

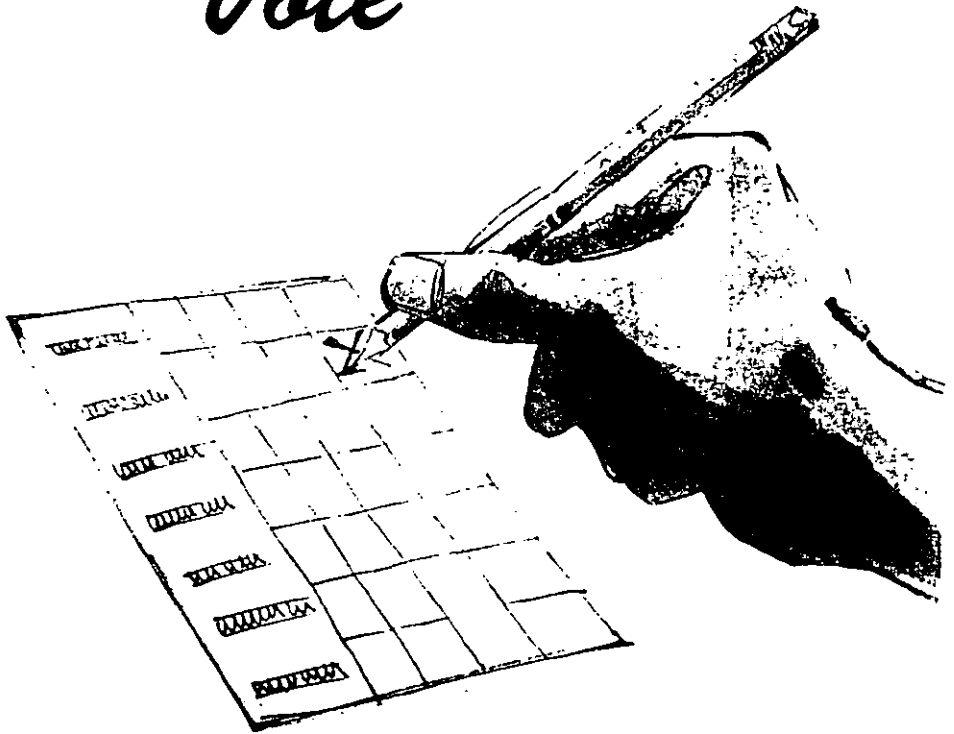
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Prepare your People to Vote



Voter Education on a Christian Basis



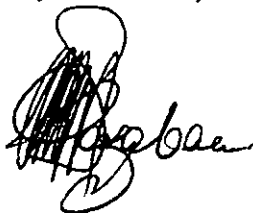
An EFSA Publication

Prepare Your People to Vote

Voter Education on a Christian Basis

A Letter to Pastors and Christian Leaders

Soon, for the first time in South Africa, everyone will have the opportunity to vote into power the government of our nation. You are a Christian leader, and your people will look to you for guidance. They will ask questions about Democracy, the Constitution, and how to vote. Member-churches have asked the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa to prepare this booklet to help you to answer such questions. Of course, many others are involved in Voter Education. We will try to give what most cannot: Voter Education with a Christian basis. Use it wherever you can to influence the future of South Africa.



Ndaba Mazabane EFSA Chairman; Hugh Wetmore General Secretary

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**Further copies of this booklet may be ordered from EFSA
at the above address, at 50c each — free on request**

Prepare Your People to Vote

1. WHAT IS "DEMOCRACY"?

It is "Government of the people by the people for the people". In the past, all the people in South Africa have been ruled by a small section of the population. The whites have elected the government from among themselves. So there has been no Democracy. We are planning and praying for a truly Democratic government, where all the people will have an equal vote to choose who will rule our country.

2. WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT DO WE FIND IN THE BIBLE?

Mostly *kings*, who were autocratic rulers. Democracy in Government is not taught or modelled in the Bible. Israel was first ruled by God through Moses and other prophets, like Samuel. But then the people of Israel saw that all the other nations had Kings to rule over them. So Israel demanded a King. But most of the Kings pleased themselves, not the people. So they became oppressors. That is a common problem when individuals or groups rule over the masses: they use their power to look after themselves, and not the people!

3. WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL REASONS FAVOURING DEMOCRACY?

a. Humankind was created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26,27). Like God, but unlike animals, people are able to make *choices* concerning their future. When God gave Adam this ability to choose, he tested him with the command not to eat the fruit of a specified tree. God told him what would happen if he disobeyed, and then left the choice to him. He could make a wise choice, or a foolish choice. He had to live with the result of his choice (Genesis 2:17). Likewise, *when people vote, they make a choice regarding their future. They can make a wise choice, or a foolish choice. They must live with the result of their choice.*

b. God gave Adam and Eve – and the whole of humankind – authority to rule over His creation (Genesis 1:26,28). This includes mutual rule over fellow humanbeings. *The modern concept of "democracy" – rule by the people over the people – is fully compatible with this Biblical principle.*

c. The "image of God" is passed on from generation to generation, to all people living on earth (Genesis 9:6). This means that every person is equal before God in value and dignity. *That is why it is right that every person should have an equal vote. Because the beggar is equal in value to the rich man, his vote in a democratic election should have equal value to that of the rich man.*

d. Adam and Eve made the wrong choice. They chose to disobey God, and fell into sin (Genesis 3:1-10). Their entire offspring has inherited sin (Romans 5:12). That is why there is so much evil in the world. Evil spoils everything, including social relationships and politics. The essence of Sin is Selfishness (Isaiah 53:6a). That is why most autocratic dictators in human history have oppressed the masses. They had too much power, and they used it to benefit themselves and not to benefit the people. *It is wise to find a way of governing the nation that will not allow a few people to have a lot of power. That is why Democracy is a better system of Government, because it spreads power among the people and prevents too much power accumulating in the hands of a few people. If the elected government does not rule well, then a new government can be chosen in the next election.*

4. ARE NOT EDUCATED PEOPLE MORE QUALIFIED FOR THE VOTE THAN UNEDUCATED PEOPLE?

Just as all people are born equal in value and dignity because all are made in the image of God, so also all people are born equal in their sinfulness. They are likely to use their positions of power to oppress others. The educated and the uneducated both suffer from sin and selfishness (Psalm 14, Romans 3:9-19,23). *As a whole, Whites have had better education than Blacks, yet this has not prevented them ruling selfishly. They voted for unjust apartheid to increase their privileges at the expense of the other races. In a true Democracy everyone has an equal vote.*

This will not stop selfishness, but it will help to ensure that the interests of most people are served.

5. HOW DOES A DEMOCRACY WORK?

The main ingredients of a good Democracy are:

a. A Constitution

A Constitution is a written document containing the rules for governing the nation. Many of the items listed below are included in the Constitution. A Government cannot do what it likes. It must follow the rules. (see b. below)

b. The Rule of Law

When there is no Constitution, or if the Government ceases to rule by the Constitution (as often happens under a State of Emergency) the Government "rules by decree". This means that the Government can make any law it likes, imprison anyone it doesn't like, confiscate property, kill anyone without being held responsible. The Government is above the Law. This is obviously evil.

God wants a Government to be *under* the Law. I Samuel 10:25 teaches that the law is permanent, that the king is *under* the law and that God is watching to see that the king obeys the law. This is called "the Rule of Law."

c. A Bill of Rights

This is a very important document which lays down what every individual is entitled to. It is a serious crime to take away any of these rights from a person. These Rights should include:

- * The Right to Life
- * The Right to Legal Protection
- * The Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion
- * The Right to Responsible Freedom of Speech
- * The Right of Adult Citizens to Vote
- * The Right to No Discrimination on basis of Race, Sex or Religion
- * The Right to Basic Education (including Human Rights Education)
- * The Right to Marry and have a Family

The fact that the Government must uphold these Rights does *not* give the Government the right to *control* these Rights. For example, the Government must uphold the Right to Legal Protection, but the Judiciary must be independent from the Government. The Government must uphold the Right to Basic Education, but this does not mean it must *control* the education.

There are other clauses often included in a Bill of Rights, sometimes called "Second Generation Rights". A better term would be "Aspirations". These would include:

- * Free Health Care
- * Homes for All
- * Jobs for All
- * A Healthy Environment

Everyone agrees that these are good and desirable. But no-one can force a Government to provide these, simply because they cost so much money that no Government could afford them.

