

-Long Version-

Public Service in His Footsteps  
- Some Theological Dimensions of Public Service -

By

Noël A. Kinsella  
Speaker  
Senate of Canada

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Thank you for the invitation to be at Assumption University and participate in the Christian Culture Series. I wish to salute the pioneering work of Father Stanley Murphy in establishing this series which pre-dates by several decades Vatican II.

In saluting Father Murphy, I wish to pay tribute to the rich vocation of the Congregation of St. Basil and to acknowledge the extraordinary work that this community has accomplished in many fields but especially in the area of Canadian post-secondary education.

It is noteworthy that the mark of this work is, in a way, signalled by the fact that the motto of Assumption University is the motto of the congregation of St. Basil: “*Doce me Bonitatem, Scientiam et Disciplinam*” – “*Teach me Goodness, Knowledge and Discipline*” . This same motto is shared by St. Michael’s at the University of Toronto and St. Thomas University in Fredericton, NB, each of these institutions having been the beneficiary of the Basilian Fathers’ leadership.

As you know, the words of the motto are taken from the Davidic Psalm 119 at verse 66. The Psalm is in praise of the Law (the Commandments) and the joys to be found in keeping it. It is not “legalism” but rather a love and desire for the word of God in Israel’s Law, which is the expression of the Lord’s revelation of Himself and His will for humanity.

The psalmist affirms that with the Law in our hearts and at the centre of our being, we can be open to *wisdom, understanding* and *goodness*, all of which are gifts of God. The Law can be obeyed only as God’s presence enables those

walking in His Footsteps to hold fast to God's will. Persons obey the Law, not as a duty, but rather because it is true and indeed is TRUTH itself.

This inspiration speaks to the Christian Culture Series of Assumption University and the significant contribution that it makes to our understanding and praxis.

To have been invited to speak in this Series is a great honour, for which I thank you. The outstanding list of previous speakers makes my task daunting but yet an opportunity to share some reflections on public service within a Christian context. I am sure that your previous lecturers in this series from Fulton J. Sheen to Charles M. Taylor, would be very helpful in this reflection.

As a youth, I was always in admiration when we would hear Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. He was your speaker in 1934 and 1936. As a student, I had the good fortune to meet Bishop Sheen and he autographed one of my prized library possessions, his book *Peace of Soul*.

In 1942, the speaker was Jacques Maritain, one of the greatest Catholic philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who in his work *Approaches to God* critically examined the methods by which man comes to know his Creator. As he phrased it:

“For man there are as many ways of approach to God as there are wanderings on the earth or paths to his own heart.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain; *Approaches to God*; (London: George Allen and Unwin) 1955, p. xi

In 1949, it was Étienne Gilson who was the Christian Culture Series Speaker. Gilson, the master philosopher and historian, illuminated for us in works like *the Elements of Christian Philosophy* the key ideas which form the foundation of the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. It was Gilson who taught us that:

“The fundamental notions of Christian metaphysics provide the necessary foundations for moral, social and political philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

However, Gilson also cautioned us to immerse ourselves and become well informed of practical questions, whether economic or political, prior to discussing the same. He said:

“Nothing is more dangerous in such matters than a metaphysician who considers himself qualified to solve all particular problems because he knows the first principles of knowledge. Metaphysical knowledge is necessarily required for all knowledge, but no particular knowledge can be deduced from it unless the metaphysician first consents to inform himself of all the pertinent facts.”<sup>3</sup>

When I was asked to speak on some aspect of Faith and Public Service, I chose as a topic “Public Service in His Footsteps: Some theological Dimensions of Public Service.” Prior to putting pen to paper, I was asked to send a couple of sentences about areas I will touch on in this address. At that time I shared these thoughts:

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<sup>2</sup> Etienne Gilson; *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*; (New York, NY: Mentor-Omega Book) p. 286

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; p. 287

Public Service is a noble, and a profoundly ennobling activity. In Canada and around the world, society has benefitted from the work of so many who have answered the call to a public service vocation. Some have found this calling within the representative public service by working on municipal councils, school boards, provincial and federal legislatures or as public officers including members of the judiciary. Others are persons serving in the professional civil service of governments, and yet others have responded to public service through participation in non-governmental organizations which make up civil society.

