

The Varied Financial Sources of the Main Denominational Churches in Sabah: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRAK

Wang adalah jantung kepada sesebuah organisasi kerana dengan adanya wang boleh menjadi pemangkin yang dapat mengaktifkan dan membangunkan organisasi yang berkenaan. Tanpa sumber kewangan yang kukuh dan stabil, sesebuah organisasi mungkin gagal mencapai objektifnya. Pemerhatian ini adalah benar dalam konteks gereja-gereja mazhab utama di Sabah. Salah satu faktor yang menyebabkan gereja-gereja mazhab utama di Sabah dapat terus berkembang dan mantap sejak zaman Syarikat Berpiagam Borneo Utara British (British North Borneo Chartered Company – BNBCC) hingga kini kerana mempunyai sumber kewangan yang pelbagai. Artikel ini akan berusaha untuk mengenal pasti sumber kewangan gereja-gereja mazhab utama di Sabah, iaitu Catholic, Anglican, Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (Sabah), Borneo Evangelical Mission, Seventh-Day Adventist, The Protestant Church of Sabah dan The Church of True Jesus of Sabah. Berdasarkan rekod-rekod yang diperolehi gereja-gereja tersebut telah mengambil daya usaha untuk menjana kewangan gereja mereka seperti menjual kelapa yang dihasilkan daripada ladang kelapa kepunyaan gereja, menjual harta mudah alih milik seperti kenderaan, dan pungutan sewa daripada lot-lot di bangunan gereja, dewan dan gelanggang permainan di samping aktiviti kutipan consecration, khususnya berdasarkan kepada konsep tithe yang diamalkan oleh kebanyakan gereja pada setiap hari church's service. Sesuatu yang menarik untuk negeri Sabah yang tidak ada untuk negeri-negeri lain di Malaysia ialah wujudnya "Peruntukan Bagi Perkembangan Badan-badan Keagamaan Bukan Islam", yang sebahagian besar peruntukan ini digunakan untuk pembangunan agama Kristian di Sabah. Selain sumber yang dinyatakan ini, pihak gereja-gereja mazhab utama juga memperoleh wang daripada pihak kerajaan yang memerintah seperti BNBCC; badan-badan sokongan gereja baik yang berada di luar negara mahupun dalam negara; dan bantuan orang perseorangan yang berada di luar negara dan juga di Sabah.

ABSTRACT

Money is the heart of any organization because it is a catalyst that could activate and develop the organization. Without a strong and stable fund, an

organization may fail to achieve its objectives. This observation is true with regards to the main denominational churches in Sabah. One of the factors that helped developed and established these churches since the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBCC) period because of its varied financial sources. This article attempts to identify the financial resources of the main denominational churches in Sabah in particular the Catholic, the Anglican, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (Sabah), the Borneo Evangelical Mission, the Seventh-Day Adventist, The Protestant Church of Sabah and The Church of True Jesus of Sabah. Based on the available evangelical records, these denominations took the initiative to generate church funds through a variety of means including selling coconut from church-owned coconut estates, easily-transferred ownership assets such a vehicles, through rentals collected from the church building lots, halls and courts, besides consecration. What is of interesting for Sabah which is not found elsewhere in Malaysia, is the state's Fund for Development of the Non-Islamic Religious Bodies in which a major portion was for the propagation of Christianity in the state. Besides other sources, the main denominational churches also obtained money from the BNBCC, church supporting bodies both from inside and outside the state and individuals donations from within or outside Sabah.

