
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUM 2001



I would like to express, here, the deep conviction of the New Brunswick Bishops - Archbishop Ernest Léger of Moncton, and Bishops André Richard, C.S.C., of Bathurst, Faber MacDonald of Saint John, and myself - on the eve of the referendum on VLTs (video lottery terminals); I would appreciate that our viewpoint be communicated to those of our diocese, in a spirit of compassion for all those who are victims of these lotteries. Besides this topic, I would like to talk about the importance of municipal elections.

VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINALS

It is not always easy to find and apply correctives to problematic social situations. Nevertheless there are ethical principles available to help us better situate ourselves both individually and collectively, and to establish measures to counter immoral consequences. Thus, regarding problems brought about by video lottery terminals (VLTs), the following principles should be kept in mind:

1. Every government has the obligation of legislating for the common good.
2. Every government has a fundamental duty to promote a sense of responsibility among its citizens.
3. A worthy cause does not justify the use of faulty or doubtful means.
4. A legalised and regulated activity does not make it moral for all that.
5. No one has a right to get rich at the expense of others.

We believe that it is in the interest of the citizens of our Province that VLTs be made illegal, once and for all. We fervently hope that the May 14 Referendum on video lottery terminals will put an end to this activity in New Brunswick.

While the increased revenue generated by these machines helps the government maintain important social services and programmes, and while we can claim that with the disappearance of VLTs the deficit incurred will have to be countered with increased taxation, we must ask ourselves what are the real human and social costs of maintaining the actual situation. In the present debate it is important for these aspects of the problem to be mentioned to the whole population: the constant use of VLTs gives rise to a long train of personal, family, and social problems. Lotteries do not produce as many winners as we imagine; there are a lot more who lose all their money at the game than there are winners. For every winner there are thousands and millions of losers. If it is already evil to enrich oneself at the expense of another, it is even more scandalous to do so when the government itself and the VLT owners who profit from such an activity. The government may believe or make others believe that it has found a soft way of financing, but it must be said that it also incurs additional expenses caused by gambling dependency, expenses which will progressively rise. Besides, who can put a price on even one person's life, and what is the cost to family and society of one compulsive gambler?

There is absolutely no need of these safety valves – costly in human terms – for the continued well-being of our people. What is needed are opportunities for more work, more creative work, for the people to make a decent and honest living and contribute in this way in creating a more just and caring society.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Municipal elections are a major activity in town and village's civic life. The quality of an election is determined by the democratic quality: it expresses or does not express a concern for the common good of all. Municipal elections give an opportunity to step back and evaluate the performance of elected officials and the implication of the citizens in the life of the community. We can still hear the words spoken many years ago: "Ask not what your country (your town, your village) can do for you, but what you can do for your country (town, village)." Elections are also an occasion for presenting a "vision" of forthcoming years: projects for the improvement of community services, and sharing of costs and responsibilities.

I for one want to congratulate the candidates offering for different positions in the municipality and assure them of my prayers. I have great respect for them and for their present and future commitment. I have already mentioned it a number of times but it bears repeating again: political commitment can be a beautiful way of working for greater justice and charity. The Christian working in his or her milieu can do so for philanthropic reasons, but also make it a commitment of faith. Because of his or her beliefs, the Christian can bring to the political arena a particular vision of the world to be built and respect for each and every citizen, because in them is seen the image of Christ the servant of humankind. Charity then becomes a service to culture, politics, economy, and the family, so that the fundamental principles on which depends the fate of human beings and the future of civilisation everywhere will be respected.

« The Christian message does not turn away people from the task of building up the world nor excuse them from ensuring the welfare of their brothers and sisters; rather, Christians are more closely bound together by the duty of working towards these ends. » (Vatican Council II)

I wish success to the electoral campaign; may it be for us an opportunity to look anew at our community and incite us to commit ourselves to the welfare of the whole population. Let us make ours the prayer of St. Thomas More (1478-1535), who was Chancellor of England under King Henry VIII, and who has been proclaimed the patron of committed people and of politicians: «Make me, O Lord, good, humble, and modest, calm and peaceful, charitable and kind, loving and compassionate. May my every action, my every word and every thought be filled with your holy and blessed Spirit.»

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