

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATE & IT

8/7 2nd copy
07/11/20/72(DSPB ...)

Speech by Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Minister of Defence,
at the Opening Ceremony & Dinner of the General
Conference of The Methodist Church in Malaysia
and Singapore at the Singapore Conference Hall
Restaurant on 13th November, 1972 at 8.00 p.m.

72	0050	804
----	------	-----

NARC

May I first say how honoured I am to be asked to
address the Methodist Church General Conference at this dinner
tonight.

Few people outside the Church itself are aware of the
size of the Church and the wide extent of the educational and
social services which it provides in Singapore and Malaysia. The
Church manages no less than 83 schools with a student population
of more than 77,500. The schools engage some 2,550 teachers.

As regards religious activities in its strict sense,
there are 142 Methodist Churches in Singapore and Malaysia with
164 pastors. The flock of the Church, adults as well as their
families, but excluding non-Methodist students in schools, adds
up to more than 140,000.

In addition, the Church provides two agricultural
extension services in Sarawak, maintains a small but well-equipped
hospital in Kapit as well as a number of medical clinics in
Sarawak and West Malaysia.

By any standard, these add up to very substantial
activities, contributing in no small measure to the progress of
the two countries. Considering that the Methodist Mission first

began less than a hundred years ago, in February 1885 to be exact, with the arrival of its first missionary, William F. Oldham in Singapore, the achievement is all the more commendable.

If we look at the contemporary scene in the world today, we can find little cause for rejoicing. Some distressing situations have emerged in recent years. Take the rich industrial nations of the west. By the increasing application of science and technology to production, they have enormously increased their wealth and general standards of living. Poverty as we know it in Asia, in the sense of hunger, deprivation and poor health resulting from inadequate incomes - poverty in this sense has been abolished. Rising standards of living and the spread of affluence have been remarkable in those societies in the post-war years.

Yet material progress has brought neither contentment nor an increase in happiness and security. On the contrary, strife between classes and communities within a nation goes on on an increasing scale. There is even basic disagreement between young and old in some western societies. Many of the old beliefs, such as belief in hard work, respect for the virtues of honesty, thrift etc have given way to a reckless pursuit of pleasure by all means, including drugs and permissiveness. This is the tragedy of the industrialised nations - that the enormous material progress that they have achieved seems to have created as many new problems as they solved old ones.

In the other part of the world, the underdeveloped portion, we see neither material affluence nor moral and spiritual upliftment which poverty is supposed to encourage. Instead, over the vast stretches of Afro-Asia, we see ignorance, superstition, intolerance toward people of different races, a lowering of standards of public morality as corruption subverts public administration in country after country.

The reasons for the sorry state of affairs are many and complex. I do not think we need go into them here. Suffice it to note that both the haves and the have-nots are going through a trying period though for different reasons and in different ways.

But however different their circumstance, the one group being rich the other poor, whatever their standing in regard to social, economic or political development, societies which find themselves in trouble have one factor in common.

This is the absence of belief in moral standards or a decline in such belief where it exists. Take the case of the underdeveloped countries trying to modernise their economies and uplift their peoples. The traditional societies in these countries do not possess in their systems of belief or in their religions, ethical codes appropriate to the conduct of modern business and administration. Accordingly people are guided by self-interest and are inhibited by few scruples when they assume positions of responsibility in business or administration. The vast literature on economic development has not given sufficient thought to this subject.

Economists like to deal with things that can be counted, quantified and computerised. There is nothing wrong in this, but it is a short step from this position to the serious error of believing that quantifiable variables are the only things that really matter. And they seem surprised and disappointed when their prescriptions for economic growth did not work in country after country.

Recently I had an interesting after dinner discussion with a widely travelled American banker. Over coffee, when peoples mood becomes expansive, he asked if I had to recommend one single prescription to solve the economic problems of a poor country, what would it be. I said I would recommend that the population be converted to some demanding, narrow-minded, intolerant form of the Protestant religion, such as one of the more extreme Calvinist sects. This would bring about the end of easy-going thriftless habits among the populace and the beginning of scrupulous honesty in public administration. This combination must result in spectacular economic growth.

This fanciful idea puts in an extreme way the need to establish a firm moral order in a society which seeks economic progress. For only then can we get high standards of conduct both in public administration and private business. As you all know, this is what we constantly strive for in Singapore, and the good rates of economic growth in recent years are a vindication of this point of view.

In the world today, many people turn away from the Christian religion in the mistaken belief that it is old-fashioned or even irrelevant to contemporary problems. In fact, the contrary is the case. The solid virtues which the Christian faith proclaims are just what sick societies need most, whether they are sick through a surfeit of material wealth or sick through poverty and deprivation.

In Singapore we are experiencing some of the problems created by rapid economic growth in a society open to influences from all corners of the world. The young especially need guidance if they are to avoid the many pitfalls awaiting them. I am sure that these problems are receiving urgent consideration in your conference and that the Church will render invaluable service in giving the guidance that is greatly needed.

National Archives of Singapore