We can, and must, expect the Government to do all it can to *enable* these Aspirations. This is the way God Himself governs the universe: He *enables* people to have food, clothing and a healthy environment by giving them the strength to work for these things. So earthly governments should open the way for people to work to achieve these Aspirations, by removing barriers and giving incentives.

Human Rights and Aspirations are not only the responsibility of Government. Everyone must respect and encourage these Rights in one's neighbourhood.

d. Division of Power in the Three Sections of Government: Making Laws, Administering Laws and Maintaining Justice.

In a true Democracy, these three Powers of Government are identified and kept separate: An elected Parliament makes the Laws of the land. The Civil Service administers these laws – putting them into effect in daily life. The Judiciary makes sure that Justice is maintained in the nation. It is especially important that the Judiciary holds Parliament and the Administrative civil service responsible to the Constitution and its Bill of Rights.

e. Public Accountability.

Political leaders must take responsibility for what they say or do. The Government is responsible for any bad laws and corrupt administration. It must report regularly to the people, be open to enquiry by the Press, and dismiss leaders and officials found guilty of abusing their power.

f. Public audits of State accounts.

Politicians are tempted to use their power to make themselves rich. Public audits will help to prevent this happening. Those who pay the taxes to enable to government to rule must be satisfied that their money is properly used according to regulations and budgets, and that there is no corruption.

g. Regular Elections.

Every four or five years there should be another Election. The people must say whether they want the government to continue in power, or whether they want to choose a new government. This is healthy for the nation, because the Government knows that it must rule for the benefit of the people, and not selfishly. If the people do not like the Government, it will lose the election.

6. HOW DOES AN ELECTION WORK?

Being able to vote is a democratic right. All citizens 18 years or over are entitled to choose their leaders and their government. *Every voter must have an ID book. If you do not have one, find out where your local ID Office is, and apply for one immediately.* Without an ID, you cannot vote. *Get it now!*

a. Each Political Party tells the people how it will rule the country *if* it is elected to be the Government. Each Party tries to persuade the people that it will provide the best government. Parties do this by means of printed publicity, through newspaper and radio/TV advertising and in Rallies.

b. You should study all the information available, to come to the best decision as to which is, in your opinion, the best Party, and the best candidates.

c. On Election Day, you should go to a Voting Station and vote for the Party of your choice.

d. All votes are secret — no-one knows who voted for which Party. Don't be afraid to vote the Party you really want to be the Government. Your vote is absolutely secret.

e. When the voting is over, the votes are counted in front of representatives of each Party, to make sure the result is true.

f. The Party with the highest number of votes forms the Government of the nation. The other Parties form the Opposition.

g. After a number of years, as laid down in the Constitution, there is another Election. Everyone has the opportunity to choose the Government that will rule them for the next period of time.

h. If the government has not pleased the people, they will choose another Party to form the government. If it has pleased the people, then they are likely to vote for that Party again.

7. HOW CAN WE MAKE SURE THAT THE ELECTION IS FREE AND FAIR?

a. The whole Election process is controlled by an Independent Electoral Commission which will ensure everyone can vote freely, and that no Party gets unfair advantage.

b. Every person's vote is absolutely secret: no-one knows who you voted for, unless you tell them.

c. No-one can be forced to vote for any Party. You need not vote for a specific Party because you are afraid of what will happen to you if you do not vote that way.

d. No-one will be allowed to vote twice. A mark is placed on the hand of every person who votes, and anyone with that mark will not be allowed to vote a second time.

e. Independent Monitors from inside and outside South Africa will watch to see that no intimidation or corruption takes place.

f. These Independent Monitors, as well as Representatives of the Parties, will together watch to see that the votes are properly counted afterwards.

If you experience any intimidation, or see any deceitful practices taking place, you should report it to the Independent Electoral Commission immediately, at its office nearest to you. A free and fair election depends on the positive co-operation of every citizen. It depends on you!

8. HOW DOES THE SYSTEM OF "PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION" WORK?

Every person votes for the *Party* he or she wants to become the Government. If the winning Party wins 60% of the votes, it appoints its candidates to 60% of the total number of seats in Parliament. Because it has the majority, it forms the Government. If another Party wins 20%, it has 20% of the seats in Parliament, and so on. A Party's power is proportionate to the number of people voting for it. This is a very fair way of allocating seats in Parliament.

