an ideal state of affairs. Rather I say that those who do seek converts should do so without making false accusations against other religions. For example, we constantly hear allegations that Buddhists are idol worshippers or that they pray to trees and stones in order to win lotteries and so on. This is as unfair as it is untrue. If somebody wants to convince another that his religion is correct, then it should be done without making false allegations which arise from ignorance about another religion.

Another cause of misunderstanding among religions stems from the very nature of culture itself. The religions that are practised in this country have all been brought from other parts of the world and they often reflect the traditions of the countries from which they came. This adds to the complexity of an already difficult problem. People are very easily led to confuse traditional cultural practices with the essential teachings of the religion itself. Hence there are times when people from one religion condemn the practice of another yet these practices may have nothing

to do with the religion concerned. For example, we have heard it said that ALL Buddhists pray to their dead ancestors. This is a cultural practice and there is no reference to it in the Buddha's teachings.

Yet through sheer ignorance, people say all Buddhists do this. What is true is that the Buddha expressly stated that Buddhists must respect the cultural practices of a community if these practices tend to improve the well-being and dignity of that group. And since an intelligent sense of respect for the achievements of one's ancestors is a desirable quality in any society, Buddhism does not condemn it. But this does not mean that all Buddhists worship their ancestors.

Again, in keeping with the cultural practices of their countries of origin, some Malaysian Buddhists believe in charms, good luck talismans and the like. But this is not a Buddhist practice and critics of Buddhism should try to understand what Buddhism condones and what it does not before condemning the religion on the observance of isolated cultural practices. There are many such practices and I am sure our other co-religionists can come up with similar misconceptions of their own religious practices. If we want to eradicate the barriers that cause religious misunderstanding, it should be done through the development of religious education. All Malaysians must be taught each others' religions so that respect and understanding can evolve. Our nation's philosophy is that Unity can exist in Diversity.

This truth must apply to the practice of religion as much as it does to all our other fields of endeavour.

Another cause of the lack of understanding among the followers of the different religions in this country is the lack of communication among them. Often we are so blinded by our own needs that we do not bother to try to understand what is happening to our neighbours. It is important that we be concerned with our neighbours' well-being because our own peace and contentment depends on everyone else being happy. Therefore it is very important that the leaders of all the religions of this country get together regularly to discuss mutual problems and examine areas of common interest through which we can contribute to the nation's progress.

We in Malaysia can consider ourselves lucky in that we are free to practise our religions without restraint. We are also free to voice our dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Government policy. Given this happy state of affairs it is our duty as concerned citizens to promote actively religious and racial harmony by voicing our own opinions as well as listening to others. Only by understanding the needs of others can we help to build a contented nation.

It is in this connection that we should mention the practices of certain groups of well-meaning but immature young people. Their over enthusiasm about their own religions make them

coerce others to join them. Their immaturity and a confused understanding of their own religion can upset the sensitivities of other religionists in this country. Here I am not referring to any one religious group in particular. In fact, I have had to advise our own Buddhist youths to be more sensitive to other people's feelings. But if we are really interested in developing religious harmony, I think we should all make a concerted effort to spread our respective religions in a manner that does not hurt or insult others. The spreading of a religion in our multi-racial, multi-religious country should be done in good taste. We should leave such activities to trained people who know how to present their ideas in a cultured manner. These same people should be trained to respect the religions and sub-cultures of other peoples in this country first.

To achieve this, we must all get together, and draw up a set of guidelines on how to spread our religions without upsetting the religious or racial sensitivities of our fellow Malaysians. Today some of the methods used by many religious groups are in bad taste and they can do much damage to the good relations that exist among the various religions — not that I am accusing anyone of deliberately trying to create religious dissension. What I am saying is that through ignorance some over-enthusiastic but ill-trained people have perhaps unwittingly created some unhappiness. We can overcome this problem if each of us takes a serious look at the manner in which we train our young to spread our respective religions.

A HINDU PERSPECTIVE

K Loganathan

Usually in a panel discussion I find myself very much like a Buddhist and when a Buddhist precedes me, he usually would have said what I wanted to say in the first place.

Take the problem of conversion. Many Hindus are affected by this phenomenon and they think that this is one of the things that really hinders inter-religious communication. On reflection, it would appear that there are some religious groups who interpret 'being religious' as being propagandists. That is, unless you propagate your religion, you are not religious. Unfortunately, the first victims of this are usually Hindus and Buddhists because their traditions are 'open systems'. That is to say, they leave the individual to choose his mode of worship. However, this freedom is often exploited by the propagandist religionists. This is worrying because it hurts the Hindus. It is a misunderstanding of a grey sort and it is an exploitation of a system which Hindus have possessed over thousands of years.

The Hindus and Buddhists are vulnerable in this way. They feel very hurt when the methods

used to convert them are dishonest and subversive. As a Buddhist adherent mentioned once, these propagandists quite often use salesmen's 'techniques'. This is inconsistent with the honest practice of religion. The propagandist religionists seem to think that they have a prophetic revelation given to them which is divine in origin and therefore unquestionably authoritative. They feel that their message has to be accepted and cannot be rejected or even doubted in any way. The message being a revelation of God himself through a chosen person cannot be wrong, they say. The only error could be in its interpretations and that, they say, is essentially human.