Pope Benedict XVI, during his June 4-6, 2010, visit to Cyprus, has also referred to the public service as a “noble vocation” and stated that: “When carried out faithfully, public service enables us to grow in wisdom, integrity and personal fulfilment.”<sup>4</sup>

For many public servants, public service is more than a profession; it is a vocation, and even a very noble calling. A calling to do good. The public service can be understood as a deeply ethical activity, directed to maintaining the social foundations that among other things make ethical activity possible, as well as serving the more immediate objectives of public sector work.

What are some of the theological dimensions of the public service vocation? What can a Christian hope to attain by answering a public service calling? In what way might the call to follow in the footsteps of the Lord be answered by public service commitment?

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI; *Meeting with the Civil Authorities and Diplomatic Corps*; June 5, 2010 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2010/june/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20100605\\_autorita-civili\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100605_autorita-civili_en.html)

Perhaps the first question to be canvassed is whether or not it is politically correct to be a Christian public servant.

Permit me to approach this question by the following account of the June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, session of the Senate of Canada. In the middle of the statements period, an earthquake measuring 5.7 on the Richter scale struck the National Capital Region. As the chamber shook, the Senators left the Parliament buildings and the sitting was suspended. The members gathered around the Speaker on the lawn on Parliament Hill and agreed on the procedure for adjournment and recall. The historical gathering on the green at Runnymede, England, in 1215 was not lost on all present, notwithstanding that the *Magna Carta* of Runnymede made our adjournment procedure pale in comparison.

Blessed Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* drew our attention to what has become known as the *Magna Carta of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, namely the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

Pope Roncalli considered the *Universal Declaration* to be: “An Act of the highest importance performed by the United Nations”<sup>5</sup>. The Holy Father wrote that it was his earnest wish:

“that the day may come when every human being will find therein [the UN] an effective safeguard for the rights

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<sup>5</sup> Pope John XXII, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*; April 11, 1963; para. 143 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html)

which derive directly from his dignity as a person and which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable rights. This all the more to be hoped for since all human beings, as they take an even more active part in the public life of their own political communities, are showing an increasing interest in the affairs of all peoples, and are becoming more consciously aware that they are living members of a world community.”<sup>6</sup>

Article 21 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides:

- “(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”<sup>7</sup>

While the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is a statement of principles and lacks an enforcement mechanism, this right was re-articulated in the enforceable Article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, to which Canada is a party.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; para.146 NB: emphasis author’s

<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, New York, NY, 1948

The *Universal Declaration* and the *Covenant* also articulate the human right of religion and the right to be free from discrimination because of religion in the exercise of human rights.

Therefore Christians have the right to participate in public service without any requirement to leave their faith at home. There is no test given by any civil service commission in Canada for secular versus religious orthodoxy. The expectation is that those who engage in public service will bring to their functions good judgment. Such judgment will no doubt be a reflection of their moral values and conscience.

Judge James L. Buckley in commenting on the American scene writes:

“In sum, we live in a society in which the importance of religion has always been recognized. And while the First Amendment [of the Constitution of the United States] forbids laws "respecting an establishment of religion," it has never required that the state be isolated from exposure to religious principles. To read the Constitution as though it did would be to rob religious liberty of meaning. The men gathered in Philadelphia who outlawed religious tests for public service surely had the practical common sense to know-if some contemporary ideologues do not-that in those roles in which public servants are expected to bring their personal judgments to bear, including judgments as to what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, the views of religious



individuals will inevitably reflect their religious beliefs. It is, quite simply, fatuous to suppose that a public official can check the religious components of his convictions at the door before entering the council chambers of government.”<sup>8</sup>

In Canada, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was added to our Constitution in 1982; Section 3 set out for the first time in our Constitution the basic right of Canadians to participate in public service in this fundamental way:

“Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein.”<sup>9</sup>

Although expressed as a right, I think there is an implied concomitant responsibility to exercise that right in a responsible manner and thereby render public service.

As the right to participate in public service through the vote is a special right reserved for citizens, I think it is fair to say that citizens have a special responsibility not just to protect it, but to actively participate. Since 1867, Canadians, with some noteworthy exceptions, have enjoyed the practice of freedom like no other people. Despite the proclamation of the *Universal*

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<sup>8</sup> James L. Buckley; “the Catholic Public Servant” 18 -22 in *First Things*; 20:, February 1992

<sup>9</sup> *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Constitution Act, 1982 NB: It is worth noting that the language of Section 3 explicitly reserves the right to vote to those who are citizens of Canada. Most of our rights in the *Charter* are guaranteed to “everyone” in Canada. There are only three which are limited only to citizens. Along with the aforementioned Section 3 right to vote, they are Section 6, the right to leave and return to Canada, and Section 23, the right to minority official language education where numbers warrant.

