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天國視野 Kingdom Perspective

Chinese Baptist Fellowship of the United States and Canada

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Being a Responsible Christian Citizen

Elder Thomas Fong

In America, when we ponder about being a citizen, we would very quickly associate it with exercising the right to vote. This is especially true this year when we hold our Presidential Election. As believers, we need to know that even before exercising our civic duty to vote, we must understand that voting is not just about making political choices but more fundamentally, is knowing our life purpose on earth.

The Dilemma of Chinese believers in North America – Their Identity

Their dilemma is a three-fold identity - of Chinese ancestry; American (or Canadian) citizenship; and, citizens of the Kingdom. But to understand Christian citizenship, they must first know their identity and to whom they owe their ultimate allegiance. Every believer of Jesus Christ is a citizen of the Kingdom who has given up his former life of sin and darkness and has entered the Kingdom of Light, acknowledging as Lord, the God who created this universe. Their identity then is eternal in nature surpassing that of their temporal earthly national identity.

“... voting is not just about making political choices ...”

Second, as people who have become citizens in their adopted country, they have a nationality. They have sworn allegiance to it. This has caused an unsettling feeling for many Americans (or Canadians) of Chinese descent when it comes to their political stance. They have strong emotional ties to China but because they are American citizens, they can no longer stand on the side of the former regardless of how imperfect America is.

How does one reconcile the identity of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God and that of an earthly nation? The Bible teaches us to obey the authorities and to give what is due them. In Romans 13:1-7, the apostle Paul taught believers to be subject to the governing authorities as they are established by God. But this is rooted on one's obedience to God, and God's will transcend the power of all earthly governments.

Christian Witness and Concern for Society

Jesus taught "Your light should shine before others, so that they can see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) The individual believer and the church should have good witness in words and in deeds, to care for the needs of society with love in action, and speak out on issues of justice. This can have a powerful impact on entire communities and the country (1 Peter 2:12) thus manifesting God's righteousness and love. However, when leaders fall, they will tarnish the glory of God and make their message about the justice of God less convincing and bring upon themselves the judgement of God.

Taking a Political Stand and Fostering Unity

People in the church often hold on to two erroneous extremes – Avoidance and Liberation Theology. The former holds the view that the church should not talk about politics and avoid participating in any social and political activities, and, the latter is of the view that the church should be involved in social reforms, and even taking the lead role in solving the problems of poverty and injustice in society. Both extremes violate God's intended role and mission for the church. Among Chinese churches, discussing political issues is generally avoided for fear that different opinions might lead to disputes and divisions. However, as a responsible community of faith, a discussion in the right spirit of a willingness to humbly learn from each other, helping each other to understand different political points of view and seeking God's will together, can be a beneficial exercise for everyone. The ground rule for any discussion is to use the principle of sound hermeneutics to understand the intended meaning of the text and its application, and not to misuse the Bible according to one's favored political position.

“... as a responsible community of faith, a discussion in the right spirit ... to humbly learn from each other, ... and seeking God's will together, can be a beneficial exercise for everyone.”

Even so, it is the focus and the perspective that one is coming from in the interpretation of a teaching that has caused differences in opinions about how issues are resolved, such as the government's handling of the refugee issue, welfare and taxes, the environment and the economy, Democrats and Republican, and the current trending issue of prejudice against the African American community, to name a few. But ultimately, one's stance on the issues at hand must be grounded on God's justice and love. Believers should be able to discuss different applications of a biblical teaching and be open to the opinions of others and not become overly dogmatic. It is not necessary for differences of opinion to spill over to arguments and even hatred for each other. We need spiritual wisdom and mutual respect among members of the body for this to happen.

“It is not necessary for differences of opinion to spill over to arguments and even hatred for each other.”

Regardless of the political opinions and stance they hold, members of the Body of Christ must maintain the unity of the Spirit. Jesus prayed that His disciples are to be one. (John 17:20-23) The apostle Paul also taught us that no matter what different backgrounds and cultures we come from, we are one in the Lord because we have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, and we serve the same God. (Ephesians 4:4-6) Let us then be mindful that there is nothing in this world that should separate us in the eternal unity we have in Christ and there is no political plan nor political leader in the world that can bring about salvation for humankind.

“Hot” Issues versus “Important” Issues

Although some of the above basic principles are understood, it is still quite difficult to decide when faced with different political issues and various information about the candidates.

