

The Church today does not need to start from scratch. What needs to be done is to ensure that the governments correctly interpret and implement their constitutions. With a good constitution in place, the prophetic task of holding the government accountable to God has become easier.

One need not be a political activist. The least a Christian can do is to inform him or herself about the truth concerning his nation and his government and then vote with conscience.

Jesus has also set us free to seek God's will done in our family and in our nation by promising to meet our needs. He says, "Seek FIRST the kingdom of God ... and all these things will be added to you". Often, the need to make a living becomes a hindrance to seeking God's kingdom. But the verse shows that seeking God's will done on earth has higher priority than even making a living.

So even the need to make a living is no excuse for not seeking God's will done in and through our life. [NECF]

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For further reading, see the article Vote with Discernment by Eugene Yapp, Executive Secretary, NECF Research Commission in the Oct – Dec 2011 of Berita NECF.

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Christians & the Ballot Box

The 13th General Election is approaching. How are we preparing ourselves to decide the future of our country Malaysia?

With prayer and the Word?

With coffee-shop analysis?

With comprehensive and objective information?

What are our considerations as we think about who and which coalition to support?

Are the economy and our own welfare the priorities?

**How important are religious freedom and other human liberties?
Do we take into account the Bible's mandate for governments to rule justly and righteously?**

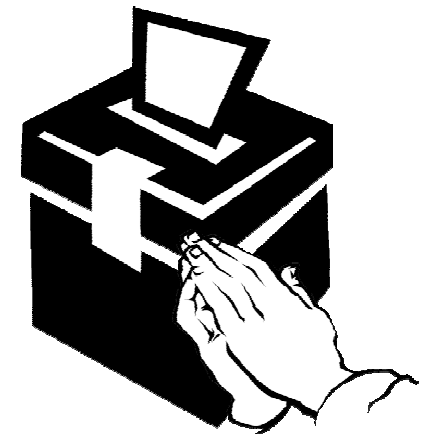
And when it comes down to the choices:

Should we risk an untested government?

Can promises of reform be believed?

Can we trust religious based parties?

Is it about choosing the lesser of two evils?



GE 13: A CRUCIAL HOUR FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

IN the Biblical worldview, all government is provisional and delegated with authority from God. They are therefore answerable to God in every decision and action they take. As voters, we must elect those who will ensure that the conditions to live and express ourselves as human beings are guaranteed and safeguarded.

The government we elect should be one which serves the common good of all. It must ensure democratic space for the freedom of conscience, of expression and other human rights. It must foster public institutions that bring about the conditions for good and righteous living. These conditions are necessary if citizens are to live peacefully, harmoniously, and responsibly.

There are many such conditions and they range from upholding the Rule of Law to establishing a proper democratic way. This includes free and fair elections and curbing abuse of power, corrupt practices and exploitation of the poor and marginalised people.

However, one of the conditions that must be of concern to Christians is the freedom of religion. This means the freedom to change one's belief, and to manifest one's faith in teaching, practice, worship and observance¹.

A society is only free to the extent it respects the freedom of conscience, of expression and of religious liberty, especially of its minority groups. It is a contradiction if a society speaks of harmony and diversity with no regard for these freedoms.

In the coming elections, amidst the many legitimate concerns, NECF wants to highlight freedom of religion which has rarely been put before candidates in past elections. It may be an opportune time to place this condition before candidates as it involves a fundamental liberty enshrined in our Federal Constitution.

with the Ten Commandments. Such a constitution would treat every citizen equally in the eyes of the law and look after the welfare of all citizens.

ii) The Prophetic Role of Media

What happens when the government violates the constitution? Who then holds the government accountable to God?

In Israel this is the role of the prophets. A true prophet was personally called and commissioned by God to confront the king with God's message when the king violated the Ten Commandments. The prophets represent the cultural sphere that holds the government accountable to the constitution, and hence to God. What is the equivalent of the prophets in a modern nation?

In a democratic nation like Malaysia this prophetic role is usually played by the media, together with informed citizens.

How do the media hold the government accountable to the constitution?

- By informing citizens about the truth concerning the nation and government. Informed citizens can further hold the government accountable to the constitution through democratic means, such as voting in elections.
- An independent media is feared by the government. This is good for the government and the nation, as it helps the government to do what is right. Only then can the nation prosper.

But very often the government, especially if it is corrupt, does not allow the media to be independent. When government control of the media becomes significant, an alternative media needs to be initiated and supported by concerned citizens. Otherwise the citizens of the nation will only know what the corrupt government wants them to know.

C. How Shall God's Church Respond?

The command to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness is a command to live out the Church's calling to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The Church, called to be salt and light, is thus called to play the prophetic role of holding the government accountable to God. At the beginning of the Church, the Apostles and the early Christians resisted their government when they were required to do what was against God's will. They were persecuted and even martyred for this. In this way they held their government accountable to God. Since then, Christians throughout the centuries have also resisted governments that violated God's will.

Because of the salt-and-light efforts of Christians in the past, God's kingdom has already taken root in most of the governments of the world in the form of constitutions that are consistent with the Ten Commandments.

¹ Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

B. Looking at Malaysia Today

In a modern nation like Malaysia, the sphere of the government also has three independent branches.

Corresponding to the king of ancient Israel is the branch that governs the nation. It is called the Executive. At the federal level, the Executive branch consists of the Prime Minister and his cabinet; at the state level, it is the Chief Minister or Menteri Besar and his cabinet.

