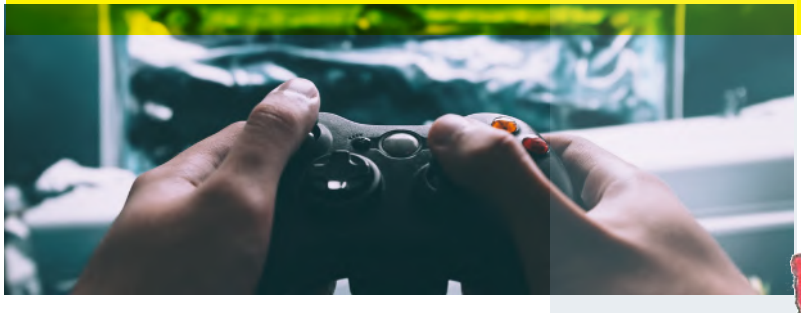
Modern-Day Parables



RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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Modern-Day Parables

When Jesus used parables, He addressed and engaged the many issues of His time. Through parables, He presented the ways of the kingdom of God and challenged the hearers' conformity to personal and corporate patterns of sin.

In late 2016, FES organised a *Modern-Day Parable Writing Competition* open to all students from our affiliated Christian Fellowships (CFs). From the 17 entries, four were chosen as winners.

In the following pages, we present these four winning entries for your reading.

We hope to encourage more of us to write modern-day parables and reclaim the power and validity of story, so that through these parables, we can engage and become a prophetic voice in our society.

1

Parable of the Three Travellers

Mildred Moh Wan Ting
NTU, Nanyang Business School, Year 2

2

Parable of the Night Sky

Jonadab Phua
NUS, Philosophy Year 4

3

It's all for nothing?

Cao Junbo
NUS, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Philosophy Year 2

4

The Parable of the Cabinet Meeting on the Government's Budget Allocation

Jefferson Fu
Nanyang Technological University
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1

Parable of the Three Travellers

Three travellers were on their way to the base of a mountain when it began raining cats and dogs, causing them to seek shelter on the porch of a nearby house. Hearing the noise outside, the owner of the house came out and greeted them. He welcomed them into the house, offering them drinks and snacks while they wait for the storm to pass. "Make yourself at home," he tells them as he goes on to recount how he has met the many travellers at his house every time the storm hits.

The first traveller takes off his backpack but holds his coat with him as he stands by the window, anxiously waiting for the rain to stop.

The second traveller took heed and settled himself nicely next to the fireplace with a cup of hot chocolate that the owner has so kindly offered.

The third traveller, however, chose to stay outside. "I'm drenched and my boots are too dirty to be inside," he says. No matter how hard the owner tried, the third traveller refused the offer. Eventually, the owner returns into the house.

Explanation

The owner parallels Jesus and the house is a visual representation of rest and surrender. Entering the house reflects God's promises that can be fulfilled if we would just walk into the Father's house – rest, comfort, joy, and so on. Yet, often we are like the third traveller. We become so self-conscious with our appearance – our sins – that we dare not get up close and personal with our Father. He offers us a safe refuge from the storms of life but are we willing to accept His invitation? Have we gotten too used to being in the rain, in the dark, in the pits, that we forget what it's like to rest like a sheep with a Shepherd? Even if we have accepted His invitation, do we continue to worry like the first traveller and remain unsettled? Are we really in complete surrender? Or will we choose to be like the second traveller – ready to let go and let God.

