

**“To The Golden Land...and Back Again”**  
**Rev. Bill Haley ARDF November 13-20, 2013**

**Blogging Burma and Southeast Asia**

Dear friends and fellow-pilgrims...In a week's time, I'll be traveling to Burma and Singapore, and writing about it on our [blog](#), and I hope you'll come along for the journey! Following the pattern of mission reports from Congo and South Sudan, and Israel and Palestine, I'm grateful that Coracle is providing a venue to tell stories about the world and what God's doing in the world. Yes, [Spiritual Formation and Kingdom Action](#).

And once again, I'm grateful for the fabulous ministry of the [Anglican Relief and Development Fund \(ARDF\)](#) for the opportunity to go on this mission. I've written about ARDF [before](#), and once again Bill Deiss, chairman of ARDF US (and Coracle board member) will be my traveling partner, or vice versa!

Burma, or Myanmar, has been on my heart for a long time for several reasons. On a more surface level, it's hard to have been U2 fan in the last decade and not been swept up in [Bono's passion](#) for the life and witness and efforts of Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1991 (did

you wear the mask during the 360 Tour?). Much more deeply, my heart was captured by James Mawdsley's life and witness, recounted in his amazing book [The Iron Road: A Stand for Truth and Democracy in Burma](#), which I read when it first came out in 2002. I'll devote a blog post to why this was one the more influential books of the decade for me then. And then there's the work of [Benedict Rogers](#), a dear brother and friend, which has kept Burma on my screen and close to my heart. He's worked closely for years with Baroness Caroline Cox, patron of ARDF, often specifically on Burma.

So Bill Deiss and I will go to Burma, to see what God is doing through the Anglican church there in an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, and explore how ARDF can be a part of it, and how we can facilitate local parish connections within the Anglican Church in North America back here. We'll meet for several days in country the Archbishop there, The Most Revd Stephen Than Myint Oo, and several bishops

But we'll also engage the whole of the Anglican church in Southeast Asia by engaging with the Anglican Province

of Southeast Asia with Archbishop Bolly Lapok, and especially the Dioceses of Singapore where we will spend some days in meeting with Bishops, and then Bill will go on to Malaysia. I look forward to explaining how the Anglican church is organized in Southeast Asia in a further blog post, especially after I understand it better! And I look forward to reporting on what God is doing in Southeast Asia, where Christianity remains for the most part a minority faith in the context of Islam and Buddhism, where the light of the good news of Jesus needs more light. I look forward to sharing what work in the world still needs to be done in that part of the world, and understanding it myself.

So, I invite you from time to time to check the [blog](#) from around November 13-November 21, and see what we're seeing and feel what we're feeling. John 3.16 will be much on my mind that whole time, "For God so loved the world..."

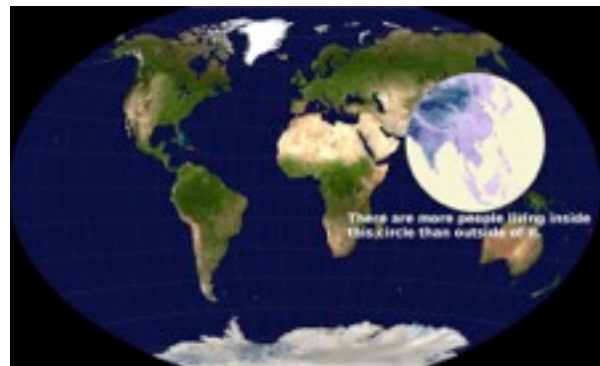
Please pray for us, for safety, for Divine Connections and deep fellowship of the Spirit with these brothers and sisters in Christ. Personally, it would mean so much if you could pray for my family while I'm away, for God's help and comfort, for Tara and the kids, and for my father-in-law Bill Scherer and Gail. Recent updates on Bill's battle with cancer are [here](#).

Grateful to you, to God, to Coracle, and to ARDF! Thank you!

