

Ecumenism in West Malaysia, part II, Post War: From Christian Council to Christian Federation.

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1. Introduction

Whatever their differences, Christians in Malaysia have always had something to do with one another and they frequently acted in co-operation - whether or not they had much time for ideas of church union. After World-War II this co-operation took on a more settled basis among many Protestant churches with the formation of the Malayan Christian Council in January 1948. By 1987 there was in place a network of relationships formalised in the Christian Federation of Malaysia which included the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) representing evangelical and independent groups, and the Roman Catholic Church.

By building on rather than destroying relationships which in different ways had been developed over many decades, and by ensuring that the needs of the situation here rather than elsewhere came to dictate the focus of shared activity, Malaysia, despite problems and considerable linguistic and cultural barriers, has thus evolved a basis for ecumenical relationships of more than local significance.

Covering the years of the Emergency and the days of Independence would be reason enough to expect that this period is of special interest. What was formative for the nation must also be formative for its Christian citizens. This was a period of great expansion, of enormous missionary effort, of growth in numbers and in denominational diversity. The ecumenical movement was part of that growth, and at the same time helped ensure that in the increasing diversity, Christians still found ways of relating and working and worshipping together.

This paper traces this process, particularly through the work of the Malayan Christian Council and the activities of its various committees and commissions. If it is a long story, then that is in part because quite a bit happened during these years. Despite this length however, as is too often the case, an account of East Malaysia remains to be tackled. Other problems are of perspective and accuracy. The attempt has been made to digest, if only in part, a large amount of material and the result may be more satisfactory in some areas than others. Those who lived through these events and participated in them, including some named, are likely to have corrections and comments to make. These are welcomed.

2. Overview

In January 1948 the inaugural meeting of the Malayan Christian Council of the International Missionary Council finally took place. The provisional constitution called for "consultation on all matters concerning the Christian good" of the peoples of Malaya, for common action and the promotion in every way of "comity and cooperation among the Christian bodies of the country." As was usual and necessary in the setting up of ecumenical organisations it was stated that the Council would have no legislative authority over its members, its decisions being "purely advisory." It was also stated that "it shall not deal with matters of doctrine, ritual or church government."¹ How this squared with later negotiations on matters of Faith and

¹ . Fleming, J R. Some notes on the history and development of the Malayan Christian Council, mimeo, CCMS, 1966.

Order is not altogether clear; the contradiction was realised, the negotiations went ahead anyway, and the offending clause was eventually removed.

The coming into being of the MCC was the culmination of planning and co-operation before and during the War.² For a time the Japanese had permitted a Federation of Christian Churches to operate in Singapore, and in July 1947 its former president was a delegate to the International Missionary Council meeting in Whitby, Canada. On his return steps were taken to formally create a national council and these bore fruit with the inaugural meeting in January 1948.

At the initial meeting the founding churches were Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian. Later they were joined by the Orthodox Syrian and Mar Thoma churches, the Lutherans, Salvation Army, and the Bethesda Brethren Assembly in Katong - continuing a long-standing and remarkable involvement of the Open Brethren in ecumenical affairs in Malaysia and Singapore. A number of other groups also became members because of their interdenominational interests and commitments: the Bible Society, the YMCA and the YWCA.

In 1967 the MCC was renamed the Council of Churches in Malaysia and Singapore and in 1975 it became two separate Councils. The CCM held its inaugural service in St Paul's Petaling Jaya on 23 May 1975.³

In 1979 was also held the First National Christian Conference, attended by 120 from 31 churches and groups.⁴ It avoided doctrine, and issues of unity, but drew on those on the fringes, if not altogether outside, the traditional membership of the CCM and sowed the seeds of more comprehensive ecumenical structures. This success was followed up by a second conference in August 1982. With the formation of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship and closer relations with Roman Catholics in a post-Vatican II age something new became possible and on 6 February 1985, the Christian Federation of Malaysia was constituted and formally registered on 14 January 1986. In February, 1987, a Third National Christian Conference took place together with the "40th" Anniversary of the CCM.

During its life the MCC/CCM has been on a pilgrimage in more than one sense. Until 1965 its offices were in St Andrews Cathedral, Singapore, although care was taken to have a high proportion of meetings in Kuala Lumpur, and regional groups were important in ensuring a more than Singaporean identity. For three years until 1968 the offices were in Trinity Theological College after which moved to Kuala Lumpur to the Evangelical Lutheran Church premises in Brickfields. In 1976 they came to the present location, the old Student Centre at 26 Jalan University, Petaling Jaya.

3. Malayan Christian Council

At the first meeting on 9 January 1948 the Methodist Bishop, Hobart Amstutz was appointed Honorary General Secretary and a search begun for a full-time person. John Fleming, a Church of Scotland missionary who had served in Manchuria and had

². D D Chelliah, "The growth of unity among the churches in Malaya," *International Review of Missions*, 37(148), 1948, pp.421-426.

³. *CCM News*, 1(1) August 1975.

⁴. Held in the Federal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, 20-24 February. Chee Chin Seang, Report on the First National Christian Conference in Malaysia, 1979 [to TRAC conference, November 1979]. STM archives.

an extremely brief ministry in Ipoh in 1941, took up the position in January 1952 and served until 1957, followed by two years as president. Fleming always realised the importance of a local appointment and was hesitant about taking the job for that reason.

Fleming was succeeded by Rev Chung Chi-an from Taiwan, but the first Malaysian to be secretary was Rev Wong Hoon Hee, from 1967 to 1970, followed by Rev Robert Chelladurai for two years, and then Mr V D Pritchai Pillai for 1973 and 1974. In 1975 the Council split between Singapore and Malaysia with Bishop C N Fang as the first President and the Rev (now Bishop) Denis C Dutton as Honorary Secretary, a position he has held ever since.⁵

By the end of 1959 the Malayan Christian Council could look back on some solid achievements. An infrastructure of committees provided fellowship and interaction across the denominations and continued to take significant initiatives. The work-force was diverse, a mixture of countries and denominations; workers from Taiwan and Indonesia, not just Europe; the Society of Friends, English Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists. There were notable achievements in the New Villages, in student chaplaincy, audio-visual aids, broadcasting, and in the stimulus to local inter-church activities facilitated by the branches. Minutes and publications breath an air of tremendous vision, a faith that things could and should be done, that the Christian enterprise was one in which the Churches could act together and do something which if they did not, no one else would.

There were of course weak points which subsequent years have perhaps made more obvious. Progress on union was patchy and frustrating. Youth work seemed to go in cycles, and was usually fragile. Meetings, talk, and even decisions may have been progress of a kind - the value of fellowship and a sense of common Christian enterprise, of working through a historic and urgent task should not be underestimated - yet decisions to act should not be confused with action itself. The perspective of those who met regularly was broadened, but how much the outlook of Christians with more limited concerns actually changed is still a subject for enquiry.

If weaknesses may be identified now, it should not be imagined they were not usually identified then. The leadership may at times have been overly optimistic, even to the point of naivety; but they seldom had illusions about the problems to be faced and the things which in an ideal world were needed to solve them. They were not in an ideal world, but they were not wrong to hope, to make commitments, and to say the possibility of success was worth the risk of failure.