Mildred Moh Wan Ting
NTU, Nanyang Business School, Year 2

2

Parable of the Night Sky

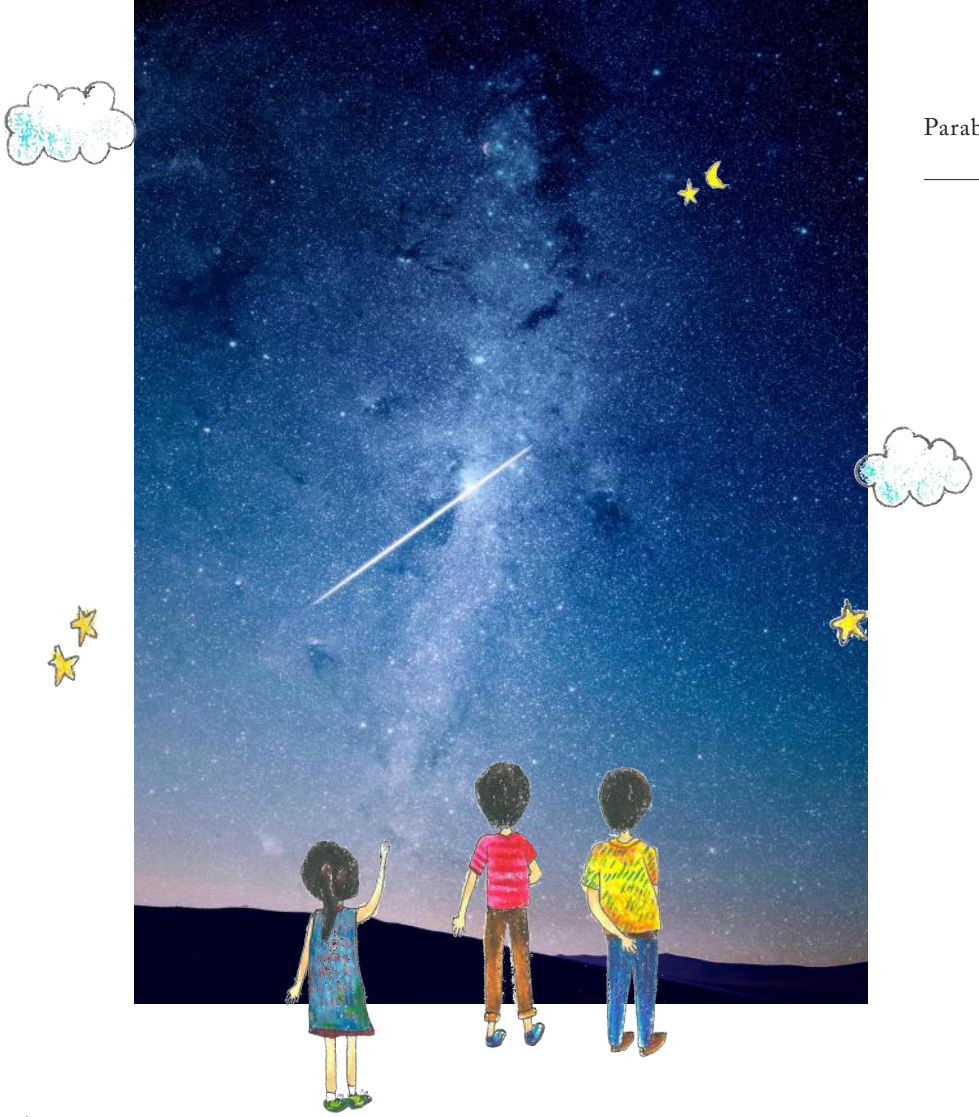
A **woman was on her way** to the market, and overheard two men in deep discussion.

"The most beautiful thing about the night sky is the moon! Look at its silvery light that shines most beautifully!"

The other man disagreed and said, "No, it is the myriad of stars that illuminate the sky above us that make it beautiful!"

The woman stopped in her tracks and said to both of them, "What do you see when you look up into the night sky? You see the moon, and you, the stars. But what of the clouds? Or the darkness that is above you? The night sky is more than each of these on their own and it is more than each of these put together. The moon speaks to us through its phases, the stars chart our paths, the clouds hint at the mysteries of life when it shrouds the familiar glow and shine of the moon and stars, and the darkness reminds us how beautiful and necessary light is when all seems lost. Yet neither of these are what the night sky is. Only when each is set in its place, set in its season, and set against each other, does the night sky become whole and truly beautiful."

The men angrily rebuked the woman, and one said, "What do you know about the night sky? Have you studied it? Be on your way and leave the talking to the men!"



Explanation

This parable speaks mainly of unity and diversity – and the resulting beauty from the sum total of both. It is similar in some sense to the 'many parts, one body' parable that Paul uses, except I wish to emphasise the resulting beauty that comes from recognising each part of the greater whole, rather than mere functionality. An additional dimension that could be a result of this parable is the fact that it is subjective; yes, perhaps we pick on things that grab our attention and we focus on those things. However, that does not negate the value of the other things. By not giving the other diverse parts of the 'night sky' (or 'body' if you prefer Paul's metaphor) their due credit, we are poorer for it. The way the parable is set also adds a dash of cultural baggage associated with women and the indignation at the unfair treatment toward the voices of women that we still hear and read about in the 21st century.

