

United Church moderator advocates moral leadership

Canadians yearn for the strong, moral leadership that public figures once provided, says the Rt. Rev. Bill Phipps, moderator of the United Church of Canada.

Where are those voices now, he wonders, the people who stand for a caring and compassionate society? Speaking after a recent Saturday breakfast at St. John's United Church in Georgetown, he decried a society which creates winners and losers, then blames the losers for being losers.

"Conrad Black and his acolytes have no corner on the economy. It's our turf too," he told a crowd representing churches from Bramalea to Acton, Erin, and beyond.

The United Church, he reminded listeners, was a prime force in the development of Canada's social welfare state, pushing for the Canada Pension Plan, medicare, and unemployment insurance. Now, too often, the church focuses inward. It has lost its prophetic voice.

He likes the definition a Jewish friend once shared: "Our economy is how we love one another collectively."

From Genesis to Revelation, says Phipps, the Bible has more to say about economics and social justice than it does about sex.

So when people say it's time to get back to the Bible, Phipps' reaction is "Hallelujah brother!"

He attacked the "obscenity of child poverty," video lottery terminals, and an Ontario government which builds supermax prisons with no space for



RT. REV. BILL PHIPPS

chaplains or chapels.

"The spiritual life is not in the mind of this government".

He is heartened by an increased interest in spirituality throughout society, by gatherings of corporate leaders who talk with him over bag lunches about their struggles to be faithful, by the swelling forces of committed, imaginative young people in the churches.

But there was criticism for the church too. In some places worship is boring, children feel excluded, and "the artwork sucks. I see Sunday School pictures my grandparents used, in which Jesus doesn't look anything like a mid-eastern Jew."

In closing he stressed the need for Christians to gather for prayer and the Eucharist, thereby gaining the strength they need to speak on major public issues.

"Be touched by the spirit of God, then go out and be a holy and reckless people."

Story and photo by Janet Duval, special

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