## With Half of the World

We arrived after a full day's journey from Washington to Singapore, 28 hours from door to door via Tokyo, Japan. Flying over Southeast Asia, the little flight map on the plane showed us the cities that lay sleeping below...Taipei, Taiwan; , Manila and the cyclone ravaged Philippines; Saigon, Vietnam; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Kuching and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and so many more smaller cities and villages, hundreds and hundreds of millions of people 35,000 feet below.

Some months ago I bumped across [this article](#) in the Washington Post that simply told in a remarkable graphic why God cares so much about this part of our globe.



It's an amazing picture, isn't it? Mind-boggling and overwhelming, with a sobering and joyful implication.

God loves this part of the world so much because so many people live here. It's fair to say I think that if we say we love the world, we get to love Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

So we've come, to see how God is loving this part of humanity through the work of Christians here, and how much more there is to see happen and even participate in. With some notable exceptions like the Philippines, Christianity has yet to take to firm and lasting foothold in this part of the world. This means there are hundreds and hundreds of millions of people who have yet to fully receive the message of God's love in Jesus, and witness the life-giving power of the Kingdom of God when it influences a whole society.

I feel privileged to be here, where 'the other half' lives. It's true to say as well that where I live is 'the other half', just spread out over a whole lot more of our shared planet.

### **Into the Tragic Underknown**

*"For years, Burma's plight was one of the most under-reported tragedies in the second half the twentieth century."* Benedict Rogers, [Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads](#)

I've been aware of just how little I know about Burma as the days before entering near. The world is full of just so much tragedy and injustice, violence and sorrow, and for too long a time the decades-long suffering of the Burmese peoples has dwelt in that category of my prayers "God help (fill in the blank) and bring peace to that land...please bring an end to the bloodshed and horror there." And so it feels like a deep privilege to be able to visit this place that for so long has

been difficult to visit by people like me, a foreigner. I can't wait to hear and see and learn, and to meet the Burmese living in Burma.

I've been grateful for Benedict Rogers' recent book, [Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads](#), which I've brought along as my guide to understanding the last 70 years of Burma and the years to come. Ben's been a friend for a long time, albeit from great distance, and he's the closest thing I personally know to an expert on this country, and I deeply appreciate the Christian faith that grounds his insights, hope, and work. Most of what I'm learning about Burma I'm learning from him (augmented by a lot of web research and reading). If there are unascribed quotes in the writing that follows, they're from him. If you'd like learn more about Burma and understand, I highly recommend that you get Ben's excellent book.

And tomorrow we'll learn from the Burmese themselves.

At the onset I don't want to opine too much, or look forward too much, or even try to describe the current situation. Rather I'll just list some learnings as I try to get my head around a very unfamiliar land.

- Burma has between 56-60 million people, the world's 24th most populous country, and geographically is the second largest country in Southeast Asia, and 40th in the world. It's no small place with no small population.
- The major ethnic groups, which fall roughly along geographic lines, are the (dominant majority

at 68%) Burman, also the Karen, Karenni, Shan, Mon, Kachin, Chin, and Araken. And then there are many sub-groups of peoples, 135 total separate ethnic groups that are recognized by the government.

- Buddhists make up 89% of the country, Muslims 4%, and Christians another 4%
- The British conquered and colonized Burma from 1824-1885, which was a main battleground between the British and the Japanese during World War II, and then was freed from British rule on January 4, 1948, modern Burma's independence day.
- For the first ten years of independence, there was a fragile democracy led by civilians, which was replaced by military rule by generals in 1958, which returned to civilian rule in 1960, and then in 1962 military rule was established by a coup led by General Ne Win, which would remain in effect until August of 2011. Burma continues to have one of the world's longest running civil wars that remains unresolved. While the progress in the last 18 months has been unimaginable even perhaps five years ago, it's too soon to tell how things will develop. But even my 3 month visa was unheard of not that long ago.
- The military dictatorship in Burma has been brutal, lethal, and effective for decades, despite many efforts from the various

ethnic groups to protect themselves from it, and despite many popular protests from within the majority Burman population, often led by students, and always brutally put down with great bloodshed and loss of life. The military regime has also been pro-active to stamp out resistance throughout the country. For example, "between 1996-2011, over 3,700 villages in eastern Burma were destroyed by the military, and more than a million people were internally displaced." Among the dictatorship's primary strategies has been to sow constant division between the minority ethnic groups.