Jonadab Phua
NUS, Philosophy Year 4

3

枉然虚度的生命？

有**一位小男生**，沉迷于虚拟世界中，每天花上大把的时间在一个叫《冒险岛》的网络游戏里，忽略了亲情与学业。在冒险岛上，他是一个成功人士，也是个英雄。他有自己的工会，有许多的随从。他在游戏里有个漂亮的妻子，也有数不尽的稀有装备。简单地说，他就是冒险岛上的“奥巴马”（现在是“特朗普”）。他将自己的价值、时间、生命与爱都投入这个游戏中。

就这样，好几年过去了，他发现玩这个游戏的人渐渐减少，因很多人都跑去玩另一个最新流行的游戏——《刀剑神域》，就连他自己工会里很多忠心的随从，甚至他在游戏里的妻子都离他而去。可是他坚决不离开《冒险岛》这个游戏，因为他无法放弃他在冒险岛上所拥有的一切繁华荣耀，也放不下自己曾经投入的心血与时间。就算Game Master（GM）宣布《冒险岛》这个游戏即将倒闭，这位男生还是继续坚持每天登陆，自己去刷怪、打Boss。

GM看他这样也不忍心，就创建了一个角色与他一起打怪，同时劝他放弃，叫他要为自己长远的生活着想，毕竟游戏结束后还是要面对现实。可是他不听，也不去想，因为他还是放不下自己在游戏中所拥有的一切。

终于有一天，游戏关闭了。他丧失了一切，荒废了自己这几年来的光阴。他坐在房间里，目光呆滞地望着自己糟糕的成绩单，想着破裂的家庭关系。他想逃避现实，却又发现父母已经年迈，故自己须要出来工作，照顾父母。尽管他再怎么想逃进虚拟世界中，面对现实的时刻终究还是到了。而这时，他却一无所有，无力面对现实。

解释

没有任何网游是永远流行、永远开放的，终有一天会倒闭。这个世界也像一个网游，是短暂有限的，终有一天即将毁灭。人生也是一样，每个人所将会面对的事实就是肉体的死亡，死后便是两手空空而去，但在我们的生活里，我们投入了多少时间、生命与自我价值在我们正处于的“虚拟世界”中？当我们进入永恒时，又有什么在等着我们呢？ 耶稣来到我们的世界，提醒我们天国近了，我们当悔改，要信祂，并在这世上为以后的永生做好准备。祂告诉我们不要积攒这个世上的财宝，而是要积攒天国的宝藏。祂要我们放下一切自己所有的来跟随祂，作祂的门徒、神的儿女。你（我）还在执迷不悟吗？

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3

It's all for nothing?

There was a boy who indulged himself in the virtual world. He spent a great amount of time daily on a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG) called Isle of Adventure, all the while neglecting his family and studies. In the game, he was a player of great success; he was a hero, with his own guild and many followers. He had a beautiful wife and countless rare equipment. To put it simply, he was the "Obama" (now Trump) of Isle of Adventure. He devoted his time, his life, his love and his sense of worth to the game.

As the years passed by, he realised that the number of players in the game were dwindling because many had transferred to play another new popular game - "Sword Online". Many of his followers, even his in-game wife, left him to play the new game. Yet, he was determined to stay in his game because he could neither give up the glory and wealth he had in the game, nor let the time, blood and sweat he had devoted go to waste. He continued to log in daily to play on his own, even when the Game Master announced that the game would be shut down.

The Game Master could not bear to see him stay in the game so desperately and decided to create a character to play with him to try and convince him to give it up. The Game Master asked the boy to think about his life, because after all, he would have to face reality after the game ended. However, the boy refused to listen, still unable to give up on all that he had in the game.

The day came for the game to be shut down. The boy lost everything; all those years of hard work and time turned into nothing. He sat in his room, staring blankly at his poor examination results and thinking about the broken relationships he had with his family. He wanted to escape reality, only to realise that his parents had grown old and could no longer provide for him. It was his turn now to earn his own living and to take care of his parents. No matter how he wanted to jump into the virtual world again, the time to face reality had come. However, he had nothing to face reality with.