4. Theological Education

Coming into being at the same time as the MCC and in relation to it the formation of Trinity College in Singapore was an important focus of ecumenical commitment, not only for the churches of Singapore and Malaya, but also for the region. Trinity built up steadily and became the shared experience of theological education of a considerable proportion of the ministers of the mainline churches in the area. Its importance for the region will continue, but as the churches developed, and

⁵. *Growing in unity with Christ, Council of Churches of Malaysia 40th anniversary, General Assembly 13-16 February 1987, Kuala Lumpur, p.43.*

especially with the withdrawal of Singapore from Malaysia, the need for other centres of theological education was apparent.

In the 1970s the CCM played a role in the calling of meetings for the establishment of a theological college within Malaysia itself.⁶ The different society emerging in Singapore, and the need to be fully part of what was a separate country made this imperative. The ecumenical experience and commitment built up in connection with Trinity was applied to the task with the important difference that STM was purely a local initiative. In January 1979 Seminari Theoloji Malaysia came into existence as a joint venture between Anglicans, Methodists and Evangelical Lutherans and the provision of this shared training in subsequent years has been ecumenically significant, both for the students (which have included other churches as well) and for the partnership of church leaders on the STM Council.

5. New Villages

The work of the churches in the New Villages and the role of the MCC in co-ordinating that work is one of the better documented aspects of Malaysian church history.⁷ It is also one which through the influx of missionary workers which it entailed and their success in church planting changed the face of Malaysian Christianity. More than at any other time in the history of the country significant numbers of Christian missionaries were encouraged to come in.⁸

It was also the sort of situation which positively demanded the co-ordinating role which the MCC was well placed to provide. By presenting a clear and unambiguous task, and one which most were keen to support, the New Villages not only became a showcase of ecumenical co-operation, they became a means by which ecumenical co-operation could grow into other areas.

The movement of rural Chinese squatters into concentration camps - soon given the more euphonious name -began as the "Briggs Plan" in June 1950. In April 1952 a New Villages Co-ordinating Committee was set up by the CCM. One of the largest groups sending missionaries was the China Inland Mission which joined but then in 1954 under pressure from some of their American constituency affected by the separatist teachings of Carl MacIntyre, they technically withdrew, staying on as non-voting members. Since proceedings were by consensus, although the action caused anxiety in government and missionary circles,⁹ in reality it made little difference.

By the end of 1959 some 450 villages were open to evangelistic work. There were 220 missionaries, representing eight missions, working in 333 New Villages, and

⁶. W J Roxborough, "Ten years of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia," *STM 10th anniversary souvenir magazine 1979-1989*, pp.21-29.

⁷. Kathleen Carpenter, *The password is love. In the New Villages of Malaya*, Highway, 1958. J R Fleming, "Experiment in democracy. The New Villages in Malaya," *International Review of Missions*, 45(177), January 1956, pp.101-108. J R Fleming, *The growth of the Chinese churches in the New Villages of the State of Johore, Malaya, 1950/60*, ThD thesis, Union, New York, 1962. R Nyce. *Chinese New Villages in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, 1973.

⁸. The other periods of influx were Melaka under the Portuguese and Singapore in the 1830s. What is striking about the 1950s is the anxious desire of the government to bring in church workers.

⁹. CO 1022 SEA 307/3/01, "Functions and activities of the China Inland Mission in South East Asia," Public Record Office, Kew, London.

six other bodies not in the MCC. The co-coordinating committee met bi-monthly in Kuala Lumpur.

Throughout the emergency the MCC co-ordinate a major part of the Churches missionary and welfare input into the New Villages and provided training conferences for the workers. Although some questioned the focus on rural Chinese, and others such as the American Lutherans were careful to also engage in suburban church planting, work in the Villages was successful and significant. Churches were created among groups of Chinese which Protestants had previously hardly touched. Virtually for the first time, missionary and church medical workers shared the primitive living conditions of the people and the experience produced its fair quota of saints. At the same time the very success of the project reinforced rather than removed cultural barriers which remain to be satisfactorily dealt with.

6. Audio-Visual Communications

In 1950 a Malaysian delegate to a World Conference on Christian Education in Toronto, Mr V D Kuppasamy, returned with a collection of films which became the core of the Audio-visual work of the MCC. The growth of work among the New Villages required that a way be found of getting this material to where it could be useful and expanding the collection with items which were more culturally relevant.

This needed additional personnel and the provision of mobile projection equipment. In 1953 Mr and Mrs Leonard Walker arrived, sent by the Society of Friends and served until their retirement in 1956. They travelled constantly in one of two film vans supplied with American funding. They were succeeded in 1956 by Rev W S Upchurch and Albert Chia Yak Cher took over in July 1959 by which time one of the vans had to be retired.

The trips with the vans were exhilarating and exhausting, and statistics of decisions for Christ and books sold indicate they were effective. The projectors, films, and slides had the benefit of novelty in a pre-television world, even if the churches were not the only ones doing this sort of thing. They helped bring to Malaysia an experience found in many parts of the world at that time, the excitement of community film shows, the inevitable break-downs as film sprocket holes wore and splices snapped at crucial moments. It was a medium suited to the age and circumstances and with its Christian films the MCC ensured that it was available when it was most needed.

7. Student Work

This was a logical extension of concern for youth and the realisation that this was a strategic segment of the population. It also reflected the long-standing relationship between Christian student work and the ecumenical movement. Chaplains were employed and experienced the difficulties of ecumenical chaplains in other universities around the world that finding a satisfactory role and relating to very diverse groups of young Christians was a strain on their patience as well as on the breadth of their sympathies. Sometimes chaplains were more willing to co-operate with evangelical groups than evangelical groups were with them, but probably each learnt more from the other than they were then willing to admit. Two centres were established, one in Singapore, the other at 26 Jalan University near to the Kuala

Lumpur campus of the University of Malaya.¹⁰ - it now houses the CCM and the Christian Federation of Malaya.

8. Christian education

A Council on Christian Education predated the MCC, but in 1950 affiliated with it.¹¹ Its main concern was to facilitate Christian education and the teaching of religious knowledge in schools. Conferences of teachers were held in Penang and Singapore in 1955 and some evening and residential courses organised. Their plea for more indigenous material is still something to note. Delegates were sent to international conferences, work was done on Chinese and English material, handbooks produced to assist teachers and lists drawn up to stimulate the purchase of better Christian books for school libraries. It is the sort of task which can appear mundane because the difference it makes tends to be qualitative rather than dramatic but its value should not be underestimated.

9. Evangelism

The existence of other groupings of churches than those provided within "official" ecumenical circles might be seen now as having a good deal to do with racial, linguistic and cultural factors more than theological, but at the time often took justification from accusations that the CCM was liberal. The comment, no doubt repeated by more than one that "if the MCC were more evangelistic I would be more interested" was answered by Fleming "All our functions through every department is to evangelize." If not all were convinced, overstatement aside, Fleming's claim can be shown to have considerable substance. At the same time evangelicals were also concerned about activity which was only indirectly evangelistic. For instance in 1951 the CIM/OMF seriously investigated building a hospital.¹²

In 1954 there was strong support from Fleming for bringing out Chinese-speaking evangelists and equipping them with an audio-visual van.¹³ In June that year an invitation was issued to Billy Graham and renewed on other occasions since he was not then able to accept.¹⁴ In 1959 arrangements for a crusade had to be cancelled because of Graham's health, and it proved not possible for Bob Pierce of World Vision to accept an invitation.¹⁵ In 1960 there was a proposal to invite Rev

¹⁰ . Denis C Dutton, "Reflexions," *Growing in unity with Christ, Council of Churches of Malaysia 40th anniversary, General Assembly 13-16 February 1987, Kuala Lumpur*, p.27.

