

Politics in Canada: A Realistic Portrait

Our 20th century is witnessing the rise of a growing sense of despair. The French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain wrote, "The end of the Roman empire was a minor event compared with what we behold. We are looking at the liquidation of what is known as the 'modern world.' "

The 1990s will find mankind rapidly moving toward greater interdependence, while at the same time the USSR, the world's last colonial empire, is disintegrating. Recent events in Eastern Europe have confounded the political pundits. The environment continues to be ravaged; the poor are still with us, without too much hope for the improvement of their lot. We will see astonishing discoveries in space, biotechnology, and genetic reconstruction. We are confronted by the rise of anti-Semitism, the precarious political situation in the Middle East, racism, drug abuse, abortion, euthanasia, and many other complex issues. Moral values are rapidly changing. What was considered wrong yesterday is acceptable today. In our pluralistic society everything has become relative. Nothing is absolute anymore or unchangeable.

Those who call themselves atheists and agnostics have vastly increased in number. On the one hand man is viewed as a consumer. What he has is more important than what he is. He demands more and more goods, demonstrates for a responsible society, while at the same time is willing to resort to violence to get what he wants. He is dominated by the making of money; the requisition of goods has become the purpose of his life. Ever increasing taxation continues to erode his purchasing power. Of course he has to pay for cradle-to-the-grave social services, which are his "divine" right. And since the government has a paternalistic attitude toward him, it acts as if by not taking all his money away great generosity is shown.

We live in an upside-down world! Consumer man is being bribed with his own money. The months before elections become the hand-out, give away time government checks flowing freely. But once in power, the new government will either have to raise taxes to make true its promises, or go back on its word.

Bryce Harlow, advisor of U.S. presidents from the 1950s to the '70s, told an interviewer in 1976 what every politically minded citizen should know. Politics is a business, he said, and not a hobby. "The bottom line is not profit and loss, it's votes."

On the other hand the New Age movement has made man godlike. He goes from glory to glory, moving ever upward to ever greater possibilities. Our culture has lost its soul; it is spiritually malnourished, preoccupied with trivia. Our western culture is returning to its pagan past. "Western civilization," wrote Toynbee, "that is now unifying the world in these various ways is a post-Christian or ex-Christian civilization." Christianity has retreated. Nobody seems to know anymore what truth is. And it is important to remember that modern paganism is not the same as ancient paganism. Our culture has discarded the Christian faith. The ties have been cut. Jacques Elul aptly remarks:

The ... most important aspect of post-Christian society is the very fact that it has experienced Christianity and left it behind. Contemporary society cannot, therefore, be regarded as a simply pagan society. It does not have the innocence and simplicity that comes from the ignorance of Christianity and of all it entails. Post Christian society is marked by its experience of Christianity and at the same time it thinks it knows what it is turning away from (The New Denons). The many new gods are even more destructive the ancient idols.

In Canada we are subjected to the tyranny of the majority. The minority has little room to maneuver. Canadian citizens are not represented in parliament as they should be. The winner of a riding takes all. This makes it difficult for any new party to gain seats. There is no representation according to proportional votes. Public opinion is being manipulated by the media. The media determine what is news and what is not. Political leaders are chosen more for their TV image, their looks, than for their principles. The image makes the politician. In our time public opinion is deified. During the Meech Lake constitutional crisis the public was bombarded by opinion polls. Our very consciences seem to be controlled by public opinion. According to Alexis de Tocqueville the greatest democratic danger is the enslavement to public opinion. Allan Bloom notes that "Flattery of the people and incapacity to resist public opinion are the democratic vices, particularly among writers, artists, journalists and anyone else who is dependent on an audience." Who dares to question public opinion? Rights and wrongs are determined by poll taking. How many are prochoice or prolife? How many favor the abolishment or the restoration of capital punishment?

Political absolutism is a real threat in Canada, not because of the danger of a dictator waiting in the wings to take over the country, but because of the vast array of means to control our everyday life – economic planning, bureaucracy which never changes though the government may change, the ever increasing demands of the public on government services. Our government structures are more rigid than in the past. The government is considered responsible for everything. It is the great provider! Many Canadians are cynical about politicians. They would agree with broadcaster Al Boliska's observation, "A candidate is a person who stands for what the public will fall for." Edgar Z. Friedenberg wrote,

"Following Canadian politics closely is a little like being a devoted reader of Peanuts or even Pogo, it's the character that holds your interest, not the story line. "

In Canada inflation has not been "wrestled to the ground." But inflation is not just an economic problem; it is another sign of moral decline. As long as people think that continued borrowing and chasing after consumer goods brings happiness, the pressures to continue inflation will continue to outweigh those for stopping. The combination of high taxation and inflation spell disaster for any country. Historians claim that the collapse of Roman society in the third century occurred when the imperial inflationary policies and punitive taxation devastated the economy, which set the stage for class warfare. This was the beginning of the end.

As I see it, our world is more confused and complex than ever. We are inviting upon us the judgment of God (Jer. 51:56; 19:3-9). Do we still have a political choice as Christians? Is the time for a Christian political party not too late?

This is the first in a series of five articles on politics in general and the Canadian political scene more specifically. It is written in response to Christian Heritage Party leader Ed Van Woudenberg's new book *A Matter of Choice*, published by Premier Ltd.

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