

ANALYSIS OF UPCOMING ELECTION: ROLE OF CATHOLICS IN THE LIGHT OF CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHINGS

At every historic juncture of a nation's history, there is need for the citizens to be more analytical and become critically aware of their power in the electoral process, but more so, in terms of the power they have in making the participatory democracy works for ALL MALAYSIANS. Citizens who are believers of Catholic Christianity are guided in roles as voters and agents in the participatory democracy by the Teachings of the Catholic Church as informed by the biblical faith.

1. Be Analytical & Critical There is much we can learn from the academicians and civil society organizations who have played the most analytical and critical roles in the political life of this nation.

1. **Aliran On Politics**. Professor of political science, USM, Dr. Francis Loh's lecture in Church of Immaculate Conception, Penang, Friday, February 29, 2008, 8pm: "Political institutions shy away from politics and focus rather on developmentalism." He added, "In the context of developmentalism, rallying behind BN can benefit one materially in the form of services and goods, if not licenses, contracts and projects. (See Dr. Francis Loh, "Elections, Parties and developmentalism: Whither Democracy?" CANews, March 2008:26) In other words, the politics of the day is about more development and less and less about the politics of a just and participatory **democracy of the people, by the people, for the people** where there is room for dissent and multiparty system.
2. **Aliran On Development. Media Statement** <http://www.aliran.com> Wednesday, March 05, 2008 7:04 PM **Subject: Sad outburst by Chandra** In contrast to Chandra's position, Aliran calls upon fellow Malaysians to vote in a stronger Opposition. It is important to deny the Barisan Nasional a two-thirds majority which has allowed them to amend the Constitution at will and ride roughshod over dissenting views. A stronger Opposition will help to consolidate Malaysia's fledging democracy. Too often, we have sacrificed democracy to pursue development – and that too, a model of development which has concentrated wealth in the hands of a minority. To reiterate, Aliran stands for sustainable people-centred development and democracy for all. We have asserted this position in the latest two issues of Aliran Monthly, which have focused on the 2008 elections.
3. **CPPS On New Activism. Young & in Opposition - from Singapore Business Times**. The new activism was a surprise, director of Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) at the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute, Tricia Yeoh observed: 'For a very, very long time, the young people in Malaysia have felt disengaged and not empowered to do anything. 'Attributing the 'positive trend' to the Internet's popularisation of politics and current affairs, she said that a stronger Opposition would emerge which in turn augurs well for the country and democratic principles.'
4. This activism has been "ignited by political scandals highlighted in blogs (Web logs), YouTube and Facebook - have been catalysed into action, said Ms Yeoh, who is of the view that have helped lessen the stigma or fear of joining opposition parties. New 'political stars' :Tony Pua Kiam Wee, bespectacled 36-year-old in the Parliamentary seat of Petaling Jaya North, an Oxford graduate, an Asean Scholar has joined the Democratic Action Party (DAP) In the past week, Mr Pua has proven very popular

