

## **"WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN"**

### **Joint Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Snap Elections**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, and Fellow Filipinos,

The eyes of the world are upon us, the only Christian country in Asia, as we conduct the February 7 elections. We are like "a city set on a hill-top" (Mt 5:14). Hence, there is a special urgency that we should let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (Cf. Mt 5:16)

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father ... Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven". These coming elections can, and should be, an event through which God's will is accomplished more fully in our land through our choice of leaders whom he wants, and in the manner that he wants. Indeed, this election will be judged not only in terms of the persons and issues involved, but also by the way it is conducted and the way we respond to its conduct.

These elections can become one great offense to God and a national scandal, or they can be an event of conversion and national renewal.

It has been our sad experience that God's will has been flagrantly transgressed in the past through the violation of our electoral process. Registration anomalies and flying voters, vote-buying and selling, bribery, unwarranted pressures, serious lies, black propaganda, the fraudulent casting, canvassing and reporting of votes, snatching and switching of ballot boxes, physical violence and killings have often characterized our elections.

It is with grave concern and great sadness that we see signs of these happening again now in a concerted manner, and threatening to escalate to a level never experienced before. These practices are sins against the Lord. They violate in a serious manner the dignity of human beings with whom the Lord has united himself. They make their perpetrators unworthy of the Body of the Lord (Cf. 1 Cor 11:27).

The presence of this conspiracy of evil should not, however, make us succumb to a paralyzing cynicism. It should rather challenge us all to organize ourselves and our actions so that evil may be conquered by good (Cf. Rom 12:21). The children of the light should not be less wise than the children of this world (Cf. Lk 16:3).

We should not passively surrender to the forces of evil and allow them to unilaterally determine the conduct and the results of these elections. The popular will is clearly shown by the interest of the vast majority of our people to participate in these elections. Banding together, we can become a massive force that will assure relatively clean and honest elections, expressive of the people's genuine will.

This will must be expressed and respected. For the power to choose our leaders comes from God. From him all authority derives. In a democracy, he chooses to designate the bearers of this authority through the free and honest expression of the people's will. Hence, voting is a sacred right and duty. To exercise this right is to do God's will. To respect this right is to respect God himself.

Hence, we exhort you to the following:

1. Pray for divine guidance and the grace of free and honest elections.

2. Vote. Vote honestly according to your enlightened judgment and conscience after carefully weighing the persons and issues involved.
3. Vote into office the persons you believe God wants you to put in office as president and vice-president of this land. Vote for persons who embody the Gospel values of justice, humility, truth, freedom, courage, love, peace, respect for human rights and life. Vote for persons who morally, intellectually and physically show themselves capable of inspiring the whole nation towards a hopeful future.
4. In the choice of your candidates, go beyond narrow selfish, family, partisan, and regional considerations. Vote for the persons who can do the most good for the whole country.
5. Refuse to cooperate with, and resist singly and in collaboration with others, all efforts at cheating, intimidation, and violence from whatever source, during the campaign period, and at any stage of the electoral process.
6. Do not allow yourselves to be corrupted by money or other immoral considerations into voting or not voting, or cheating for a candidate. Always vote according to your conscience.
7. Exercise unwavering vigilance in organized collaboration with others so that your votes are cast, counted, tallied and reported properly and honestly, and transported untampered. In this connection, we wish to express our wholehearted support for NAMFREL.

We earnestly appeal, in particular, to the official guardians of the polls.

To the Teachers and Public School Personnel, we say:

We trust in your integrity. In the eyes of the young you are upholders of truth and honesty. Please do not destroy or let others destroy your name and profession.

Many of you have courageously resisted bribes and pressures in the past. We trust you will do the same in these elections. We note with joy that many of you have exposed attempts by unscrupulous persons to bribe some of you.

To the Military, Police, and CHDF (Civilian Home Defense Forces):

You are the guardians of peace and order. You owe your allegiance to the Flag and to our people, not to any particular individual or political group. Above all, we trust you also to believe in a just and all-knowing God. We urge you to defend the life, dignity and rights of our citizenry. We ask you never to allow yourselves to be used as instrument of election violence and cheating.

To the COMELEC and other People in the Government:

You are public servants. No matter who appointed you into office you are the servants of the people. Your utang na loob and loyalty should be directed, above all, to the people you are committed to serve. We urge you to resist all efforts to demean your dignity through pressures and intimidations of all sorts.

To all who serve in the polls, we give this general reminder:

"We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In a conflict of loyalties and interests, God's will must prevail over unjust commands of earthly leaders.

We address these words to all of you, our countrymen, not only because of our concern to uphold gospel values but also because of our country's critical situation. These elections, if free and honest, will be a big step in restoring that confidence in government and cooperation with it which are essential to national recovery. This confidence can only be lost and our crisis worsen in the event of massive election frauds.

While we raise this call to massive vigilance and propose to you this program of action, we are, nevertheless, conscious that "unless the Lord build the house they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127:1). Therefore, once more, we fervently exhort you to pray and fast even as we struggle for clean elections. To those who can, we suggest that you celebrate or participate in Eucharistic celebrations for peaceful, free and honest elections. Be assured that we, your brothers and pastors, stand together with you in this common effort to build a nation worthy of God's children.

Through our concerted effort, may Jesus truly shine out in our part of the world as "a light for revelation to the nations" (Lk 2:32). Let us all in the Spirit offer ourselves to the Father with Christ in this national exercise. May he, who is God-with-us, and Mary, his mother, the patroness of our beloved country, make their presence felt by all of us in this moment of decision.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:

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25 January 1986  
Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, the Apostle