We believe that to be mistaken in our interpretation is the nature of human beings. We cannot avoid this and therefore it is a learning perspective even in religion. We learn through our experiences and errors and we continue learning until the day we find that there are no more questions to be asked. When this perspective is part of our religious life we should not talk about tolerating other religions but should instead accept all religions as equally valid. To tolerate is to imply that your religion is somehow better than the others and you tolerate the other till you convert him to your religion. What we need is not tolerance but acceptance. As a Hindu I want to be accepted as a Hindu for what I am, and if you do not accept me and only tolerate me, it means that you are rejecting me.

Another reason why there is very little interac-

tion among different religions is that the world religions are aligned into two different camps. One is the propagandist and the other one is the developmental, or transformational type. The latter believes that to be religious you have to keep on learning and improving. The alignment is somewhat like the political alignments — democratic and communist. As long as this alignment exists in religion there is not going to be meaningful interaction. One religion or one group of religions will try to subvert the other.

How are we going to question the validity of those alignments? It must be noted that the propagandist does not have a conceptual framework in order to accept, clarify or taste the existence of the developmental religion. There are only such terms as humanistic, pragmatic and idolater. The moment we classify Hinduism or Buddhism along these lines, the implication is that such religions are erroneous. There is something wrong with such thinking because it generates the conviction that it is the moral duty of the propagandist to preach to these people the doctrine that has been revealed to them and which cannot be questioned. These "lost children" must be brought back, preached to, informed and sometimes coerced into accepting the truth. As long as there exists this kind of attitude, the alignment of world religions into two camps will be validated through power politics.

I mentioned that conflict is inevitable. It is a kind of mental disease which usually leads to con-

flict. If being religious is not interpreted as being a propagandist or a missionary, how are we going to interpret it? The central question about religious existence is essentially the question of the ultimate meaning of human existence. We want to know within the deepest part of ourselves why we are in this world, how it came to be thus and where we are going. To these questions, we seek the absolute goal to existence – the terminus to all our unending strife.

In the Eastern religious traditions such things are called *Moksha*, *Mukti* and *Nirvana*, but the essence of religion is the basic question. It is not morality. The personal *mukti/nirvana* transcends morality. Moral perfection is not the end of religious life. We go beyond moral perfection when we are truly religious. This question transcends the political, economic, moral and social. It transcends them and through that it transcends the guiding principles of all the others. This question is universal and has found expressions in all cultures throughout the ages. The question can never be obsolete. It is this question that keeps religious life an important part of human life. This question is not the privilege of the rich, the politically powerful, or even those with some divine right decreed by tradition or scriptures. It emerges in the bosom of men and women alike, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the underprivileged. It emerges in the context of life's shattering vacuum, in the deepest recesses of a person. And if at the onset, it changes, it is at this point that one chooses to live a religious

kind of life. It is this kind of question that we have to keep repeating to ourselves. If we are religious in the sense that unites us, then are Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Christians religious?

One of the most tragic things of moral life is that very few of us can transcend a kind of mental slavery. The moment we pose a religious question we pose it as a Christian, Muslim or Buddhist and not as a human being trying to find his place or the meaning of his human existence. Therefore we suffer from this mental slavery. Very few of us can transcend ourselves or free ourselves from practices, dogmas and creeds and face the deepest question of religious life in its nakedness. So long as we do not have the intellectual capacity, and the will to transcend all these creeds and cults and pose that question in the deepest part of ourselves, we cannot make that a condition which determines our judgment in our social and personal life. This conflict is crucial and as it cannot be avoided, I see it as the weakness in this meaningful interaction, in the inability of all of us to transcend what is accidentally determined for us.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Stephen Leong

In Malaysia, there seems to exist a very great contradiction where religion is concerned. We are supposed to have inter-religious harmony and yet we find obstructions when we want to come together so that in the name of the supreme being we could focus on Him, in Him, in order to lead the lives of believers. I am concerned about my two children. What is going to happen later on? I would not even think of having more children at the rate things are going. Not that I am criticising the Government's policy. I believe in the democratic system, that this Government allows us to speak up in this way.

Let me give you an example. I have a daughter of five years old. My neighbour is a Muslim family. The two children meet very often. They go into each other's homes and all the innocence is there. It is beautiful to see a Christian child and a Muslim child coming together and sharing whatever they have — feelings for one another. Yet as I watch them play wonderfully together, I have a sense of fear. Fear that eventually as they grow older, when they become six, seven or eight years old, they are going to grow apart.

They are going to be divided, and all in the name of God.

This disturbs me very much and I feel that something is wrong. Something needs to be done about this at the human level. We have great traditions in our religions. We respect one another. We have differences but we need to respect these differences. Unity is diversity, as it has been pointed out over and over again. When we are asked to come together, we are asked to gather what we already have and hold so dearly to it. We believe that God created man, compelling man to want to worship and communicate with Him. Out of this communication with Him, a very important part is the communication with our fellowmen.

You and I know that we are able to pray to God, but what is more important is that we communicate with one another. But I find that such communication is being threatened. I may be wrong about this but I see this trend as a very dangerous one. My concern is that because we have different faiths, a strong call to worship is there.