¹¹ . A Wittenbach, *Working together IV, Malaya*, Highway Press, 1957, p.30ff.

¹² . CO 1022 SEA 307/3/01, "Functions and activities of the China Inland Mission in South East Asia," Public Record Office, Kew, London. The proposal was discussed in 1951 and 1952. The CIM were not the only ones who decided clinics rather than hospitals were more appropriate to the New Villages.

¹³ . Rajah B Manikam, 17 December 1954, Circular 6. CCA archives, Trinity Theological College Singapore.

¹⁴ . Minutes of Standing Committee of MCC, 16 September 1954.

¹⁵ . *Unity in the Faith' The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960*, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p.6.

Bryan Green from Birmingham for a Malayan Evangelistic Campaign although Perak expressed a preference for an Asian speaker.¹⁶

In February 1960 at the Perak Branch called for the revival of the Commission on Evangelism in the MCC. In the subsequent discussion it was noted how lay visitation, or visitation by a nurse and pastor, were effective as were short prayer and praise meetings in clinics. While a Chinese congregation reported that it could no longer get a licence to hold open-air meetings, they were now meeting in an old-folks home.¹⁷ The Commission was duly revived and as one of its first tasks issued a fresh invitation to Billy Graham to include Malaya on his itinerary in 1964.¹⁸ Graham eventually came in 1978 and his associate, Grady Wilson in 1969.¹⁹

10. Literature

In December 1951 the MCC hosted an East Asia Literature Conference, and it was decided that the organising committee should continue in existence to follow through some of the ideas. In 1953 Rev Jim Sutton, supported by the Baptist Missionary Society in England, was appointed as Literature Secretary.²⁰

Rev Sutton was only able to serve for a few years, but from his base in the Methodist Boy's School, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, toured the country with vans of literature, stimulated the production of suitable material and worked in closely with the Audio-Visual department. There was a concern to make Chinese material available, especially when it was no longer possible to obtain it from China. Around Malaya sales of Christian material were made to all, and in Sutton the MCC had a person with strong convictions who worked hard to get good literature into people's hands. Efforts were made to stimulate authors and in 1963 a competition was held for the writing of original evangelistic tracts.²¹

11. Home and Family Life

In 1953 Dr Irma Highbaugh was brought out by the MCC and spent a year giving talks and seminars on marriage counselling and Christian home and family life - activities she had earlier been involved in in China.²²

As a result local committees were formed by MCC branches and on October 16-17 1954 the inaugural conference of the Malayan Christian Family Commission was held in Kuala Lumpur²³ with delegates from Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Topics for study were identified and those of marriage guidance, young

¹⁶. Minutes of a meeting of the Malayan Christian Council Perak Branch, 20 September 1960. STM Archives.

¹⁷. Minutes of a meeting of the Malayan Christian Council Perak Branch, 9 February, 1960. STM Archives.

¹⁸. *Ecumenical News*, October 1961.

¹⁹. Bobby E K Sng, *In His good time. The story of the church in Singapore 1819-1978, Graduates Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980, pp297-303.*

²⁰. A Wittenbach, *Working together IV, Malaya*, Highway Press, 1957, p.24f.

²¹. *Ecumenical News*, October 1963.

²². A Wittenbach, *Working together*, *ibid*, p.26f. Minutes of MCC Standing Committee, 16 September 1954.

²³. Minutes of the Inaugural Conference of the Malayan Christian Family Commission held at Kuala Lumpur October 16 and 17 1954. Microfiche, CBMS archives.

people's recreation and amusement, moral problems, and how to make family worship vital were divided among the four centres. This was followed up by a "Christian Family Life Week," booklets and a film strip.

Although this provided a focus for applying the faith to a foundational aspect of life, the specific way this was done proved hard to sustain. In April 1960 the Perak Branch decided the "Home and Family Life week should be continued,"²⁴ but the existence of the question suggests enthusiasm was fading.

12. Youth Movement

A Youth Department of the MCC was founded in December 1954, after the first of a number of ecumenical youth conferences and a subsequent work camp.²⁵ It was realised that the population had a large proportion of young people and in succeeding years work camps, leadership training courses and national conferences were held.

The camps and conferences proved memorable experiences, with the third ecumenical work camp being held in Salak South near Kuala Lumpur in 1957. This was just two weeks before Merdeka and the camp shared the sense of excitement and expectation which was in the air. The overseas delegates included three from Indonesia who surprised Malaysian Christians by happily wearing songkoks.²⁶

It is common for youth work to run in cycles, particularly when the attempt is made to organize it on more than a local or denominational basis. In this the MCC was no exception. In 1959 the National Youth Conference was cancelled for lack of support, but in 1964 a Malaysian Christian Youth Assembly was again held, this time in Ipoh²⁷ and others have been held since.²⁸

Despite the occasional setbacks these activities proved extremely formative for sharing the ecumenical vision with a new generation and exposing younger (a term which in Malaysia seems to extend practically into old age) Christians to other churches, cultures and concepts of discipleship. Looking back in 1987 Denis Dutton recalled that while the leadership of the churches was "completely in the hands of foreign missionaries ... the ecumenical Christian youth movement was in the hands of nationals. Some of the names that were household names among the youth were D R Daniel, the late K C Yeoh, P O Thomas, Samuel Jesudason, K Jambunathan and the late Peter Chew."²⁹

13. Malaysia and international ecumenism

A number of regional and more widely scattered international events were instrumental in giving a rising generation of Christian leadership a vision for what inter-church co-operation could achieve. In earlier years many if not most delegates

²⁴. Minutes of a meeting of the Malayan Christian Council Perak Branch, 9 February, 1960. STM Library.

²⁵. A Wittenbach, *Working together*, *ibid.*, p.28ff.

²⁶. How to work and like it! Third ecumenical work camp in Malaya 1957. Jim Sutton papers, STM archives.

²⁷. Minutes of the meeting of the Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, 6 April 1964. STM library.

²⁸. *CCM News*, 2(1), Mar/April 1976.

²⁹. Denis C Dutton, "Reflexions," *Growing in unity with Christ, Council of Churches of Malaysia 40th anniversary, General Assembly 13-16 February 1987, Kuala Lumpur*, p.27.

to international conferences were missionaries, but this eventually changed to the point where it was the missionaries who were left behind. There had been a few local Christians among the Malayan delegates to the International Missionary Council meeting in Tambaram in 1938, and to that in Canada in 1947. In both cases these were important stimuli to what became the MCC.

The formation of the East Asia Christian Conference in Bangkok in 1949 and its subsequent meeting in Kuala Lumpur in May 1959 were of great importance in putting local Malaysian church leadership in contact with their counterparts elsewhere in the region. There were numbers of other meetings which took people to Hongkong, Indonesia and further afield. One practical result was the calling on Malaysians to share in international relief projects. In 1959 \$10,000 was donated to relief work in Japan and Taiwan, and plans made for an MCC Refugee Week the following year.