INTRODUCTION

Without adequate financing, an organization may not be able to carry out its activities efficiently. What more if the organization is big in terms of administration, membership and planning. This also holds true for any religious organizations such as Islam, Christianity and others. The main denominational churches could not develop rapidly and carry out many missionary activities without strong and continuous financial resources. This paper is an attempt to trace the financial sources of the main denominational churches in Sabah, specifically the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM), Sabah Branch, the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB), the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), the Protestant Church of Sabah (PCS) and the True Jesus Church of Sabah; viz from agencies outside of the country, the state government, individuals, self finance-generating church programs and from the activities of church supporting bodies.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION FROM NORTH BORNEO CHARTERED COMPANY

Relationships between the main denominational churches of Sabah and the administrators of the North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC) were clear, especially

when viewed from the financial contributors of the NBCC to these main denominational churches, i.e the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Basel Church (Table 1). During the NBCC era, these churches received financial contributions and aid for the development of Christian education in Sabah.

The NBCC gave allocations through Capitation Grants and Block Grants for missionary schools, especially Catholic, Anglican and Basel. Awarding of these grants were approved after the NBCC was satisfied that the missionary schools were not used for political gains or as anti-British propaganda tools (G. S. No. 1023, 8). The allocations were given in instalments, as follows (North Borneo Central Archire 497; North Borneo Central Archire 66; North Borneo Central Archire 1084):

Efforts undertaken by the NBCC were to realize missionary education as the formal education for Christianity and this proved to be one of the most successful

TABLE 1. Financial contributors of North Borneo Chartered Company

Year	Total allocations	Catholic Missionary School	Anglican Missionary School	Basel Missionary School	Others
1908	\$1,140.00	\$ 598.54	\$ 340.00	\$ 200.64	—
1909	\$1,140.00	\$ 558.48	\$ 366.12	\$ 215.40	—
1910	\$1,140.00	\$ 534.20	\$ 335.44	\$ 270.36	—
1913	\$2,324.76	\$ 899.34	\$ 550.49	\$ 864.93	—
1914	\$3,061.36	\$1,002.62	\$ 832.84	\$1,226.00	—
1915	\$3,153.72	\$1,037.02	\$1,006.07	\$1,110.63	—
1916	\$3,245.26	\$1,059.33	\$1,001.41	\$1,184.54	—
1917	\$3,461.61	\$1,255.82	\$1,179.13	\$1,026.66	—
1918	\$3,440.38	\$1,267.28	\$1,246.66	\$ 926.44	—
1919	\$3,554.74	\$1,416.68	\$1,219.68	\$ 818.38	\$100.00
1920	\$3,176.36	\$1,451.90	\$1,090.27	\$ 634.19	—
1921	\$3,353.39	\$1,543.69	\$ 971.27	\$ 787.93	\$ 49.79
1922	\$5,005.06	\$2,605.21	\$1,337.56	\$ 932.18	\$130.11
1923	\$5694.68	\$2,986.17	\$1,601.02	\$ 999.91	\$107.58
1924	\$6,103.30	\$2,966.39	\$1,515.77	\$1,472.66	\$148.48
1925	\$6,084.11	\$2,913.09	\$1,267.14	\$1,789.01	\$114.87
1926	\$6,332.54	\$3,206.03	\$1,218.49	\$1,773.49	\$134.53
1927	\$6,095.41	\$3,162.31	\$1,454.78	\$1,363.99	\$114.33
1928	\$6,852.14	\$3,334.23	\$1,743.09	\$1,498.92	\$275.90
1929	\$7,728.18	\$3,579.56	\$1,957.91	\$1,498.92	\$244.64
1930	\$7,980.57	\$3,788.82	\$1,944.88	\$2,079.83	\$167.04
1931	\$7,700.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1932	\$7,700.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1933	\$7,700.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1934	\$7,700.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,100.00	\$2,000.00	—
1935	\$7,800.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,100.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1936	\$7,800.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,100.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1937	\$7,800.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,100.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00
1938	\$7,800.00	\$3,600.00	\$2,100.00	\$2,000.00	\$100.00

and effective missionary channel and have left a meaningful impact toward the growth and development of Christianity in Sabah and in general (Krappmann 1994: 155-187 & Hunt 1992: 325).