Many people vote according to their party affiliation or they vote according to hear say and what is trending in the media. But we need to understand that what is considered “hot” is in part orchestrated by the media. Unfortunately, the present-day media is not impartial. Some of the “news” about the elections we have out there is technically “propaganda”, promoted by interest groups skewed to their narrative. Believers need to discern the “news” as to its neutrality and to refer to Christian publications and authors to the issues at hand. Therefore, do not be taken by trending issues, not that they are unimportant, but we should be careful not to be side-tracked by what is “hot” and trending to the neglect of the bigger picture of what ails our country. We need to know what God cares most about and the real consequences of the actions of a candidate after he is elected to office.

“...we should be careful not to be side-tracked by what is “hot” and trending to the neglect of the bigger picture of what ails our country.”

In 2009, a group of 125 ministers who were greatly used by the Lord signed the "Manhattan Declaration" (<https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/>), affirming a series of key social issues that Christians needed to pay the utmost heed to. These included the "death culture" (such as abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia), same-sex marriage, religious liberty, concern for the poor and the vulnerable, among others. At its core, these issues have to do with the sovereignty of God and His intent in creation and in the institution of marriage and the dignity of the human life. They identified these as the core values of believers. But in today's media, there is scarce mention of them. Even believers have the notion that these are peripheral issues and therefore unimportant. But from God's perspective, I believe these are the really “hot topics” for today and should be the factors seriously considered when a believer casts his or her vote.

Conclusion

In order to be a responsible Christian citizen, you must:

1. Know your identity as a citizen of your adopted country
2. Your life testimony as a Christian citizen is critically important
3. You may have a political stance, but you do not have to split the church
4. Discern the issues of the times and hold fast to core values in evaluating your candidates



May you be wise as you participate in the political process by voting according to the core values you hold as a believer.

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如何作一個有責任的基督徒公民

鄭傑安長老

在美國作為一個公民很快就聯想到投票的責任，而今年是總統大選年，作為基督徒很需要考慮到我怎樣投票呢？但在談論如何投票之前，需要明白基督徒公民的責任不單止是政治上的選擇，更基本的是要明白到神給我們每一個信徒在地上日子的使命是什麼。

1. 北美華人基督徒的三重身份矛盾 – 他們是華裔 + 美國(或加拿大..)公民 + 天國公民

“基督徒公民”首先要弄清楚自己的身份，和效忠於誰。每一個信了主的人就是天國的子民，我們放棄之前活在罪中的黑暗，進入光明的國度，稱呼這位創造天地的神為我們的王，這是我們最高的效忠身份，也是一個永恆的身份。

“...基督徒公民的責任不單止是政治上的選擇...”

另一方面我們在地上也有一個屬於國家公民的身份，很多人生於中國，但是當我們成為美國公民的時候，是宣誓承諾願意放棄對之前的國家或主權的效忠。所以令很多華裔美國人在政治立場上很多矛盾，感情上是對中國的親切，但是現實上自己是美國公民，無論美國有什麼不完善的地方，都不可以從以前國籍的利益來取決。當我們弄清楚自己地上屬世國籍的同時，我們如何能夠揉合天國子民和地上公民的身分呢？聖經要我們遵行地上國家權柄的義務，保羅在羅馬書 13: 1-7 教導信徒需要順服地上的君王，但這一切是基於順服神，神的心意超越所有地上政權的統轄權力。

2. 基督徒公民的最重要責任 - 生命見證 + 對社會的關注影響

基督徒在社會上的影響力最重要是在乎生命的見證，主耶穌在馬太福音 5:16 的教導“你們的光也應當照在人前，讓他們看見你們的好行為，又頌讚你們在天上的父。”信徒個人及集體(教會)要在言語和行為上有好的見證，用愛心和行動來關懷社會的需要，在公義問題上發聲，結果是大有能力的影響整個社區及國家(彼前 2:12)，而彰顯神的公義和慈愛也是我們基督徒參與政治一個最基礎的理念，相反來說若果基督徒，特別是領袖，失腳跌倒的時候，就羞辱了神的榮耀，也令到我們所說神的公義失去信服力，反而成了自己的審判。

3. 教會當中不同政治見解 - 如何有立場而不分裂有不同卻能夠合一

教會很多時候會有兩方面錯的極端 - “避世主義”及“解放神學”。前者是覺得教會不應該談政治，避開參與任何社會政治活動，而後者是主張教會應該投入社會改革，甚至應該主導政治來解決社會的貧窮及不公義的問題。這兩個極端都違背了神設立教會的身份和使命。

