

Politics and Religion – Water and Oil? –

I always voted at my party's call And I never thought of thinking for myself of all, I thought so little they rewarded me, By making me the ruler of the Queen's Novee. (A verse from H.M.S. Pinafore by Sir Arthur Sullivan)

A maxim of traditional Canadian etiquette still is: "Never discuss religion and politics." Religion and politics don't mix. One must avoid allowing any private beliefs to affect public behavior. Politics is a secular affair, unrelated to God. Remember Northern Ireland! Remember Lebanon! We don't want religious strife here. Ours is a pluralistic society of many faiths. What would happen if every religion had its own political party?

Christians have been too polite far too long. They have abdicated their political responsibility. Mainline churches are politically engaged through taskforces, lobbyists, and petitions to the government. They have turned the gospel into a horizontal social justice program. Much time and effort is spent on aboriginal rights instead of winning the lost for Christ. (I am not saying that Christians have no responsibility toward the aboriginals.) But why do evangelicals object to political involvement? The reasons vary.

1. The world is wicked. Satan is in full control. He is the prince of this present evil age. We are awaiting Christ's millennial reign. When He comes again all social and political questions will be solved. We are only pilgrims and sojourners, travelling toward the New Jerusalem.

2. A Christian must not be tainted by the affairs of the world. Individual piety, godly living in the midst of a fallen world, is all that counts. Vernon C. Grounds has parodied the spirit of this kind of evangelical spirituality in his paraphrase of a popular hymn:

Sit down, O men of God:
His Kingdom He will bring
Whenever it may please His will.
You cannot do a thing.

3. Politics is dirty. All politicians are power hungry. Have you ever seen an honest politician? A Christian shouldn't get his hands dirty.

4. Political involvement doesn't make any difference. Christians are only a small minority in a multicultural society. Who will listen to them? What kind of impact can they make?

Naked Public Square

Because evangelical Christians did not participate in the political arena, others filled the void. And the others are dedicated to secularism, humanism and other isms. The public square never remains empty for long. To refuse political involvement because it is dirty is an irresponsible act. Politics has become dirty because Christians allowed it.

I see political engagement as another dimension of Christian service in God's multi-dimensional world. We must be doers of the Word, not hearers only. Jesus Christ is

either Lord of all or not Lord at all. He is both Savior and Lord. The gospel is concerned with political activity. The Bible is not just a light to guide us to heaven, but our Lord's Word for all of life. If Christians don't speak now; if they refuse to get involved in this critical hour of history, they may very soon lose both the right and the opportunity to do so.

Part of Our Calling

Politics is as much a part of our discipleship and walk with God as evangelism and missions. We cannot separate our social calling, the need for just legislation, the prevention of misery and oppression from our personal faith. I fail to understand how a Christian can divorce his deeply felt private religion from his political action. Why leave the Lord behind when you enter the voting booth? The question is not, "Should a Christian be involved?" but rather, "How shall he be involved?" What should a Christian do? Can he be a member of a non-Christian social-minded party, which strives for a more humane world? Many Reformed Christians still vote for the Conservatives. They seem to have a special affinity to them. Is it because they are traditionally minded people, conservative by habit? But conservative no longer has the traditional meaning. The platform of the Conservative party is as secular as the other two mainline parties the N.D.P. and the Liberals. Philosophically the difference between today's conservatives and liberals is the difference between six and half a dozen. The N.D.P. has a distinctive social democratic platform. But how can a Christian ever vote for a party that is blatantly pro-abortion and pro-gay rights?

Voting for the Party

Some Christians say, "The candidate in my riding (Liberal or Conservative) is a Christian. My vote goes to him. I know his position on social justice, foreign affairs, abortion, homosexuality and so on. If I vote for a Christian party my vote is wasted. My candidate will speak for me in parliament." But this is living in dreamland. Even the Christian member of parliament has to toe the party line. When a Christian votes for a fellow Christian, his vote goes to the candidate's party. In Canada there is little room within the three major political parties for a candidate to promote his own convictions. Parliamentary rules are designed to let private members talk, if there is time. Private members don't make laws. The party, which forms the government, makes the laws.

Gordon Aiken, member of parliament from 1956-1973, refers to parliamentarians as "trained seals." The price of survival in parliament is constant loyalty to party and leader. "On several occasions I had to vote against my conscience," says Pauline Jewett, Liberal Member for Northumberland from 1963-1965, "and those times I felt I had no character at all. But I could see no alternative." Phil Givens, Liberal Member for York West from 1968-1971, came to Ottawa believing that he had something to contribute; but to his dismay he soon discovered that even Trudeau wanted only "trained seals." "Trudeau told the caucus he liked members to disagree and criticize," he recalled, "but whenever anyone did, he got the stiletto."

My choice is a Christian party. In such a party a Christian can have communal experience and expression. I am not in favor of a church party, but a party of Christians who submit themselves to God's inerrant, infallible Word. The Christian Heritage Party is such a party. It is not a confessional party, though it has its roots in the Reformation. The party looks at politics from the perspective of eternity; but it does not work for Utopia. The new world is God's gift. The Bible is its guideline for social Justice, family relationship, foreign affairs, and aboriginal rights. It is not a one issue party. The CHP is in direct antithesis to Canada's old and tired mainline parties. It is anti-revolutionary in character. Over against revolution is the gospel. Its political program is spelled out by its leader Ed Vanwoudenberg in his book *A Matter of Choice*.

Johan D. Tangelder
October, 1990