

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS LISTEN TO RELIGIOUS CREEDS

Presentation of Pastor Francisco Javier Rivera Mardones in the Panel held May 10, 2007, in which the following participated: Mohamed Rumie, General Secretary and spokesman for the Islamic Community; Gabriel Salvador, President of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Virgin Mary; Father Rodrigo Tupper, Vicar of Social Pastoring and of the Archbishopric of Santiago's Workers; and Gabriel Zaliasnik, President of the Jewish Community of Chile.

Congratulations to the Christian Democrats for this initiative and my sincere appreciation for the invitation and opportunity to share some thoughts related to the questions posed.

It is necessary to clarify that owing to the diversity which is characteristic of the evangelical churches in subjects such as those considered this afternoon, only general perceptions can be given. Although I will try to gather together the feelings of the majority, in short, they are personal opinions given from a clearly evangelical Christian perspective.

I.- HOW DO THEY SEE THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS?

As these questions have the objective of prompting reflections regarding the future, where we are going and how to channel the future, I would like to recall the words of Ken Burns:

"It is not possible to know where we are going unless we know from where we came."

So let us recall some roots that gave rise to the Christian Democrats: Personally, I saw its birth first-hand, as my early years in the humanities were spent in the German School of the Divine Word and I was a friend and neighbor of various founding leaders of the Phalanstery and thus spent time studying in their homes and their children in ours.

In those years history was made in Chilean society by a large group of young Christian socialists, full of ideals and innovative concepts, inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and influenced by the National Association of Catholic Students (ANEC), with thinkers and spiritual guides such as Father Fernando Vives and the Chilean Syndicate Association related to Father Alberto Hurtado. The thoughts of Jacques Maritain and their application to our reality by Jaime Castillo Velasco based on Christian humanism were determining factors.

I saw it grow as some of my relatives, including my father in the Colchagua zone and my mother in the Mardones Restat, shared their principles and collaborated in their ranks. I, as did all of Chile, witnessed its rapid development up to that historic march of the young patriots in June of sixty-four and the years that followed under the banner "revolution in liberty". Without ever having been militant in any party, my parents were active participants in the Christian Family movement and every year we attended the massive outings presided over by Father Gustavo Ferraris which also marked a milestone and, although these certainly were not of a political character, they reflected in some manner the ideal for a better country. But all that is in the past.

How do I see the Christian Democrats today, not only personally, but also from the perspective of an evangelical protestant pastor, servant of Christ for 33 years with a Christian point of view?

I will summarize it in one simple sentence.

1.- As a party in transition.

Seventy years have passed since the National Phalanstery was formed in 1937, linked to the Conservative Youth Movement, which broke off the following year from the National Party and became independent, transforming itself into the Christian Democratic Party in 1957.

Without doubt the reality in Chile 70 years ago was very different. A lot of water has passed under the bridges. The Chile of the 21st century, which represents only 0.2% of the world's population, is barely a global village in this cyberspace, but it is not because we are a small country that we are marginalized and continue to dream and work, each one in his own environment, for a better country.

There are other parties that were born in the midst of globalization and thus have a very distinct reality. It was not so with the Christian Democrats, and **the shock of change** has doubtless affected them.

I will synthesize this transition in three areas, although there are certainly others.

A.- Transition from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.

It began as a homogeneous party in leadership, in fundamentals, in social sector, in vision for the country, etc. Today it is diverse, because the world and the country have been diversified and hence their identity has become diffuse.

What is the identity of the Christian Democrats? What characterizes them? What makes them different and distinguishes them from the other parties? The problem of loss of identity is occurring in the great majority of institutions, not only in political parties, but also in some nations, owing, among other things, to the lightning speed of the changes.

Today among the militants as well as the sympathizers, the Christian Democrats are heterogeneously integrated and form a varied spectrum of persons with diversity of thoughts, visions and life projects. From that comes the great difficulty as well as the great challenge to find future agreements that may integrate this diversity.