The need for places of worship is a problem that is dear to the heart of believers who are not Muslims. It is something which is part and parcel of a person's religion – of communicating with God. We find it difficult that, if we want a Church established or a temple to be set up, we have to go through so much red tape. Perhaps our Muslim brothers may not be able to see or understand this. Dr Rauf raised a question, "Why are

you afraid of Islam?" I pose the question the other way around, "Why is Islam so afraid of other religions?" I am sure it all boils down to lack of communication. This is why we need to come together.

The call to worship for believers who are non-Muslims is no less strong than that of Muslims. I rejoice when I see people gathering at the surau every Friday. At the mosques, I see so many cars. And in spite of the obstruction to traffic through careless parking, I look at the cars and say, "Praise God" – these are believers, they are worshipping God. This is good. However, I will be frank and admit that at the very beginning when I watched television and prayers were being said, I would immediately switch it off because this was something alien to me. It is not my way of worship. But when I thought about it seriously, I realised that there is a lesson to learn from my Islamic brethren. They are calling people to pray. They are worshipping God. They also call me to pray to God in my own way. Thus I make use of those same times to pray. I appreciate this very much. So just as I am concerned and happy to see my Muslim brothers and sisters worshipping, I would like the Government and my Muslim brothers and sisters to try seriously to understand the reality of this situation. We all have an urgent problem of lack of communication.

We need to work at ourselves. We need to find it in ourselves. As Dr Chandra pointed out, God is in us. The God who created us has placed

something in Him and about Him in us. There is a need to communicate. I believe that this is the beginning. We have not missed the opportunity. I believe that it is our God in us who compels us. I believe that we must preserve and maintain what we hold dearly to. I am also totally convinced that it is the God in us who asked us to come together.

A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

Manjit Singh

Man's basic thoughts are on survival and economic gain. Religious problems are not considered a priority by most people. Since Malaysia is a cosmopolitan country with different ethnic groups who embrace various religions, its people should confront the problems that have arisen because of this diversity.

More directly, the problem areas that hinder inter-religious harmony in Malaysia are basically:

- o lack of understanding or inadequate knowledge of each other's religious practices;
- o the absence of the development of character in an individual's religion alongside the development of moral values;
- o the presence of excessive individualism and loose morals;
- o the unchecked fanatical practices of various religious groups;
- o the lack of awareness of the cultural and religious traditions of the various religions;

- o the lack of policy makers to assist in educating the people, through the use of mass media or other means, to promote understanding between the various religions of this country.

Fear is the greatest enemy of mankind. Take one simple example. A Chinese putting some candles or food at the roadside, prostrating and praying there would instil fear into people of other races or religions because of lack of understanding. This deep sea of fear in different beliefs or traditions must be eradicated by explanations and education. It is with deep regret that in schools which emphasize only one particular religion, missionary, Islamic or Sikh Punjabi, each religion insists that his is the best. Yet we are all children of God.

In the development of a character based on religious and moral values, personal integrity and high moral standards are most essential. All religions profess to have the utmost character and high standards of moral values. It is unfortunate that although all have the same aim, this is not professed openly among the different religions. There is no *ad idem* on what moral values are acceptable. Take another simple example: if you see two people kissing in public, this may be immoral to some yet it is normal to others. Look at the case of *Dakwah* groups wearing certain attire. This practice generally does not mean much to non-Muslims but it means a lot to the people who do so. Yet there

are those who tend to jeer at them. This is unfortunate because it clearly shows the failure to understand.

Each person tends to profess that his religion is the best. This is the individualistic development of religion. It is totally undesirable as it gives rise to feelings of superiority, fanaticism, resentment and extremism. All these clearly have no place in our Malaysian society. A typical example is the Kerling incident, where a particular religious group attacked a Hindu temple. It is very unfortunate that such things should happen in a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. The reason it happened was because of a total lack of understanding. Let us not forget that all religions have one basic goal — peace, harmony and tranquility. We are all children of God and we are brought to this earth to live as one big happy family, but in practice it doesn't work this way. It is unfortunate that positive steps have not been taken to subdue the rising of fanatical groups in various religious sects. We must not forget that religious freedom is enshrined in our Constitution. This is according to Article 11. Hence we must take positive steps to prevent the rise of fanatical groups in any religion and teach them about tolerance and understanding. For it is not the intention of God to have his children fighting with each other, but to live in peace and harmony.

It is very sad to see that since achieving *Merdeka* in 1957 there still exists a total lack of un-

derstanding between the various ethnic groups concerning cultural traditions and values. We have people who are unable to tolerate the lion dance of the Chinese in Malaysia even to the extent that some people have taken steps to prevent them from performing this dance on a wide scale. It is a very honourable idea to say that we must only allow Malaysian culture. However, I pose the question – Can anyone truthfully say that the Chinese lion dance is not part of our Malaysian culture? Or even the Indian flute, the Sikh harmonica or sita or even the *kompang*? As Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon mentioned, we must get into the arena and fight for our Constitutional rights. To have greater inter-religious harmony we must impress upon the various ethnic groups the existence of various cultures which is part and parcel of the religion and also impress upon the Government that they must advocate greater tolerance of all cultures and religions.