The second Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Evanston in 1954. Bishop Baines appears to have been the only MCC delegate, but Evanston was important in raising issues of religious freedom and the responsibility of the churches in Malaya to all groups in society. On his return Baines spoke at meetings around the country.³⁰

In November/December 1961 the World Council of Churches held its third Assembly, this time in New Delhi. On 20 January 1962, Dr Ho Seng Ong, one of the Malayan delegates, spoke at a meeting organised by the Perak Branch of the Malayan Christian Council. Rev Sam Jesuthasan, Youth Delegate to a World Christian Youth Conference held in conjunction with the third assembly spoke at a United Youth Rally the following Saturday.³¹

In his report to the MCC³² Jesuthasan recorded the difficulties of camping in New Delhi in cool temperatures, and of finding a consensus on youth issues in a sub-group which included Australasia with Southeast Asia. There was a questioning of youth-work which was overly focused on the middle-class, a call for greater indigenisation, "a word which none of us liked," and complaints about ecumenical jargon being incomprehensible. It was asked whether the expenses of work-camps were not mimicking the West and little more than a provision of holidays for the middle-classes.

Other Malaysian delegates to New Delhi were Bishop Amstutz and Miss Moreira from the Methodist Church, Bishop Sansbury and Bishop Roland Koh (Anglican), and John Fleming. One of the major decisions at the Assembly was the integration of the International Missionary Council, hitherto the umbrella international body for the MCC, with the World Council of Churches. This issue had been debated over many years. A theology of wholeness of mission required the move, as did the increasingly anachronistic distinction between older and younger churches. But there were questions of timing and the change was not without cost as the IMC embraced more of the evangelical community than the WCC was likely to.³³

³⁰. Minutes of Standing Committee of MCC, 16 September 1954.

³¹. Malayan Christian Council Perak Branch, World Week of Prayer for Christian unity, January 18-25, 1962. Circular. STM Library.

³². World Christian Youth Conference, Rev S S Jesuthasan, MCC Youth Delegate, STM archives.

³³. Warren, M. "The fusion of the IMC and WCC at New Delhi: retrospective thoughts after a decade and a half," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*, July 1979, pp.104-108.

In Malaya and Singapore these issues appear to have been little noted except by the Brethren in Singapore who were members of the MCC. To them, the move to be part of the WCC brought associations with the Russian Orthodox which they found difficult to accept.³⁴

Regional Ecumenism found its greatest expression in the Christian Conference of Asia and its predecessor, the East Asia Christian Conference.³⁵ Although earlier in its history the CCA appeared more accommodating of cultural and political diversity and conciliatory rather than confrontational in representing Christian social concerns, it has remained an important forum. While criticisms which might be made are less relevant when judged by this function, the basis of those concerns, and the situation leading to the CCA's expulsion by the Singapore government needs to be considered seriously because of the polarisation which resulted. The ease with which some now distance themselves from the CCA at the very time they need to be more in touch with other churches and Christians in the region, whether they happen to agree with them or not, is unfortunate.

There is no doubt that the inability of the CCA to raise funding within the region says something about its relationship with the felt needs of the churches it purports to serve. These churches are no longer poor and some of the analysis of money and power applied to society at large could usefully be applied by the CCA to its own operations. The CCA's implausible protestations of innocence and the shortsighted withdrawal of Singapore churches from its membership alike seem calculated to exacerbate divisions rather than heal wounds. Malaysia has been spared some of this, and still being part of the CCA, perhaps could have a role to play reminding others of some of the etiquette of ecumenical fellowship.

Bi-lateral ecumenism in the region should also be considered as important. Historically churches in the region had been linked through the missionary bodies which helped found them - Methodists were related to Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines; the old archdiocese of Malacca in earlier days covered an enormous chunk of the region in theory if not in practice; Anglicans had links which gave a relationship between Borneo and the Peninsular a century before Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia.

At times the sense of fellowship was strained. There do not appear to be close links with Thailand, although Malayan Catholics were once under their Vicar Apostolic and the Churches of Christ in Thailand would seem to be a logical counterpoint to the CCM. Getting Anglicans in Sabah, Sarawak, West Malaysia and Singapore to trust one another and form a province of dioceses independent of Canterbury appears more than they are capable of. The pentecostalism now dominant in Singapore's churches generally, has not helped relationships with neighbours who want some places at least to allow for other styles of worship.

But if at times regional church relations have reflected the flux of wider politics, and have been reinforced by differences of language and theology conveniently at hand for those so minded, they have also served as reconciliatory elements. This was particularly the case with Indonesia after the end of

³⁴. Letter from the elders of Bethesda (Katong), Dr Khoo Peng Seng et al, to the General Secretary of the MCC, 22 February 1962. STM archive.

³⁵. Park, Sung Jung. "A short sketch of the first 25 years of the CCA," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, 23(2), 1982, pp.183-197.

Confrontation. When the conflict was still taking place, the Australian Council of Churches arranged for a meeting of representatives from the CCM and the DGI (Council of Churches in Indonesia)³⁶ - something which cannot have been totally without risk to both parties. In 1967 a good-will team from the DGI visited Malaysia.³⁷

14. Social Concern

Social concern, has shown itself in a number of ways in the life of the churches. At times it has been more concerned with morality than with justice, more with works of compassion than with political solutions to problems which risk dividing its own constituency as well as muddying the waters of church and state relationships. None of this is outside the scope of the Christian gospel, and at different times, the churches individually and together have addressed the needs which have become uppermost, whatever their nature. One of the first tasks of the fledgling MCC was to make representations which succeeded in stopping, for some time at least, the introduction of state lotteries.³⁸ At the 1961 AGM it was reported that over \$30,000 had been collected for a World Refugee Year project, the largest from any Southeast Asian country.³⁹

The MCC/CCM has over the years provided a voice to government on matters not just concerning its own life, but on matters concerning the nation at large. There has long been the realisation that in the modern world prophecy is not just about inspiration and reckless courage can be just that. Christians need to be informed before they speak, and they need to be participants not spectators. It was a constant theme of Bishop Baines that Christians be more involved in politics, and the call is sometimes renewed indicating that it is still something to be heeded. The component groups of the CFM have together refined their ability to speak for their constituencies and to the authorities on a select, but broadly conceived range of issues. This is no game for amateurs, and Christian individuals as well as Christian groups need to know precisely what they are doing.

The process has not been without difficulty or without irony. Those with links with the international ecumenical movement have been regarded by some as thereby tainted with radical and leftward inclinations. In fact few have been more circumspect about ensuring that what was done and said avoided confrontational models of social analysis and social change. On the Protestant side it has been left to some of those whose theology is said to debar them from thinking in other than a conservative mode to voice deeper questions, and in so doing they have brought themselves closer to a good many Catholics.

It is perhaps more of the nature of the case than many realise, that there is wisdom in leaving sensitive issues to those who have to answer only for themselves. The action and proclamation of the churches together is necessary, but it is the more potent for being restrained. What different groups and individuals say and do more

³⁶. *International Review of Mission*, 55(217), January 1966, p.28.

³⁷. *International Review of Mission*, 57(225), January 1968, p.13.

³⁸. Fleming, J.R. Some notes on the history and development of the Malayan Christian Council, mimeo, CCMS, 1966. p.2.