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

The financial position of the churches became stronger when there was a continuity of contributions from outside the country. Since 1932, the Vatican in Rome has allocated £100 per year to help Catholic church seminaries in Sabah (Poilis 1981: 8). The Anglican church management received contributions from their friends in England which were delivered through the British North Borneo Chaplaincy, Church, Schools Funds Preliminary Committee (*The British North Borneo Herald* 1891). This committee also comprised of individuals from outside Sabah, specifically England. They were Lady Alcock 14, Great Queen Street, Westminster; The Rev. Brymer Belcher, Bodian Rectory, Hawkhurst; Mark Wilks Collet, Esq., Founders' Court, Lothbury; Alfred Dent, Esq., 11, Old Broad Street; John D. Dewhurst, Esq., 38, New Broad Street; Lieutenant-General R. W. Lowry, C. B., 25, Warrington, Crescent, W., Richard B. Martin, Esq., 68, Lombard Street; Mrs. Mayne, 101, Queen's Gate; Miss Annie Spurling, 7, Vanburgh Park, Blackheath; Mrs. W. H. Treacher, Government House, Sandakan; Percival Spurling, Esq. 2, Tokenhouse Building, Lothbury as a secretary (*The British North Borneo Herald* 1 July 1887). The list shows that some of them lived in Sabah and held important posts, such as Alfred Dent (Chief of the famous British Company, Dent Brothers that had businesses in the Middle East) and Mrs. Treacher (wife of the governor). Involvement of these high ranking administrators as well as individuals who had never been to Sabah had contributed towards the development of Christianity in Sabah. Involvement, contributions and concern showed by these individuals further stimulated the development efforts on Christianity in Sabah.

Besides that, in 1960, the St. Margaret church of England donated \$23,000 to build the St. Margaret Church in Keningau (Vun 1987: 77). The Council of Churches in East Asia, through the Partners in Mission Consultation that had its head office in Hong Kong, gave financial aid totalling US\$8,000.00 in 1981 and US\$25,1000 in 1982, to set up the Tongud Training Centre as well as US\$6,000.00 per year for three consecutive years to the Anglican Diocese of Sabah to organize training for church leaders (*Sabah Anglican Observer* April 1981: 7).

Organizations from outside the country, for examples the International Management of Basel Churches which has its head office in Germany, had contributed money almost every year to several main churches, for example the PCS. According to Sopirid Masandu, the PCS President, this church received yearly allocations from the International Management of Basel Churches as follows: RM251,000.00 in 1970, RM92,645.74 in 1973, RM232,058.53 in 1975,

RM259,098.98 in 1976 and RM289,331.93 in 1977 (Financial Statements for the Year 1969/1970, 1973, 1976 and 1977 in RS 901/617 File – “The Protestant Church in Sabah”). In 1991, the True Jesus Christ Church of Sabah received financial aid totalling RM582,909 (Statement of Income and Expenses of the True Jesus Church of Sabah (Headquarter) 1992 in File PPP/SB: 103/50 – “The True Jesus Church, Sabah”) whereas the SIB received RM1,778,000.00 in 1990 and RM1,684,00.00 in 1991 (Minutes of the SIB 7th Annual General Meeting, 1992). These financial contributions show that the activities of the local churches would be reported to the administration of foreign churches in order for the local churches to receive continuous financial contributions. Whether the local churches needed to obtain the blessings of the foreign churches to carry out their activities is yet to be researched. With these financial aid, the monetary status of the main churches became stronger and their missionary efforts more active. Besides foreign contributions, the state government was also a source of finance for the main denominational churches.