The lack of policy makers to assist us is the biggest hinderance to harmony among religions. Take a look at the Wilayah Master Plan. I am not anti-policy makers, but it is very clear that no proper provisions have been made for other religions to have proper lands to build their places of worship. Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon has reminded us of the case of a developer who allocated a particular piece of land for a church in Subang Jaya. This land was acquired by the Government to build a mosque and the Christians were not given an alternative site. It is very unfortunate and sad that these things happen. It

is my hope that the religious Council will make clear to the policy makers that we are all one big happy family and should, regardless of what religion we profess, remove barriers and fears among ourselves by educating ourselves in the intricacies of each others' religion through bodies such as the MCCBCHS. We should fight together against all oppression as loyal Malaysians.

DISCUSSION

Comment: I would like to respond to what Vijaya said concerning conversion. Though I may not agree in the way that Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon said it, I think there are two points we have to consider:

1. The right to share our faith is enshrined in our Constitution;
2. On the basis of better understanding and communicating with one another, I think there is a place for us to share our faith. But I think there are four points we have to bear in mind which I think he is responding to:
 - o We should avoid ridiculing any religion.
 - o We should avoid forcing anyone.
 - o We should avoid deceiving anyone.
 - o We should avoid bribing people – giving gifts to converts.

As long as we maintain objectivity in our discussion, we should allow ourselves to communicate with one another. As for the aspect that only specialized people can share their faith, I think there will be a lot of practical difficulties. I cannot wear a tag to show that I am a professional Christian propagandist. Religion is something which, when you get involved, you get excited also. Therefore you will talk about it as frankly

as you would talk about, say a badminton game. Apart from talking about religious harmony, we should also remember that certain religions will have certain characteristics of their faith which they enjoy sharing. But at all times they must not be offensive to the party they are talking to.

Comment: I would just like to say that he should be talking on behalf of the Buddhists because he puts it very beautifully. I would like to add that if you are enthusiastic about badminton, do not talk to me about tennis because if I am a tennis enthusiast and you are telling me badminton is great and tennis bad, that would upset me. We are talking about tolerance. I firmly agree that it would be very impractical of me to deny anyone the right to share his views with others. But I insist that it should be done on the basis of mutual respect.

Comment: I would like to comment about the lack of Muslim presence in this Consultative Council. I think the sort of Muslims that should be invited are the grassroot Muslims like *ABIM* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia) which some say are extremists but are not. If you were to sit down, share and talk with them, you will find that they are very tolerant people. The other group of people are the Muslim scholars who need exposure to other religions just as other people need exposure to them. I think it would be a very useful exercise to have people like the *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (the Muslim Scholars Society of

Malaysia), *Persatuan Berkas Mahasiswa Timor Tengah* (Middle East Graduates Association) to be involved in discussions with peoples of these religions for the people's mutual benefit.

I agree with this concept of discussion about different religions. It is stated in the Quran that the only basis for discussions between the various religions should be on the basis of mutual respect, tolerance and it should be in the nicest possible manner. If people start getting offended then the discussions should be stopped straight away.

SIX

**TOWARDS NATIONAL UNITY
THROUGH INTER-RELIGIOUS
UNDERSTANDING**

Lim Kit Siang

The subject presupposes that the religions have a role to play in helping to achieve national unity in the country. I think that this is very correct. National unity in a multi-national, multi-religious society can only come about if there is inter-religious understanding, besides other factors. Various speakers touched on the various common universal values of the great religions in Malaysia — justice, love, compassion, tolerance, moderation and harmony — which could become the basis of the ethical, moral and spiritual values of a Malaysian nation. This could be a society where people are committed to oppose corruption, injustice, poverty and all forms of exploitation. I think the question we should focus on is whether there is inter-religious understanding in Malaysia.

Dr Goh Cheng Teik mentioned the absence of inter-religious strife in Malaysia, apart from what is described as an exception, that is, the desecration not just of Hindu temples. But I believe that the absence of inter-religious strife cannot be equated with the presence of inter-religious understanding. In the same way before the tragedy of 1969, the absence of racial strife did not

mean that there was inter-racial understanding. Lebanon, ridden with inter-religious conflict, was until very recently a very good example of inter-religious peace and harmony. We should not be too complacent.

Lebanon is a case history of how quickly a nation can degenerate into very destructive religious strife. I would have liked to say that we Malaysians, with our various religions, are moving towards inter-religious understanding. Then only can we develop solid grounds for national unity and develop the core values whereby we can bring Malaysians of all creeds to a common aspiration. But recent developments are very disturbing — not only are we not moving towards greater inter-religious understanding, but we may be moving away from it.

Much as I would agree with Puan Hajjah Saleha that it was very good to see various religious groups gathered together to discuss inter-religious problems as a contribution towards inter-religious understanding, I think it was also an indication of the problems that we are facing in Malaysia. The organization of the conference on common religious values, though commendable, highlighted a very great problem as far as inter-religious understanding is concerned. The organizer, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism did a very good job and I hope that they will not follow the footsteps of the Malaysian Inter-Religions Organisation (MIRO). But unless there can be parti-

icipation by all major religious groups, I think somehow we will miss the crux of the problem.