- That said, democracy groups and the minority ethnic groups have made their own mistakes along the way, but on a very different scale.
- Atrocities consistently committed by the military regime include, but are not limited to torture, killing and execution, politically motivated imprisonment, burning villages, forced slavery and labour, conscription of child soldiers, human trafficking, using human beings as living minesweepers, and of course, using rape as a weapon of war. This list sounds dangerously like, well, a list. But we must remember that behind each phrase are very individual stories that have happened to a man, a woman, or a child, and each one

our brother or sister in the eyes of God.

- For both the majority and minority populations in Burma, there is a “common enemy: a brutal military regime that has sought to maintain power and deny them freedom at all costs.”

In twelve months I will have been to the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and Palestine, and now Burma. How much can a head hold? How much can a heart hold?

There is a massive common denominator in this country list, and that is the dark and lethal legacy of European colonialism, in these cases French and very much British. National boundaries drawn in pencil on flat maps at a mahogany table over drinks, and chaos when the benefits of ruling over a country that was not theirs diminish, followed by despots and dictators. And it's the most vulnerable who always suffer the most.

I so appreciate, and resonate, with Ben's driving conviction which I take with me tomorrow: “I am not biased in favor of one or other ethnic, religious or political group, but rather in favor of the basic values of freedom and human rights. I have a moral framework, informed by my own personal faith and humanity, which tells me that rape, torture, forced labor, the conscription of child soldiers and the use of human minesweepers is wrong, and that we all are entitled to express our political or religious beliefs freely, without

hindrance, and without fear of discrimination, detention, or death.” Amen.

I now, 10 or so hours from a flight from Singapore to Rangoon, am so excited to go to Burma. And I simply cannot wait to see what God is doing there, through his Church and through the people of Burma. No doubt there are stories of light breaking into the darkness, by many means...that's what God does, and it seems as though that's what he's doing in Burma, through many people after a long long time.

### **First Impressions of Yangon, Myanmar (or Rangoon, Burma?)**

The first question to get clarity on upon arrival is “What do I call this place? Yangon or Rangoon? Myanmar or Burma? It's a complicated question, not without risk of having one's political tendencies assumed depending on which one you use.

At the risk of oversimplification, before British colonialization, the city where I am was in the country Myanmar. They renamed the city Rangoon and the country Burma. In 1989, the military regime changed the name Burma back to Myanmar (though they're related) back to what they'd been, and renamed the city Yangon which means literally "end of strife". The democracy movement tends to speak of Burma, simply to make the point that they do not accept a unilateral decision to change the name of the country. I'll use them

interchangeably, as many here do, while my sympathies lie with the sensitivities of the democracy movement. See more on this question of names in [this BBC article](#), which is helpful at least in describing the complexity!

It's easy to feel quickly at home here, as it's quite reminiscent of Kolkata, India with a good dose of Kathmandu, Nepal thrown in and a little splash of Thai religion. The streets are crowded due to a massive influx of cars in the past two years and a traffic system that has yet to catch up. One can easily see a remarkable amount of ethnic diversity that is Burma.

In a brief tour of the city, our new Anglican priest friend, Reverend Allen, took us to the what feels like the two hearts of Burma: the Shwedagon Pagoda and the house of Aung San Suu Kyi. It was here that she remained in house arrest for 15 years after winning a democratic election in 1990 before the military regime discounted it and imprisoned so many of those who were a threat to its power.