³⁹. Minutes of the meeting of the Malayan Christian Council Perak Branch, 11 April, 1961. STM Archives.

than this is their prerogative; that they would wish that all would follow them and that their church leaders would give greater voice to their message is as perfectly natural as it is rarely possible. That this will only be the case in a limited but important way is only to be expected. Yet taken as a whole this has ecumenical significance in bearing witness to the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. In this can be seen churches and individuals stretched in their understanding of the scope of the Gospel and drawn together in common compassion and concern.

15. Church and State

The British did not officially favour their own religion, and were reasonably scrupulous about the implications of the Treaty of Pangkor which by leaving (or placing) religious affairs in the hands of the Sultans effectively proscribed evangelistic activity among the Malay population. However during the Emergency the British administration was keen to use the churches in any way it could to assist in the task of resisting communism and winning the "hearts and minds" of those who had no reason to thank them for putting them behind barbed wire in "New Villages."

It is not known whether the resultant policy of offering to pay half salary to mission agencies for workers in the New Villages was known to the Malay community. It was implemented with a certain amount of discretion and it is not known how many actually accepted it. What is striking is that it was the missionary community which was the most cautious about being recipients of government generosity and sensitive to its possible implications. Bishop Baines understood this, but was reported by Templer at least, as accepting the offer. Baines saw the rejection of a state connection as reflecting attitudes which were also dangerous.

It is one thing to sympathise with the scruples of ex-China Missionaries who do not want to be in any way associated with Government Servants or Service, but another to condone the equally heretical indifference to politics of people in Malaya who have never suffered as these Missionaries and have left no hostages behind them.⁴⁰

A year later, in 1954 Rajah B Manikam came away from a visit to Malaya with the belief that in the New Villages, "All workers, including missionaries, are being paid by the Government, excepting China Inland missionaries."⁴¹ Other parts of his report lack precision and suggest he is recording impressions rather than certainties, but the comment is revealing all the same.

The CCM was associated with this policy through the co-coordinating committee and as the local representatives of the Conference of British Missionary Societies as it sought information in order to respond to Templer's initiatives coming to it through the Colonial Office. It had made representations to the government on a small number of issues, but by and large avoided having a great deal to do with either them or the emerging political structures which would one day replace them.

⁴⁰ . IMC Survey, [1953?], Appendix II.

⁴¹ . Rajah B Manikam, 17 December 1954, Circular 6. CCA archives, Trinity Theological College Singapore.

This may not have been altogether surprising, but it may also represent an opportunity missed.

The major topic which did involve the MCC as a body were the provisions in the new constitution for freedom of religion. Representations were made to the Reid Commission charged with drawing up the constitution,⁴² and there is no doubt that in 1957 the MCC got significantly less than the "freedom to profess, practice, propagate and change"⁴³ they had hoped for.

At the same time the CCM had been at pains to clarify its own understanding with respect to Christianity and the Malays and to try and ensure some protection for those who might convert. In December 1959 a delegation comprising Roland Koh, Howard Amstutz, Fr T N Koshy and Mr Chan Chee Hong visited the President of the Selangor Religious Affairs Department and the Keeper of the Rulers Seal.⁴⁴ They raised questions about the implications of the Constitution, and about acts passed in Penang and Melaka making it "a punishable offence for a Malay to listen to non-Islamic religious teaching and for anyone to propagate non-Islamic religions to Malays."⁴⁵ The delegation understood the authorities to say that a "Christian or any other faith cannot be blamed if a person who professes the Muslim Religion were to choose, on his own accord, to obtain a Bible or any religious doctrine books or pamphlets or to do [sic] on his own to attend a religious meeting of another faith." It was stated that Romanized Malay could be used for Christian literature, but not Jawi.

MCC carefully studied these responses which are an important part of the history of Christian-Muslim understanding in Malaya. The main problem is that on the Christian side all those involved have died, and the documentation has only recently been rediscovered.

From the end of 1959 non-Islamic groups were no longer permitted to make regular radio broadcasts of religious services. Previously the CCM in Selangor had been co-coordinating the transmission of services on three Sundays a month. These matters were taken up with the government, with minimal result. It was important, if difficult, to try and do so in a way which was "not in any narrow sectarian interest, but in the national interest, since a threat to religious freedom is a threat to all other freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution."⁴⁶

With the bringing of Singapore into the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, the MCC made representations to try and ensure that the degree of religious freedom which then existed in Singapore would be maintained.⁴⁷ Assurances were received that it was "not the intention ... to introduce legislation to control or restrict the

⁴². Malayan Christian Council. Memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Committee concerning human rights and religious freedom for consideration in drafting the new constitution of Malaya. STM archives.

⁴³. J Sutton to A R Booth, Council of Churches on International Affairs, 22 Jul 1957. STM archives.

⁴⁴. Report appended to the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the MCC, 16-17 February, 1960.

⁴⁵. 'Unity in the Faith' *The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p1f.*

⁴⁶. Ibid.

⁴⁷. Final draft of MCC letter to the Prime Minister of Singapore, approved 25 April 1962. STM archives.

propagation of any religious doctrine or belief."⁴⁸ Statements about intentions allow ample scope for changes of mind, nevertheless this was something.

After the May 13 riots in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, among the institutions brought into being to cope with the situation were a National Goodwill Council and a National Consultative Council. Bishop Roland Koh of the Anglican Church and the Catholic Archbishop, Archbishop Vendargon were members of the National Goodwill Council and Bishop Gregory Yong and Dennis Dutton were appointed to the National Consultative Council. These appointments gave "some recognition to the Council of Churches" and "hereafter the Council has often participated in discussions with the government of Malaysia."⁴⁹

16. Church Union

In August 1951 Bishop Baines wrote to the MCC asking for "conversations on a theological level"⁵⁰ and the first official meeting of the Faith and Order Commission was held on 16 July 1952. Baines spoke on the Lambeth Quadrilateral, and Fleming translated. In September 1952 the Ceylon Plan for Union was discussed. In February 1953 a move was made to have accredited representatives so that their meetings were not just something set up by the MCC. Early on the main area of serious difference was ministry, but work progressed with the sharing of papers and an effort was made to involve more than the expatriates. Meetings continued in 1954, and a Faith and Order Document was prepared by a conference and sent down for comments. The effort to get a possible basis for Union was not easy and in Feb 1957 the chairman reported "though it seemed at times that the conversations were going to break down entirely, we are now able to present one consolidated report."

In 1958 there were again four meetings but there had been few responses to the document prepared. Efforts to stir up greater interest with a lay conference in December 1959 put procedures on a firmer basis, but did little to alter the basic dynamics of the whole enterprise which was that the expatriate church leadership had a felt need which locals, particularly Chinese did not share. They did not want Western denominationalism, but they did not seem to want Western solutions either.

It is no co-incidence that the 1950s and 1960s saw a peak of interest in church union in many parts of the world. In Malaya and Singapore efforts to unite Tamil and Chinese Lutherans and bring together English and Chinese Presbyterians were inspired not just by the logic of their own denominational needs but by a sense of imperative towards union which had built up a considerable momentum world-wide however shallow its roots locally. That the Presbyterians only succeeded because the English churches felt they were doomed by the departure of their expatriate membership and gave up trying to make any demands worth mentioning, and the Lutherans failed altogether trying to unite what were theoretically no more than different branches of the same tradition, might have been warnings that hopes of success ought not to have been too high.

