

Elections 2010: What Do We Desire?

On the eve of the midterm elections, our nation faces grave issues that touch the lives of all Americans: a deep and extended recession, stubbornly high unemployment, a crisis in health care, and a ten-year war in Afghanistan. We are pained because the possibility for dialogue in our political culture seems to be evaporating. With this flyer, we hope to offer a contribution to all men and women of good will before the November vote.

We discern the origins of the polarization and hostility in our political culture and the origins of the most pressing problems our nation faces as the forgetfulness or, perhaps, the undervaluing of our common human desire.

We know no other reason for tirelessly making the effort to dialogue with others, if not to gain a better understanding of truth. Without a dogged dedication to discovering what is real, communication ends, leaving only the will to power in order to impose one's own ideology. Ideologies, in turn, become evermore rigid and restrictive. We also recognize that the struggle to realize justice can frustrate and tempt us to disillusionment. Yet, if we do not take up that struggle, what is left but surrender to the powerful? We understand that there can be no better relationship among people than love. And clearly love costs sacrifice for the other's true good. But, if we surrender to the fear of sacrifice, we become trapped in ourselves, alone, numb to the needs, desires, and sufferings of others. Moreover, the social structures we build tend to alienate and manipulate others. Above all, we recognize the risk in constantly betting on human freedom and its ability to seek what is good, beautiful, and true. Yet, without betting on human freedom, we entrust ourselves to policies, procedures, rules, and regulations, pretending that—in the words of T. S. Eliot—we can dream up a "system so perfect, no one will have to be good."

We recognize these primal human yearnings as the voice of the mystery of God in each of us, ever calling us forward, beyond ourselves toward a richer human existence, capable of love for the truth and others. Yet, even without such certainty, we are sure that there is no more attractive adventure than a life and a society that seek the answer to these yearnings.

To live such an adventure is the goal of any truly human education, and particularly a Catholic one. ***For this reason, the first criterion that guides our assessment of any political party, candidate, or system is support for freedom of education, the most critical element of religious freedom.***

People who have the courage to live with human authenticity build enterprises, communities, and institutions animated by justice, truth, beauty, and love. ***For this reason, our second criterion is subsidiarity.*** Government should defend the common good, supporting and deferring to those human structures that dedicate themselves to the good of persons and communities. The recent disappearance of Catholic hospitals (such as St. Vincent's in lower Manhattan, the first hospital to welcome AIDS victims *en masse*), orphanages, adoption agencies, and other charitable organizations impoverishes our communities.

We offer such a statement because we want to affirm what Pope Benedict XVI recently said in Scotland: "Society today needs clear voices which propose our right to live, not in a jungle of self-destructive and arbitrary freedoms, but in a society which works for the true welfare of its citizens and offers them guidance and protection in the face of their weakness and fragility."