Corresponding to the laws of Moses is the Legislature. At the federal level the Legislature consists of the Parliament; at the state level it is the State Assembly. This branch of the government makes the laws of the nation, and the laws must be consistent with the constitution.

Corresponding to the judges is the Judiciary, which interprets and applies the constitution and the laws of the nation.

The Accountability Issue

As in the case of Israel, God's will for a modern nation like Malaysia is that the government holds the people accountable to God, and not to the Prime Minister.

In practice, for this to happen, it is important to ensure that the head of government does not have influence over the Judiciary or the Legislature. And since the Legislature makes the laws that the Judiciary interprets and implements, it is important that we vote for the right people to be in the Parliament and the State Assembly.

How then can a government today hold the nation accountable to God? It does so by: i) holding the people accountable to a constitution that is consistent with the Ten Commandments, and ii) through the prophetic role of the media.

i) The Nature of the Constitution

What is a constitution that is consistent with the Ten Commandments? It must:

- *Require the three branches of government to be independent.*
- *Guarantee religious freedom.* Since family and religion answer directly to God and not to the government, people must be free to choose and practice the religion of their choice. Their religious choices are between them and the Creator God. The government cannot interfere unless the people practice a religion that promotes criminal activities.
- *Be based on the Golden Rule: "Do not to others what we do not want others to do to us."* All religions teach the Golden Rule. According to Jesus the Golden Rule summarizes the Ten Commandments (Matthew 7:12). And according to the Apostle Paul, people of all religions, or no religion, are aware of the Golden Rule because God has put the Ten Commandments into their conscience (Romans 2:14-16). So a constitution that is based on the Golden Rule is already consistent

Let us thus hold election candidates accountable to the following:

- Uphold the Federal Constitution.
- Stop abusing religion for political agendas.
- Stop the use of state laws to discriminate and intimidate religious minorities (Christian, Shia, Ahmaddiyah, etc).
- Stop demolitions of houses of worship built on privately-owned land and land gazetted to indigenous communities.
- Commit to legislation that protects the freedom of conscience and religious liberty of all citizens, including to change one's religion.
- Table the draft proposals on child conversions and inter-religious custody disputes in Parliament.
- Commit to the civic education of these freedoms to our children and successive generations.
- Reform state apparatus that spread hate ideology of other races, religions and cultures, i.e. Biro Tatanegara.
- Maintain strict observance of boundaries in Syariah law whereby non-Muslims are not subject to its jurisdiction.
- Discipline overzealous "Little Napoleons" in the government administration who thwart cabinet policies aimed at protecting and enhancing inter-racial harmony and religious freedom.
- Ensure that the state will administer the nation without undue influence from religious authorities.

Being Salt and Light in Malaysia

Dr. Leong Tien Fock

Dr. Leong Tien Fock an Old Testament scholar and a researcher/observer of societal issues at the Campus Crusade For Christ in West Malaysia. This is a condensed version of an article in the January-March 2011 issue of Berita NECF. The full article is available at the NECF website. The article was based on his presentation at the seminar, entitled 'Biblical Perspective of Political Engagement', on 7 Nov 2010 in Kuching, jointly organised by NECF Malaysia and the Kuching Ministers Fellowship.

Some other questions you may want to put to election candidates

What will you and your party do to:

1. Eradicate poverty?
2. Provide employment opportunities?
3. Provide adequate and affordable housing?
4. Ensure fair prices for essential commodities?
5. Stamp out all forms of corruption and mal-administration in the public sector?
6. Stop leakages and profiteering through government projects?
7. Ensure equal opportunities to higher education for all capable and excellent students?
8. Uphold and protect the fundamental liberties under Part II of the Federal Constitution?
9. Ensure that all citizens can freely profess and practice their religion?
10. Ensure that all citizens enjoy the freedom of assembly, of expression and of association?
11. Ensure that citizens have the freedom to relate to each other socially, politically, professionally, and religiously, without undue interference or control by the authorities?
12. Uphold the independence and integrity of the judiciary?
13. Promote and foster a free but responsible press?
14. Uphold the freedom of (access to) information?
15. Give citizens a greater and more participatory role in Malaysia's democracy?

WHAT can we learn about God's will for a nation and for its government? We can look at what Israel in the Old Testament was supposed to be.

A. Gleaning from the Historical Israel

The Constitution

Israel was commanded to observe the Ten Commandments in every sphere of the nation. Hence the Ten Commandments was the supreme law of Israel. Today, such a supreme law, to which even a government must submit, is called the constitution of a nation.

The Authorities

The fifth of the Ten Commandments is: "Honour your father and your mother" (Deuteronomy 5:16). This commandment is also about other authorities in the nation. Parents are the authorities in their respective families. A nation needs authorities beyond the family.

According to Deuteronomy chapters 16 to 18, they are four more categories of authorities: the judges, the king, the priests and the prophets. Each of the categories has its own jurisdiction, and each jurisdiction answers directly to God. They do this by submitting to God's will, which is expressed in the Ten Commandments, the constitution of Israel.

This means, even though the king is in charge of the nation, he himself must submit to the constitution, and under normal circumstances, he cannot interfere in the jurisdictions of the other authorities. But since he is overall in charge he intervenes when a crime is committed in any jurisdiction. When this happens, a judge would try the case. And he would do so based on laws given by God, not laws made by the king or the judge; and the king cannot interfere with how the judge decides the case. Hence the king, the laws, and the judges are independent of each other. In this way, the king holds the people accountable to God, and not to himself.

The sphere of government was thus represented by the king, the judges and the laws given by God through Moses. Hence, the government had three branches, and all three branches were independent of each other.