It was at the Shwedagon Pagoda that Suu Kyi launched her political career in 1988 with a famous speech that drew half a million Burmese to hear here. This pagoda, or place of Buddhist worship, has been an important site to this largely Buddhist country for 2,500 years, since the days of the Buddha himself, and peers out over the city like the [Bodnath Stupa](#) in Kathmandu. Its gold leaf that thickly covers the pagoda gives rise to the nickname for this country, "The

Golden Land".



First impressions? Beautiful land, beautiful people. complicated history, immense changes.

### **One Gospel, Two Churches, One Christ, New Efforts**

In a country of 70 million people, 2.4 million of them are Christian brothers and sisters in Burma...and most of them Baptists. This is only part of the legacy of one the church's missionary greats.

Being here has brought back to mind the life and ministry of America's first two foreign missionaries, Adoniram and Ann Judson. I don't remember when I first read one of his great biography, [To the Golden Shore](#), but I've never forgotten it, and now it has new and much deeper meaning. In fact, I'm rather in awe of the man.

The Judsons were the first two missionaries sent out on mission as a result of famous "[Haystack Prayer](#)



[Meeting](#)” in 1806. This meeting, creating America’s first mission board, would be the spark of the Protestant mission movement in America which lasted for decades through the 1800s and into the 1900s. And the Judsons from Massachusetts were the first two to be sent, initially targeting the east coast of India, but finding no welcome, then crossing the Bay of Bengal and landing in Burma in 1813. The whole Christian community here now is preparing great celebrations later in the year marking the 200th anniversary of his arrival.

His legacy of fruitfulness by the time he died 37 years after his landing would be enough to celebrate and be amazed by. “When Judson began his mission in Burma, he set a goal of translating the Bible and founding a church of 100 members before his death. When he died, he left the Bible, 100 churches, and over 8,000 believers.” It is remarkable that Burma has the third largest population of Baptists in the world, behind the US and India.

People are not Judson’s only legacy however. He translated the whole Bible into Burmese, one of the world’s hardest languages, and of course he arrived not knowing a word of it to speak or write, and it remains by far the preferred translation of the Bible in this country. He wrote the Burmese to English dictionary, and English to Burmese dictionary, and both have formed the basis for every dictionary since.

He did all this while enduring some of the most harsh conditions imaginable, both external and

emotional, and traveled the whole country preaching. He lost two wives and several children to death while here, and more than once was imprisoned and sentenced to execution. Ann Judson throughout was heroic, as the only Western woman in the whole country, and often alone. Adoniram suffered severe depression upon her death.

An overview of his story is worth reading [here](#), and [John Piper’s reflections](#) on his life are more than instructive, and Piper’s also put together this [video](#).

200 years after Judson’s arrival in Burma, among these 2.4 million Christians, 60% of them are Baptist, and are the majority of the Kachin and Chin people and many of the Karen. Another 25% of these Christians are Roman Catholic, and the remaining 15% are split amongst various denominations, including the Anglican Church.

The Anglican legacy here is not as inspiring as Judson’s. Anglican priests came first in 1825, not as missionaries though, but as chaplains for the British military who were beginning the colonialization process that would take 60 years and 3 wars to complete by 1885. That’s not a great first impression, I would imagine.

In the decades that followed, their primary ministry, beyond pastoring expatriates, was to provide education and run boarding schools for the British and other Europeans under the Church of England. It was English Anglican until 1930 when the Burmese Anglican church joined the Anglican Province of India and Ceylon

(Sri Lanka), which would later include Pakistan. Then came independence from Britain in 1948, the ultimate military coup in 1962, and in 1966 all foreigners, including any missionaries, were expelled from the country by the military regime. The Burmese scrambled to provide their own leadership, and for the first time a native Burmese was appointed a bishop in the capitol diocese of Yangon. In 1970, the Anglicans in Burma formed their own province recognized as part of the Anglican Communion, called the Church of the Province of Myanmar, or CPM.



