

2010/2 The Use Of “Allah”: What Next?**by B. S. Poh**

The use of the word “Allah” for “God” in the *Alkitab* (the Malay/Indonesian Bible) has been a long-standing problem in Malaysia. Attempts have been made by various parties to address the problem but it has persisted with no sign of a solution in sight. I have addressed this issue in the Reformed Ministers’ Conference of 2008 in Kuala Lumpur, which culminated in the publication of that address as a booklet that was circulated to church leaders in Malaysia and Indonesia.(1) The present article is a follow-up of the previous address. The focus this time is more specific, both in objective and scope. The objective is to show that there are strong linguistic and theological reasons why Christians must move away from using “Allah” as a translation for “God”. The scope is limited to the Malaysian situation, with passing reference made to situations elsewhere.

Overview to the problem

We must first give an overview to the problem. The Bible began to be translated into Malay from the 1600s when Christian missionaries arrived at the Malay Archipelago. Malaysia attained independence from the British in 1957, with a Federal Constitution which states that Malay is the national language, Islam is the official religion, the sultans are the custodians of Islam in their respective states, laws may be passed to restrict the spread of other faiths to the Muslims, the Malays are Muslims occupying a special position in the country, and other religions may be freely practised. When the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo joined Malaysia in 1963,

the Malay Bible had already been used among the sizable Christian population there for generations.

In the 1980s, a number of states in the country passed laws prohibiting the use of certain words, including “Allah”, in non-Muslim contexts. The central government passed a similar law which prohibits the publication, sale, distribution, or possession of the *Alkitab* since it uses the word “Allah”. This, of course, affected the Malay-speaking Christians in this country who have relied on Bibles and books imported from Indonesia. Due to protests by the Christians, the *Alkitab* was allowed to be imported by some approved bodies for use in churches. Problems surfaced sporadically when imported copies of the *Alkitab* were held up by the immigration department and when certain Christian books containing the word “Allah” were banned.

In recent days, the Roman Catholic weekly, *The Herald*, was prohibited from using the word “Allah” in its Malay section. It was feared that the use of the word would cause confusion among the Muslims in the country. This was euphemism for the fear of proselytization. The Roman Catholic Church took the matter to court, claiming that the word “Allah” was not exclusive to the religion of Islam. *The Herald*, which is printed in four languages, had been using “Allah” in its Malay section for years. On 31 December 2009, the high court ruled that *The Herald* has the right to use “Allah” (2). The ruling stirred up the ire of Muslims in the country so that there were demonstrations and warnings issued by various Muslim organizations and politicians against the Christians. Other politicians, including Muslim ones, voiced a different opinion, believing that other religions may use “Allah” in reference to God.

Following the court ruling in favour of *The Herald*, eleven churches and a Christian school were attacked with firebombs and paint. As tension rose, two mosques and two Muslim prayer rooms were hit with arson or vandalism. A mosque in an area which had seen clashes between Muslims

and Hindus in 2001 was desecrated with two pig heads thrown into its premises. A few arrests of individuals were made and brought to court. The government has applied for a stay of execution of the court ruling in favour of *The Herald*, while appealing against the decision (3). To date, the issue is not settled.

While the case connected with *The Herald* was ongoing, the Borneo Evangelical Church (Sidang Injil Borneo, SIB) had a case pending in court over the confiscation by the immigration department of 20,000 copies of Christian publications imported from Indonesia(4). A former Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir, issued a statement in his blog that a sensitive matter such as the “Allah” controversy cannot be resolved through the courts(5). The Malay dailies have also published strong statements on the subject. The Christians were incensed by the suggestion that they have been unnecessarily confrontational in refusing to settle their cases out of court. The Sultan of Selangor issued a statement that there should be no dispute over the use of the word “Allah” since the 1988 non-Muslim Enactment prohibits non-Muslims from using the word(6). The Borneo Evangelical Church has since agreed to settle the issue with the government out of court. What the settlement would be remains to be seen. It is unlikely that there would be a lifting of the ban on the use of “Allah” by religions other than Islam.

