

Is Politics Everything?

At a conference on Christian political and social thought held in 1987 at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, Professor Dr. Edward E. Ericson Jr. said: "It is clear to me that politics is our primary area of human concern today. Look at television news. Who do you see? Poets? Novelists? Philosophers? Educated people are likely to tell us that persons such as these are the most profound interpreters of human experience. But such figures seldom show up on television news. Nor do preachers, those persons charged with the high task of speaking the word of the Almighty to us-unless they engage in naughty deeds that titillate us. For the rest of the time, we watch politicians, with a smattering of actors and athletes thrown in." And Ericson asks, "Do Christians accept the idea of the primacy of politics?" In our highly politicized society, Christians need to take up politics. As disciples of our Lord we must be obedient to Him in every area of life. Faith without works is dead (James 2:14-18). And the example of Christ Himself is the key reason for our involvement.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer called Jesus "The man for others." Our Lord directed His disciples to concern themselves with the quality of family life, hunger, sickness, relieving the oppressed, comforting the distressed, and justice. As His followers today, we have the same mandate. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). In his commentary on this text, John Calvin perceptively wrote, "The purpose of man is to be a servant to all." Calvin's seal, a heart presented as a sacrifice on a hand, and his motto: "I offer my heart as a sacrifice to God," illustrates the Christian's submission to service. We are saved to serve. And this service is not limited to home, church or private philanthropy. Our union with Christ should lead us to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. As salt shakers (Matt. 5:13), Christians must be willing to go against the grain of contemporary political assumptions. There will be times when Christians may have to act in ways, which many of our fellow citizens will consider divisive.

As we are to be politically engaged, party policies, programs, actions and propaganda should be carefully studied. And John Stott's timely warning should be taken to heart, "Christians should not get involved unless they are prepared to do their homework. Politics is for politicians, who have gained the necessary expertise. There is little more embarrassing than the sight of Christians pontificating on political issues from positions of ignorance."

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