Yesterday (Sunday) Bill Deiss and I so much enjoyed worship and sharing communion with our Anglican family by going to the English service Holy Eucharist at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Yangon. It is a profound joy to go literally halfway around the world and be able to not only understand a church service, but to have it be so familiar because it is pretty much like the liturgies we're used to at home, even refreshingly traditional (think Rite I Eucharist with

chasubles that leans toward the 1928 BCP, with hymns from the 1906 English Hymnal). But it was still a little unsettling to realize just how culturally different this is then common Burmese culture, and how long it would take to adapt to it. It was an extremely traditional Church of England service in the middle of Buddhist Southeast Asia. (That said, of course we went to it because it was the English service! There are other forms of worship services that the CPM offers here that are a touch more contemporary, though still none would have more than an organ or piano for music.)

One statistic writes a book. In 1970, there were 70,000 Anglicans in Burma. In 2013, there are 70,000 Anglicans in Burma. At the same time, the population of Burma has at least doubled from 28 million in 1970 to almost 60 million today.

This is sobering math for the Anglican church in Myanmar, and tells a story of a church tradition that had as its foundation care for the British, but not so much the Burmese. In other words, Anglicans came in the 1800s to care for their own, while the Baptists came to care for the Burmese. There's an obvious missiological lesson here.

But our Anglican brothers and sisters in the CPM are not unaware of this or unconcerned or discouraged. Along with many Christians in Burma, and even the Buddhists, a fire for caring for the country and reaching out to the Burmese was lit in the wake of the devastating [Cyclone Nargis](#) in 2008. The immense death and



suffering that this storm caused, compounded by the utter failure of the government to provide help and even impede aid has compelled all faith groups to look outward and seek to reach out with greater compassion and greater development.

It was in that same year that Bishop Stephen Than Myint Oo became the sixth Archbishop of CPM. As we've heard again and again from Anglican priests here and laypeople, he has put forth a vision for much greater outreach efforts by the Anglican church here. The goal is clear: to have 100,000 members by 2020. This is orienting the efforts of CPM in the coming years, and all are excited by it.

This renewed emphasis on outreach is under the banner, "Thy Will Be Done" and is taking two specific forms: an increase in evangelism, and an increase in development. Recently, provincial directors have been hired both for evangelism and development, and today (Monday) we'll meet again with each of them, as well as spend the day with Archbishop Stephen, and hear much more. I'll put some of this in another blog post.

And Bill and I are looking forward to find the right ways the [Anglican Relief and Development Fund](#) and ACNA churches can be a part of helping this renewed vision for evangelism and outreach in Burma. That's why we're here, to find and fund the efforts of the church here to grow and spread the gospel in Burma.

In light of such sobering statistics about the Anglican presence,

we're delighted to find the church and her leadership with a new fire to spread the gospel through word and deed in a country that so desperately needs more of the Kingdom of God to come in all its many facets.

## **A Growing Church in Burma**

After hearing virtually every Anglican Burmese talk about the Archbishop's vision for the Province of the Church of Myanmar (CPM), "Thy Will Be Done", we were excited to hear it from Archbishop Stephen Than Myint Oo himself, and not only were we not disappointed, we found ourselves compelled by his vision as well. He presented us with a 22 page vision document, thoroughly rooted in theological depth, historical reflection, contemporary application, and clear implementation with a goal of growth and self-sustainability. It's is clear-eyed in expressing the challenge to a church that has diminished.

In his plan he writes of the need for the Anglicans of Burma to grow into their own. "In reality, we are not that poor. We have our own theology, we have our unique spirituality. The problem is we think we have no theology and that we are poor. The worst thing is we that we have never tried with our own strength and resources to find out if we are rich; if we have a unique spirituality; if we have our own theology."

It's not just his goal of seeing the church grow to 100,000 members by 2020 that was encouraging, it was also his patient and systematic

cultivation of godly leaders and firm commitment to the orthodox Christian faith that was encouraging, and his challenge to the CPM to grow up, stand on its own feet, claim it's own unique identity, and reach out.