The 1980 census in Malaysia showed a breakdown of religious groups, those professing Islam — 53%, Buddhism — 17%, Christianity — 7%, Hinduism — 7%, Confucianism — 2% and others. Unless we can get all major groups together to agree that there is a need for a dialogue, a need for reaching out to understand each other, to develop common values as core values to nation building, it is virtually a minority discussion. I think that there is a need to convince everyone concerned that there can only be genuine progress and inter-religious understanding if every group participates.

I said earlier that I was very concerned about recent developments in Malaysia. In particular, the recent policy of the Government to implement Islamization — Islamization in various sectors of national life; in the adoption of Islamic values in the economy, in education, in the various sectors. Of course, nobody objects to the values as such and even the Government has said that these are values acceptable by other religions. But the principle is, in a multi-religious society where we are basically a secular state, although under the Constitution, Islam is the official religion, I think there is a need for those in authority to be very sensitive to the religious sentiments of all groups. If there is a need to develop the ethical, moral character of Malaysians, whether in Government or outside the Govern-

ment, it should be on the basis of the core values of the religions found in Malaysia and not on the basis of any one particular religion.

What is worrying is that the process of Islamization which is going to affect everybody, is being conducted and implemented in a way whereby there is no participation by the other religious groups. The argument given was that there could be no objections because the values which are good and acceptable can also be extended towards the establishing of an Islamic state. It is argued that in a genuine Islamic state there would be justice and fairplay. Thus other groups have no cause to fear or worry. As I see it, a very important principle is being breached. Unless all groups concerned, those who want to restore an equilibrium, are prepared to make their voices heard, I think that we may be heading towards a further development in this process. I raise this point not out of a desire to create chaos but to highlight an important principle of nation building in Malaysia. It is important in determining whether there will be inter-religious understanding in Malaysia or whether what we are going to have is just absence of inter-religious strife, until one unfortunate day it degenerates into trouble.

If every Malaysian, especially those in authority, can be made to see the importance of a genuine dialogue among all religious groups and, if they can be made to participate, then something positive may come out of it. Up to now I

think that the unpreparedness on the part of the Government, to establish or to support the establishment of an inter-religious council for a nation building policy, or for the development of an inter-religious understanding, is a very disturbing sign. It means that the principle of inter-religious understanding and the acceptance of the common values of all religions as the core values of all Malaysians, have still to be accepted. I hope that the discussion at the conference will be an important beginning in this direction. Otherwise we might one day be grouped together with countries like Lebanon and Northern Ireland.

Dr. Goh Cheng Teik

The inhabitants of Lebanon are mono-racial. They are of Arab stock. So are the inhabitants of Northern Ireland. They are Irish. However, because of religious differences, Sunnis, Druzes and Maronites in Lebanon, and Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, are at war with each other. Nobody knows for sure when they will return to sanity and restore peace and tranquility in their respective countries.

The inhabitants of Malaysia are multi-racial. They are Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban, Melanau, Kadazan, Bajau and so on. At the same time, they are also multi-religious. The Malays are exclusively Muslim but the other races are Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and so on. And yet since independence was obtained twenty-seven years ago, Malaysia has been free from inter-religious strife. Adherents of the different faiths have lived side by side with each other in peace and harmony. This is an achievement we can be proud of.

What are the secrets of success? Why has Malaysia, a nation that is both multi-racial and multi-religious, succeeded in keeping the peace whereas Lebanon and Northern Ireland, which

are multi-religious but mono-racial, failed to do so?

I can think of several reasons. Firstly, the rules governing the relations amongst religions in the Federation of Malaysia have been correct from the very beginning. The Federal Constitution states that Islam is the official religion. At the same time, it provides for freedom of worship for the adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and so on.

Secondly, the founding fathers of the Malaysian nation led by Tunku Abdul Rahman placed these rules on a firm foundation. They resisted the pressures from the extremists, regardless of their vehemence, and steered the ship of state along a moderate course. Their successors in the Government, including the present Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, have also not deviated from this direction.

Thirdly, the leaders of the respective religions in Malaysia have been very level-headed. They have consistently preached the virtues of mutual tolerance and respect in a multi-racial and multi-religious society and exhorted their followers to show goodwill to believers of other faiths.

And fourthly, the followers of the various religions in this country have, on the whole, behaved well towards each other. The desecration of Hindu temples by Muslim fanatics in Kerling was an exception rather than the rule.

What about the future? Will inter-religious understanding and co-operation continue and contribute towards the evolution of a truly united nation in the coming decades?

Based on the track record so far, one has every reason to be hopeful that the *status quo* will remain. However, one can also detect a little cancerous growth in the Malaysian politics, namely the growing habit of using religion in political campaigning.

Nowadays, party politicians in Malaysia have to contest not only general elections but also party elections. For the component parties of the National Front, internal party elections are more important than general elections. So far, the National Front appears unbeatable in general elections. Whoever controls a National Front party is assured of a share of power in the Government. Hence, the importance of party elections.

Believers of the various religions in this country can tell party politicians to stop using religion as a gimmick for winning votes but, as a politician myself, I doubt whether words alone can produce the desired effect. In one breath, the average Malaysian politician will express appreciation for the advice given but in another breath, he will continue to exploit religion for political gain.