A proposed solution

When considering a solution to the current impasse, we must remind ourselves of the importance of remaining cool-headed and not be under the sway of emotions. Fairness, courtesy and compassion would require that we hear out the views of those who differ from us and genuinely try to understand them. We need also to distinguish between issues - whether they are political-and-historical, or theological-and-linguistic. While not denying the relevance of politico-historical considerations, the theological-linguistic ones should hold sway in what is basically an epistemological issue.(7) The Christian protagonists need to further remember that we are seeking

to glorify God, to edify the church, and to advance the gospel. In short, Christians must be guided by spiritual considerations and biblical principles.

We now come to consider the reasons that have been put forward for the retention of the use of “Allah” by Christians(8). The reasons are:

- i. The use of “Allah” for “God” among the Christians in Arabic countries preceded the advent of Islam.
- ii. The Bible has been translated into Malay for over 300 years in which “Allah” is used.
- iii. Indigenous Christians in the states of Sabah and Sarawak have been using “Allah” long before the two states joined Malaysia in 1963.
- iv. It is the constitutional right of non-Muslim Malaysians to use “Allah” since the freedom of religion, speech and association is guaranteed, and the use of any language, including Malay, is not the sole prerogative of any ethnic group.

It is to be noted that all these reasons are socio-political and historical ones. When the linguistic consideration comes in, it has been pointed out that there are affinities between the Hebrew “El” “Eloah” and “Elohim” with the Arabic “ilah” and “Allah”. Malaysian Christians choose to use “Allah” instead of “Elohim” because, it is claimed, “Allah” has been absorbed into the Malay language and it means “God”.

Linguistic problems

In my 2009 article, I have pointed out that in the Malay language, “Allah” is not a proper noun derived from a generic word. It is adopted from Arabic, while the corresponding generic word, “ilah”, has not been similarly adopted. The word “Allah”, therefore, becomes a personal name for God. In fact, in the Malaysian context, it is the personal name of the god of Islam. The standard Malay dictionary, the *Kamus Dewan*, lists “Allah” (with uppercase “A”), and “Ilah” (with

uppercase “I”) but not “allah” (with lowercase “a”) or “ilah” (with lowercase “i”). What I am saying is that “allah” and “ilah” (with lowercase “a” and “i”) are not words in the Malay language. They have not been absorbed into Malay yet. That is why it is incorrect to say, “Salah satu allah orang Hindu ialah Subramaniam” (“One of the gods of the Hindus is Subramaniam”). Similarly, it is incorrect to say, “Salah satu ilah orang Hindu ialah Subramaniam”. Instead, we would say, “Salah satu tuhan orang Hindu ialah Subramaniam,” (“One of the gods of the Hindus is Subramaniam,”). Both “Tuhan” (with uppercase “T”) and “tuhan” (with lowercase “t”) are listed in the Malay dictionary.

You see now that the word “Allah” as used in the *Alkitab* is inaccurate. Instead, “Tuhan” should have been used. We may not draw a parallel with the Arabic Bible because “Allaah” (with uppercase “A”) as used there is derived from the common noun, “ilaah” (with lowercase “i”). The word “ilaah” (with lowercase “i”) is native to the Arabic language, but not to the Malay language. The Arabic Bible uses “Allaah” in a similar way to “God” (with uppercase “G”) in English, which is derived from the common noun, “god” (with lowercase “g”). The same may be said when compared with Bibles in other European languages such as French, Dutch, and German, which use “Dieu”, “God”, and “Gott” respectively.

When the translators of the *Alkitab* chose “Allah” as a translation for “God”, they were left with the word “Tuhan” which was used for translating “Lord”. There was no need for them to choose another word to translate the Greek word “Kurios” which, when applied to Jesus Christ, carries the connotation of deity. The expression, “Tuhan Yesus Kristus” seems most appropriate for “the Lord Jesus Christ”. However, the use of “Allah” for “God” and “Tuhan” for “Lord” leads to awkwardness, and even inaccuracy, in the translation of certain passages. Two examples are the following:(9)

Deuteronomy 6:14-15, You shall not go after other **gods**, the **gods** of the peoples who *are* all around you (for the **LORD** your **God** *is* a jealous **God** among you), lest the anger of the **LORD** your **God** be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

2 Corinthians 4:4, ...whose minds the **god** of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of **God**, should shine on them.