⁴⁸. *International Review of Mission*, 53(209), January 1964, p.12.

⁴⁹. Denis C Dutton, "Reflexions," *Growing in unity with Christ, Council of Churches of Malaysia 40th anniversary, General Assembly 13-16 February 1987, Kuala Lumpur*, p.29.

⁵⁰. MCC Executive minutes 8 August 1951, STM archives.

Nevertheless, in February 1960, feeling perhaps that the answer to apathy was persistence, the MCC decided the time had come to set up a Negotiating Committee. The first meeting was held on 29 November 1960 at Orchard Road Presbyterian Church with 24 delegates and observers: Anglican, Methodist, English Presbyterian, Mar Thoma, Tamil Lutheran; United [Chinese] Lutheran; Katong Bethesda Brethren Assembly; and the Malaya Synod of the Chinese Christian Church [Chinese Presbyterians].

The purpose was described 1. Negotiate for Church Union in Malaya; 2. Take cognisance of other plans of Church Union in Asia and elsewhere; and 3. To study the draft plan ... prepared by the Faith and Order Commission of the MCC.

Although called together by MCC the Committee was to be autonomous. John Fleming presented a paper "Faith and Order discussions in Malaya 1951-1960." He noted the "Blakang Mati Faith and Order Document" of 1954 and the "Draft Basis of Agreement" of 1958 - which was similar to the constitution of the Church of South India. The question of the status of delegates and the authority of the committee had to be clear. All were elected by their own churches, but any definite scheme would be referred back for ratification.

The third meeting was held on the 26 July 1961, in Wesley Church, Kuala Lumpur. Ho Seng Ong was in the chair, Frank Balchin was secretary. Anglicans included Bishop Sansbury; the Methodists H B Amstutz; Presbyterians Revs Greer, Scott and Honey. There were Mar Thoma representatives and observers from the United Lutherans and Salvation Army. Apologies included the Chinese Presbyterians. Bishop Sansbury gave a paper which took worship as the first direction of the life and work of the church and T N Koshy of the Mar Thoma Church, who at least represented Asian and not Western Christianity presented a statement on the nature of the Church emphasising apostolic tradition and fellowship.

From a distance this has the appearance of a noble if desperate and ultimately futile attempt to reverse history. The negotiations carried a sense of high importance which helped outweigh some of the frustrations, yet they also had more than a tinge of unreality. There was a seriousness and energy which many brought to the task, but what hope did they really have of theological agreement, never mind of stimulating the sustained commitment of many more than themselves to overcome barriers much deeper than theology - those of tradition, race, language, and lifestyle?

The social barriers to union may have been underestimated, nevertheless it was agreed "as a basis for further negotiation" that the church was "outward and visible as well as inward and spiritual" that spiritual unity was not enough and that therefore something organic was required. The Apostles and Nicene Creeds were held to be a "sufficient basis of agreement in doctrine for a united church," but while union required the sacraments it did not demand uniformity.

As in discussions elsewhere involving episcopal and non-episcopal traditions, the doctrine of the ministry was a sticking point as private correspondence shows. The Singapore Presbyterian R M Greer wrote to his Ipoh colleague W P Irving saying he objected to episcopacy being a *sine qua non* with its implication of reordination at unification.⁵¹ Irving later wrote that the scheme appeared "calculated to perpetuate

⁵¹. R M Greer to William P Irving at Ipoh, 28 February 1961. St Andrews Perak Papers.

the Church of England's theory of the alleged historic episcopate and is therefore ... unacceptable in itself." It did not help that the Church of South India had been rejected by the Church of England and that it appeared it would only get proper recognition when all its ministers who had not been episcopally ordained had died off.⁵² When a scheme which stretched Presbyterian tolerance to the limit was rejected by those who gained most and conceded least, the prospects were bleak indeed.

The fifth meeting⁵³ was held in Kuala Lumpur on 1 March 1962 with a poor attendance, partly because the timing was bad for laymen. Doubts were expressed about the status of the committee and "whether the stage of actual negotiations for the union of the churches in Singapore and Malaya had in fact been reached, and in that case whether the Committee could truly be called a negotiating committee." The next meeting was scheduled for 6 June 1962. Local expressions of concern for what was going on took different forms. In 1963 the Perak Branch included in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity a debate on the proposition "That all churches in Malaya should become one church."⁵⁴

In 1967 it was reported that union talks had been initiated between both Lutheran churches, Presbyterians, Mar Thoma, and Anglican and the hope expressed that Methodists would join in.⁵⁵ How this was different from earlier commitments is hard to say, but in the event it was virtually the last effort before the enterprise was abandoned. Interest faded after 1968 with the departure of missionaries who had played a key role.⁵⁶ It was clear that to get anywhere local initiative and a felt need at the grass-roots level were required.⁵⁷ For a time the local initiative at least was provided by the Anglican Bishop Roland Koh and the Methodist Bishop Yap Kim Hao, but Koh died in 1972 and the following year Yap Kim Hao moved across to the CCA.⁵⁸ The formation of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia in January 1979 and the gathering of the First National Christian Conference perhaps laid deeper foundations for the long term concerns which the schemes for union had been unsuccessful in grasping. For a time at least it appeared that a letter in the MCC Bulletin in 1954 was all too perceptive.

Of course the evil one is afraid that Christians may really get together ... But for the time being he does not have to worry. He has so skillfully directed the thinking of many Christians that they think that to be different from other Christians is the only way to be true to their Lord.⁵⁹

⁵². W P Irving to Frank Balchin, 8 March 1961. St Andrews Perak Papers.

⁵³. F Balchin, Secretary, Negotiating Committee. Circular. 20 February 1962. St Andrews Perak Papers.

⁵⁴. Robert F Lundy, Chairman, Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, circular letter, 12 January 1963. STM Library.

⁵⁵. *International Review of Missions*, 57(225) January 1968, p.13.

⁵⁶. Denis C Dutton, "Reflexions," *ibid.*, p.29.

⁵⁷. George A Lindbeck, "The present ecumenical and church situation in West Malaysia and Singapore," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, 11, 1969, pp.72-80.

⁵⁸. *Survey of Church Union Negotiations 1979-1981*, Faith and Order Paper 115, WCC 1982; reprinted in *Ecumenical Review*, 34, October 1982.

⁵⁹. Quoted in H A Wittenbach, *ibid.*, p.19.

17. Women and the Ecumenical movement

A proper history of women in the Ecumenical movement in Malaysia is yet to be written, and is beyond the scope of this paper. The impression from minutes and records, is that during its formative years this was in no way a particular concern for the CCM. Individual women contributed, but these were usually missionaries or missionary wives who perhaps found scope for their gifts in missionary service they could not find at home. When the international ecumenical movement started to reinforce the concerns of women's liberation, one does not get the impression that Asian ecumenism was in the forefront of these developments. Two delegates, were to represent the MCC at a first Asian Church Women conference in Baguio, November 1962.⁶⁰ Groups of Christian women have been formed outside the formal ecumenical structures, and more recently the NECF has made this a focus of concern. A gender analysis of committees would no doubt produce predictable results, but a considered analysis of cultural patterns of leadership and a study of the place of women in Asian society generally, not just issues theological, could be revealing.