The only effective way is for the believers to resort to action. Most voters in elections, whether

party or general elections, are believers of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and other religions. These voters should use their votes to unmask these opportunistic politicians and cut off a cancerous growth which, if not gotten rid of at an early stage, will eat into the womb of our multi-religious society and wreck the peace and stability which our nation has enjoyed since independence. Let us hope that they will act before it is too late.

DISCUSSION

Question: Our theme is 'Towards National Unity through Inter-religious understanding.' The dominant religious group consisting of 53% of the population has no proper representation in this particular *Majlis*. Can you explain why the policy makers of this country have not taken positive steps to establish a non-Islamic affairs department as a part or body of the Government? Secondly, looking through the Wilayah Master Plan, do you think that unity would be created among the various religious bodies by the unequal allowance for places of prayer for those of the non-Islamic faiths and the unequal allocation of burial grounds for them?

Lim Kit Siang: I am actually not the best person to answer these questions. It should either be Pathma, Cheng Teik or Stephen Yong. But I would agree that a lack of a non-Islamic council or an inter-religious council to deal with the problems that arise, whether the values that should be pursued in various development policies, is a reflection of the unpreparedness of those in power to accept the need for a meaningful dialogue. What appears to be the fashion of the day is monologue — whether it means the introduction of the penal code amendment or any other proposal which is going to affect the basic rights of religious practice, profession or propagation as enshrined in the Constitution. In that con-

text the Wilayah Master Plan with regard to the places of worship and burial grounds for non-Muslim faiths is just a reflection of those very unhealthy attitudes and other aspects which I mentioned earlier: the question of the absorption of Islamic values, the introduction of Islamic civilization courses for university students or police recruits.

What we want is to promote and accept Malaysia as a multi-religious society whereby everyone is exposed to universal values which can be found in the various religions. So this finally comes to the question of the political will of those in authority. But unless those who are affected are prepared to make their voices heard, then I think the situation will just deteriorate. If there is a need for a concerted attempt to bring back the religious development to a more even keel, then I would agree.

Question: Through this panel I learnt a revealed truth: namely, that politicians are good storytellers. But I am going to ask a serious question and I hope they will give me an answer, not through stories but through serious discussion. I see a contradiction between what is preached and what is practised in Malaysia. It is stated in Islam that all men and women are equal and therefore it appears to be the case that all should be given an equal chance in some way or other, and particularly in the practice of religion. I am a Hindu and I, as a Hindu father, suffer discrimination, in the sense that I do not have my child

taught my religion in the school. Therefore I see a contradiction between what is preached in the name of equality and what is practised in actual fact in the school. Since politicians are the people who are responsible for this perceived inequality, I would like to ask them to explain this kind of situation without telling me any more stories.

Comment: I am not an expert in this topic. When I read about the controversy in the Wilayah Master Plan, I checked on that. But really when you consider that Muslims have to pray five times a day and that their places of worship may be small, I think this needs to be taken into consideration; whereas some other people have to pray maybe once a week. My point is that Muslims need to pray five times a day, and they cannot cremate their dead. I do not know the statistics in the Master Plan, but they need places of worship though other people do need them too.

Comment: I would like to mention three points here:

- o One concerns the National Quran Reading Competition. When it is organized every year, the Government broadcasts it over four networks over Radio Malaysia and the two channels over Television Malaysia. I feel that if the Government wants to encourage people to listen to the competitions, then I think one channel would be enough and other programmes can carry on as scheduled.
- o During Tunku's time, there were broadcasts of

Christian service on Radio Malaysia over the Blue Network from churches in and around Kuala Lumpur. Islam is the official religion of this country and will continue to be. But as other religious services were broadcast during Tunku's time, why can these not be continued?

- o This concerns the officials coming from the Religious Department in the Prime Minister's Department who go around the Lake Gardens etc. at night, checking for people making love. I have nothing against this. But they only catch the Muslims and the non-Muslims they let go. How are they going to inculcate universal ethical values? If pre-marital sex is wrong for the Muslims, then it is wrong for all other races. If it is right for the Muslims, then it is supposed to be right for all the other races.

Comment: We have heard the word 'tolerance' the whole day long. I hope we can eradicate the word 'tolerance' from now on and instead use, 'understanding' or 'appreciation' of each others' religion, If we do this, we shall not need to 'tolerate' anyone else. I have here a suggestion. At present, we have only the teaching of *ugama* classes in our schools. I would suggest that this forum makes representation to the Government, in particular, the Ministry of Education, to recommend that all children, irrespective of any religion, be given religious instructions according to their own religion in all schools in the country. Today, whilst the Muslim students go for *ugama* classes, other children waste time on other in-

complete subjects, such as a library period, physical education or something else . . . and they cannot have any other lessons because the Muslim children would miss them. So why waste the time of other children when they could have instructions of their own religion as well? I would like to appeal to this Council to bring the matter to the proper authorities and enable these children to have their own religious instruction in accordance to the preamble of our *Rukunegara*. Finally, we have heard about the allocation of religious places etc. and it is disturbing to read in the press (though sometimes distorted) that certain states do not permit the building of religious houses in certain areas. Today, we heard a speaker say that we should not disturb the people in a certain group by building churches or temples in certain areas. I do not think the building of any religious places would be a disturbance. I think we shall all be happy that we are providing adequate places for the people of the country to consecrate and worship only one God. We have so many paths that lead us to that one God. So let us have places which would lead us to that path that lead us to that one God. I sincerely pray that the State Government will not reject any such applications when they are made.

