

Christian Beliefs Should Count Politically

Winston Churchill was once giving a press interview to American journalists who were asking the usual rather fatuous questions which come after major topics have been dealt with.

"Would you like to tell our readers, sir," one journalist asked, "What are the desirable qualifications for any young man who wishes to become a politician?"

Mr. Churchill put on his best bulldog look and everybody thought that he was going to make a profound statement. But there was the characteristic twinkle in his eye as he said: "It is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year." He paused and looked round the room to make sure that all the journalists had put this down, then he added: "And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen."

Of course this great politician and statesman said this with tongue in cheek. Seriously though, to be a politician requires much more than that. Winston Churchill himself proved this through his own life and work. His political career was not based on flimsy ideas. He was motivated by firm convictions.

Firm convictions are sorely needed. We are facing a crisis of confidence in politics and with politicians. The Watergate hearings have made many cynical. The Spiro Agnew resignation from the vice-presidency has left the United States in a state of gloom. Nothing can shake one's belief in honesty, and in principle as to see men changing their opinions without any reason, except for political expedience, making affirmations about issues and but a few weeks later doing the opposite of what has been said.

Policies nowadays are mainly based on counting heads and who can lobby the best. If the majority are in favour of relaxing the laws regarding pornography or abortion on demand, well the majority opinion is always right. Dr. John C. Bennett, professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, commented about the political stanch in the United States, and his remarks are also applicable to our country.

"In this country, the major parties have no consistent ideology. The most decisive political struggles among us are the struggles within each party to determine its leadership and direction. The overlap as between the parties in outlook and policy is remarkable and often the chief differences between prominent leaders of the two parties are over very marginal issues of strategy and these as seen in the light of regional differences."

Our political parties are basically humanistic and pragmatic in their orientation. Therefore the blurring of distinctives in their political programs. What is pragmatism? The word pragmatism indicates that movement of thought that denies that there is One norm for truth that binds all people.

As someone wrote: "Only that can be 'true' and 'correct'; which is useful for the factual, practical goals which one has established. If a certain pronouncement or measure brings you closer to this practical goal, that pronouncement or measure is true and correct.

For example, the American philosopher William James, the founder of pragmatic philosophy, was of the opinion that it is true that God exists, not because he 'believed' this, but because he found that people who believed in God felt more secure in life. Religion proves to be useful, and therefore it is true.

"The question whether a certain action is moral or ethical is asked less and less, and more and more people are interested in practical results only. The question "Does it work?" is now more important than "Is it right?"

What of the Christian? A Christian confesses a norm for truth and behaviour. He asks first: "Is it right?" He bases his philosophy of life on the Scriptures. At present, the making of a public Christian contribution to politics is discouraged by the very structures of North American governments. All what the Christian minority can do at the moment is rather limited because the government listens only to the majority.

Yet the Bible-believing Christians must do their utmost to have a Christian witness in politics. As Christians we may not withdraw ourselves from the battle of ideas which determine the direction in the affairs of a nation.

The Lord said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The Christian forsakes his principles when he is only concerned about heaven and not earth. The ancient creed has as its head: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth..." In this statement of faith is the explicit commitment that the Christian religion must also deal with our relation to nature, and our fellow men. Therefore, the social structure, our whole way of life, must be planned not according to the whims and wishes of the creature. We cannot substitute the will of the creature for the will of the Creator.

I believe that there is room for evangelical political action. The Bible does not only give an appeal for the salvation of our souls, but speaks authoritatively in the political arena as well as in any other phase of life.

Johan D. Tangelde
November, 1973