

**DAP and the PAS Islamic agenda**  
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COMMENT One of the most contentious issues that MCA president Chua Soi Lek raised at last weekend's great debate is the so-called call PAS Islamic agenda, and the alleged failure of his opponent DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng to make a public stand on the matter.

Soi Lek and his MCA have been harping on this PAS issue consistently, persistently, and tediously since early 2011, trying to score political points rhetorically to undermine the credibility of Guan Eng and the DAP, using in particular the party-owned newspaper The Star in his unrelenting determined campaign against the DAP.

But does Soi Lek truly understand what the whole matter of the Islamic agenda is all about?

PAS, like any other political party all over the world is founded on a political ideology, in its case the Islamic theocratic ideology. The *raison d'être* for the founding of PAS is the promotion, advancement and establishment of an Islamic theocratic society. Without this mandate, PAS has no legitimate purpose to continue its existence.

Hence, like the communist ideological platform, the liberal social political philosophy, the capitalism system, the authoritarian right-wing fascism, the democratic secularism of the DAP, the open laissez-faire free society concept, and even the contemporary green movement, PAS has a very social, civil, human and constitutional right to promote and advance its Islamic agenda, more so when our country is a Muslim-majority state.

The problem is not the PAS Islamic agenda per se, but the stupidity of its leaders, who are not too intelligent, let alone intellectual.

141010 pas student protest gay adam lambert concert 4 bannerDespite so many of them having purported doctorate degrees, they are going about promoting their PAS Islamic ideology the wrong way, by stressing and emphasising on petty irrelevant matters of non-substance such as protesting against concerts by foreign artistes, moral policing of personal behaviour, banning of the Valentine celebration, objection to even healthy entertainment joints like cinemas, enforcing dress code on the womenfolks, and going witch-hunting at Christian churches for so-called apostates, etc.

In the process of such silly and senseless practices, they frighten off the non-Muslims and brought about a lot of ill-will and caused a lot of anger among the non-Muslims.

Winning the hearts and minds of Muslims and non-Muslims

What the Muslim party should stress on is the fundamental goodness of Islam in the areas of truth, righteousness, justice, fairness, and human rights, to win the hearts and minds of both the Muslims and non-Muslims, not to put them off with all those nonsense propagated and perpetuated by the likes of Hasan Ali and Bangi state assemblyperson Shafie Abu Bakar.

Being a Christian, whose religion also teaches the exclusiveness of the faith, I can understand the stand of my Muslim sisters and brothers in PAS who insist on and stand firm on the exclusiveness of their religion.

From the strictly theological perspective, PAS is right. Islam, like Christianity, is certainly an exclusive religious faith, claiming in the Shahada (Declaration of Faith) that "There is no god, but Allah" (La ilah haillallah) and Muhammad is Allah's messenger (Wa Muhammad rasul u'llah). The PAS position is

certainly consistently with the fundamental doctrine of Islam.

Like Christianity, Islam also claims exclusivity to its beliefs and teachings. A Muslim's faith is firmly based on the belief that the source of his religion Islam is God and Muhammad is the only and last and final prophet and spokesperson for God on the Earth. A true Muslim holds that Islam is not just one of the many religions, but THE religion per se, the only true religion of God, the religion of the created natural order (din-al-fitrah).

The religion is called Islam because Allah had decreed it in the Quran: "Lo the religion with God is Al Islam to His will and guidance" (3:19) and "I have chosen for you as religion Al Islam" (5:3). Islam, an Arab word, means submission, total surrender and obedience, and that is the practical implications for Muslims. There are several greetings based on the word Islam, such as "Peace be upon you" (salamalek) and "Go in peace" (bissalma, masalma).

Thus, the teaching of Islam is about a life of faith and peace through submission to the one and only true God Allah. The word "Muslim" means a person who has totally surrendered his whole life to Allah.

The Islamic faith is not just purely an organised ritualistic religion, but a complete way of life, covering every area of life and thoughts, including politics.

Hence, the PAS claim to exclusivity for Islam is not without theological merit.

As I said earlier, as a Christian, I can understand the PAS position, since my faith is also an exclusive one.