Explanation

No MMORPG lasts forever; all will face the day of its closure. This world is like an MMORPG, it is short and limited, and will face destruction one day. It is so with life; everyone will face the reality of physical death and can carry nothing of this world with us as we step into death. Yet, how much of our time, our life, our worth have we devoted into this "virtual world" we are in now? And as we step into eternity, what will await us? Jesus came into our world, to warn us to repent and believe because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. He warned us to be prepared for the eternity to come. He does not want us to gather treasures in this world, but in the Kingdom of Heaven. He wants us to put away what we have and follow Him, to become His disciples and God's children. Are we still refusing to act on what is truly important in life?

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Philosophy Year 2

Perumpamaan tentang Rapat Kabinet tentang Alokasi Dana APBN

4

Alkisah kabinet pemerintahan akan mengadakan rapat untuk mengesahkan pengalokasian Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara (APBN) kepada setiap kementerian. Rapat seharusnya dimulai pukul 8 pagi, tetapi karena Presiden harus menjawab telepon dari pemimpin negara tetangga, maka rapat pun harus ditunda selama beberapa saat. Sembari menunggu Presiden menyelesaikan urusannya, beberapa menteri mulai berbincang-bincang.

"Ibu sebagai Menteri Keuangan pasti kerepotan ketika harus menyiapkan rapat ini," Menteri Pertahanan memulai pembicaraan.

"Iya. Selain harus merencanakan anggaran untuk kementerian sendiri, Ibu masih harus merencanakan pengalokasian APBN bersama dengan Presiden," timpal Menteri Riset dan Pengembangan.

"Apa boleh buat, itu kan memang tugas saya sebagai Menteri Keuangan," jawab si Menteri.

"Kalau saya boleh boleh tahu, apakah Ibu sudah mempunyai gambaran tentang pembagian anggaran nanti?" tanya Menteri Badan Usaha Milik Negara (BUMN).

"Mohon maaf, bu, tapi saya tidak bisa berkomentar mengenai hal itu."

"Mengapa begitu, bu?" sambar Menteri Perencanaan Pembangunan.

“Bapak Presiden sudah menginstruksikan saya untuk tidak menyingkapkan informasi apa pun sampai ia sendiri mengumumkannya kepada kita semua,” balas Menteri Keuangan.

“Kalau begitu cukup dijawab dengan ‘Ya’ atau ‘Tidak’ saja, kan? Apakah kementerian saya akan mendapatkan persentase anggaran yang sama seperti APBN tahun lalu?” tanya Menteri Pertahanan tanpa basa-basi.

“Maaf pak, tapi mengenai hal-hal yang berhubungan dengan APBN mulut saya akan tetap tertutup sampai Presiden kembali.”

“Apa maksud dari pertanyaan bapak ibu sekalian? Apa untungnya kalau kita tahu besaran dana yang bisa dipakai oleh kementerian kita masing-masing? Toh kita masih bisa memberikan saran dan masukan kepada Presiden di rapat nanti,” tegur Menteri Pendidikan.

Menteri Pertahanan yang adalah veteran perang merasa tersinggung. “‘Apa untungnya’? Sangat penting bagi saya untuk memastikan anggaran Kementerian Pertahanan untuk tahun ini cukup, bu Menteri. Ancaman dalam bentuk apa pun, baik itu terorisme atau senjata biologis atau bom nuklir, mengintai kita kapan saja. Adalah tugas saya untuk memastikan semua hal itu tidak terjadi. Dan untuk melakukannya saya membutuhkan teknologi pertahanan tercanggih.”

“Ingatkah Bapak kalau Kementerian Pertahanan menyerap 20% dari dana APBN tahun lalu? Dan apa yang bapak lakukan dengan anggaran sebesar itu? Membeli kendaraan perang dalam jumlah yang tidak masuk akal serta melakukan pelatihan tentara tanpa henti, seolah-olah kita sedang akan berperang melawan seluruh dunia!” balas Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, sama berapi-apinya.

“Yang kita butuhkan adalah pembenahan sistem pendidikan supaya kita bisa menghasilkan sumber daya manusia yang berkualitas dan memiliki daya saing tinggi. Coba bapak ibu lihat negara tetangga kita. Banyak penduduk kita yang beremigrasi ke sana karena sistem pendidikan mereka lebih baik dibanding negara kita.”