Two clear indicators of the earnest commitment to reaching the spiritual and physical needs of Burmese are two recent positions that have been created to oversee and coordinate efforts at evangelism and development. A Director of Development was hired in 2010, and a Director of Evangelism was hired just this past year in 2013. Among other highlights of our visit here were:

- Meeting twice with Peter, the Director of Development and his wife Joy, and the development staff. Both Peter and Joy used to work for World Vision in Burma. Current projects we heard about include agricultural development, animal husbandry, clean water and wells, craft making for trade, providing electricity, medical clinics, education, and providing scholarships.
- Meeting with Allen, the Director of Evangelism. He's helping establish 'Schools of Evangelism' around the province, as well as introducing the evangelism effort Alpha!
- Meeting with John, the President of the Men's Association, a provincial wide men's ministry. With him we were able to visit a four acre

agricultural project on the outskirts of Yangon, which served to train people from around the country in simple agricultural development projects as well as generates income for church.

- Meeting with Bishop David the CPM Diocese of Mandalay
- We also visited a pre-school in downtown Yangon that ARDF helped to fund this past year. It's always so encouraging to see projects that we've funded come into reality with bricks and mortar and laughing kids and dedicated staff, committed to showing these children God's love and teaching them!
- As God would have it, our visit has coincided with a mission effort led by Glen Petta and [SOMA](#) (Sharing of Ministries Abroad). It was great to connect with Glen and consider more partnership, and to do the same with Bishop Kevin Allen who leads ACNA's [Diocese of Cascadia](#). This US diocese that covers the Pacific NW is a sister to the Yangon diocese here.

It was very clear to us that God is moving in the CPM, and that this is a small but very meaningful part of the larger picture of what is going in Burma. And it's also clear that ARDF can be a meaningful partner, and that such is desired on the part of these Burmese Anglicans.

It was a point Archbishop Stephen made several times. Once

again, akin to South Sudan and Congo, Archbishop Stephen was clear that while some from the more liberal branches of Anglicanism were not welcome in Burma, we were, and not only welcome, but wanted. Stunning. In his words, CPM needs relationships with holy churches for the good of Burma. “I want you to know that we want to partner with you,” he said.

The feeling is very mutual, and the future possibilities feel quite endless, for ARDF and CPM, and for this beautiful country of Myanmar.

### **An Inspiring Story and Recommended Book**

*"They tried to put me in solitary confinement but that is actually impossible as God is everywhere"*  
James Mawdsley

What would you go to jail for in Burma? Burma itself, in the case of James Mawdsley.

Mawdsley is a Brit who got himself (intentionally) imprisoned three times in Burma in an attempt to raise the world's awareness about the plight of the Burmese in the late 1990s. His telling of his story in [The Iron Road: A Stand for Democracy in Burma](#) is one of the most influential books for me in the 2000s. It put Burma on my screen for the first time, but that's not the only (or even primary) reason his book was so powerful.

[The quotes I use below not from the book itself, but rather from [this interview](#) granted some years later

about his experience. Find it here, but know the book is better than answers to some interview questions.]

Inspired by Aung San Suu Kyi, at 23 years old he went to Burma to make a positive contribution, to teach English in some rural villages. But two months after arriving, the military came through and burned the village to the ground.

Reflecting on this experience and what he could do about it, he decided that, as a Westerner, he might be able to draw attention to the oppression and violence inflicted by the military junta if he himself could be jailed. It wasn't hard to find a way get jailed.

He flew to Yangon, and went from the airport straight to a public square and started handing out pro-democracy pamphlets. Within five minutes he was arrested, detained for one day, then deported. Not the desired result. He says, The first time wasn't long enough and I didn't achieve anything as I was in and out too quick.“

So the following year he came back to Yangon, this time having to hike through the jungles of Thailand to cross over into Burma, went to the same public square, and once again was arrested. This time he was put in prison for 99 days in terrible conditions, and once again deported. Still not what he was hoping for. He says, “The second time I was really paralyzed with fear and too frightened to be of much use to the democracy movement.”