B.- Transition from the confessional to the plural

The Constitution of 1925, which my grandfather, Mr. Francisco Mardones, had the honor of signing as Home Secretary, established in our Republic the separation of Church and State, which was a fundamental change in our republican life and brought enormous benefits to the country, permitting, among other things, the broader development of Christianity which is essentially diverse, a characteristic that has been manifested since the primitive apostolic church up to the present day.

I also think that it benefited the Catholic Church itself as it has permitted it to act in these decades, and at times in crucial moments of our history, with independence from

the State in order to carry out its plans and direct its actions according to its purposes which have not always been in agreement with the politics of those governing our country.

Seventy years later we find ourselves with another historical fact in the future of our country expressed in Law 19,638, known as the *Law of Worship*, which brings to our country judicial equality for religious creeds, and is opening the doors and doing justice to the reality permitting other creeds and particularly the 20% of evangelical Christians to no longer be considered second-class Christians and to develop their spiritual and social work without discrimination.

In this aspect it is necessary to recognize that even though this Law has been in existence seven years, the application of certain articles and principles established in it, the enactment of some complementary regulations, such as the Chaplaincy in the Armed Forces, has been delayed more than necessary, and the Law is not being applied in all its force.

In view of the fact that the Christian Democrats began as a Catholic confessional party, it took a long time for it to become sensitive to the evangelical sectors. For this same reason they did not feel identified owing to certain exclusions, every time in the past century that there was intolerance and alack of understanding, respect and collaboration in some areas, as today is seen among these expressions of Christianity. However, it is correct to recognize that this reality has been changing, especially these last years in relation to the Christian Democrats.

C.- Transition from youth to experience

The force of youth, their visionary ideas, and doubtless their Christian foundations were the most significant elements since the beginning and at the height of the Christian Democratic Party. Today they have experience but lack youth.

Today they have their annals full of histories, achievements and epics. Today those youths that gave not only their lives but also their families to this noble cause dress in gray and walk more carefully. They treasure having lived in times of triumph and of defeat, of difficulties, of deep suffering and contagious happiness. Today they have experience – a prized capital which is very necessary to guard.

I think that today the Christian Democrats lack the push of **visionary ideas** that attract youth, which at the same time carries the force and courage indispensable to carrying out change. It is to be hoped that in the Ideological Congress they can express good **innovative concepts** for the well-being of the country.

2.- WHAT DO THEY EXPECT FROM THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS?

1.- What can they contribute to strengthen the basic values of our country.

A.- Corruption

Corruption has no frontiers and time does not detain it. It breaks out whenever we are not careful about trafficking influence, illicit payments to obtain tenders, nepotism, privileged information, in public as well as private areas, etc.

In the Holy Scriptures we always find situations that help us understand and prevent the realities that approach. Chapter six of Genesis describes the reality of the world previous to the disaster of the flood: “...*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.*”

It is interesting how corruption grows out of and is associated with violence. Of course it is not speaking here of an ecological deterioration of the earth, but specifically of human beings, as it adds “*for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.*”

Hence the importance of stopping it at the very beginning.

B.- Value Agenda

It is a great challenge to be able to reconcile the universality of certain values with the pluralism of twenty-first century society.

Subjects like the day after pill, legalization of abortion, legalization of drug consumption, Civil Union Pact, homosexual marriage, euthanasia, etc., are complex realities that require profound analysis and reflection.

The solution that our society gives to these subjects will determine the future: **what we sow in Chile today we will reap tomorrow.**

Let us remember that moral failure was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire. This was also true for Alexander the Great, who in the Battle of Algeria conquered the Persians who were superior 15 to 1. When his disciplined troops were corrupted through contact with the luxury and ostentation of the recently conquered Persians, they also collapsed, and Alexander himself died an alcoholic in a drunken orgy in the year 323 BC in Babylon.

Relativism has invaded all areas of contemporary society. This manner of thinking was already established in Greece by the philosopher Prothagoras (485 BC to 411 BC) with his well known phrase *man is the measure of all things* which denies the possibility of objective knowledge and states that there is no absolute truth for everyone since it depends on each individual.