“Mungkin Ibu benar, tapi—”

“Bapak, Ibu, coba tenang dulu. Mari kita pikirkan baik-baik,” Menteri BUMN mencoba melerai. “Dari tadi kita hanya memperjuangkan kepentingan kementerian masing-masing tanpa memikirkan dari mana kita bisa memperoleh anggaran yang cukup untuk membiayai semua kepentingan itu.”

“Apa maksud Ibu?” tanya Menteri Riset dan Pengembangan.

“Begini. APBN kan memperoleh pendapatan dari pajak dan keuntungan dari BUMN. Dan lagi selama ini pajak selalu menyumbangkan pemasukan terbanyak. Jadi, bagaimana kalau kita mengembangkan BUMN yang sudah ada supaya bisa berkontribusi lebih banyak kepada APB-—”

“Ha, Ibu sendiri setali tiga uang dengan mereka!” potong Menteri Perencanaan Pembangunan. “Ibu kira saya tidak mengetahui maksud terselubung ibu? Bahkan jika kita mengalokasikan semua APBN kita untuk meningkatkan kinerja BUMN, itu tidak akan cukup kalau tidak disertai dengan infrastruktur yang memadai. Kalau kita fokus pada pembangunan, kita pasti bias—”

“Kalian semua mungkin benar. Tapi, kalau negara kita sendiri tidak mempunyai teknologi yang dapat memajukan negara, semua ide yang sudah disampaikan akan sia-sia,” sela Menteri Riset dan Pengembangan. “Kita seharusnya memfokuskan APBN untuk riset dan pengembangan teknologi yang bisa menopang pertumbuhan.”

Perdebatan di antara menteri-menteri berlanjut dengan sengit. Setiap menteri tidak mau mengalah dan bersikeras bahwa kementeriannya berhak memperoleh persentase terbesar dari APBN. Menteri-menteri lain yang tadinya tidak terlibat pun ikut terseret ke dalamnya. Mereka baru berhenti ketika Presiden kembali ke ruangan rapat.

“Apa yang kalian semua lakukan? Saya hanya meninggalkan ruangan rapat sebentar, langsung ribut tak keruan! Kenapa kalian memperkarakan siapa yang terpenting di antara kalian? Percayalah, kalau ada satu kementerian saja yang saya anggap tidak penting, saya tidak akan repot-repot membuat departemen itu dan meminta kalian untuk memimpinnya.

“Kenapa kalian tidak percaya bahwa saya dapat dan akan mendistribusikan dana APBN secara adil? Kalian kira saya tidak berusaha mempertimbangkan kondisi dan setiap aspek negara ada dalam merencanakan APBN bersama Menteri Keuangan? Bukankah itu adalah tugas saya sebagai kepala negara ini?

“Sekarang saya akan mengumumkan pembagian alokasi dana APBN kepada setiap kementerian, tapi sebelum itu saya ingin mengingatkan kalian untuk bekerja sama dalam menjalankan tugas masing-masing. Beberapa kementerian akan mendapatkan bagian yang lebih besar karena saya percaya bidang-bidang itu memang memerlukan perhatian yang lebih. Sementara yang mendapatkan bagian yang lebih kecil, saya percaya kalian akan tetap mengerjakannya dengan serius. Tidak ada yang tidak penting di sini, karena setiap kementerian mewakili satu aspek pemerintahan yang tidak bisa dipisahkan satu dengan yang lain.

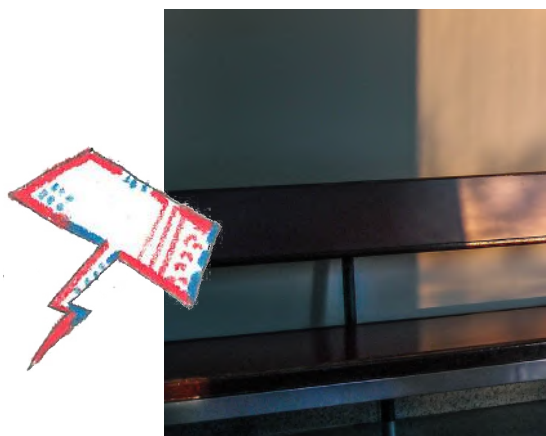
“Apakah saya sudah jelas?”