So once again he went back, went to the same public square,

started passing out the same literature, once again was arrested and put in jail, though this time sentenced for 17 years. He remembers, "The third time, thanks to God and thanks to the Bible, I had overcome that fear and I was able to challenge the regime in a number of ways."

James spent most of his time in solitary confinement and the brutality he suffered was awful, though he would be quick to say nothing compared to what a Burmese prisoner would face. His presence did indeed spark an international response, throughout the UK and Europe and even further vigils were kept for him, prayer meetings arranged, and governments and ambassadors conscripted into advocacy. His plight became a world wide cause, and many more people then before were made aware of the situation in Burma and the outrage of the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi. After 416 days in a Burmese prison, he was released and deported. And this time he didn't go back. His hope of raising awareness and making some contribution had happened.

That's the amazing story. Yet, as much that much meant to me, it was James' motivations to do this, and his courage that blew me away. What do I care enough for to be willing to be sentenced not once, but three time, to prison in some far-off jungle? As he recounts early in the book why he did this, for all it's youthfulness, it's awfully moving.

Also early in the I absolutely loved how honest he was about his fears and failures. You'll have to read

it to see what I'm talking about. But it's just gorgeous in its shock.

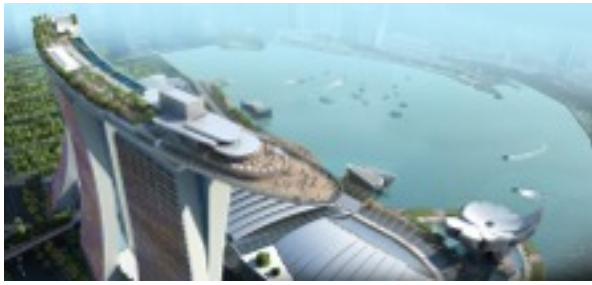
Most of all, what is so moving about James Mawdsley's story and book is the spiritual journey that he undertakes, his dramatic death and resurrection, and the power of the Bible to bring light to any dark place. His retelling of his own spiritual death is about as powerful and well written as any I've come across, and I've used it quite a few times in teaching. I can't read it without passion welling up in me, and awe in the power of God, and once again convicted in my need to die, and die, and die, so that I can be raised with new strength that comes from trusting in God, and not myself.

As he puts it in a later interview, "Throughout the time in prison I had to learn the lesson again and again that I couldn't survive this in my own strength. When I thought I could I would fall flat on my face and in that dark moment I would learn again to rely on God's strength. He would always pick me up again and I would be fine."

It's a remarkable story, but all the other elements of it make it much more remarkable than simply a story.

James Mawdsley came back to the UK after being released, worked (with Ben Rogers) at Christian Solidarity Worldwide advocating for the people of Burma, ran for the British Parliament, and currently is finishing his studies in order to become a Catholic priest.

## Singapore in One Photo



The 55 story high Marina Bay Hotel and Park, with a giant 'boat' on top connecting the three towers, complete with pool, casino, restaurants, spa, and more. And why this photo sums up Singapore is that when Bill Deiss left Singapore in 1984, there was no land here, it was all ocean. In other words, they built an island, and then put the big boat on top. Amazing. And not too dissimilar from other striking illustrations of massive urban development amongst the super cities around Asia, and the technological feats required to make it happen.

Here for a full day of meetings with Bolly Lapok, Archbishop of the Province of Southeast Asia, and others from the Diocese of Singapore, and various folks responsible for relief and development efforts made by the Anglican church in large parts of this region. Probably won't be gambling on the big boat.

### **The Church of the Province of Southeast Asia**

Bill and I had long meetings today in Singapore at St. Andrew's Cathedral.



