

DOES WASHINGTON KNOW THE WEST'S RECIPE FOR FREEDOM?

Before the largest crowd yet, on Tuesday night, October 23, Vishal Mangalwadi set forth yet another argument in his 10-part series "Must the Sun Set on the West?" This time he asked whether the US leadership that invaded Iraq had any idea what made Western democracy such a success. Vigorously and with many illustrations, Mangalwadi, a Fellow of the MacLaurin Institute, insisted that the answer must be "No."

The problem, he said, is that for the past century, there have been two approaches to understanding the foundations of Western democracy. The first, generated in the 1920s and 1930s under the rubric of the Great Books and Great Ideas series, was that the roots of Western democracy were to be found in ancient Greece. In fact, said Mangalwadi, the Greeks turned against democracy. For example, Plato condemned democracy because it was the reason his mentor, Socrates, was killed. His solution was leadership by philosopher-kings.

The second approach emerged in the fateful 60s, when democracy was attacked as a Western construct responsible for colonialism and racism. Deconstructionists have emerged to insist that all language about democracy is really a function of culture and is, in turn, a language game played by powerful Western interests intent on subverting other cultures. Consequently, no one today cares to explore the foundations of Western democracy.

Freedom is, in fact, a uniquely biblical idea, said Mangalwadi. The freedom narrative begins with Israel's exodus from Egypt, with the 10 commandments offered by God as the legal structure for maintaining that freedom. The result of this biblical freedom narrative is that law becomes binding on rulers. Law's success, however, is critically dependent upon the idea that law comes from a transcendent source.

Democracy, or rule by the people, was thus understood less as majority rule, but, rather, as the people's rule under the greater law of God. Democracy began to emerge in the West in the 1500s under the Protestant French Huguenots. Reformation scholars such as Beza and Mornay wrote highly significant texts that grounded democratic ideas in the biblical worldview. Even the office of the "presidency" emerged from this body of work. Over time, Reformation churches came to be known as the "nursery of democracy."

Thus, Vice President Al Gore, in his 2000 concession speech to newly elected US President George W. Bush, was entirely accurate when he asserted that the US has a government "not under men, but under God and law." Gore had won a majority of the votes cast for president, but had lost in the electoral college. Mangalwadi showed that this notion, as it was embodied in the American constitutional democracy, came from the Presbyterian church's rule by eldership. That biblical idea, in turn, was translated by America's founders into the electoral college.

Mangalwadi closed his lecture by warning that America not only has no idea where lay its democratic foundations, but that the current postmodern deconstructionist mindset

seriously risks opening the US to fascism. This is so, he said, because culture and collective has replaced the biblical notion of the value of the individual, power has replaced truth as the criterion for ethics, and, in the absence of confidence in reason (itself a product of biblical thought), rhetoric and propaganda have become the means to cultural and political authority.

The next lecture in the series is set for 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 30, when Mangalwadi will explore the economic consequences for a Western world shorn of its biblically-grounded moral heritage.