The *Alkitab* renders those verses as follow:

Ulangan 6:14-15, Janganlah kamu mengikuti **allah** lain, dari antara **allah** bangsa-bangsa sekelilingmu, sebab **TUHAN**, **Allahmu**, adalah **Allah** yang cemburu di tengah-tengahmu, supaya jangan bangkit murka **TUHAN**, **Allahmu**, terhadap engkau, sehingga Ia memunahkan engkau dari muka bumi.

2 Korintus 4:4,yaitu orang-orang yang tidak percaya, yang pikirannya telah dibutakan oleh **ilah** zaman ini, sehingga mereka tidak melihat cahaya Injil tentang kemuliaan Kristus, yang adalah gambaran **Allah**.

As we have pointed out above, the use of “allah” (with lowercase “a”) and “ilah” (with lowercase “i”) is linguistically inaccurate. The word “tuhan” should have been used instead. Furthermore, the word “allah” is used in one verse, while the word “ilah” is used in the other verse. Which of these two words is the translation for “god”, or are they both equally valid translations? Or is this an attempt to reproduce the Arabic singular and plural, namely “ilaah” and “aaliha”? Since when did the Malay language take on such a rule of inflection, such that the singular “ilah” becomes the plural “allah”? This is grammatically inaccurate. In Malay, the rule of transforming the singular to

the plural is to duplicate the singular as a hyphenated word, e.g. “orang-orang” (people), “tuhantuhan” (gods), etc.

We see now that the use of “Allah” and “Tuhan” in the *Alkitab* is linguistically inaccurate, and it is also grammatically inaccurate. Another point should be noted, it introduces an element of inaccuracy in the result, or outcome, of the translation. There are, therefore, inaccuracies in linguistics, in grammar, and in the translation itself. How this happens is that by using “Allah”, which in Malay is a personal pronoun - not a proper noun derived from a common/generic noun - we have subtly changed the meaning of those scriptures where it occurs. When we translate “the image of God” as “gambaran Allah” instead of “gambaran Tuhan”, we have subtly changed the message much like translating “the voice of Dad” into “the voice of John”, although John might be the name of my dad. The word “Dad” (with uppercase “D”) is a proper noun derived from the common noun “dad” (with lowercase “d”), while “John” is a personal name not derived from a common noun. Similarly, when we translate “the Lord Jesus Christ” as “Tuhan Yesus Kristus”, we have subtly changed the meaning from “Jesus Christ who is Lord (or Master)” to “Jesus Christ who is God”. We know that the use of “Lord” in reference to Jesus Christ carries the connotation of deity, but the connotation is to be distinguished from the root-meaning of “Lord”, or “Kurios” in Greek. The work of translation should be kept separate from the work of interpretation.

Theological problems

Apart from the problems arising from linguistic considerations, we must also consider the problems that are theological in nature. Evangelicals hold to the principle of “sola scriptura”, which means that the Bible alone is the authority in all matters of faith and practice. This principle leads to three obvious corollaries that are of direct relevance to us. The first corollary is that *no writings other than the Bible are to be accepted as the revelation of God*. The 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament together constitute the complete revelation of God. We do not

accept any other book as part of Scripture, much less the *Quran* which was written and compiled more than five hundred years after the completion of the last book of the Bible. To evangelical Christians, the *Quran* is not inspired Scripture. Those who accept the *Quran* as inspired, in the same sense that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God, are not true evangelicals.

