



Institute of World Religions

Seminari Theoloji Malaysia

Lot 3011 Taman South East Asia, 70100 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan.

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Preamble

The establishment of The Institute of World Religions (IWR) under the auspices of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM) is to provide a means for Christians to better understand the people of other religions in the local and global context. These conventional religions are namely Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism, Chinese folk religions, and Indigenous Religions, all of which has a long established history of coexistence. The IWR is neither a consultative nor an advisory body but an academic centre in the interest of intercultural and inter-religious understanding. The primary role of IWR is to maintain standards of its academic rigour in research and study. The IWR in order to equip itself to engage the society in which it subsists, will therefore engage in the collection of data, rigorous analyses and debate its own findings, ergo the IWR is a centre of learning.

Rationale

Religion by definition is a constantly evolving phenomenon created by the interaction of people with (a) their inherited socio-politico and economic conditions; (b) sacred traditions; and (b) the aspirations of the community. Per se each generation defines its own religious parameters, they are to be constantly studied to come to an understanding that can help the Christian Church make informed decisions, and engage in intelligent conversations. The Church in Malaysia being a minority and a mission oriented body, often predisposes itself to certain biases that needs to be discerned, and can be discerned by its own interaction with neighbours of other religious traditions. This also presupposes that Christians can communicate meaningfully with people of other religions, and the space for such communication is important, and ought to be created. As such, the IWR recognises the need for space for continued interactions with people of different cultures and religions in order to foster inter-religious and intercultural relations.

Objectives

The objectives of IWR are to:

- ◆ Establish a rigorous methodology in research and study of religions;
- ◆ Provide research work that deals with epistemology, philosophy, sociology and knowledge of classical and folk religions;
- ◆ Provide the collection of sacred texts and literature in (a) digital form, (b) printed medium, and (c) net locations;
- ◆ Build a reference library of non-Christian religious resources in order to provide access to those engaged in research;
- ◆ Be a facilitator of inter-religious dialogue by organising seminars, workshops and symposiums;
- ◆ Provide regular forums on religious issues of public concern;
- ◆ Establish formal relationship with religious Associations and Centres of higher learning;
- ◆ Document significant religious movements and events in Malaysia;
- ◆ Publish occasional papers on religions and religious issues in Malaysia;
- ◆ Assist research students in their work on religions.

Areas of Institutional Concerns and Research

- ◆ Why people convert, and to study if there are patterns of conversion from one religion to another;
- ◆ Conversion and apostasy in different religions;
- ◆ Conversion to the Christian faith and its socio-political impact on people of other faiths;
- ◆ A study of Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia;
- ◆ Religion and ethnic identity (for example, Islam and Malay identity);
- ◆ Study of Islam Hadhari in the context of an Islamic Government;
- ◆ The Islamisation policy of the Government and its implications;
- ◆ Conversion to Islam and its implications for Muslims and others;
- ◆ The challenges of Post-Modernism to religions;
- ◆ Study of Buddhist religious trends in Malaysia;
- ◆ Study of Hindu religious trends in Malaysia;
- ◆ Study of Chinese folk religions in Malaysia;
- ◆ Study of cults and occultism in Malaysia;
- ◆ Study of Sikhism and its community in Malaysia;
- ◆ Study of Indigenous Religions in Malaysia;
- ◆ Religious demographic changes in Malaysia and its implications;
- ◆ Effects of globalisation on religions;
- ◆ Study on the nature and purpose of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia.

Focus for 2007

Collection of other religious resources and reference materials.

Programmes for 2008 & 2009*

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Tentative Dates</i>
Islamisation Policy	Talk	12 March 2008
Effects of Globalisation on Religions	Talk	09 July 2008
The Issue of Conversion and Apostasy in Malaysia	Seminar	17 September 2008
Islam Hadhari	Lecture	18 March 2009
Interreligious Dialogue	Forum	22 July 2009
Cults and Occultism in Malaysia	Seminar	09 September 2009

* The above programmes are subject to confirmation.

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