18. Urban Mission

The most notable effort in urban mission was the Jurong experiment in Singapore, and a number of mistakes were made. It was a much more sensitive area of social involvement than the churches had hitherto engaged in, it was not one where the support of their own constituency could be taken for granted, and those who were engaged in running it had a confrontational style which damaged the project from an early stage.

Near Kuala Lumpur, the only other area where it would be feasible for the churches to consider doing something for newly industrialised society, involvement was more circumspect, but also not necessarily straightforward. The factories of the satellite city of Petaling Jaya seemed the place to start, and the period after the May 1969 race riots seemed to be an appropriate time whereby it might be possible to do something useful. The Committee for Selangor Urban Industrial Mission (COMSUIIM) was formed under the chairmanship of Rev David Eichner.⁶¹ In the event the group was denied registration and these concerns had to take other forms.

Useful projects subsequently came into being such as a telephone counselling service (Befrienders), but it did not seem possible to find lines of action which substantially altered the general focus of the Malaysian churches on the middle-classes. An urban clergy/church workers conference in 1980 drew together stalwart faces, but it is hard to see how it differed very much from many another gathering of church leaders, before or since. There was some social analysis and a concern that the churches should identify with national aspirations. That it was addresses on the offices of Christ which drew a standing ovation says something for their central theological commitments, but it does not suggest there was much new thinking or likely action about the church and the cities.⁶² In the long run it has been para-

⁶⁰. *Ecumenical News*, October, 1961.

⁶¹. Lim Chin Chin, "The Council of Churches of Malaysia 1947-1987," *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*, p.40.

⁶². Report of the urban clergy/church workers conference, 1980, 21-24 July 1980 at the Methodist Centre, Port Dickson. STM archives.

church groups which have been more successful in combining sustained provocative thinking, feasible plans for doing something, and a recognizably Christian base. Nor should the achievements of the YMCA be overlooked.

19. Language and ecumenism

A persistent problem, long recognised but not yet solved, has been that of involving with any degree of conviction, churches whose basic language of operation is other than English. To today, it is the exception rather than the rule that Chinese speaking churches are fully represented at ecumenical gatherings, whether of the CCM, NECF or CFM. Where a recognised Chinese speaking leader from the churches is active, there is greater involvement, but this is not often the case. If this represents a failure, and it is difficult to say otherwise, it is not for the lack of trying. The reports of the MCC frequently express frustration at the lack of response to their various efforts.⁶³

John Fleming as secretary from 1952 to 1957 was Mandarin speaking and acutely aware of the issue. Frank Balchin who became very involved with Faith and Order and who had taught at Trinity was also very fluent, but his theology was not above suspicion. When Rajah B Manikam visited in 1954 he noticed how his talks were translated for even a small number of Chinese, and lamented that a Federation of Chinese Churches which existed before the war had not been brought into the MCC from the beginning.⁶⁴

One factor in all this was the influence of Carl McIntyre and his International Council of Christian Churches.⁶⁵ Elsewhere it may not have been difficult to see McIntyre as a nuisance and a fraud; in Malaysia his teaching and followers found a potent combination in language differences and theological sensitivities. The differences were real and deep, and if not every last complaint about theology was utterly ill-founded, his theology of separatism was also a departure from scripture and the damage done all too real. His influence in Singapore split the Chinese Presbyterians and helped make those who did not break away highly suspicious of ecumenical contact.

It was in part out of an appreciation of the difficulty of maintaining in the face of linguistic diversity a movement dedicated towards unity, that from time to time leaders in the MCC made positive statements about the development of Malay as the national language. In his 1959 report as President, John Fleming called for a "greater use of Malay in the churches' life and worship and also in the work of this Council. ... Common use of the Malay language could give a great impetus to the practical aspects of Church unity."⁶⁶ Fleming had been inspired by four weeks in Indonesia and the experience of a delegation to a government minister in Malaya being forced to use the national language. The AGM in February 1960 resolved to set

⁶³. *'Unity in the Faith' The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960*, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p4.

⁶⁴. Rajah B Manikam, 17 December 1954, Circular 6. CCA archives, Trinity Theological College Singapore.

⁶⁵. Fleming, J R. Some notes on the history and development of the Malayan Christian Council, mimeo, CCMS, 1966. p.2f.

⁶⁶. *'Unity in the Faith' The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960*, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p1.

up a National Language Committee to advise on the use of the national language, and study problems of vocabulary and terminology.⁶⁷ It also resolved to "encourage all its member-Churches and Trinity Theological College to learn and become familiar with the national language so that Christians could take their full position in the life of the nation."⁶⁸ The following year it was reported that a committee "had been formed to unify the existing translations of the Lord's Prayer, the General Prayer of Confession and the Apostles Creed."⁶⁹ Somehow this seems rather less than what was originally intended. The realisation of the vision must take time, but one wonders how much.

20. Local ecumenism

Ecumenism on the ground is not always the same as for those who meet frequently in councils and committees, yet at the end of the day this is the ecumenism which is most important. The war period and after saw many examples of sharing of facilities. From 1949 the Council made strong efforts to encourage regional ecumenical activity through its branches in Kuala Lumpur,⁷⁰ Penang, Ipoh (Perak), Melaka and Singapore and later in Negri Sembilan. In Kuala Lumpur they held monthly meetings of ministers and other church workers, operated the Student Christian Centre from 1960 and did prison work as well as co-coordinating radio and television programmes before these were no longer permitted.⁷¹

In most areas committees arranged for combined services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January and at Easter and Christmas and provided a forum for local church leadership. Cemeteries were a natural item on many agendas - in 1959 there were negotiations in Penang to try and ensure that provision of land remained a municipal responsibility.⁷² Collections were also made for relief projects overseas.

The involvement of Roman Catholics developed rapidly after the Vatican II Council from 1962 to 1965. Perhaps 1962 was a bit early as that January they were invited to participate in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Ipoh, but the chairman reported that while "the utmost friendliness was found at the point of contact ... no further response seems to be forthcoming."⁷³ However that in Kuala Lumpur in 1963 included Roman Catholics.⁷⁴ The following year *the Straits Times* for 20 January carried the headline "Christian factions unite in prayer service," and noted that the Vicar-General of Penang, Monsignor J Aloysius, said that the idea of

⁶⁷. Minutes of the Annual General Council Meeting of the MCC 16 & 17 February 1960. STM archives.

⁶⁸. Chun Chi-An, General Secretary MCC to Heads of churches and Trinity Theological College, 18 March 1960. STM archives.

⁶⁹. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the General Council February 23 and 24, 1961. STM archives.

⁷⁰. First called the Central Malaya Branch of the MCC, in 1967 it began the Selangor Regional Council and in 1974 the Selangor and Federal Territory Regional Council.

⁷¹. Lim Chin Chin, "The Council of Churches of Malaysia 1947-1987," *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*, p.40.

⁷². A C Dumper, "Penang Branch Chairman's report," *Unity in the Faith' The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960*, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p.20.

⁷³. Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, Chairman's report, 1961-2. STM archives.

⁷⁴. *Ecumenical News*, January 1963.

Christian unity had been spreading and was now out in the open. "Christians must join forces. ... If we cannot unite, how can we hope for the conversion of the world."