The second corollary is that *the God revealed in the Bible is alone the true God*. Not only is the way of salvation revealed in the Bible alone (Acts 4:12), but the true God is revealed therein. The existence of the true God, together with some of His attributes, are revealed in nature and the human conscience such that man stands condemned before Him for suppressing the truth (Rom. 1:20-21; 2:14-15). However, a saving knowledge of the true God is revealed in the Bible alone. The Athenians attempted to worship the true God which they did not know (Acts 17:22ff.). Paul declared the character of the true God to them, and showed that He could be known through knowing Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God referred to is both objective and subjective in nature. In other words, it is not just having a saving knowledge of God through faith in Christ, i.e. having a subjective faith, but it is also having a correct understanding of what the true God is like, i.e. having an objective faith. The Muslims are attempting to worship the true God, calling Him “Allah”, when He is unknown to them objectively and subjectively. They do not have a subjective (saving) knowledge of the true God because they have not known the Son of God. Only those who have known the Son know the Father (John 14:7, 9). They also do not have an objective knowledge of the true God because the true God is correctly revealed in the Bible alone. The God of the Bible is the Trinitarian God, not the unitarian god of the *Quran*. Furthermore, the prophet Isa of the *Quran* is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible, the Son of God who has taken upon Himself perfect human nature and who died on the cross and rose from the dead. The *Quran* denies that the prophet Isa is the Son of God and that He died on the cross. The Isa of the *Quran* is “another Jesus” different from that of the Bible (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4), and the “Allah” of the *Quran* is another god different from that of the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 8:5-6).

We draw some conclusions from the two corollaries before proceeding to consider the third one. Since we do not accept the *Quran* as divinely inspired, and reject the god and the prophet Isa taught in it, we would not want the God of the Bible and the Saviour revealed in it to be confused with what are taught in the *Quran*. While it is appropriate for Arab Christians to use “Allah” in reference to God, it is not so for Christians who speak other languages. Arab Christians may rightly use “Allah” in reference to God not only because it is linguistically correct in Arabic, but also because they have developed a religious vocabulary distinctively their own, without fear of confusion with Islam. In Malay, “Allah” is the personal name of the god of Islam. It is not a proper noun derived from a common noun such as “allah” or “ilah”, for no such words exist in the Malay language. Instead, the common noun for “god” in Malay is “tuhan”. It is common knowledge that people throughout the world generally associate “Allah” with Islam. The word “Allah” is inextricably linked to the *Quran* because most Muslims do not approve of the translation of their holy book into other languages. The Muslims do not hide the fact that they believe in biological increase. As the population of the world increases exponentially, “Allah” will increasingly be associated with them. To use “Allah” in reference to God in the *Alkitab* is theologically unacceptable and practically unwise.

The third corollary of the principle of “sola scriptura” is that *the Bible is sufficient to guide us in translating the word of God into other languages*. Scripture teaches by commands, precepts, principles, and examples. It is a hermeneutical rule that the examples of Jesus Christ and the apostles, correctly understood, constitute teaching that must be followed. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” He says in Philippians 4:9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do...” John Owen says that an apostolic example “hath the force of a divine institution”(10). The principle of “sola scriptura” gives rise to “the regulative principle” of worship, by which only what is commanded in Scripture is to be

carried out in the worship of God. It stands in contrast to “the permissive principle”(11), which holds that whatever is not forbidden by God’s word is permissible in worship. Reformed Christians and informed evangelicals hold to “the regulative principle” of worship, while other evangelicals hold to “the permissive principle” - with sad and confusing consequences. Rightly speaking, the parent principle of “sola scriptura” would mean that the word of God should regulate all areas of our life, including how we serve Him, and not limited to worship. The translation of Scripture to other languages is a service to God, for it brings God’s word close to others who speak those languages. The 1689 Confession advocates the translation of Scripture into other languages:

“...the Scriptures are therefore to be translated into the ordinary language of every nation into which they come, so that, with the Word of God living richly in all, people may worship God in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.”(12)

How should the Bible regulate the translation of God’s word into another language? It is by the example shown in the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, called the Septuagint. Jesus Christ and the apostles showed their approval of the Septuagint by using it in their teaching and worship. This is clear from their many quotations from the Septuagint which are found in the New Testament. Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the early disciples spoke Greek as well as Aramaic. The Septuagint had been in circulation for over two hundred years before the coming of Christ. The Pentateuch in Greek was in circulation by 280 B.C., while all the books of the Old Testament had been translated by 180 B.C.(13). Koine Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire. When the New Testament, written in Koine Greek, was completed, it was combined with the Septuagint to form the Greek Bible, and used by the early church. How the names of God are translated from Hebrew into Greek in the Septuagint, and how the apostles refer to God and to Jesus Christ in the Greek New Testament, would be binding examples for us in the work of translating the Bible.