Penjelasan

Perumpamaan di atas terinspirasi oleh pertengkaran murid-murid Tuhan Yesus mengenai siapa yang terbesar di antara mereka. Peristiwa ini dicatat dalam Matius 18:1-5, Markus 9:33-37, dan Lukas 9:46-48. Pesan Alkitab yang ingin disampaikan terambil dari 1 Korintus 12 tentang tubuh Kristus yang memiliki banyak anggota dengan fungsi yang berbeda.

Perumpamaan ini menggambarkan perpecahan yang mungkin terjadi dalam suatu organisasi. Saya percaya akar permasalahan dari konflik ini adalah kesombongan manusia yang menganggap dirinya paling penting di antara yang lain. Seperti menteri-menteri di atas, seringkali kita menganggap diri kitalah yang harus diprioritaskan dalam perencanaan dan pelaksanaan organisasi. Pada akhirnya kita hanya akan berdebat tanpa henti, sementara tugas-tugas yang harusnya dilaksanakan terbengkalai.

Dalam 1 Korintus 12, Paulus ingin menegur perpecahan dalam jemaat mengenai karunia roh. Ia memulainya dengan mengingatkan jemaat bahwa semua karunia berasal dari satu sumber: Roh Kudus (ay. 1-11). Kemudian Paulus menganalogikan kesatuan anggota-anggota tubuh Kristus yang beraneka ragam dengan tubuh manusia (ay. 12-30). Secara spesifik, Paulus menjelaskan bahwa Tuhan memang mendesain tubuh-Nya sedemikian rupa sehingga ada anggota-anggota tubuh yang membutuhkan perhatian khusus dan ada yang tidak, supaya anggota-anggota tubuh boleh belajar untuk saling memperhatikan (ay. 23-25).



Setidaknya ada dua bentuk pengaplikasian konsep kesatuan tubuh Kristus ini dalam konteks pelayanan mahasiswa. Yang pertama, dalam segi kepengurusan persekutuan kampus. Pertengkaran antar bidang pelayanan mungkin terjadi karena anggota pengurus melupakan struktur persekutuan sebagai tubuh Kristus di mana anggotanya bekerja sesuai dengan fungsi masing-masing. Perumpamaan ini bisa mengingatkan pengurus bahwa setiap bidang pelayanan penting dan harus saling menopang satu sama lain. Yang kedua, dalam segi jurusan yang diambil mahasiswa. Dari pengalaman saya pribadi, banyak mahasiswa yang frustrasi karena tidak jelasnya cakupan pekerjaan yang ditawarkan jurusan mereka. Perumpamaan ini mengingatkan bahwa bidang apapun yang kita tekuni penting di mata Tuhan, sehingga kita harus berusaha dengan sungguh-sungguh untuk memuliakan Dia melalui bidang tersebut.

Soli Deo Gloria!

The Parable of the Cabinet Meeting on the Government's Budget Allocation

4

A cabinet meeting was held to ratify the allocation of the government budget to the different ministries. The meeting was supposed to start at 8 o'clock in the morning, but it was put on recess while the President had to answer an important phone call. As they waited for the President, some ministers started conversing with each other.

"Ma'am, as the Minister of Finance, you must have been very busy preparing for this meeting," the Minister of Defence began.

"Yes, aside from planning the budget for your own ministry, you had to plan the allocation with the President," chimed in the Minister of Research and Development (R&D).

"What can I do? Those are my duties as the Minister of Finance," she replied.

"If I may ask, how is the budget going to be allocated?" asked the Minister of State-owned Enterprises (SOE).

"Pardon me, ma'am, but I cannot make any remarks about it."

"Why is that so?" cut in the Minister of Developmental Planning.

"Because Mr President has instructed me to not reveal any information regarding the budget until he himself announces it to all of us," answered the Minister of Finance.

"That being the case, you can answer a yes-or-no question, can't you? Is my ministry going to get the same percentage of the budget as last year?" the Minister of Defence asked straight away.

"Pardon me, sir, but my mouth will remain closed regarding any matters about the national budget until the President returns."

"What do all of you mean? What is the benefit for us if we know how much of the budget we can use for our own ministry? Aren't we allowed to give any feedback or suggestions to the President in the meeting later?" rebuked the Minister of Education and Culture.