9. WHICH PARTY SHOULD WE VOTE FOR?

If there was one Party that was totally good, and all the others were totally bad, then it would be easy to decide who to vote for! But the real world is not like that. All Parties have some good, and some bad in them. They include some wise policies, and some that are not wise. Even if a Party was to call itself a "Christian" Party, this would not mean that it was a perfectly good Party. We remember with sadness that our previous governments have regarded themselves as "Christian", but have imposed unjust apartheid policies that have brought the judgement of God on our nation.

Christians, like other people, are free to join parties, and work for parties, which they support. It is good when Christians stand for political office. The country needs Christians in government and positions of influence.

But the Church of Jesus Christ cannot align itself with any earthly political Party. It stands above Party- politics. Joshua asked the man with a drawn sword: "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither" he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come!" Then Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence, and asked him "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" (Joshua 5:13,14).

We must not expect God to align Himself with us, and our group. We must be His humble servants, and align ourselves with God! Which brings us to the all-important question:

10. IN CONSIDERING MY VOTE, HOW DO I ALIGN MYSELF WITH GOD?

God has clearly revealed Himself — in Scripture, and supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ. God combines perfect Holiness and perfect Love. Jeremiah 9:23,24 sums it up in practical terms:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

As each Party explains its policies, and the way it will govern, the laws it will make, ask yourself: Is it proud? Does it prioritise wisdom, military strength and power? Does it seek riches for itself? God does not want such governments.

Then ask more positive questions:

* Are this Party's policies **KIND**, especially to the poor and under-privileged? God wants the government to be His servant to do you good (Romans 13:1,4).

* Are they **JUST**, treating all people impartially without favouritism? (Leviticus 19:5). Does the Party respect the Rule of Law? (1 Samuel 10:25)

* Are the policies **RIGHTEOUS**, upholding the difference between what is morally right and wrong? Will good people live in peace, and only evil people fear the police? (Romans 13:3)

Evaluate each Party not only on what it says, but on what it has done in the past. Try to find out how much Kindness, Justice and Righteousness there is.

We live in a sinful world, and no Party will fully meet God's standards. Sometimes you will be forced to vote for the lesser of two evils. Vote for the one that you think comes closest to what God wants. And do not be surprised if your Christian friend, using the same criteria, favours another Party! That's life — and that is democracy.

11. HOW WILL THE PARTIES TRY TO INFLUENCE MY VOTE?

As a voter you are very important in the eyes of political parties and politicians. Because each party wants to win the election, it will use many means to influence you to vote for it. Many of these methods are quite acceptable: election manifestos, rallies, advertisements, posters,

house-meetings, door-to-door visits, radio and TV speeches and interviews. Listen, learn, ask questions and make up your mind on the basis of what you believe is right.

Beware of two dangerous influences:

a. Promises that cannot be fulfilled. It is easy to make wonderful promises in an Election Manifesto. Some politicians will promise people everything they want, in order to gain more votes. Like false prophets, they tell people what they want to hear, not the truth. But in the real world after the election, they find they cannot keep those promises. Because the State will never have enough money to give people everything they want!

So do not be deceived by election promises. Find out all you can. Examine their promises and ask: Can a government really provide all this Party promises? Discuss these things with people at work, at church and in the community. Listen to the other Parties. Make your decision after examining the facts.

b. Intimidation. Some people will frighten you to vote for their Party. They may threaten to harm you or your family if you do not vote their way. They will tell you that you must vote for them, because you live in an area that is controlled by them. Your boss may tell you that you will lose your job if you don't vote the way he wants you to vote.

But remember: *your vote is secret*. No-one will know who you voted for, unless you tell them. Even if it looks like you are voting for their party, you can really vote for another party — the one you really want to govern the country. Be honest and courageous (1 Peter 3:14). If everyone votes for a Party because they fear they will be victimised if they don't, then we will get a Government that rules by Fear! There will be no freedom. So, if any Party tries to frighten you with threats, then *that* is a good reason for *not* voting for that Party!

12. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PARTY I VOTE FOR DOES NOT WIN THE ELECTION?