How is “Elohim” translated into Greek in the Septuagint? “Elohim” is translated by the word “theos” in the Septuagint. An example is the Hebrew “torah haElohim (law of God), as in Nehemiah 8:8, which becomes “nomos theou”. Another example is Genesis 1:1, “b rashith bra aleim” (In the beginning God created) which is translated as “en arche epoiesen o theos”.

How is “Jehovah” translated in the Septuagint? In Deuteronomy 6:13 we have “the LORD your God” translated as “Kurion ton Theon sou”. Here, “Jehovah” (or “LORD” in English, with uppercase letters throughout) is translated by “Kurios”, while “Elohim” (or “God” in English) is translated by “Theos”. Similarly, in Psalm 7:1 & 3 we have “O LORD my God” which is translated as “Kurie ho Theos mou”. Again, “Jehovah” (or “LORD” in English, with uppercase letters throughout) is translated by “Kurios”, while “Elohim” (or “God” in English) is translated by “Theos”.

How are God and Jesus Christ referred to in the Greek New Testament? God is always referred to by the word “Theos”, while Jesus Christ is addressed by the title of “Kurios”. For example, in John 20:28 we have, “Ho Kurios mou kai ho Theos mou” which in English is “My Lord and my God!”

We see now that the English Bible follows the pattern set in the Septuagint by translating the word “Elohim” with the generic word “God”, and “Jehovah” with the word “LORD” (meaning “MASTER”). The English Bible follows the Greek New Testament by using the generic word “God” to refer to the Creator, and “Lord” (meaning “Master”) as a title for Jesus Christ. Although the translation for Jehovah, viz. “LORD” (in uppercase letters throughout) is distinguished from the title “Lord” for Jesus Christ in print, the same word meaning “Master” is used just as in the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament. We see, therefore, the pattern set by Scripture being followed in the English Bible. The same can be said of the Bible in other European languages and in Arabic. This is not the case with the Malay/Indonesian Bible, the *Alkitab*. Instead of using the

generic word “Tuhan” for translating “Elohim” and “Theos”, a borrowed word, viz. “Allah” is used. Instead of translating “Jehovah” and “Kurios” with a word meaning “Master”, a word meaning “God” (“Tuhan”) is used. By so doing, the translators are not following the example set in Scripture.

In the earlier article of 2009, I have suggested using the word “Yamtuan” for “Lord” and “Jehovah”. The word “Yamtuan” is equivalent to “Yang Dipertuan” or “Baginda”, i.e. “the highest Lord” or “his Majesty” in English. It is a word registered in the standard Malay dictionary. “Yamtuan” is the ideal translation for “Kurios” in reference to Jesus Christ and to Jehovah, not only because of its meaning but also because it is a dual-syllable word that rhymes with “Tuhan”, which makes for easy amendment of existing Malay hymns. The use of “Tuhan” for “God” and “Yamtuan” for “Lord” would solve the present linguistic and theological difficulties, while being more consonant with the principle of “sola scriptura”. Following the English Bible, we can then spell “YAMTUAN” (LORD), with uppercase letters throughout, to denote “Jehovah”, in distinction from “Yamtuan” (Lord) for “Kurios”.

We summarize the reasons against the use of “Allah” in reference to God and “Tuhan” as a translation for “Jehovah” and “Kurios”.