Feeling offended, the Minister of Defence replied harshly, "'What's the benefit?' It is very important for me to ensure that the budget for the Ministry of Defence this year is enough, ma'am. Threats of any form, be it terrorism or biological weapons or nuclear bombs, may happen any time. It is my duty to ensure that they are prevented and mitigated well, and to do that, I need the most advanced defence technology.'

"Don't you remember that the Minister of Defence absorbed 20% of the government budget last year? And what did you do with the budget that large? You bought a ridiculously huge amount of war vehicles and conducted military training relentlessly as if our country would have fought against the entire world," the Minister of Education and Culture reprimanded his colleague with the same harshness.

“What we need is the improvement of our education system so that we can prepare the future generations to face a tough business climate in the future. Look at our neighbouring countries. Many of our residents have emigrated there because they have a better education system.”

“Perhaps you are right, but—”

“Please, try to calm yourselves. Let us think this through,” the Minister of SOE said, trying to cool down the situation. “From the beginning, we have been fighting for the interests of our own ministry without thinking about where we can get enough income to fund all these interests.”

“What are you trying to say, ma’am?” asked the Minister of R&D.

“Does not the income of our country come from tax and state-owned enterprises’ revenue? And has not the tax always contributed the largest proportion? That being said, why don’t we develop and expand the existing state-owned enterprises so that they can contribute mo—”

“Ha, you are no different from them!” interjected the Minister of Developmental Planning. “Do you think that I do not know your own hidden agenda? Even if we allocate the entire government budget to increase the enterprises’ performance, it won’t work well if it is not complemented with good infrastructure. If we focus on infrastructural development, we surely ca—”

“All of you may be correct. Then again, if our country does not have the correct technical tools, all those ideas would be in vain,” the Minister of R&D interrupted. “We should use the budget to research and develop technologies that can support national growth.”

The debate between the ministers continued fiercely. Each minister did not want to concede and insisted that their own ministry deserved the largest percentage of the national budget. Even other ministers who had not been involved in the skirmish ended up joining the debate too. They only stopped when the President returned to the meeting room.

"What are all of you doing?! Can't you discuss politely with each other? Even more, why do you dispute which ministry among you is the most important? Believe me, if there was even one ministry I think to be expendable, I would not bother to create that department and ask you to lead it.

"Why don't you believe that I can and will allocate the government budget fairly? Do you think that I would not try to consider the circumstances and every aspect of the country in planning the budget with the Minister of Finance? Isn't it my duty as the head of this country?

"Now I will announce the budget allocation, but before that, I want to remind you to cooperate in executing your own duties. Several ministries will get a bigger portion because I believe that they require more attention and resources to address the problems they face. On the other hand, for those who receive a smaller portion, I trust that you will still do your work seriously. There is no one who is not important here, for every ministry represents a governmental aspect that is inseparable from one another.

"Am I clear?"

Explanation

This parable is inspired by the argument between Lord Jesus' disciples about who was the greatest among them. This event is recorded in Matthew 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37, and Luke 9:46-48. The message it intended to convey comes from 1 Corinthians 12 about Christ's body that has individual members with distinct functions.

This parable illustrates the schism that may occur in an organisation. I believe that the root of such conflict is the human pride that considers himself to be the most important among the others. Like the ministers, we often think that the planning and execution of our interests should be prioritised in the organisation. Eventually, we would only debate relentlessly and abandon the tasks that we should do.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul wanted to reprove the division in the church about spiritual gifts. He began by reminding his congregation that all gifts come from one source: the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-11). Then, Paul analogised the unity of the diverse members of Christ's body with the human body (vv. 12-30). Specifically, he explained that the Lord did design His body in such a way that there are body members who need special attention and some who do not, so that members of the body may learn to care for each other (vv. 23-25).

There are at least two forms this concept can be applied in the context of a student ministry. Firstly, in terms of the committee of a campus fellowship. The conflict between various portfolios of the ministry may occur because the committee members forget that the fellowship is structured like Christ's body in which its members work according to their own function. This parable can remind the committee members that every aspect of the ministry is important and must support the others. Secondly, it can be applied in terms of the programme students major in at the university. From my own personal experience, many are frustrated because of the unclear scope of the work that their programme offers. This parable reminds us that whatever major we study in, it is important in His eyes, hence we should fervently seek to glorify Him through that major.

Soli Deo gloria!

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