FINANCIAL AID FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENT

The State Government not only gave morale supports, but also extended financial aid to the main denominational churches in Sabah. For example, the contributions enjoyed by the Central SIB at Jalan Saga, Likas, Kota Kinabalu. The financial aid received from the state government were as follows: RM285,000.00 in 1989 to build SIB churches (Financial Statements for 1989, 1991-1992 in File RS 901/57 – “Sabah Evangelical Mission, Tuaran”); RM201,270.00 in 1990; RM123,106.00 in 1991, RM71,525.00 in 1992 (Minutes of the SIB 7th Annual General Meeting, 1992) and RM350,000.00 in 2001 (*Daily Express*, 2001). Allocations received by the Central SIB were further redistributed to other Bible Council Churches at parochial level. It was ascertained that the Central SIB had allocated RM3,378.52 to churches at parochial level (Financial Statement for 1994 in File PPP/SB 57/50 vol. 11 – “Sabah Evangelical Mission”).

The financial aid mentioned above, the figures which were given by Fidelis W Toisam, Senior Work Officer, Budget Section, Finance Ministry of Sabah during the interview, started in 1986, when the PBS government created a special allocation for the “Development of Non-Islamic Religious Bodies” (*The Borneo Post*, 10 June 2002: 1) with an approval of RM12 million. In 1990, this allocation was increased to RM15 million. This allocation was distributed to Christianity (70%), Buddhism (15%), Hinduism (8%) and Sikhism (7%). On the other hand, allocation for Islam was channelled by the government through the Islamic Council of Sabah (MUIS). The objective is to coordinate the activities and development of Islam throughout Sabah. In this case, Fodelis W Toisam says in *The Borneo Post* (2002:1), from the allocation for Christianity, the Catholic Church

got the major share because it has been the most dominant church in Sabah compared to others.

Allocation for the “Development of Non-Islamic Religious Bodies” had been managed by the Chief Minister’s Development, but since 1990 it has been moved to the Finance Ministry of Sabah. This was done to hasten the distribution of allocation and to reduce the hassle of bureaucracy.

Since this allocation was established during the time of PBS, and for the sake of harmony and to guarantee freedom of worship, Sabah under the National Front government (Osu Haji Sukam 1999; *Borneo Mail* 1996; *Berita Harian* 1998) has continued to allocate RM20 million for the development of non-Islamic religious bodies (Osu Haji Sukam 1999). This allocation is in line with Sabah statutory laws and conforms to basic rights in the Malaysian Constitutions that gives freedom to a religious group to manage its own religious affairs (Groves 1983: 33), and to set up and maintain institutions for religious and *khairat kematian* (a form of an organization that consolidates money (fees) for the welfare of its deceased members; for example funerary expenses) objectives. Non-Islamic religions, especially Christianity, is fortunate because this allocation is only available in Sabah and no other state in Malaysia have this special allocation (*Daily Express*, 2001).

With this financial contribution from the State government, relationship between the state government and the church improved. The distribution of allocations at parochial levels further enhanced missionary efforts at grassroot stage. Missionary efforts generally were able to be carried out successfully because the church received enough funds.

In order to further strengthen the finance of the main denominational churches, their monetary sources have been diversified to include donations from adherents when they visit their churches, especially during church services.

CONSECRATIONAL COLLECTIONS IN THE MAIN DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES

Church activities, especially services on Saturday and Sunday are more than just evangelical and missionary, such as mere Bible reading. The church management also organizes consecration (in normal practice is termed “donation”) activities.

Consecration is a normal practise and is demanded upon every individual in the Christian church. In this practise, a bishop, a monk or a church members will consecrate something that belongs to him (such as a piece of land, a property or monthly income) to the church with the purpose of multiplying the value of the property, the fund or other church belongings for missionary purpose. Consecration depends upon an individual’s capacity, and it is demanded that

every individual be involved in the Christian missionary agenda and development. One of the form of consecration is donation (Bush 1990: 5). Consecration activities are held in the main denominational churches during church services days, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. On these days, individuals gave donation based on how much they can afford, for example the headquarter of the True Jesus Church of Sabah, has fixed RM1.00 per month from the public. One of these donations is the tithe, which can be extended in the form of money or other things such as rice, coconut, fruits etc. The tithe is a donation that is really hoped for from every Christian follower. They are demanded to donate a tenth of their income to the church every month. This donation is not necessarily given in full at once. The demand to give a tenth is based on what is fixed in the Bible, which stated as follows:

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year (Holy Bible 1978: 224).