- with the ceramah crowds, attracted by his message that Members of Parliament need to vocalise their constituencies' concerns - a point he stressed that his opponent, Chew Mei Fun from the Malaysian Chinese Association, would not do given that her party is a coalition member of the National Front, and is obliged to toe the party line.
5. Mr. Badrul had declared that since someone had to stand against the prime minister's son-in-law, that person might as well be him. More of an accidental 'hero' is Loh Gwo-Burne. The 33-year-old businessman shot to fame when in a moment of boredom, he unintentionally recorded lawyer VK Lingam allegedly in the act of brokering judicial appointments. Three women in their 20s - Hannah Yeoh, Jenice Lee and Teo Nie Ching - will also be running on the DAP ticket. At 26, PKR's Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad is the Opposition's youngest candidate. Contesting a state seat, the former political aide to Mr Anwar has said that he is willing to be the catalyst for the community's betterment. Besides guts and passion, the young political aspirants have something else in common - they are all graduates of foreign universities or had the opportunity to study for a time overseas 'where they had the time and space to participate in political ideology, as opposed to our locals who are deprived of it.
 6. **CPPS On Governance & Resource Management.** It was also stated that scarce development resources should be utilized sustainably. Indeed, Sabah, Sarawak, Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah, all of which are particularly rich in resources (with oil, gas, timber and agriculture), are ironically also the poorest states in the country. In order to avoid the "resource curse", where resource-rich countries fail to benefit from their natural wealth, the Government should improve significantly its national resource governance and management through increased revenue transparency and accountability measures. This would ensure that income from resources is invested for the purposes of long-term development. Despite its natural resources, Sabah has 42% of its children living in poverty, while poverty stands at 24.2%.
 7. In light of these alarming poverty statistics, the CPPS calls for renewed commitment to fighting poverty by placing equity at the core of development policies and programs. In order to do so, the CPPS urges the Government to ensure that policies addressing poverty for all poor communities regardless of race, political affiliation and gender are correctly implemented. The CPPS also recommends that Government engage in better resource management through effective revenue transparency mechanisms. With these policies correctly implemented, Malaysia would successfully maximize its national wealth for the sake of all Malaysians alike, and steadily progress towards its goal of becoming a developed nation. To this end it is imperative that the Delivery System should be improved at a faster pace to overcome widening income disparity especially among the lowest 30 % of the country's population.
 8. **Women's Centre For Change: On Gender Discrimination.** On March 2, 2008, Lawyer Ling Kah Cheng of WCC confirmed that "violence against women is still on the rise" making a mockery of Article 8 which reads "there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law...." **This meant that women and men are entitled equal protection and rights under the law. As such, gender equality as a principle was protected for Malaysians at the most primary level.** However, Article 15 only enables the foreign

spouses of male citizens to apply for citizenship in the country. Correspondingly, the foreign husbands of Malaysian women are unable to apply for Permanent Residency status in the country or eventual citizenship by virtue of their marriage. Instead, they will have to resort to other methods to stay in the country legally with their wives; for example, through employment or professional visas.

9. Although the government has recognized that this limits the capacity of Malaysian women - especially skilled Malaysian women - to continue to stay in the country after they have married men of other nationalities, nothing concrete has been done to rectify the situation. In addition, the Second Schedule, Part II Article 14 (1) (b) clearly discriminates against Malaysian women, as it only allows for "fathers" to confer citizenship to their children. This means that if a Malaysian mother wishes her child to have Malaysian citizenship, she will have to give birth in Malaysia. She further confirmed all BN politicians have to tow the line and cited the example of Tan Cheng Liang who has been reprimanded for opposing the outer ring road in Penang Island.

2. Act under D' Guidance of Church's Teachings The Catholic Church has reflected on countless issues in the light of the biblical faith and the corpus of teachings are worth our attention as conscientious citizens bent on ensuring a healthy democracy which is at the foundation of a violent free society where equal status is accorded to all citizens and equal believers.

10. **Politics & Faith.** On the level of concrete political action, there can generally be a plurality of political parties in which Catholics may exercise – especially through legislative assemblies – their right and duty to contribute to the public life of their country. Other than political parties, citizens are encouraged to participate in the democratic political processes with “a sincere quest for the truth, using legitimate means to promote and defend the moral truths concerning social life- justice, freedom, respect for life and for other human rights – is a right and duty of all members of a social and political community.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church/CSDC, no. 571, p. 323) Besides, the political order which is the field of involvement of both politicians and the citizens in any one country “is perceived by the human conscience and, in social life, finds its fulfillment in the truth, justice, freedom and solidarity that brings peace.” (CSDC, no.383, p.216)
11. **A Humane & Multiparty System.** In order to make the political order truly human, “no better way exists...than by fostering an inner sense of justice, benevolence and service for the common good, and by strengthening basic beliefs about the true nature of the political community and about the proper exercise and limits of public authority.” (CSDC, no.392, p.221) In addition, “the Church’s commitment on behalf of social pluralism aims at bringing about a more fitting attainment of the common good and democracy itself, according to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice.” (CSDC, no.417, p.234)
12. **Electoral Power.** Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes/Church in the modern world*, no. 75 urges: “all citizens should be mindful of the right and also the duty to use their free vote for the common good.” The 2002 Vatican Document, “Participation of Catholics in Political Life” insists that “in democratic societies, in a climate of true freedom, all can contribute, by voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials,