“...但作為負責任的信徒群體，只要中肯，客觀的分析，謙卑的討論是可以從互相學習中得益 ...和尋求神的心意。”

華人教會當中，很多時候都避開討論政治議題，因為恐怕不同見解會引致爭論甚至結黨分裂，但作為負責任的信徒群體，只要中肯，客觀的分析，謙卑的討論是可以從互相學習中得益，磨練大家更加明白不同的政治立場和尋求神的心意。討論基礎是要使用正確解釋的原則來應用聖經，明白經文的原意，不可隨意照著自己偏袒的政治立場來錯用聖經。

然而就算大家都中肯的基於聖經，仍然會有很多政治議題是可以容許不同取決的，包括政府如何處理難民問題，社會福利稅收問題，環保與經濟之間的取決，參加民主黨或共和黨，甚至最近的黑人被歧視這個熱門話題教會如何回應等等，很多時候是基於不同的聖經聚焦或是解釋的角度帶來不同的立場，總之所有取決是基礎於聖經教導的公義和慈愛，信徒之間是可以討論不同的應用，也要接納並非絕對一個聖經角度可以判定的，不要過份獨斷，更無需為了不同的意見而紛爭甚至互相敵視，這方面我們需要有屬靈的智慧和主內肢體之間的互相尊重。

“...更無需為了不同的意見而紛爭甚至互相敵視...”

無論在一切政治見解的討論和立場上的分歧，教會肢體一定要保守合一。聖經中耶穌吩咐他的門徒要合而為一（約翰福音 17：20-23），保羅也教導我們無論是怎麼樣不同的背景文化，在主裏面是合而為一的，因為我們是同一個主，同一個信，受同一個浸禮，事奉同一個神（以弗所書 4 章 4-6 節），沒有什麼世上的不同超越我們天國裏永恆的合一，也沒有什麼世上的政治方案或政治領袖可以帶來人類的救贖。

4. 政治上眾說紛紜 - 熱門議題及重要議題何去何從？

雖然明白了以上的一些基礎原則，但是當面對著不同的政治議題及候選人的各方面資料，實際上取決時候仍然是相當困難的。

不少人都是照著自己所註冊的黨派來投票，而大部分人則照著耳聞目睹最近的熱門話題來主導自己的立場取決，但要明白我們每天所聽到，所看到的熱門新聞是由傳媒主導，很可惜今天的傳媒並非中立，臨近選舉之前大量新聞和文字宣傳，當中很多是利益團體技巧的推銷他們的立場，所以我們不單止每天看新聞，看的時候要小心審核資料的中立性，亦需要參考不同的基督教刊物及書本，對時代議題要明白及有敏銳的觸覺，來透視不同政治議題的背景和論點。最近幾個月在美國最熱門的話題是黑人被歧視的問題，及中美關係的惡化問題，或者是候選人的花邊新聞，全國上下都好像覺得這些議題是最重要的。不是說這些熱門話題不重要，但小心被熱門話題牽制著我們對整個社會國家大局的焦點，只跟著大眾趨勢，錯失了神最關注的問題，不能正確的衡量議題輕重或候選人當選之後的實質影響。

“...小心被熱門話題牽制著 我們對整個社會國家大局的焦點...”

2009年，由125位主所重用的僕人們簽署並發佈了「曼哈頓宣言」(<https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/>)，認定了一系列基督徒最需要關注的社會嚴峻問題，包括「死亡文化」(如毀滅胎兒，助理自殺，安樂死)，同性婚姻，信仰自由，貧窮及弱勢者的關注..等，這些大都是挑戰神創造生命的主權和家庭制度的原意，也是基督徒的核心價值，可能今天的傳媒已經很少提到這些問題，令到甚至基督徒也以為這些問題不太重要，但若果從神的角度來看，我相信這些議題比今天很多熱門話題來得更加重要，也應該是我們投票選舉所考慮的取決因素。

5. 結論:

成為一位有責任的基督徒公民, 你需要:

- (1) 認清你的公民身份
- (2) 有基督徒公民的生命見證
- (3) 有立場而不分裂教會
- (4) 明辨時代議題 - 緊守基督徒核心價值來衡量輕重

願大家有智慧的作政治參與。



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