*Declaration of Human Rights* some 60 years ago and other international human rights treaties, the practice of freedom is still rare. The organization Freedom House produces an annual survey on the level of freedom enjoyed by the citizens in countries around the world. Only one third of all countries were rated as “free”, while the others were rated “partly free” or “not free”.

If citizens are to take up their responsibility to protect their right to participate in public service, how should they do so? The best way to protect this right is to exercise it. The simplest way is to vote in elections. At the federal level, that normally means you are asked to exercise the right every three and a half to four years. People come up with all kinds of flimsy excuses as to why they do not vote. The fact is that it has never been easier, with statutory time off to vote on voting days and both advance polls and mail-in ballots for those who have irresolvable conflicts on voting day.

By voting, one exercises their right in a very important way, although it is not unfair to say that this participation in public service is only in a peripheral manner. There are many other opportunities to participate in public service both directly and indirectly. The first is through direct participation in the political process. You could join a political party. I know this is not the most popular choice for young people today, but it is certainly possible to address goals within a political party. While political parties are not mentioned in our Constitution, they really are the extra-constitutional machinery that makes our system of parliamentary representation work.

If you do not want to run for office, but still wish to participate in public service in a party context, there are many options that party membership brings.

Working for a parliamentarian is one which springs to mind. Volunteers in the constituency work on policy development, riding organization, or voter registration and mobilization. There are a myriad of ways to participate in public service through political parties.

There are ways to participate directly in public service other than through political parties. Employment in the civil service is an obvious one. By working for the civil service, it is possible to help shape and implement government policy. This is a way in which to directly affect the lives of people for the better while being paid to do so.

Another form of participation in public service is through the medium of non-governmental organizations, which tend to have more focused goals. In addition to a mandate to provide direct assistance, NGOs regularly engage in public education and also inform the legislative process by testifying before parliamentary committees and even by lobbying parliamentarians.

Participation in public service is ultimately working for the common good. There is both a right and a responsibility to render public service and there are many ways in which to participate. Public service is inherently rewarding and I thus do not hesitate to encourage everyone to exercise their right to participate to the fullest.

In reflecting on Public Service in His Footsteps let us begin with the following story image:

A lone, single, individual person finds himself on a distant abandoned island. Our solitary islander mounts

the highest peak of the atoll, holds up his pencil and cries out: “this is my pencil; I have a right to this property”.

What is wrong with this image? Probably many things. However, for pedagogical purposes, I wish to suggest that the cry of our incongruous character demonstrates an apparent pointlessness – here one person is making a claim of “right” when that person is in isolation. This helps to illustrate that, at a minimum, the conceptualization of “right” requires a dyad. That is, right by essential definition is a social reality. People constitute the *material cause* of human rights.

This, of course, is a very Aristotelian argument. In Book I of the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that the city comes into being for the sake of living (i.e., self-sufficiency), but that “... it exists for the sake of the good life.”<sup>10</sup> With this claim, he is not associating society with mere comfort or convenience, but arguing that it enables human beings to fulfil their *telos*, by leading lives of virtue, resulting in happiness. This is the basis for Aristotle’s famous claim that life in the city is therefore necessary for anyone who wishes to be completely human. The quality that distinguishes human beings from the beasts and the gods – the uniquely human character of human beings – is profoundly rooted in participation in social relationships and citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Public Service, in my view, is the call to facilitate social relationships and citizenship within the body politic and to discern the common good and the public interest.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Politics of Aristotle*, Translated with an Introduction, Notes and Appendices by Ernest Barker, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1946, 1252b, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Clayton, *Aristotle*, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aris-pol.htm#SH7a>.

As indicated earlier, at least three categories of public service can be identified. Firstly, there are elected representatives and public office holders. Secondly, there is the professional civil service at all levels of government. Thirdly, there is the non-profit, voluntary sector.

The unifying feature of the three ways of public service is, of course, that they are not merely directed to the interest of the individual engaged upon them, but are contributions to the public interest and the common good.