- and in other ways as well, to the development of political solutions and legislative choices which, in their opinion, will benefit the common good. The life of a democracy could not be productive without the active, responsible and generous involvement of everyone.”
13. **Clean & Just Governance.** “Among the deformities of the democratic system, political corruption is one of the most serious because it betrays at one and the same time both moral principles and the norms of social justice.” (CSDC, no.411, p.231) “In the presence of serious forms of exploitation and social injustices, there is “an ever more widespread and acute sense of *the need for a radical* personal and social renewal capable of ensuring justice, solidarity, honesty and openness.” (CSDC, no. 577, p. 327)
 14. **Common Good.** “The pursuit of the common good in a spirit of service, the development of justice with particular attention to situations of poverty and suffering, respect for the autonomy of earthly realities, the principle of subsidiarity, the promotion of dialogue and peace in the context of solidarity: these are the criteria that must inspire the Christian laity in their political activity.” (CSDC, no. 565, p. 319) In the Roman document “Participation of Catholics in Political Life,” the common good “would include the promotion and defence of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity.”
 15. **Integral Development.** “Development that benefits everyone responds to the demands of justice on a global scale that guarantees worldwide peace and makes it possible to achieve a “complete humanism” guided by spiritual values.” (CSDC, no.98, p.57) “Pope Pius XI: “the distribution of created goods, which, as every discerning person knows, is laboring under the gravest evils due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good, that is, social justice.” (CSDC, no.163, p.95)
 16. The “...giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God, even if the practice of charity is not limited to alms-giving but implies addressing the social and political dimension of the problem of poverty.” ***“When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.”*** “What is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity. (CSDC, no.184, p.103-4; cf. CCC, 2446) “The demand of justice” which stems from wisdom/fear of the Lord, precedes concern for profit: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it’ (Prov 15:16). “Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice” (Prov 16:8) (CSDC, no.257, p.151)
 17. **Just Distribution.** “An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it” an accordance based on “suitable social policies for the distribution of income which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen.” (CSDC, no.303, p.174) “Good administration of the gifts received, and of material goods also, is a work of justice towards oneself and towards others. What has been received

should be used properly, preserved and increased, as suggested by the parable of the talents (cf. Mat 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-27) (CSDC, no.326, p.185)

18. All said and done, integral development is inspired by the faith-vision/theological principle that “God destined the earth and all it contains for all people so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.” (CSDC, no.171, p.96-7)
19. **Service of Human Persons.** The 2002 Roman document Participation of Catholics in Political Life” places the human person at the center:] “In addition, there is the right to *religious freedom* and the development of an *economy* that is at the service of the human person and of the common good, with respect for social justice, the principles of human solidarity and subsidiarity, according to which «the rights of all individuals, families, and organizations and their practical implementation must be acknowledged».”

3. Participation in Participatory Democracy

20. **Strategies.** Dr. Francis Loh highlighted several involvement worth citing: (a) promote inter-faith dialogue and greater tolerance of one another in spite of our different religions and cultures; (b) promote sustainable and alternative development which cares for the poor and marginalized, yet preserves our environment and heritage; (d) make people more conscious of their rights and assume responsibilities in the struggle for justice, freedom and solidarity; (e) campaign for the abolition of the ISA and the other coercive laws. To this can be added: (f) promote greater democratic space for freedom of religion, of speech and assembly; (g) promote greater gender sensitivity and gender rights not to be discriminated on the based of being a woman; (g) promote a safe space for all so that our society become violent-free.

4. Mission of the Asian-Malaysian Church

21. For the Churches in Asia, the teachings of the Asian Bishops on the mission the Church is truly all-encompassing. In the preparatory document, ***Instrumentum Laboris, no. 51 (Working Document before the 1999 Special Synod of Asia Bishops in Rome)***, the Asian bishops exhort: “The Church’s contribution to human promotion includes vocally denouncing injustices, supporting victims in their just causes, caring for the marginalized and suffering, joining together with all persons of good will who seek to build a more just and humane society, engaging in the analysis of the given situation in order to arrive at the root causes of poverty and injustice, and faith reflection on pastoral action...”
22. “In Asian countries, the Church has been active in pro-democracy movements aimed at establishing participatory democracies and humane government, in monitoring elections, in working for legislation against graft and corruption, in efforts at reconciliation after communal clashes, and in establishing peace in regions torn by civil war.” “While the Church in Asia strives to oppose forces which threaten the unity and well-being of the individual, she also works to encourage people to form a better society.”

Jojo M. Fung, SJ,
March 7, 2008, SHC JB.