
PRIORITIES TO BE PROMOTED



The federal elections are a special time to reflect on the state of our life as a nation, on the quality of our community experience, and on the solidarity we are developing with one another. I hope that the participation of all Christians will not be limiting to the simple act of voting but that it will also take the form of active participation in the different campaign debates. The electoral period is an outstanding opportunity to say what kind of society we want to have. But how can we make sense of it all, with all the cross-messages we are getting? According what criteria should we support one party rather than another? What questions must we ask before voting for a candidate?

DISCHARGING ONE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

I want to share with you the reflections made by the Bishops' Commission for Social Affairs, of which I am chairman. They are offered to you in the hope that they will help in enlightening our social conscience and asserting the our deepest values. The Bishops' Commission members are not telling us whom to vote for, although they state that all are morally bound to exercise their democratic right and following the election, to take part in the building up of the kingdom of God by a concrete deliberate commitment to society. They draw attention to three important aspects of the Church's teaching: respect for the human person, a preferential option for the poor, and the carrying out of the common good.

RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN PERSON

Created in the image of God, the human person must enjoy the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death. Respect of the human person « *requires that everyone have the courage to enter into a new lifestyle which adopts a just scale of values at the personal, family, social, and international levels: primacy of being over having, of the person over things. This renewed way of life also supposes going from indifference to interest in others, and from rejection to welcome.* » What do the platforms of the different political parties have to say regarding the right of the unborn, euthanasia, medically assisted suicide and palliative care, control of firearms, and capital punishment? Do they propose measures to help parents balance their family and professional responsibilities at a time when the work environment becomes all the more demanding?

A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

To whomever lives the Christian life, concern for the poor is not only a political choice but also a Gospel requirement. Pope John Paul II stated once again in April that the value of a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. In this area, what do the political parties propose to cover the human cost of strategic and financial strategies that condemn one Canadian in six to a life of poverty? Do they opt for policies aimed at decreasing the number of those receiving social assistance, or to policies aimed at reducing poverty? Do they suggest that the war against the deficit - which is being won, according to observers - not be waged to the detriment of the most vulnerable sector of our society, for example, the unemployed, women, children, the handicapped? And how do the party programmes talk about the poverty stricken? Do they contribute in perpetuating negative stereotypes and in stigmatising these people?

CARRYING OUT OF THE COMMON GOOD

We are considering the common good by recognising the dignity of all persons and working for the welfare of the poor; we also do this through genuine acts of solidarity. The common good is in a way a sum of the social conditions which permit and promote the development and progress of people. As those responsible for its implementation, the powers that be must carry out this common good to the advantage of all their citizens. How do the parties in question measure up? Do they present policies for creating stable and well-paying jobs linked to a strategy of integrated social and economic development? What are their proposals regarding protection of the environment, the preservation of non-renewable resources, the ongoing development of the human person, here and abroad, and the better use of the land? What do the party platforms have to say regarding local and regional responsibility for the socio-economic, cultural, and political development of the population, as well as respecting the establishment of communication and cooperating between these communities? At the heart of our global village, do they encourage our contribution to international development and the establishment of fair commercial agreements?

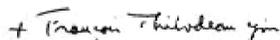
A FEW GOLDEN RULES

In times of political campaigning, the Church's social teaching can help our discernment. Economics and politics are there for the person, and not vice versa. All economic and political activities must be founded on ethical principles. Economic choices and legislation must be judged according to how life, human dignity, and families are protected and championed. An evaluation of the economic and political situation should first be concerned with how the poor and the vulnerable are treated. Everyone has a inherent right to life and to the goods therefrom: food, clothing, housing, education, health care, financial security. Everyone has a right to a well-paid job, decent wages, social benefits, decent work conditions, and free association with one's peers. To the rights pertaining to all correspond the special responsibility of seeing to the needs of one's family and to contribute to the development of society. Christian Churches in Canada have addressed in one voice what they consider priorities. It would be good for you to become acquainted with their positions and to discuss them among yourselves.

TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000

The 1997 elections are special: We shall be electing those who will lead us into the twenty-first century. During this period of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, and inspired by what Holy Scripture says about jubilees, I offer you the following questions: What do the political parties propose, to ensure that everyone will have a revenue sufficient to look after their needs? What do they propose, to alleviate the heavy financial burden that poorer countries cannot reimburse? Are the political parties committed to follow up on the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, and especially to establish an independent commission to settle the territorial claims of the native people? What initiatives are they suggesting, to end child exploitation and poverty? What do the political party programmes have, regarding women's rights both at home and in the workplace?

Let us join with all those of good will who are taking a stand for human dignity, for the poor, and for the common good. Let us pursue together our commitment to social justice: It shall be our way of preparing for the Jubilee Year 2000.



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (172) (07 May 1997)