The Book of Genesis provides us with certain foundations of Judaic – Christian anthropology; the inalienable dignity and constitutive social nature of human beings. We are told that man was created “to the image of God” [Gen 1:26] and therefore is a creature of inestimable dignity and worth and “by his innermost nature man is a social being and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.”<sup>12</sup>

It is public service that plays a crucial role in facilitating the orderly relations of person to person in society. In Vatican II’s pastoral constitution “*De Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis*” [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] at Chapter II – “The Community of Mankind” it is observed that:

“One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development promoted chiefly by modern technical

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<sup>12</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium Et Spes*, Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965; [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

advances. Nevertheless brotherly dialogue among men does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships. These demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person.”<sup>13</sup>

The interdependence of persons and society is underscored by the Council Fathers:

“Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another.”<sup>14</sup>

Whether here in the local Windsor community, in our province or even nationwide, human interdependence is ever more a reality. Globally we see human interdependence ever more a sign of the times. This was vividly brought to light a few weeks ago when I hosted the Speakers of the G-20 countries to discuss food security and supply.

From a human right analysis it is instructive to find the common good described by Vatican II as:

“...the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to

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<sup>13</sup> loc. cite., para. 23

<sup>14</sup> loc. cite., para. 25

the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.”<sup>15</sup>

The importance of responsibility and participation is to be underscored.

“In order for individual men to discharge with greater exactness the obligations of their conscience toward themselves and the various group to which they belong, they must be carefully educated ...”<sup>16</sup>

It is here where the work of this distinguished university and your sister institutions play such an important role in helping to shape men and women of “refined talents” and “great-souled persons” who are so needed in the world of our times.

For those who choose to bring to bear their talents as professional public servants, they have chosen a very honourable life’s work.

Public service in His footsteps is, in many ways, being engaged with our neighbours and society as the Man from Galilee was engaged: tending to the poor and disadvantaged, helping to deliver us from the limitations of that which surrounds us. He is the ultimate public servant and the perfect role model.

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<sup>15</sup> loc. cite., para. 26

<sup>16</sup> loc. cite., para. 31

In many ways, answering a calling to public service is fulfillment of the urging to serve our neighbours. He sought to help the poor and oppressed, and to promote peace and harmony among all people. A public servant does this as well, albeit in many different ways.

Much of the work of public servants occurs behind the scenes, out of the public eye. While the day-to-day work of the elected representative, the civil servant, or non-profit worker may go unnoticed, any shortcomings are often very public. It has been my privilege to have been a public servant in some way, shape or form since 1967 when I became Chair of my province's human rights commission. In the 43 years that followed, I met many public servants, whether as a federal deputy-minister or Senator, and I can say with some confidence that I have yet to meet any who wakes up in the morning asking "How can I do bad today?"

This does not mean that we would all agree that what is actually done is "good" or in the public interest. There are competing visions of the public interest good, which may lead some to the belief that public servants are doing bad, when we simply disagree with their ends, the means to achieve them, or both.

Public servants are certainly not beyond reproach. There have been lapses and struggles. Gethsemane taught us about temptation. There are many temptations for public servants. There is incredible pressure to achieve a particular result or to respond to the passions of the moment. My own office has a cautionary note in Latin carved in the wood which comes from the teachings of Cicero: *Principum munus est resistere levitati multitudinis*. "It is the duty of the



nobles to oppose the fickleness of the multitude.”<sup>17</sup> The literal translation does not do the context justice, because Cicero was essentially urging that we observe the common good and resist opinions that change from day to day, no matter who might hold them.

Public servants sometimes fall short of Cicero’s maxim. While the Lord rejected Satan’s temptation and sacrificed himself for us, public servants are human and, as such, may succumb to temptation. Human beings are not perfect. With that in mind, we build systems of governance to mitigate the potential for a negative influence of the few over the many. As James Madison stated in his essay *Federalist Number 51*:

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”<sup>18</sup>

The temptations in public life and the complex challenges faced by public servants, underlie the need for a theological understanding of public service.

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<sup>17</sup> Cicero; *Pro Milone* 22

<sup>18</sup> James Madison; “Federalist 51” in *the Federalist Papers* (1789)

For many, public service is a calling. It is one way to fulfil the call for us to serve our neighbours. Those who respond do make a decent income, but few will get rich from their work. Many will find they could earn much more doing something similar in the private sector. With this in mind, an examination of what one would gain from answering the call to public service requires that we focus less on the material and more on the spiritual rewards. Those who heed the call to public service do so in the knowledge they are working to better the situation for their neighbour.