No Christian will dispute or challenge my contention that Christianity also claims exclusivity to be the only way of salvation for mankind, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" and "No one comes to the Father (God) except through me (Jesus)". (John 14:6), and that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

How to relate an exclusive faith to other religions

The issue before us, therefore, is not the question of theological belief per se, but how to relate an exclusive faith to other religions in a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual society like Malaysia.

This is where many PAS leaders lack the wisdom and intelligence to understand and articulate the relationship of Muslims with people of other faiths in a plural society like Malaysia.

The word "pluralism" has been used unilaterally by almost everyone - religious leaders, politicians, journalists - without fully understanding what the concept actually means and implies.

The Oxford Dictionary defines "pluralism" as "a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, etc co-exist".

The keyword, I believe, is "co-exist". The context in which pluralism exists and practiced is the widely diverse and varied range of religious faiths in a given society, such as Malaysia which has Islam as its official religion and other faiths being part of the scenario.

The fundamental issue we face in a plural society like Malaysia is the matter of peaceful and harmonious co-existence among the people of various races and religious beliefs.

Although I believe that PAS is theologically consistent with the teaching of Islam, its leaders' stated public stand that Islam rejects religious pluralism that claims all religions to be equally good and truthful is certainly not politically correct in the context of the Malaysian plural society.

I believe PAS should look at the issue of pluralism from two broad perspectives, before making a sweeping dismissal of pluralism per se.

First, there is the pluralistic perspective that all religions are equal and “all roads lead to God”. Obviously, Islam, and, for that matter Christianity, will never endorse such a view. Islam and Christianity both teach and propagate that their respective faith is the only true religion, with all other religious systems and faiths being considered “pagan”.

Hence, it is simply impossible for a true Muslim or an honest Christian to agree to inter-faith “spiritual activities”. For a Muslim or Christian to participate, for example, in an inter-faith “worship” or prayer is to acknowledge that his faith is just one among many others, to place his God on equal standing with the deities of other religious faiths.

This is what justifies the PAS position in relationship to other faiths. And I will say that the PAS concern is valid and theologically consistent with the Islamic teaching. As a Christian, I take a similar stand that I cannot participate in an inter-religious worship service or other inter-faith spirituality activities, without dishonouring and betraying my Lord Jesus.

Common universal moral values

But, there is another perspective of pluralism which does not involve the matter of spiritual compromise, and that is the common universal moral values among all peoples of the world. And it is this common earthly destiny of all peoples that PAS should consider the vital role of Muslims to help promote peace and harmony among the people, who are the vice-regents of Allah (khalifa Allah) on Earth.

As I said before, as a Christian, I will not participate in an inter-faith worship service which will place my Lord Jesus as being among one of the gods, on equal standing with them. If I do, it will mean I am not consistent with my faith in the Lord Jesus as the only way, the truth, and the life. Such a compromise in matters of spirituality is surely not correct and honest.

My Muslim friends, too, are correct in taking a similar stand, or else their Shahada becomes a vain recitation, rendering their faith to be meaningless. Hence, PAS is theologically correct in its stand.

However, in the matters of truth, morality, justice, righteousness, equality, freedom, human, civil and constitutional rights, I will endorse and support any inter-faith “dialogue” and joint stand and actions.

This is the other perspective of pluralism that I believe PAS should seriously study and evaluate, before dismissing the whole concept of pluralism per se.

Although the people of Malaysia are adherents of various faiths and religious systems, they are united for the common purpose of nation-building, and are jointly dealing with many fundamental civil, social, constitutional and human rights issues relating their role as citizens. Hence, the need to come together to talk and compromise.

There is an urgent need for inter-faith dialogues on matters such as the freedom to worship, teach and propagate each other’s religion, the matter of land for places of worship and burial, the right to use the national language Bahasa Malaysia without restriction in worship and religious education, the legal disputes over the conversion of individuals, particularly children, and the vital matter of co-existence.

PAS and all the responsible Muslim leaders should be willing to participate in such inter-faith dialogues as the common-interest issues need not involve doctrinal compromise or theological dispute.

I hope all parties concerned with the dispute over pluralism will understand and accept that the fundamental heart of the matter is the peaceful and harmonious co-existence of all persons or all faiths, with each practising his faith with full sensitivity and due respect to people of other faiths.

What we want is not a theological war, but a channel for inter-faith dialogues and a medium for communication on issues of universal common interests.

That, I believe, is what Lim Guan Eng and the DAP stand for.

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