We had very profitable time with the Archbishop of the Province of Southeast Asia (CPSEA), Bolly Lapok from Kuching, Malaysia, Keith X who convenes the Economic Empowerment Task Force for the Global South archbishops, and the Reverend Kenneth, Archdeacon of the Diocese of Singapore. When it comes to the Anglican church in Southeast Asia, there's a lot to untangle in order to understand it! That's part of why we're here, but another major part is simply to spend with this part of our church, build relationships, and explore opportunities for partnership. All that happened, and for this post I'll simply put into words how the Anglican church here is structured, with a couple of thoughts.

The total number of Anglicans in the province numbers towards 300,000 people, with the overwhelming majority of them being Malaysia, around 270,000. The CPSEA has four bishops overseeing four dioceses covering 9 countries.

The Diocese of Singapore includes Singapore and six deaneries, each led by a Dean: Cambodia,



Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The Diocese of Kuching covers east Malaysia and includes Brunei. Bolly Lapok is not only the Archbishop of the province but also the Bishop of Kuching.

The Diocese of Sabah covers the northern part of the island of Borneo and is a city of Malaysia.

The Diocese of West Malaysia covers, well, West Malaysia, and is also divided into archdeaconries.

The Diocese of Singapore is quite wealthy, and looks for partnership in ways that do not involve merely being the recipient of economic support. At the same time, they serve as an important conduit for resources that flow to churches in their own province, and even other provinces in the region, like Myanmar. They've also become a significant resource for other NGOs, like the Red Cross, for distributing funds to areas that are in need of development and relief from natural disasters.

Archbishop Bolly responded to our question, "What are the biggest challenges facing your Province?" His answers were short and understandable. The increasing challenge of militant Islamic thought, environmental degradation negatively effecting especially the poor, infrastructure building, and constant relief needs for the poor.

He also mentioned that the Anglican church in Southeast Asia faces the same challenge that we saw in Burma: The Anglican church is often perceived as the foreign religion of the conquerors, the British

colonialists. Throughout the province the Anglicans here are experimenting and trying to develop ways of being Anglican that does not imply or require being English. I look forward to seeing how they continue to bring a Gospel that transcends culture into this southeast Asian culture.

And I look forward to the ways ARDF and CPSEA can discover further partnership.

### **A Few Last Thoughts from 39,000 Feet**

On the flight home now, still in and over this amazing part of God's good earth where so many of the people of this earth live. While I'm on my way back, Bill Deiss will head on today to Kuching, Malaysia for several days with Archbishop Bolly to see some of work of the church there and the needs of the people.

It's been a profoundly eye-opening trip, to see the great needs and great opportunities in these two provinces. The difference between Singapore and Burma is stunning. The changes in Burma are remarkable for their speed, and along with the rest of the world we are cautiously optimistic (if you can, see [Ben Rogers' piece this week](#) in the Wall Street Journal). In both Provinces, the Anglican Church is really beginning to ask some important questions about its own identity and mission.

We were impressed with how small the Anglican presence is in Southeast Asia. 370,000 Anglicans in these 10 countries with their millions

of people. It's not our question to answer but it's the one that Anglicans here have been exploring: How does Anglicanism contextualize the Gospel and shed the English trappings, heritage, and perceptions? In other words, how can Anglicanism shed its Englishness? Another one of our questions, in light of the fact that Malaysian Anglicans represent almost 90% of the Province of Southeast Asia, is "What has enabled the Malaysian Church to grow, and what does that mean for the rest of the region?"

And as always, whenever visiting our brothers and sisters in faith around the world, we were impressed, inspired, and challenged by their own faith and discipleship and faithfulness. God's family is great, and big, and global.

No doubt in the coming months there will be more about what we've seen and what the Anglican Relief and Development Fund is starting to do in SE Asia on the [ARDF website](#). Stay tuned, and thanks be to God for his faithfulness, and thank you for your prayers!