It is helpful to examine the social doctrine of the church and what it can offer those in public service.<sup>19</sup> In our service to our neighbour, we must seek to aide him or her to achieve full development as a human person. For the public servant this may mean administering programs such as those that fund our education and healthcare that allow us to develop. In creating and implementing these programs, however, public servants must be careful not to become too involved in the lives of those they serve. The support those in need may require must be provided, but at the same time the public servant should step back to allow them to fully develop in their own personality.

In public life, a common mistake which can have profound consequences for the outcome of the work is that laws and programmes are conceived around a hypothetical construct of “the individual” as the basic unit of society, neglecting another basic unit: the family. The effect of this can be seen in many social

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<sup>19</sup>NB: In a recent posting to *Catholic Culture*, Christopher Kaczor distilled the social teachings of the church into seven main elements: respect the human person, promote the family, protect property rights, work for the common good, observe the principal of subsidiarity, respect for work and the worker, and pursue peace and care for the poor. See: Christopher Kaczor; “Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching” on *Catholic Culture*  
<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=7538>

welfare policies that actually reduce benefits if recipients marry, but remain the same if they just live together.

For those in public service, St. Thomas Aquinas’s articulation of the “*principle of subsidiarity*” is instructive. The message of Aquinas is that the state is not to replace the family but should rather be available to assist the family when the latter no longer has the means or the capacity to meet its needs. As Pope Pius XI taught in *Christian Education*: “the function of civil authority residing in the state is twofold: to protect and to foster but by no means to absorb the family and the individual, or to substitute itself for them.”<sup>20</sup>

Another caution against being too invasive in our assistance to those in need is that it risks absolving the community from its own obligation to come to the assistance of its own members, to the community’s detriment. As John Paul II instructed:

“By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending. In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Pius XI, Encyclical *Divini illius magistri*, December 31, 1939  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_31121929\\_divini-illius-magistri\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri_en.html)

closest to them and who act as neighbors to those in need.”<sup>21</sup>

His Holiness was concerned that the bureaucratic nature of the secular state would have a negative impact both on the individual receiving assistance and the community as a whole.

Of the multitude of professions one can find in public service, not all appear noble from the outside looking in. There are some professions that have come to be feared and sometimes even despised. The job of tax collector comes to mind.

Such was the lot of Zacchaeus as described in Luke 19 1-10. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho and was rich. Jesus saw him in the sycamore tree he had climbed to see the Messiah and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." This made the people of Jericho question Jesus because, as a tax collector, Zacchaeus was viewed as a sinner.

“Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.’”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991; para. 48  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html)

<sup>22</sup> *Luke 19 1-10*

Jesus recognized what the people of Jericho did not: even though Zacchaeus did bad things, he was not a bad person. He attempted to compensate for his perceived sins by giving back to the poor in his community.

In Canada, a robust public service awareness has developed during the 143 years since Confederation. In my opinion this development has been achieved by Canadians playing a positive role through their engagement in public service, whether as an active citizen in civil society; serving as a professional public servant or as a legislative representative.

At the national level, the Public Service of Canada, which has been in existence for more than 100 years, has promoted ethical standards for public servants. An important document which sets forth in an articulate manner the values and ethics of professional Canadian public servants is entitled: “Values and Ethics Code of the Public Service.”<sup>23</sup> A number of outstanding Canadian public servants and academics, such as John Tait and Professor Kenneth Kernaghan, can be mentioned for their work in the areas of public service values and ethics. One finds underscored as a mark of the good public servant such qualities as: knowledge, disciplined analysis, understanding, compassion, integrity, wisdom, prudence, perseverance, leadership and fortitude.

Before her untimely death, Monika Hellwig argued in the *Public Dimensions of a Believer’s Life* that public servants needed to rediscover the cardinal theological virtues and incorporate them into the practice of their service to the public. These cardinal virtues are: faith, hope, and love or charity. Hellwig argued

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<sup>23</sup> Government of Canada; *Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service*; Canadian Government Publishing, Ottawa, 2003

that use of the term “morality” has been restricted to private behaviour which leaves aside responsibility for immensely consequential decisions in public policy such as initiating wars, oppressive policies, regressive tax structures, and disregard of the United Nations and international law. Hellwig believed we have to incorporate the cardinal virtues into the decisions people make in human affairs at all levels of social organization. She thought it important to explore the values that guide these decisions and the way those values are often apparently in conflict with one another.

