



From A Bishop's Journal (662)

“Leaven” in the Political Life

As we are but a few days from the September 18 election day, I would like to reflect with you on a parable of Jesus about the Kingdom of heaven: “The reign of God is like yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of dough began to rise” (Mt. 13:33). I would say that we have, here, the very basis of the Church's entire social teaching, that Christ's disciples be, wherever they work, “leaven” as Jesus himself was, and this, whether in the cultural, educational, economical, social or political fields.

Not A Big “Yeast”

I don't know whether you have ever seen grains of yeast. They are not big, they don't appear impressive. Yet, the dough, the cakes and breads are completely transformed at its contact. We are far from those fundamentalists who want to impose a sectarian agenda. Far, also, from revolutionary ideologies. Still, throughout the world and over the centuries, the presence of Christians in a given area transformed ways of thinking and living. The prodigious power of Christ's Beatitudes or of even one of his commandments upset our thinking and acting. Through love of God and neighbour, Christians can become the world's greatest revolutionaries. We only have to think of Paul's testimony on behalf of the slave Onesimus who would have been condemned to death as a runaway, but Paul's love for him revolutionised the entire penal system.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

After receiving, in July, 2005, a copy of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, I received in May this year the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. It is a quite impressive, over 480-page summary published at the request of Pope John Paul II by the Pontifical Council “Justice and Peace,” a text which the Canadian Bishops' Conference has edited for our people. We must say that since 1891, date of the publication of the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Vatican publications on the subject have not been lacking. We only need to remember the great texts of John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* and *Mater et Magistra*, those of Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* on the development of peoples, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on evangelisation, along with his messages for the World Day of Peace, and the many writings of John Paul II on labour, the family, the centennial of *Rerum Novarum*, on women, the laity, the mission of the Redeemer, the Gospel of life, the new millennium, without forgetting his messages for the World Day of Peace, and his many appeals for human rights. In all of this, however, two texts remain exceptional: *The Church in the Modern World*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which are expressions of the main elements of the Church's social teaching. To my knowledge, no other Church has published such a doctrine and such a teaching. This is the leaven in the dough which has produced so much.

Being Leaven in Political Life...

“The Church has great consideration and esteem for the activity of those who dedicate themselves to public office for the service of all.” This, it seems to me, summarises the whole teaching of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, that presents the mission of the Church on political life in today’s world.. Besides, the very first words on Vatican Council II on the subject make it very clear: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” Their community, in fact, is composed of men and women gathered together in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit on their journey to the Father’s Kingdom; they carry the message of salvation offered to all. The community of Christians can be truly recognised and is in full solidarity with humankind and its history.

Mass for the Lay People

The liturgical calendar recently had a mass for lay people. It seems to me that the prayers, there, reiterate Christ’s great comparison: “You wanted, Lord, that the power of the Gospel work in the world like leaven in the dough: Watch over all those who respond to their Christian vocation in the midst of the world and its concerns. May they always seek the Spirit of Christ, so that in carrying out their human tasks, they work for the coming of the Kingdom.” And this one: “God who wanted to save all things through the sacrifice of Christ, make this offering bear fruit in us. Give your faithful the strength to carry out their apostolic vocation. May they witness to the Gospel spirit in the world where they live, and help in this way in the sanctification of all.” And this third one: “Lord, we count on the riches of your grace for all those who want to be Christians in the world. May this Eucharist strengthen their faith to witness to the Gospel, and to ensure the presence of your Church wherever they work.” In the Liturgy of the Hours, there are similar prayers for all Christians active in the world.

A Demanding Mission

In St. Matthew’s Gospel, this is what we read about the mission Jesus gave his disciples: “What I am doing is sending you out like sheep among wolves” (Mt. 10:16). A directive of “cleverness” and “innocence” is not easy to adopt, especially in certain political, social, and economic areas, and even in religious ones. It is then that we must remember what we have become through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We must then have greater love for God and neighbour. We have been given “special power” to witness to Christ.

A Few Guidelines

The bottom line is really that every Christian love God with all his heart, with his whole soul, and with all his strength, and love his neighbour as himself. Whatever the road taken, this guideline is basic to every life dedicated to Christ and to one’s neighbour. Each one can find adaptations to this, for one’s daily life. In continuity and renewal, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* offers a few vital guidelines and reminds us of certain inalienable human rights, in the light of and moved by the Gospel, after having shown us that every person is in the image of God.

A Few Reminders

I only want to recall certain principles: those of the common good, the responsibility of all in the common good, the duties of the political community, the universal distribution of earthly goods and private property, a preferential option for the poor, the principle of subsidiarity, participation and democracy, the principle of solidarity, the common growth of humankind, the relationship between the values of truth, freedom,

justice and charity, the family, marriage, serenity, peace, work, ethics, etc. These are some of the aspects which the social doctrine discusses at length. It would be good for us to have the possibility of sessions on these social issues, with those who labour in the fields of education, economics, politics, and pastoral ministry. This would be a wonderful challenge to us!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

09-13-06