Dr Goh Cheng Teik: I think the root of the problem is that there exists a pressure group in this country which is pressuring the Government towards Islamization; not Islamization as has been taken by the Government, but Islamization

in the sense that the state would be a theocratic Islamic state . The Government is right in the middle. I am not trying to carry a brief for the present Prime Minister, but I feel that I am not honest if I do not say that during my term as a deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Department, I had the privilege of attending closed door meetings in the department with the Prime Minister in the chair. Several sensitive questions have cropped up and I am happy to say that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet as a whole have been very level-headed and have used their common sense. For example, people pressuring for Friday to be a public holiday and insisting that restaurants in all government hotels must be *halal*; people pressuring for workers to be given lots and lots of time for prayers on Friday and some people objecting to Muslims having duty free licences because duty free goods include liquor etc.

I would like to point out that the present Government is very firm in rejecting extremism. Of course, the political leaders, including UMNO leaders, have to watch their politics, otherwise they might be blown away in the next election. So they have to play very well. I think that some politicians *tunggu angin*. They have no direction and follow where the wind blows. But I am happy to say that today we have a Prime Minister who is not afraid to say that "this is not good for the country, enough is enough." What we do need has been pointed out by Lim Kit Siang. We need dialogue. The conference today

is a good start. We need a dialogue with the Muslims of this country. I would suggest that when you have a dialogue, besides inviting 'literal Muslims', you should also invite the hard-core conservative Muslims so that they reflect feelings which are more widely felt. We have to come to reality and maybe through interaction with Buddhists, Christians and Hindus, they may have a better world-view or appreciation of the intricacies of inter-religious relations in this country.

Lastly, it is not true that there is no inter-religious council. When I was in the Prime Minister's Department looking after the National Unity Department, I called meetings attended by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus etc. and a lot of views were brought up. I must give credit to the religious leaders of this country who have been very level-headed. I think that problems of the kind raised can be used as input to the decision-making process by channelling them to the Government, particularly to the Prime Minister who is receptive. Some issues brought up are very minor. For example, the question of not being able to have broadcast time. These issues can be discussed behind closed doors.

SEVEN

Conclusion

**Datin Paduka Chow Poh Kheng
alias Rosemary Chong**

Our country is progressing gradually, with a developing consciousness of the majority of the citizens and component parties of the Barisan Nasional regarding the reality of 'United we stand, Divided we fall.' Both society and country are heading towards the fostering and laying of a foundation, in building a nation that is united. Unity and harmony in a country is an important factor. Without unity and harmony, it is not only difficult to achieve further prosperity and progress, but we may even lose both.

In a democratic country like Malaysia, we have the privilege of religious freedom. It is stated very clearly in our Constitution that religious tolerance will be enjoyed by all. However this freedom should not be abused, especially in the interest of the nation. In a multi-racial country like Malaysia, sensitive issues, if not handled diplomatically, will lead to severe repercussions and affect the political stability of the nation. Sensitive issues should be discussed through proper channels such as seminars and forums. Here issues can be discussed objectively so that doubts and misunderstandings can be removed and findings channelled through the proper authorities for action.

On behalf of my Ministry, I would like to clarify the meaning of Islamic values. Since we achieved independence in 1957, Islam was declared the official religion of the country, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation. This pro-

vision has caused the Government to reject any form of political pressure from certain quarters to impose Islamic laws on non-Muslims. If Muslims want Islamic laws to be imposed on their own society, it is their prerogative to do so. However, the Islamic religion does not mean that Islamic laws will be imposed on non-Muslims. The Government of Malaysia has no wish to impose Islamic law on non-Muslims.

Islamic values, however, are different from Islamic rules and laws. In actual fact, Islamic values are similar to the concept of universal values of good and evil. What are regarded as good values by other religions are considered desirable in Islam too. This means that the absorption of Islamic values will not destroy other values in Malaysia.

The trouble is that, with today's modern and scientific outlook on life, more and more people have turned to material gain. As the world becomes more materialistic, people begin to forsake the goodness of spiritual values in life. The problem with this is whether man can resist the temptation of materialism. If not, then, will he be able to acquire the moral values of religions in the end? Another question is, whether man can realize this danger in time to save himself from being destroyed by material gain. As Jesus Christ himself said, "Man does not live by bread alone." This is very true and meaningful. Jesus also said, "What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul?"

Today, however, there is an unhealthy trend in the West where acts of homosexuality, lesbianism, sodomy and adultery are almost accepted practices. The smoking of *ganja* and other drugs is almost regarded as the right of a human being. This new trend seems to become more important than that of the rights of the society. Such unhealthy trends have already reached our country. Many think that since such values are acceptable in the West, they should also be acceptable in the East. Such values are objectionable to all religions. Only universal values of good are accepted by the Government.