While Hellwig argued that public servants should find ways to include the cardinal virtues in their decision making, she cautioned against using a narrow definition of them that could have the effect of, on the one hand, tying oneself into a theological straightjacket or, on the other, falling short of the goals’ virtues. She wrote:

“In fact, faith is concerned with a constantly expanding interpretive vision of reality, which is a gift of God to those who are open to see what is divinely unfolded before them. The theological virtue of hope is the expectation, motivation, and striving that grows out of the faith vision. And charity is not love in the popular sense of attraction or emotion, but rather a total commitment of oneself, one's energies, loyalties, resources, and time.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Monika K. Hellwig; *Public Dimensions of a Believers Life: Rediscovering the Cardinal Virtues* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield) 2005, p. 139

Benedict XVI indicated that a Christian in public service should strive to promote moral truth. In his aforementioned address to politicians and diplomats in Cyprus, His Holiness illustrated three principles that public servants should follow to promote moral truth. First, promoting moral truth means acting responsibly on the basis of factual knowledge. He believes this helps public servants identify true injustices and grievances, enabling them to consider dispassionately the concerns of all involved in a given dispute. It requires that parties rise above their own particular view of events so they acquire an objective and comprehensive vision. Those who are called to resolve such disputes must make just decisions and promote genuine reconciliation by grasping and acknowledging the full truth of a specific question.

A second way of promoting moral truth consists of deconstructing political ideologies which would supplant the truth. He stated, “The tragic experiences of the twentieth century have laid bare the inhumanity which follows from the suppression of truth and human dignity.” While these are not-so-veiled references to the experiences with communism and fascism, we must hold this principle to be true for our own ideologies and ideological labels, as well. When we look through the lens of ideology at facts, we should not reshape facts to fit through our ideological lenses.

Third, promoting moral truth in public life calls for a constant effort to base positive law upon the ethical principles of natural law. An appeal to natural law was once considered self-evident, but the tide of positivism in contemporary legal theory requires the restatement of this important axiom. Individuals, communities and states, without guidance from objectively moral truths, would become selfish and unscrupulous and the world a more dangerous place in which to live. On the

other hand, by being respectful of the rights of persons and peoples we protect and promote human dignity. When the policies we support are enacted in harmony with the natural law proper to our common humanity, our actions become sounder and more conducive to an environment of understanding, justice and peace.

As Canadians, we might wish to add an additional principle for the promotion of moral truth in public service: the need for solidarity. Given that Canada is a multi-cultural society [cf. Section 27, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*], Canada is also a multi-faith society. It is important that all Canadians be able to make use of the public square and not scrub it clean of religious references. In an interesting study, David Houston et al<sup>25</sup> examined the religiosity of public servants (governmental and non-governmental) and non-public servants, as well as the secular attitudes held by members of each group. The study finds that individuals in governmental public service occupations generally are more religious and possess less secular attitudes than those in non-public service occupations.

It has been my experience that those who engage in all forms of public service from all faith communities have been highly successful public servants by remaining faithful to their faith.

As we go forward on our journey through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important that men and women of Faith will continue to improve our shared life by engagement in public service. As the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent

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<sup>25</sup> David J. Houston; Patricia K. Freeman; David L. Freeman; “How Naked is the Public Square? Religion, Public Service, and Implications for Public Administration” in *Public Administration Review* (May) 2008; Pp. 428-444



Nichols, put it when describing our liberation through the Resurrection whereby we are released from the grip of helplessness and restored to goodness and hope.

To paraphrase:

This is the underground stream of faith which nourishes so many today who strive to improve our shared life, to lift the burden of victimhood and helplessness, and who seek in so many ways to serve the common good. The fruit of this hidden stream is seen in the work of every sincere politician or public servant who is dedicated, at any level, to public service. This is the true dignity of the public service vocation: that by working for the good of all, the genuine common good of our society, politicians and people in public life attempt to create signposts of that greater hope, the hope of the fulfilment of all our potential, ...<sup>26</sup>

In this vein, public service is rendered in His Footsteps.

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<sup>26</sup> Archbishop Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, Sunday Civic Mass, February 14, 2010 <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStoryPrinter=15642>