The Party that wins the most seats becomes the Government. But the other Parties still have a role to play. Either in a Government of National Unity, or as the Opposition, they debate the proposed laws with the governing Party and so help to improve them. It is very good to have different points of view debated in Parliament. Otherwise the Government could become careless in its rule. So do not think your vote was a waste of time if your Party does not win the Election. Rather, realise that your vote is helping to put the policies you want into the thinking of the Government.

Sometimes people get very angry when their Party loses the Election, and they refuse to accept the result. This happened recently in Angola and Nigeria, and it caused much trouble. Everyone should decide *before* the Election that they will accept the result of the Election – whatever the result is – provided the Independent Electoral Commission has declared the Election to have been Free and Fair. Otherwise there could be a terrible civil war.

13. HOW SHOULD WE TREAT PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT POLITICAL VIEWS?

Everyone should learn *political tolerance*. This means that we let others choose the Party *they* want to support. And we expect them to let us choose the Party *we* want to support. Yes, we can discuss our differences, and argue for our point of view, and try to persuade others to support our Party. *But we must never try to persuade people by threats or by force. This political intolerance has led to devastating violence and suffering in our country. It must stop. We must have peace. We must be tolerant.*

14. WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP THE ELECTION?

- a. Promote political tolerance and peace. In this nation of hatred, intolerance and violence, Jesus calls us to be peace-makers (Matthew 5:9).
- b. Explain to others all you have learned about Democracy and the Election, so that everyone is well-informed, and well-prepared to vote. *Plan a Seminar in your church, using this booklet and other helpful materials* – see list on back cover.
- c. Study the things God wants in our Government (see item 10. above), and persuade others to work for Kindness, Justice and Right moral standards. Interact with politicians, and tell them what God wants. Use every opportunity to lobby a Christian viewpoint at every level of government and society.
- d. Urge everyone to vote in the election. Anyone who does not vote is allowing other people to decide the kind of government that will rule over him or her. That is stupid! Every vote counts. Everyone should take responsibility for his or her own future.
- e. Fight corruption and intimidation. Make sure of your facts, then have courage to report those who are guilty (Ephesians 5:11). All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing!
- f. Volunteer to help with the election, as a voting station official or as an independent election monitor. We need people with integrity to ensure the

election is free and fair. Genuine Christians who know God will share His sense of Justice, and so should be well-qualified to help here.

g. Pray! Paul wrote to a young minister: "I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4). God is sovereign over the affairs of humankind, and we must work with Him in earnest prayer for a good government that will prioritise Kindness, Justice and Righteous moral standards. This will yield peace, and give freedom for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Suggestion to Preachers and Evangelists

You may wish to use the Election process to illustrate the Gospel invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ – an "election" of eternal importance! Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than any politician. All other religions offer false hope. God's promises are realistic and true. Voting for Jesus brings people into the Kingdom of God. People must make only one cross on the ballot paper: choosing one means rejecting others. So when we choose Jesus, we turn our backs on every other hope of salvation.

"Fear the Lord and serve Him with faithfulness. Throw away the gods of your forefathers. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14,15) "Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:11,12)

Use such illustrations with sensitivity. Our evangelism must not become like cheap political electioneering. Remember to balance human responsibility in "choosing" Jesus with the sovereign grace of Jesus in "choosing" us (John 15:16). So with spiritual insight we can take the topical theme of the Election, give practical help to ensure its success, *as well as urging people to choose eternal hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords!*

The Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa
P/Bag X1 Mayor's Walk 3208 Phone/Fax 0331 441080

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National Initiative for Reconciliation, PO Box 3053, Pretoria 0001
Telephone: 012 3202230/1 Fax: 012 3229411

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Telephone: 021 9592151 Fax: 021 9592317
(Supplies Manual for Trainers in Voter Education,
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Concerned Evangelicals PO Box 1751 Johannesburg 2000
Telephone 011 3318609 Fax: 3316783

Practical Ministries, PO Box 1337, Port Shepstone 4240
Telephone: 0391 826203/4 Fax: 0391 22895

Institute for a Democratic Alternative for S.A., 39 Honey St, Berea 2198
Telephone: 011 4843694 Fax: 011 4842610
(Supplies Manual to train people how to vote, with posters and leaflets)

Institute for a Multi-Party Democracy PO Box 2811, Durban 4000
Telephone: 031 3043863 Fax: 031 3040556

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