I am sure that many of these issues have been discussed, and numerous doubts erased as a result of this conference on common religious values. I congratulate the Chairman and the Committee on the success of the conference. I am sure that many left the Seminar with a better understanding of each other's culture and religion and that many of the objectives of the Council have been realized.

CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL OF BUDDHISM, CHRISTIANITY, HINDUISM AND SIKHISM

Consequent upon a resolution unanimously adopted in a meeting held on 12th November 1982, attended by the representatives from the four major religions, steps were taken to form a pro-tem Committee to draft a suitable constitution for the formation of the Majlis Perundingan Malaysia Ugama Buddha, Kristian, Hindu dan Sikh (MPMUBKHS).

A formal application was submitted on 19th November 1982 to the Registrar of Societies and approval was obtained on 6th August 1983 under Registration Number 3430/83 (Selangor).

Established with the aim of holding meaningful dialogue among peoples of all religions, the body is a non-profit and voluntary organisation.

The Aims

- (a) To promote understanding, mutual respect and cooperation among different religions.

- (b) To study and resolve problems affecting all inter-religious relationships.
- (c) To make representations regarding religious matters when necessary.

The Objectives

- (a) To uphold and promote the ideals as enunciated in the Rukunegara.
- (b) To promote unity, harmony and understanding amongst peoples of different religions through conferences, seminars, and other channels.
- (c) To print, publish and distribute journals, periodicals, leaflets or books that the Executive Committee may consider desirable for the promotion of the objectives, with the proviso that, prior approval must be obtained from the competent authority.

Secretariat

528, Jalan Bukit Nanas

Kuala Lumpur 04-01

Telephone: 03-205034

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE OF THE MALAYSIAN
CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL OF BUDDHISM,
CHRISTIANITY, HINDUISM AND SIKHISM**

President

Tan Sri D. Vendargon
(Catholic Archbishop Emeritus)

Vice-President

Rev. Seet Kim Beng
(President, Malaysian Buddhist Association)

Hon Secretary

Rev. Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing, S.J.
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(Vice-President, Sikh Welfare Society,
Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor)

Hon Assistant Treasurer :

Mr. Tan Teik Beng
(Vice-President, Buddhist Missionary Society)

Committee Members :

Dr. S.M. Ponniah
(President, Malaysia Hindu Sangam)

Rev. Dr. Denis C. Dutton
**(Hon General Secretary, Council of Churches
of Malaysia)**

Mr. V. Harcharan Singh
(Representative, Khalsa Diwan Malaysia)

Abbreviations and Definitions

ABIM	— Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia
Allah	— Name of God among Muslim
Apa boleh Buat	— What can we do?
Bapa Malaysia	— Father of Malaysia
Bataks	— An Indonesian tribe
Bisa	— Usual
Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy	— In conjunction with the above campaign, the people were urged to remain at all times, "clean, efficient and trustworthy".
Dakwah	— Mission
Halal	— Permissible according to Muslim law
Hidup Melayu	— Long live the Malays
Imam	— Muslim prayer leader

- Kompang** — A tambourine used by Malays
- Leadership by Example** — A nation-wide campaign launched on 19th March 1983 by the Prime Minister to improve the national productivity and standard of performance
- Look East Policy** — When the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad took over the reigns of government in 1981 he looked around for models of countries to emulate their achievements. He was particularly impressed with the success stories of Japan and Korea. Malaysia's Look East Policy came into being in consequence. This means emulating the rapidly developing countries of the east in the effort to develop Malaysia.
- Majlis Perundingan** — Consultative Council
- Majlis Perundingan Malaysia Ugama Buddha, Kristian,** — The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity,

Hindu dan Sikh	Hinduism and Sikhism
MCA	— Malaysian Chinese Association
MCCBCHS	— Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism
MIC	— Malaysian Indian Congress
Mufti	— Muslim religious advisor
Mutasamihin	— Very tolerant
New Economic Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — A policy formulated — with the long-term objective of achieving national unity through two-pronged development strategies namely :- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty among all Malaysians irrespective of race; and ii. to restructure Malaysian society so that the present identification of race with economic function and geographical location is reduced and eventually eliminated

- Padi — Rice
- Panca Sila — National Ideology of Indonesia consisting of five main principles namely:-
- o Belief in the One Supreme God
 - o Just and civilized humanity
 - o Unity of Indonesia
 - o Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberation among representatives
 - o Social justice of the whole of the peoples of Indonesia
- Perbuatan Tuhan — Act of God
- PKNS — The Selangor State Development Corporation
- Reid Commission — The commission who in 1956, drafted Malay's constitution just before its independence.
- RISEAP — Regional Islamic Da'wah of South-East Asia and the Pacific
- RTM — Radio Television Malaysia

Shahadat an la ilaha illa'Allah	— Bearing witness that no — god but God only
Shari'ah	— Islamic Laws
Suraus	— small Muslim places of worship
Syabas Tuanku	— Congratulations Your Majesty
Syura	— Consultation
Tunggu Angin	— Indonesian (Literally: Wait for the Wind)
1969 Tragedy	— racial riots between the Malays and the Chinese
Ugama	— Religious
Ummah	— Community
UMNO	— United Malays National Organisation
Ustaz	— A Muslim Religious teacher