I want to say this with great caution so there will be no misunderstanding, but in some aspects today **democracy has enthroned itself as the measure of all things** and has exercised a strong influence in the area of thought, coming to the conclusion that what the majority thinks is correct. And since the “*majority rules*”, then “*every one does it*” becomes the norm, the refuge, the standard, and governs as an accepted pattern of conduct.

Many times that means the law of the jungle reigns and the strongest prevails, having to compete in the midst of a ruthless jungle of values which are negotiable and submitted to a vote. We could arrive at the extreme of **submitting to plebiscite the existence of God and if the majority is in agreement then God would not exist.**

Jacques Maritain says this is a suicidal method.

“If every individual adheres to his own convictions, will not everyone try to impose them on the rest? Consequently, will not living together become impossible if every citizen adheres to his convictions and believes in a particular truth?”

*This is a **suicidal concept of democracy**, since a democratic society that lives in universal skepticism would condemn itself to perish due to starvation and would enter into a **process of self annihilation**”.*

In another of his writings he affirms:

*“In its essential principle, this form and this ideal of common life which calls itself democracy, comes **from the Evangelical inspiration and cannot survive without it.**”*

In view of the foregoing, I think that the CD could be living a similar situation to that of Europe. Having celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on March 25, 2007, the great expectation was if the long awaited *Declaration of Berlin*, signed by the twenty-seven countries of the Union, would or would not mention God. Similarly today the dispute exists among these nations whether or not to incorporate in the European Constitution that is being written the recognition of its “*Christian roots*”. Such is the dispute that the Pope, some weeks ago, warned that Europe would be “apostatizing itself”.

Chile needs a party that can lift up and defend subjects related to values.

3.- WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MUST DEAL WITH?

Owing to the lack of time, I am going to summarize them into just one. If corruption generates violence, so also do strong social contrasts.

1.- THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

If this problem were solved, access to better quality health and education would be the result. The differences in income between the rich and the poor of the world are greater than at any other time in world history. Distribution of wealth is not equal: in Chile 10% remains in the hand of half the population and 90% is distributed among the other half. Chile is in tenth place among the countries with the worst distribution of wealth on the planet.

But today we speak not only of the distribution of wealth, but of the distribution of risk. In the case of the distribution of risks, “*riches accumulate above, risks below*”. As recent examples, we have the tragedy in Aysén and the shipwreck of the barge in Lake Maihue where several poor students from the zone died and disappeared while en route to their educational establishments.

This problem, which is so serious and has so many implications, is, as the prophet warned

...like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly¹

As you know in New Orleans, the dykes that protected the city from flooding had cracks. In August of 2005 hurricane Katrina touched down. The force of the torrent of water found the dykes weakened by the cracks which had not been repaired in time, extending them up the high wall, whose fall came suddenly and inevitably. The walls gave way resulting in a great flood which brought death, destruction and pain that will be projected for generations.

Chile has a crack that urgently needs to be repaired: that crack is the inequality in the distribution of wealth.

“The belief that globalization and liberalization in themselves are the key to the reduction of poverty has proved false, and the data demonstrate that there are still a billion persons who live on only one dollar a day and half of the world’s population – three billion – survive on two dollars a day.

These facts demonstrate that the so-called neoliberal economy that is imposing itself on the world is not by itself able to regulate, among other things, the distribution of income. Someone has said that money *is like the water of the sea, the more one drinks, the thirstier he becomes.*

If we analyze the history of mankind, there has never existed an economic system that managed to bring equality to the inhabitants.

Problems that occur in economics on the other side of the planet affect our pocketbooks. The so-called “domino effect” was evident in the world repercussions of the Asiatic crisis. As the economists say, when Wall Street sneezes the world gets a cold. On the other hand, when it explodes in laughter, the great majority of the planet barely harvests a smile.

I will end by recalling the characteristics of a good leader: he sees beforehand, he sees better, and he sees further. It is to be hoped that the CD in its debates will, for the good of the country, take up again and assume a leadership with these characteristics.

Thank you very much.

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1.- Isaiah 30:13

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