

A POSITION PAPER:
TOWARDS A GREATER FAITH-IMPELLED ENGAGEMENT
FOR THE 2010 ELECTIONS

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Individuals and groups involved in the anti-graft and corruption crusade often find themselves in a seemingly never-ending cycle of picking up after the mess of those who use their public office for private gain in unholy tandem with people from other sectors. Truly, we are all in this together as part of the problem and part of the solution. The political landscape is littered with such mess. The picture, however, is not limited to corruption but good governance and nation building work in general. Many feel tired and weary.

Experience tells us that elections represent the original sin in the corruption of our political system, even as the same democratic exercise also manifests larger socio-economic and cultural problems. During elections, winning at all costs becomes the rule and the end justifies the means. Those who run for office need so much money to campaign and to secure votes. The money comes from their own pockets, or is the windfall of graft practices, or secured from the pockets of other interest groups. Whatever the source, payback time is always detrimental to the common good. Not surprisingly, voters are often made to choose the lesser evil.

Elections also bring another aspect of corruption. While the systems dimension of corruption has been rightly identified, corruption, in the end, is still the free decision of individuals who are endowed with consciences. Government corruption results from the decisions of elected, appointed, or career officials.

However, of the three classes of government officials, elected officials represent the starting point for much good or much evil. They appoint or promote other officials. They approve budgets and projects. They have large discretionary funds. Dynasties result from the need to protect family or group interests. The list can go on.

There is need to do something decisive about elections. The 2010 elections provide an opportunity for such engagement. But where do we start? How do we do it?

The starting point seems to be on identifying and articulating the kind of change we seek for our nation as well as the kinds of people (i.e. citizens and leaders) we need to effect such change. This may lead to what a well-known person describes as helping clean up a stinking toilet and not just complain about it nor just to look at it from a distance.

The May 2007 elections showed that it is possible (“pwede pala”) for good people to run and to win. One particularly bright spot is the Pampanga experience where a non-political veteran who had no political machinery and no money ran and won the gubernatorial post. This deserves a closer look. Several factors stand out: a popular consensus, driven by Kapampangan

pride, against choosing the lesser evil; a nomination process; an honest and courageous man rising to the challenge; Christian faith-impelled effort with strong inter-denominational collaboration; the spirit of volunteerism; strong media support; presence of a conscience bloc among the voters; vigilance at the polls; etc. Of these, the faith dimension and its effective channeling stand as the key element that ignited the rest.

Although the most prominent, the Pampanga experience, however, is not the only source of lesson. Other efforts include both faith-impelled and other approaches connected with civil society. The former includes the usual, and vital, efforts at voters' education and poll watching, as well as newer initiatives at identifying and even endorsing worthy candidates. And then there is the effort at even fielding candidates. These efforts have met with varying degrees of success. In addition, there is a discernible shift in voters' behavioral pattern suggesting a move towards more discerning voters. Is a significant conscience bloc emerging?

These lessons of the past can be broadened to include lessons regarding the connection between elections, governance, and development since People Power 1 with the view that the possibilities and energies unleashed by EDSA 1 continues to this very day. Nation building is a continuing process. If this is so, certain questions need to be addressed: In what ways is faith "systematically excluded" in our political culture resulting in the practice of Philippine politics that "is most hurtful to us as a people" (1997 CBCP *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippines Politics*)? How come that our Christian values are excluded despite Christians being the vast majority of our nation (Catechism for the Filipino Catholics 1197)? Why do many of yesterday's heroes become today's tyrants? What support system(s) is (are) needed to sustain public servants in their journey towards integrity? What worked and what did not work in the area of good governance, and why? What role does the Christian faith and the Christian groups need to play in our emerging nation, particularly during elections and between elections? What hindering factors stand in the way of such engagement?

As the 2010 elections approach, concerned citizens and the Christian groups face very crucial choices. Do we just watch things happen and wonder what happened? Do we continue with what we have been doing in the past or do we explore new grounds of engagement? How do we help shape the agenda for 2010 so that Christian values may become the defining element during the elections? What fresh approaches can we agree upon? Who will undertake and lead these new approaches?

There is a growing impulse from concerned citizens to replicate the Pampanga experience – and other similar cases - with its choice of the good, rather than of the lesser evil. There is also much room for action along the lines of heroic Christian citizenship that goes beyond, but complementary to, generalized voters' education and monitoring of votes.

When all is said and done, all these engagements have to do with hope. After all, "all serious and upright human conduct is hope in action" (Spe Salvi 35).