

Reynolds C.L. (1993) “After the Bitter Bout”, *ON BEING, The Nation, Australia* pp. 8-9.

The recent election victory by the labor party is remarkable given the condition of the nation. Regardless of the outcome, however, the 1990s pose a challenge to Government to design a future for Australia that will improve our national prospects and lifestyle.

On the surface, the election appeared to be a dispute between two parties over how the economy should be taxed and stimulated so as to bring about a better future. At times, it seemed, like it was a classic hip-pocket election with both sides promising to ‘throw money at it’, whatever ‘it’ was, in order to win electoral votes.

This election was about the economy, essentially a debate over how to restructure its mechanical processes. Perhaps never in Australia’s history have we witnessed two trained economists running for the job of Prime Minister debating over growth policy from different perspectives. John Hewson has a Ph.D. in economics and has worked as consultant in private business and Paul Keating has spent the past 10 years working as the Commonwealth Treasurer and Prime Minister.

For Dr Hewson, however, the issue was not about moving the deck chairs on the Titanic – as some may have thought – by making certain Treasury Department policy changes. The issue was ideology. Dr Hewson believed we needed a different philosophical approach to how we relate and operate in Australia. The Liberals believe in equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome.

Dr Hewson wanted to lead Australia to become a land of opportunity.

Paul Keating, too, believes things must change in Australia as we adjust our relationship with rest of the world.

In many ways these two leaders want the same things. In both their minds it means becoming more like America. Regardless of who won the election, our tax system is going to undergo change in the next three years.

The Americanization of Australia has been going on for some time. Much of our life – our entertainment, our music, clothing styles and even eating habits – is American influenced, and it seems inevitable that we will follow in the track of American politics and business as well. Neither party is resistant to this trend. It will only take the Labor Party longer to introduce changes and slowly erode the equality-of-opportunity model that our States now function on. Had things been reversed, we may well have seen a right-wing led Labor Opposition campaigning on similar reformist policies against a Liberal Government having to nurse and defend an existing system of political/business relations.

Still, not everything that comes from America is better than what we have here. Sure, the economy gives opportunity and rewards initiative, but it carries the burden of millions of people who have nothing and little hope of ever having anything. Certainly, the US has great opportunities in education but it has terrific ignorance and poverty. Where there are winners there are also losers.

There are lessons to learn from this election that go beyond economics. Both parties tried to give us a vision of Australia could be under their leadership. They failed. There was no imagination or

dream of what 'could be' to inspire the populous. Many people were disillusioned by the political options. It was worse than complacency. There was widespread rejection of the option. What was missing from both sides of the political argument was hope.

On one 'morning radio program' before the election, the announcer asked people to call in and register their vote. The response comprised people mainly wanting to show their disillusionment by voting of Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck (again, the American influence on the donkey vote).

The two parties' election campaigns were basically campaigns of fear, not of faith. Each side tried to induce fear of the other's policies. And, it seems, people's fears won out.

People were looking for hope. In the current social and economic environment, people need hope not fear. As the great psychologist Victor Frankl has shown, it is hope that gives people the meaning of their life and the desire to keep on living. Without an offer of hope and something to believe in, there is no meaning, and that's the problem facing our country. We have lost our sense of meaning and with it sense of value.

The question of meaning, however, is for some a meaningless question. Frederick Nietzsche, writing 100 years ago, believed that life was meaningless precisely because there is no meaning to life.

The meaning to life, thought Nietzsche, is dependent upon the meaning of God. But God, he said, is dead, and therefore human life is utterly degraded. And if God is dead then humanity had meaning; no reason to love, no reason to hate, and there is only left a desire for self preservation and comfort. For humanity there is nothing – a nothingness Nietzsche called nihilism.

So nothing becomes truth and humanity has no future. Accordingly, death defines life. Our actions, aspirations, desires and loves are all defined by death. The offspring of death is fear, an experience we all know only too well. Thus, a life lived without faith becomes hopeless.

Yet, death like darkness has power and can only exist in the absence of light, or life. It is an interesting coincidence that this election has occurred during the season of lent as we approach Easter. For again, we remind ourselves that the Easter message is of light coming to darkness, of life overcoming death.

The message of Christ is a message of hope, and, accordingly, it is always a message that gives meaning to our lives. Jesus, in the prophetic tradition, comes challenge our consciousness to imagine a future prepared by God. In this context, Paul is able to say "death where is your sting?" Because of his faith in Christ, he was no longer afraid of death. He had a vision of anew creation, a future, created by God. It is a tragedy in the church's life and witness when we forget how to dream and imagine a better future designed by God.

Without God's spirit, which speaks to us of things of the future, our lives are powerless. As our country moves away from faith in Christ, we, at the same time, become a powerless people. A people without hope.

The future presented to Australia in the election was primarily an economist's future; a future characterized by statistic, graphs and trends. In the true sense of the world, this is a materialist future in that our happiness as nation and as individuals is dependent upon physical remedies.

Prime Minister Keating's program of economic rationalism may look good for the national books, but it is unlikely to answer the pleas of ordinary Australians for help. On the morning after the

election, even Senator Bronwyn Bishop said something to the effect that the Liberal campaign had needed more heart. She was right!

This country is looking for imagination and a dream of a better Australia. The candidates in this election were not men of vision or imagination and so left much of the electorate disillusioned.

Jesus said: "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceed from the mouth of God". To offer our country economic rationalism as an election incentive lacks inspiration and imagination. People want more than monetary and fiscal policies. They hunger for some meaning to the country's advancement.