

WALK IN THE LIGHT AND SHARE IT

(1 John 1:5-7)

By the grace of God, I returned yesterday from a fruitful Provincial Synod gathering in Kuala Lumpur. Catching up on news in Singapore, I am led to write pastorally to the Anglican flock entrusted to me as Diocesan Bishop – a responsibility I share with the bishops, priests and deaconesses who serve alongside me.

The public discussion in the media concerning the coming Madonna concert in Singapore surfaces

- a) the need for Christians to walk in the light of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus, and also
- b) the role of the Church as a faithful witness to the society she is part of.

Let me address these briefly in turn.

WALK IN THE LIGHT

We make our choices in the light of holy Scripture and with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Should Christians go to the Madonna concert?

Having come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness of our sins and newness of life, we are to choose to walk in the light and to shun the darkness:

“... God is light; in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)

As Christians, we are to avoid everything that darkens and defiles our hearts and minds, and that ultimately breaks our fellowship or close communion with God and even with each other. What language, values and images will one expose oneself to at the Madonna concert? What impact will it leave on the attendee’s heart and imagination?

Secondly, the choice is framed for Christians in terms of love for God the Father as against love for “the world”. By “the world” is meant the world organised and opposed to God’s intentions and God’s ways for man:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” (1 John 2: 15-16 ESV).

We are to exercise our choices in a way that decisively shows that our love for God is greater than our love for what “the world” craves for.

Thirdly, our choices and the conduct that follows affects the witness of Christians before a watching world. How will non-Christians understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the lifestyle it calls us to if Christians find “no problem” with attending such a concert? The power of the Cross sets us free to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”. (2 Tim 2:22; cf Rom 12:1-2). Will attending the concert convey a Christian’s commitment to the beautiful and holy life Christ Jesus has redeemed us for?

In light of the above, I agree with the biblical exhortation Archbishop William Goh gave to the flock under his care (Straits Times, 23 Feb 2016 and 24 Feb 2016) and his call to them to make their choice on whether to attend the concert with “an informed conscience”. I would like also to call upon each one of you as members of Christ’s one body to encourage “one another daily that none may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness”. (Heb 3:13).

BEARING WITNESS IN THE SOCIETY

Not only are Christians to order and shape their own lives in the light and pattern of Christ, we are to bear witness to that light in the society we are part of. This includes our responsible participation as a Church in the public square of ideas, discussions and decisions in our society.

In Singapore, our Diocese is part of a registered umbrella organisation of Protestant Churches called the National Council of Churches in Singapore (NCCS). When NCCS learnt of the coming Madonna concert, we made direct representation to Media Development Authority (MDA) to convey our grave concerns about the content of Madonna concerts and its profane use of religious symbols. We were assured in writing that MDA has made clear its terms for allowing the concert to ensure that anything offensive to what is sacred (like the item “Holy Water”) or is religiously insensitive is removed from the content of the coming show in Singapore.

As NCCS leaders, we have also conveyed in private to the authorities who govern and oversee the public space our question on the wisdom of allowing such shows in Singapore in a mass event setting. On the one hand is artistic license and popular appeal. But on the other is an artiste who has chosen to brazenly embody and stridently promote self-indulgent and antinomian (against moral law) values which, in our view, are contrary to the well-being and future of our nation.

In making known our views in appropriate ways at the level of public discourse, we are not forcing our views on others but conveying our faith-based values as fellow-citizens in an intermediary organisation to the national conversation of what is best for Singapore. In taking a position on the Madonna concert, the Church can be cast as being moralistic or arrogantly prescriptive for everybody else. That is not our intention or motivation. The Church is not simply anti-this or anti-that. Rather, we have a God-given role to bear witness to the values that make for life... values that under-gird peoples’ choices.

Finally, life is about choices... choices made by a society, a family and an individual. This is true also for Madonna. The spirit of Christians and of the Church is not to condemn but to invite, admonish and encourage one another, both as fellow-believers and fellow human beings, to make the right decisions for man’s well-being and for the glory of God.

As hot-button issues continue to surface in every society and every age, pray that the Church and the Christian within her fold will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to take a clear, biblical position, to be bold and humble in posture and to be invitational and winsome in witness to the world that God so loved and continues to love (Jn 3:16). We make clear our position, we live our lives authentically and we pray fervently (2 Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-18) so that God’s life-giving reign will be known in the Church and in the nations.

To God be the glory in your life and mine, and in our life together as people redeemed by His grace in Christ Jesus.

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