This tithe collection is a major source of income for the church, such as the PCS, the True Jesus Christ Church and the SIB. The PCS was able to collect RM3,164.56 in 1970 (which was one-third of what was given by 7 parochies to the church's central administration) and RM1,127.43 from the sale of rice given to the central church, RM5,625.80 in 1973, RM10,195.80 in 1975, RM16,043.70 in 1976 and RM18,525.02 in 1977 (Financial Statement 1970, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977 in File RS 901/617 – "The Protestant Church in Sabah"). The True Jesus Christ Church of Sabah, on the other hand, collected RM213,275.00 in 1989 and RM258,976.00 (Statement of Income and Expenses of the True Jesus Church of Sabah (Head Quarter) 1992 in File PPP/SB: 103/50 – "The True Jesus Church, Sabah"), RM305,997.00 in 1991 and RM228,249.00 (Statement of Income and Expenses of the True Jesus Church of Sabah (Head Quarter) 1992 in File PPP/SB: 103/50 – "The True Jesus Church, Sabah"), and RM329,454.00 and RM266,456.00 in 1994. The SIB also collected RM131,481.00 in 1990, RM206,174.00 in 1991 and RM107,983.00 in 1992 (Minutes of the SIB 7th Annual General Meeting, 18-20 December 1992), RM97,649.32 in 1993 and RM80,608.50 in 1994 (Financial Statement 1 January 1993 – 31 December 1993, 1 January 1994 – 31 December 1994 in File PPP/SB 57/50, vol. 11 – "Sabah Evangelical Mission"). These consecrational collections show a high degree of participation and commitment from among the Christian faithful to develop their churches.

This tithe consecration is, however, not strictly adhered to by the Christian faithfuls. If they can give more than one-tenth, their lives are said to receive more blessings from Jesus. This is considered as "psychological church" by the faithfuls. Some faithfuls, especially among those with a steady income and with heavy commitments, question this tithe. Those with a family feel reluctant to donate RM2,000.00 a month compared to those who are unmarried and have no commitments.

The tithe consecration also depends on each church's management, and usually the church make it a special agenda during every service. This is done so that the church faithfuls do not feel forced to give tithe because what is more important to the church is that the faithfuls continue to come to church and be loyal to Christianity.

However, the churches do not depend entirely a donations as discussed above. They also have self financial generating systems, especially through existing assets.

GENERATION OF FINANCE THROUGH CHURCH ASSETS

From 1963 to 1994, compared to other states in Peninsular Malaysia, the government's leadership changed from Islam to Christianity to Islam. To ensure that the financial resources are guaranteed during the Islamic leadership, the main denominational churches managed their own financial resources through their existing assets. For example, the PCS had a coconut plantation and was able to gain a yearly income, as follows: RM746,527.00 in 1973, RM845.20 in 1975, RM2,465.50 in 1976, and followed by the amount of RM1,666.80 in 1977 (Financial Statements for 1973, 1974, 1976, 1977 in File RS 901/617 – "The Protestant Church in Sabah"). The True Jesus Christ Church of Sabah also earned RM15,816.00 in 1992 through the sales of vehicles (Statement of Income and Expenses of the True Jesus Church of Sabah (Head Quarter) 1992 in File PPP/SB: 103/50 – "The True Jesus Church, Sabah"). According to Ho Xin Kheong, the Anglican Diocese of Sabah leased for rent certain lots at its Anglican complex to law and accountancy firms; the BCCM at Inanam and St. Peter's Catholic Church at Kuala Penyu rented out their halls and badminton courts to the public as a source of income. Other sources of income for the main churches are from individuals and church supporting bodies.

