

REPRESENTATIVE LAY CATHOLICS BACK BISHOPS

The South African Council of Catholic Laity issued this endorsement of the Catholic bishops' statement on the elections on 19/3/1987.

The South African Catholic Council of Catholic Laity is made up of 26 officially affiliated organisations, the largest. St. Anne's Sodality, has a membership of 26 000 women. Membership of other organisations; range between 1500 and 6000 each. The Laity Council is therefore the mouthpiece of the majority of lay Catholics in South Africa.

The so-called Catholic Defence League is not an officially recognised Catholic lay organisation and is not a member of the Council of Catholic Laity of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The South African Council of Catholic Laity declared: "The upcoming white elections will effect all South Africans. We executive members of the South African Council of Catholic Laity believe it is our duty to express our views on this matter. We hope that issues raised will serve as a basis of discussion and that all Catholics participate in the political life of South Africa will do so on the basis of an informed conscience.

"It should be made clear at the outset that our concerns lie less with narrow party politics, and more with the morality which should guide us all in these matters of social importance. In these and all other matters it is our hope that we will all be guided by the values of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The present government of South Africa can only claim to represent roughly 20 percent of the members of our Church and indeed a mere minority of the peoples of South Africa as a whole. As such it could be based upon the will of the people of South Africa.

"Moreover, its track record clearly illustrates that it does not have the good of all people of South Africa at heart.

"As such the white minority government is a morally illegitimate government.

"This white election will solve none of the problems which beset South Africa's peoples and as such this election is little more than an expensive exercise in futility.

Silenced

"In the first place we should not forget that this election takes place at a time when thousands of fellow South Africans (and hundreds of Catholics) lie languishing in goals, the cost of their opposition to apartheid. Those who remain outside of goal are not exactly free either with the emergency regulations effectively silencing any voices of dissent.

"Is this the context for a free and fair election?

“From the remaining number there are the relatively small percentage of Catholics who have the so-called “privilege” of voting: While some of these Catholics will, in conscience, want to use this vote in the interests of their voteless brothers and sisters in Christ, one should never happily accept the unfair position imposed upon one of having to speak on behalf of others. Voteless South Africans have their own views and no Catholic should feel satisfied until the organisations, which voice these people’s aspirations are unbanned and once more allowed to express these views legally.

Extra-parliamentary groups

“it is the duty of every Catholic to take seriously Jesus’ simple request to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Mk 12:31), and in this respect all Catholics need to work towards the day when South Africans of all colours will equally be able to participate in the running of their country.

“In the light of this all Catholics, both black and white, are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the mushrooming number of non-racial extra-parliamentary organisations. Although these groups have been heavily repressed of late, they remain some of the few channels where black and white South Africans can still meet together as equals to decide the future of our country.

“These organisations desperately need our active support while they remain a flicker of hope in the growing darkness. Furthermore all Catholics should read and discuss the contents of The Freedom Charter (its legal). It remains the only document, which was drawn up by all sectors of South Africa’s people and is supported by many people aspiring for freedom in South Africa.

“Finally let us pray for the strength of commitment to follow Jesus’ example in all these matters as we are reminded by Him: ‘I am the way, the truth and the Life; no one can come to the Father except through me’ (Jn 14:6).”