- i. The word “Allah” in the Malay language is a personal pronoun used in reference to the god of the *Quran*. It is not a proper noun derived from a common/generic noun, since “allah” and “ilah” (with lowercase “a” and “i”) have not been adopted into the Malay language.
- ii. The attempt to use “allah” (with lowercase “a”) as the plural of “ilah” (with lowercase “i”) is grammatically incorrect because, quite apart from the fact that they are not words of the Malay language, it breaks the rule of plural inflection.
- iii. Using “Allah” and “Tuhan” for “God” and “Lord”, respectively, introduces subtle inaccuracies into the end results of the translation.

- iv. Using “Allah” for God inevitably leads to the wrongful association of the true God with the god of Islam, since “Allah” is inextricably linked with the *Quran* and increasingly associated with Islam.
- v. Using “Allah” for “God” and “Tuhan” for “Lord” is not following the example set in Scripture of how these words are to be translated, and therefore breaks the principle of “sola scriptura”.

The next steps

We have offered theological and linguistic arguments against the use of “Allah” by Christians other than the Arab Christians. Compared to the arguments for the retention of the word, which are socio-political and historical in nature, I contend that the theological and linguistic ones should prevail with Christians. The essence of our concern is the translation of the Bible. The socio-political aspects of the problem loom large at the moment and need to be addressed, but we must not lose sight of the key issue. We should be asking questions like: How should the first translators of the *Alkitab* have rendered the words for “God” and “Lord”? If the present socio-political considerations are somehow resolved, or rendered irrelevant, should we continue to use “Allah” for “God” and “Tuhan” for “Lord”? If not resolved, would not the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Malay-speaking church continue to be hindered? It is coming to 30 years since the problem first arose. I hazard the prediction that this problem will not go away even with a complete change of government in Malaysia.

I am also putting forward the suggestion that Christians should continue the legal battle for the right of using “Allah” to be sustained, but declare at the same time that we intend to drop the use of the word, in favour of “Tuhan” for “God” and “Yamtuan” for “Lord”. By so doing, we are accomplishing a number of important things:

- i. We are making the point that non-Muslims in Malaysia have the inalienable right to use the word “Allah”;

- ii. We are acknowledging the fact that the translation of the *Alkitab* could have been more accurate, a fact which we now want to put right;
- iii. We are showing forth our desire to follow the biblical injunction to forego our rights for the sake of those with a weaker conscience (Rom. 14:1 Cor. 9: 19, 22; 10:31-32).

Allow me to elaborate a little on the last point, viz. our desire to forego our rights for the sake of others. We must recognize the fact that Muslims in the world are not homogeneous in belief and practice, much as they would like to portray the oneness of their *ummah* (brotherhood) in better times. The events of recent years have shattered their illusion of unity and unanimity in the faith. Shaken as we are by the irrationality of the Muslim terrorists, are we unable to bring ourselves to believe that the vast majority of the followers of Islam are against such violence? Can we not see that the moderate Muslims are reeling from their shattered dignity and credibility by their own numbers? Try to understand that these are a people already plagued with generations of backwardness in education, technology, and healthcare, despite some Muslim nations being rich in natural resources. Try to fathom the frustration in the leaders who have unsuccessfully attempted to uplift the livelihood and mentality of their people on the basis of Islamic teaching and principles. Try also to picture their bewilderment as they harp back on the glorious days of Islamic civilization under the caliphs, while failing to see that it was not Islam *per se* that brought progress in that bygone age, but the transfer of knowledge from the earlier Greco-Roman civilization.

Evangelical Christians would be able to say right away that the root of the problems faced by the Muslims, in common with all the descendants of Adam, is sin. Evangelical Christians would be able to say that the solution lies in the *new birth* wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is *regeneration* alone that will ennoble the human spirit, not education or religion. The Holy Spirit works via the instrumentality of the word of God. “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). If the *Alkitab* is a banned book, we would not have the liberty of proclaiming