AID FROM INDIVIDUALS AND CHURCH SUPPORTING BODIES

The financial position of the main churches became stronger with the aid of certain individual and church supporting bodies, whose active efforts made sure that the development of the churches were not retarded. For example, *The British North Borneo Herald* (1909:4) reported that the construction of a chapel from planks and *nipah* attap next to a cemetery in Sandakan was facing a financial problem. This problem was settled when the chapel construction committee succeeded in collecting \$200.00 from Europeans, \$200.00 from non-Christian Chinese and the rest from followers of the BCCM which comprised of poor farmers and labourers who utilized their savings.

When Ben Stephens was the Executive Director of Sabah Foundation and chairman of the Church Councils of Sabah, he was able to collect donation amounting to \$406,680.00 for the All-Sabah Catholic Parochial Fund (*Catholic Sabah* April 1982a). A friend of Msgr. Wachter, according to Ben Stephens, sent a blank cheque to the construction committee of St. Michael's Church, Penampang in order to complete its constructions which was hampered during the second world war.

This generous attitude was also showed by members of the BCCM at Inanam when the Construction Committee of the BCCM, Inanam Branch managed to collect \$193,959.85. This was a major contribution towards the completion of the church. The growth and developments of the Basel church were also helped by groups or societies created under the auspices of the church. For example for the construction of the Inanam Basel church, the Inanam Basel Church Youth donated RM12,685.50, the Inanam Youth Prayer Group contributed \$1,833.35 and Inanam Woman Church Association donated \$500.00 (Accounts Statement for the Construction of the BCCM, Inanam Branch 1984, 52-54).

Church supporting bodies also carried out charitable activities such as bazaar sales on every Sunday to top up church funds, such as those done by the Keningau Society of Catholic Woman Parochial League, and St. Joseph in Papar and St. Joseph Youth Parochial Council at St. Joseph Papar (*Catholic Sabah* 1982b & *Blessing of the New St. Joseph's Catholic Church Papar, Sabah* 1987: 31-32). The All Saints Secondary School Alumni contributed RM60,000.00 for the construction of a tennis court to be used by students at that missionary school (*The Saint* 93 1993). The Chinese Youth Association Hall and the Telecom Company worked together to organize a jumble sale to buy an organ for St. Michael in Sandakan (*North Borneo News* 1951a & *North Borneo News* 1951b). Efforts shown by the local community are proof of their seriousness to help the church carry out its activities.

Churches of the same denomination also helped each other to generate funds especially to help those in need of finance. For example, the True Jesus Christ Church of Mansasoh obtained financial loans from its member churches at Tanjung Aru (RM200.00), Kota Belud (RM200.00), Kampung Lima (RM100.00), Beaufort (RM300.00), Balung (RM200.00), Papar (RM100.00) Sungai Apih (RM100.00) and Tuaran (RM100.00) (Minutes of the True Jesus Church, Sabah 17th Annual Council Meeting for Year 1991/1992 in File PPP/SB: 103/50 – “The True Jesus Church, Sabah”).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the financing of the Sabah churches got their support, contribution and aid right from the time of NBCC. However, from the discussion above, the financial resources were further strengthened when in 1986 the PBS

government created a special allocation for the 'Development of Non-Islamic Religious Bodies' with an approval of RM12 million. This allocation has been continued up to this day. Datuk Harris Mohd. Salleh (the Chief Minister of Sabah during the BERJAYA era) when interviewed by the author on 15 October 1999, stated that during the time of the PBS, the progress of Christianity reached its zenith in contrast to the previous governments. He added that this situation was brought about by the close rapport between the PBS leadership and the churches, and as a result, the number of churches also increased.

With finances from these different sources, the financial status of the church continued to be strong and it was able to carry out its missionary activities to the faithfuls. It is not surprising to see that the physical development of Christianity such as churches, administrative centres, seminaries, hostels and games courts like badminton could be built successfully. The ability of the local church management to set up worship centres in housing, estates, shoplots and strategic town areas shows that the main denominational churches in Sabah are financially strong and this enables them to grow, especially in missionary aspects.

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