

Movement of the Moderates

MALAYSIA continues to face some of her darkest moments as a nation. Over the past months, the lack of political will to mitigate racial and religious intolerance has naturally given rise to ideologues, extremists, and radicals. All these are no different in essence from the keris-wavers and cow-head trampling demonstrators we saw a few years ago.

How one can rant and rave and threaten bloodshed and yet walk the streets a free man, whilst those who merely wear yellow T-shirts can be arrested, is most incomprehensible and unfortunate.

Last week's Bersih2.0 rally is a culmination of frustrations of the nation's citizenry, and I suspect this marks the beginning of a movement of the moderates.

There is some truth in the government's reasoning that rallying "is not our culture." But when tens of thousands of ordinary peace-loving people persist to take to the streets, besides the many thousands more who could not go due to the blockades and gridlock in the capital city, then it is incumbent on all of us to do some soul-searching.

The arguments for the legitimacy or otherwise of the Bersih2.0 rally reminds me of the famous "Lady Justice". This iconic figure wears a blindfold over her eyes while lifting a sword in one hand and carrying a pair of scales on the other. Symbolically, she represents fair and equal administration of the law - without prejudice, avarice, corruption, fear or favor.

If our leaders had likewise worn a blindfold¹ and were asked to objectively judge the calls of concerned citizens and assess their conduct at the rally, their response would not have been so immature.

In many parts of the world, any group or government espousing to "clean the electoral roll," "stop corruption," "use indelible ink" - would have been praised as being proactive, decent, fair-minded, honest, rational. Strangely in Malaysia, when some people ask for these very same practices, they are "demonized", simply because they are "not government". What we witnessed on 9 July 2011 was the epitome of crude partisan politics.



¹ Remember, the blindfold on Lady Justice represents objectivity, not blindness i.e. she is blindfolded, not blind.

Image from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HK_Central_Statue_Square_Legislative_Council_Building_n_Themis_s.jpg

Personally, I think the demands of Bersih2.0 – for electoral reforms and the right to have a peaceful march - were not only reasonable, but impartial as well. Bersih2.0 was not pro-opposition but pro-democracy.

The people of Malaysia are maturing in democracy and we can no longer tolerate unfair practices, corruption, vote-buying and otherwise. Being “blindfolded” like Lady Justice also means we are color blind, i.e. it does not matter if you wear red T-shirts or have green banners, nor does it matter if you are yellow, black or brown-skinned.

A right is a right. A wrong is a wrong regardless of whether it is committed by the government or the opposition or whomsoever.

I know the Church in this nation to be a peace-loving people. But more importantly, we are a people of the Book and our Book teaches us principles and values, rights and wrongs.

We remember Christ's mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves and not conduct ourselves in an un-Christian manner. At all times, we want to be conciliatory and be agents of peace to ensure harmony.

We must resist the temptation to say and do things that are escalatory and antagonistic. When highly confrontational tactics begin to replace more co-operative approaches, conflicts escalate and more extreme personalities maneuver to become leaders of the conflict groups.

And when this polarization degenerates till so much that is said and done makes no sense, we then need to remind ourselves that Lady Justice, though blindfolded, is “not gagged.” This is where the silent majority and the Church must speak up. Scriptures mandate us to open our mouth.²

Moderates must speak up to check the damage intended by hard-liners and ensure that democracy is not hijacked.

We do not subscribe to “political subversion” but the Church has the responsibility to stand up against the fanatics and hypocrites bent on corrupting the moral fiber of our people and destroying our democratic nation.

There is nobody to save Malaysia except Malaysians. It is time for the moderates to speak up, be heard and play their role in this nation.

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This article is written to guide members of NECF in their prayers and in their journey as responsible non-partisan Christian citizens.

² Proverbs 31:8 - Open your mouth for the speechless, 9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy. ^{NKJV}