God's word in Malay. If Muslims are forbidden to hear the word of God, the means of the Holy Spirit to give the new birth is being taken away. That is why, instead of frightening the Muslims with the possibility of proselytization, we should be fighting for "the liberty of conscience" to be upheld across the board. God alone is Lord over the human conscience. No one should be made to accept any belief by force, threat, or law. The freedom of speech and association would include the freedom to teach and propagate what one believes, without encroaching on the rights of others. The Muslims are free to preach what they believe, and they must allow others the freedom to preach what they believe. Others are free to hear what the Muslims have to say, and Muslims should be given true freedom to hear what others have to say. The individual has no choice in his birth, but he has a choice in his belief. One's birth and one's belief should not be tied together. God determines our birth, and God demands that we be responsible for our own belief. That religion is a sensitive matter which leads to violence is a myth that must be shattered. It is immature, self-conceited and irrational passion directed criminally against others that causes violence. It is that that constitutes violence.

Currently, the so-called freedom of religion in Malaysia is nothing more than grudging tolerance of non-Muslim religions. I dream of a Malaysia in which true liberty of conscience is recognized and upheld, in which institutionalized discrimination by colour, class and creed is a thing of the past, and in which justice, mercy and honesty are valued as universal virtues. The place to begin is to have true liberty of conscience - something unknown and unheard of in a nation founded on imperfect principles. We can expect some surprises when there is true liberty of conscience. More individuals might be won to Islam than is presently the case, and with more happy consequences, although the Muslims must expect that there would be those from their numbers who turn to Christ.

What practical steps may we take while awaiting the outcome of future court battles over the right to use "Allah"?

- i. We would attempt to persuade as many Christians as possible in this country of the propriety - indeed, the imperative - of dropping the use of “Allah” and adopt “Tuhan” for “God” and “Yamtuan” for “Lord”.
- ii. We could make a trial publication of, say, a thousand copies of the *Alkitab* using “Tuhan” and “Yamtuan” as replacement words. For this, we would need to raise sufficient fund, while procuring pre-publication orders to ensure quick dissemination and use of the new version of the *Alkitab*. We would also need to seek the help of the Bible Society of Indonesia in amending these words, as well as others, to suit the Malaysian situation. For example, we would spell the word “kerana” (because) instead of “karena”, we would use the word “*perigi*” (a well) instead of “sumur”, and we might even use the word “Kristian” (Christian) instead of “Kristen”.
- iii. We would attempt to persuade the churches in Indonesia of the propriety and advantages of using the terms “Tuhan” and “Yamtuan”, while retaining the Indonesian spellings and preferred words such as “karena”, “sumur” and “Kristen”. Cross-border exchange of teaching and publications would be facilitated by a common theological vocabulary, leading to the mutual edification of the churches in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Conclusion

The current use of the words “Allah” as a translation for “God” and “Tuhan” for “Lord” is linguistically and theologically incorrect. Instead of those words, “Tuhan” and “Yamtuan” are proposed as ideal replacements for “God” and “Lord”, respectively.

The task of promoting the use of these replacement words in a revised version of the *Alkitab* among Christians will not be smooth and easy. We foresee opposition from various quarters arising from fear of change, insistence on the legal right to continue using “Allah”, and unworthy personal

considerations in certain church leaders. As I send forth this article, I crave the prayer support of friends and fellow servants of God who see the crying need for a usable version of the *Alkitab*.

References

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9. Bible quotations are from the New King James Version, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc., in which words added in the process of translation are in italics, and the *Alkitab* published by the Indonesian Bible Society.
10. *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 16. p. 197. The Banner of Truth Trust.
11. The permissive principle is often referred to as "the normative principle" in the literature, which is unfortunate, for Scripture sets the norm, or standard of behaviour, for the church and the believer and is therefore "normative". The "normative principle" should therefore be the alternative name of the "regulative principle". On this principle, see, Ernest C. Reisinger & D. Matthew Allen, *Worship: The Regulative Principle and the Biblical Principle of Accommodation*. Founders Press.

12. *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Chapter 1, Article 8. This is similarly taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647*, Chapter 1, Article 8.
13. Irving L. Jensen, 1978. *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*. Moody Press. pp. 50-51.

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