The 1964 minutes of the Perak Branch indicate fairly solid support, particularly Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran, although the expatriate presence was probably still dominant in influence if not in numbers - the mailing list from this period had 62 names, 13 of whom appear to be expatriate. A Women's World Day of Prayer service had been attended by 180 in Ipoh and 120 in Taiping,⁷⁵ but combined youth activities were more difficult⁷⁶ - though in 1961 a "Sunset Service" in a local park drew 170.⁷⁷ In November 1959 Perak was providing scholarships for 13 pupils at Sungei Durian Chinese School, Tg. Tualang, and considered, but decided against a scheme for building a Christian hospital.⁷⁸

National gatherings provided for an informal ecumenism on a wider basis. World Vision, not always seen as having a useful ecumenical function, helped fund the 'Second All-Malaya Christian Worker's Conference' which brought 320 to the Methodist Centre in Port Dickson in July 1959.⁷⁹

21. The Malayan Christian College Project

Christian involvement in the provision of education in Malaysia has been considerable, though usually on denominational lines and not always without some sense of denominational competition. Various efforts had been made to extend beyond primary and secondary education, the most notable being a proposal in 1918 which got as far as purchasing 100 acres in Singapore, but which was scuttled by English opposition to American Methodism, and the disdain of English civil servants for the sort of education it would provide.⁸⁰ The government belatedly started its own projects leading to the founding of the University of Singapore and the University of Malaya.

There remained for some however the vision of both the need and the value of Christian-sponsored higher education and the ecumenical framework of the MCC was the obvious place to try once again to get a project off the ground. In 1958 the MCC held discussions with the New York based United Board for Higher Education in Asia, appointed a local committee, and sounded out opinions. They were not altogether positive. In December 1959 the Perak Branch expressed doubts about the value of the proposed College, its financing and "how much Christian witness there

⁷⁵. Minutes of the meeting of the Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, 6 April 1964. STM archives.

⁷⁶. Minutes of the meeting of the Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, 3 February, 1964. STM archives.

⁷⁷. Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch, Chairman's report, 1961-2. STM archives.

⁷⁸. Minutes of a meeting of the MCC Perak Branch, 29 September 1959. STM archives.

⁷⁹. *'Unity in the Faith' The churches working together 1959. Reports presented to the General Council - February 1960*, Malayan Christian Council, Singapore, 1960, p.3.

⁸⁰. Thio Chan Bee, *The Protestant Christian effort in higher education in Malaysia and Singapore - background*, 1966, p.3. United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia papers, Yale Divinity School Archives. J H Oldham, letter and memo, 5 April 1922, IMC Archives, 265.115(4), WCC Geneva. After a visit to Malaya Oldham saw the failure arising out of American tactlessness and a Director of Education who was "probably stupid and admittedly ignorant of education." Memo, p.6.

would be."⁸¹ The 1959 MCC Annual Report described the project as "at a standstill,"⁸² although enquiries were made about international support.

Finance seems to have been a critical issue, not only for the capital required, but also for the annual running. The days of private education being lucrative business ventures were not yet foreseen. Locally and internationally funding seemed out of reach, but another effort was made in 1964, especially as there was the possibility of doing something in Sabah and Sarawak which were newly part of Malaysia.

In 1966 these inquiries culminated in the CCM's sponsoring an appraisal visit by a high powered international team which was well received by Government and Church leaders in Singapore, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Ipoh, Penang, Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur. They got plenty of encouragement, though apart from the possibility of an endowment of 3000 acres of logging rights in Sabah, the matter of finance remained uncomfortably vague.⁸³ A report two years later recommended starting with junior colleges, but did not sound confident about anything actually happening.⁸⁴ Three hundred acres was eventually made available near Kuala Lumpur,⁸⁵ but the project still failed to go ahead.

At the Third National Christian Conference the topic was again raised, and the sixth form College which the Methodists started in Brickfields in the 1980s would seem to provide a logical base on which to build. Unfortunately the number who still have a vision which sees the place of a Christian University in the life of a nation as justifying the trouble and expense appears limited, and those who are willing to look beyond denominational interests to fulfill it, seem unable to carry their respective churches.

22. Review

The celebration in 1987, a year early to coincide with the Third National Christian Conference, of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the MCC in January 1948, was the occasion for looking back and looking forward. The souvenir publication⁸⁶ contains letters of greetings from local and international ecumenical leaders and articles reviewing the history and work of the Council. The drama of the story of Changi was a focus of reflection.⁸⁷ Unity in the shared experience of deprivation was not so easily sustained when peace returned,⁸⁸ and the forty years seemed like those of the children of Israel not yet quite in the promised land.⁸⁹

⁸¹. Malayan Christian Council, Perak Branch. Minutes of meeting of 1 December 1959. STM Library.

⁸². p.4.

⁸³. The tour took place from 25 September to 7 October 1966. Thio Chan Bee, The people whom we met and general impressions, United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia papers, Yale Divinity School Archives.

⁸⁴. An appraisal of the Protestant Christian effort in Higher Education in Asia, Malaysia and Singapore, United Board for Higher Education in Asia, New York, 1968. United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia papers, Yale Divinity School Archives.

⁸⁵. Annual report, 1968. The land was at Genting.

⁸⁶. *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*

⁸⁷. Bishop Savarimuthu, *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*, p.66.

⁸⁸. George Vergis, *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*, p.7.

⁸⁹. George Vergis, *loc cit.* Also Park Sang Jung, *ibid.*, p.15.

The future had to take account of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious face of Malaysia and the call for unity was still there to be heeded. Others pointed to areas of concrete co-operation which could bear fruit; between East and West Malaysia and in the shared study of theological documents, such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.⁹⁰ There were reminders of the value of ecumenical bodies providing a common voice for the churches in dealings with the government, and of co-operation in dealing with social needs and disasters.

Yet it was outside these that the real looking to the future took place. The existence of the CFM as a new central ecumenical body inevitably meant the building up of new structures and the transfer of some functions. There had been wisdom in not destroying the old in order to build the new, but there was also the realisation that the old would not be unaffected by new developments. Issues of church and state are in the nature of things a matter of continued attention as church leaders strive to provide an example of loyal citizenship concerned for the nation as a whole and not just for a sectional or ethnic interest. At the same time they must represent those interests which no one else can represent, and not abuse the opportunities which remain for questioning policy and decision from a Christian perspective.

Within its own ranks life could not be static, or simple. The certainties of unity and support can never be taken for granted for long. Most felt the need to come together, others were oblivious to matters outside their own group. The independently minded will always find reason and excuse to do their own thing in their own way; and in a large and diverse association there will always be something done or said which causes offense. It is a reminder that every generation must integrate into its own understanding issues of Christian faith and obedience as far as relations with other Christians are concerned.

Over the years many things were started and not finished as the reports of the Council freely acknowledge. Why could so many programmes not sustain themselves beyond the vision of an initial founder - or does it not matter very much? In some cases it was enough to do something creative for a short period, or even just the once. But that does not account for everything. It is easier to pass resolutions than to produce sustained action. No doubt many things have their time, and once that time has past Christian obedience and usefulness need to take different forms. A willingness to be committed is also a willingness to try despite the possibility that one may fail. It is this willingness and its associated commitment, as much as the achievements with more obvious institutional legacies, which remain impressive for so many.

⁹⁰. Bishop Thu En Yu, *Growing in unity with Christ*, *ibid.*, p.67.