

PHILANTHROPY AND THE CHURCH

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A newscaster has just given me the finest news I've heard in years! With Bora Laskin as our new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada I am greatly heartened as I look to the future. The dictum "the law was made for justice" finds fulfilment in this man's deep humanitarianism. That he is a Jew further excites me as a Christian!

How interesting, then, that the last issue of this publication had the flashback to the eight degrees of charity of Rabbi Moses Ben Maimonides. How right, too, for the editor to note that the eighth degree is as fresh as to-day's humanitarianism — "and the most meritorious of all, is to anticipate charity by preventing poverty; namely, to assist the reduced fellowman, either by a considerable gift, or a sum of money, or by teaching him a trade, or by putting him in the way of business, so that he may earn an honest livelihood, and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity." This is from a Jewish Rabbi!

The root meaning of philanthropy is "love of man". Its whole meaning is tied up with a concern for the welfare of our fellow creatures on this earth. At its best its realization cuts across every religious and theological difference that divides us. As Thoreau has put it, — "philanthropy is almost the only virtue which is sufficiently appreciated by mankind". What, then, can the Church say with respect to philanthropy?

Our one world realized on every tv screen is bringing wholeness again to an understanding of philanthropy, the love of our fellow man. One world is showing us the deficiencies of our understanding in the past of the meaning of this word. Somehow, Maimonides leapt over the centuries to where we are to-day in this awareness of wholeness. When you love and appreciate your fellow man and when you realize that you are living in one world (if we didn't know it before), then both as giver and recipient of philanthropy there are new depths of understanding.

The person who gives must free himself from paternal ideas that he is somehow helping "the poor" with his gift. Notice how early Maimonides added context to the giving of gifts. Senator Croll showed us in his report on poverty that the gift without consultation with the recipient ends in disaster. Canadian philanthropy through World Development falls into the trap of wanting to control the gift. We must learn in one world that our love of that man in the underdeveloped nation means that he is the key party to the development of his own country and that "tied aid" is demeaning to him and in the long run defeats development. A hungry woman in Bangladesh told a relief worker who wanted to give her rice, — "First we need respect, and then only do we need rice." To-day's world means, with respect

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to philanthropy, that we love that other man so much that we will value his judgments of his need, and then together with him work out methods of justice and up-building.

One world to-day also means that we must think of the recipient and the damaging effects of simply giving him material things to get him past the next twenty-four hours of hunger, needful as this may be. Our waspish society has been very guilty of producing dependence upon welfare in generation upon generation of recipients. Some call it the "canned goods syndrome" which is really not up-building the recipient, not expressing true philanthropy, the love of man, but is simply satisfying his material need for a few hours.

I believe the Church at its best is striving to uplift the dignity of human nature. It therefore helps to change our wrong ideas of philanthropy into concepts that recognize the indescribable potential that God has placed in his creature, man, and which true philanthropy to him will allow to develop in his way, not ours.

When the Church talks of philanthropy it usually does so in terms of stewardship. There are many definitions of this word, all of them deficient and all of them with a short life-span. One of the simpler is to say that it is our response to our awareness that God has given us our talents and abilities together with a world in which to exercise them, and that we are stewards of these personal and natural resources for His world and His creatures. Having said this, it has been customary to think in terms of three categories of stewardship, that of time, of talent, and of treasure. To-day's world has dramatically changed the manner in which these three categories affect our philanthropy or stewardship.

Consider the use of time. A moment in time to-day has an infinite breadth and depth which no other age has ever known. A moment in time has messages from the whole world and beyond it. There is no delay now in the world's news. Thus the whole impact of the world and its confusion and its tensions is upon everyone with a tv screen, at any instant. Our community is not our village but our world. Hence, philanthropy to-day means not just helping a needy one in our village, but means seeking out justice for the political detainees in South Vietnam and for those with restricted freedom in Russia. Wholeness, too, means that our philanthropy is not just the time we spend in Church or worthwhile community ventures; it is the time we spend in our regular work seeking justice, seeking to serve our fellow man through good production, worthwhile products, the saving of scarcer and scarcer materials. Moreover, this wholeness also means that leisure and recreation have a more necessary place in the total response of the person to the maker of this world.

Likewise, with respect to talent, our concepts need to change and broaden into a one-world ideal. Within our Churches we used to seek out the spiritual person for high office, thus leaving many a talented person on the side-

lines. More and more the Church is attempting to recognize that talent is a spiritual gift to man, and that the contribution of his talent to the welfare of the Church community, is a stewardship or philanthropic response on his part. More and more, too, are we finding that the non-Christian can express philanthropy and the love of his fellow man as well (often better!) than the Christian. One need only contemplate the life of Mahatma Gandhi to realize that his God-given talent was used with deep love of his fellow man, with the deepest kind of philanthropy. The history of the Church is riddled with cases of excessive zeal against the non-Christian, e.g., the sinful destruction of the totem poles of the Haida Indian on the west coast of Canada; the excess of Calvinist zeal against the Celtic Christian of Northern Scotland.

The third concept of philanthropy or stewardship deals with treasure. Here, too, the Church at its best is seeing a far broader context for the use of treasure than was formerly the case. No longer is it an adequate response even to tithe, and with the remaining ninety percent be wasteful or excessive, or anti-social. Philanthropy calls for justice and the love of man in the use of our total resources. How I invest my money, and with what kinds of companies, and to what ends, is a deep expression of my philanthropy. How my government spends its resources is a serious concern for my sense of philanthropy. Again we look back to Maimonides and see the concluding expression of his eighth degree of charity "that he may earn an honest livelihood and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity".

So, basic for to-day's world, and the reason I am exhilarated at the appointment of Bora Laskin as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada is that philanthropy means the recognition of the dignity and worth of all men everywhere, and the constant necessity for us to undergird all our personal, corporate, and governmental activity with this priority. Of course we must give money; increasingly, however, we must learn to involve the recipient in the sharing of concerns and understandings and wisdoms, recognizing that what we have to give is but a trust held by us for the benefit of all mankind, and that justice means love in action.

Personally, philanthropy means for me an urging upon my government at every level of the goals that Maimonides expressed so well in his Eighth Degree. It means giving to others not of my excess, but of part of my cost of living, recognizing that person's fundamental need for a quality of life, a dignity and a sense of worth. If anyone is deprived, I am deprived. For lawyers this means working in the ghettos, providing opportunities for self-help, for an understanding of our system, while at the same time working to reform the law to make it more viable in the interests of justice.

For me, all this, too, means a deepened appreciation for the work of the Church through the years. It is often so far from its best; but at its best it represents the pinnacle of philanthropy, of the love of one's fellow man. (The

secular agency dearly loves to have the list of Church folk when it starts its campaign. It knows where good giving rules!). Finally, philanthropy for me means using the God-given talent with which He has endowed me and the gift of time in His world together with the resources that He places at my individual disposal all in the service of my fellow man in this one world, in South Vietnam, in Egypt, in Israel, in China, in Toronto.