

[after 1945]

THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT IN POLITICS

When I decided a few short years ago to enter politics as an active candidate for elective office, I was cautioned by many close friends against what they termed the inevitable evils and abuses which exist in the broad political arena. They uttered sharp cries of dismay that one whose career had been devoted to education, church work, and youth activity should elect to enter a field which over the years had become associated with corruption, "smoke-filled rooms", "party bosses", and other evidences of unsavory human relations. They warned that politics held little opportunity for the kind of public service with which I had sought to identify myself.

My friends were stating to me a view which is held by a great preponderance of American people. A recent public opinion poll revealed that more than 70% of American parents do not want their children to enter public life as candidates for office. This, too, is most tragic. It reveals a fundamental weakness in the attitude of the American people toward democracy and the responsibility which each individual, as a citizen, has in making that democracy work.

Notwithstanding the warnings of my well-intentioned friends, I decided to enter politics, to face the real facts of our political life, and to make whatever contribution I could to the development of a higher standard of governmental service.

I made this decision because I was persuaded that, if ever politics was the business of every person, that time certainly

had arrived and that it was now incumbent upon every person to participate to the fullest possible extent in the total life of his community.

I have frequently stated to people who criticize those of us who are in politics that "you may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you." Today government has become inextricably tied up with virtually every phase of our daily lives. Government is called upon to assist in the development of a prosperous economic order. Government is involved more and more in programs of social welfare of widespread importance.

Whether one is engaged in business or is a professional person or is a member of a labor union, he finds that his government is inevitably involved in his economic activity. Whether this be good or bad, the point is that government, as a controlling force in our lives, cannot be escaped. If we are to listen to those who, because they are terrified by the abuses that do exist in the political world, ^{seek to escape all politics} we would simply bury our heads in the sand and ignore the realities of our individual community lives.

We have in America a democratic system which embodies the most advanced development in the application of ^{the} Christian ideal of the essential dignity of every individual. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that democracy has been achieved only relatively recently and after many centuries of struggle against oppression and tyranny.

Today democracy is sometimes threatened by new forces, variously described as communism, fascism, or totalitarianism, which deny the basic premises of Christianity and democracy. The

theories underlying these conflicting forces hold that the individual is important only as he serves the state and that the state is an end in itself. Thus, facing a fundamental crisis in our way of life, it is absolutely imperative that every person who is devoted to principles of Christianity and democracy must become alive to the politics of our time and must find the means of participating so that he may help preserve and extend these ideals.

Christianity holds that before God each man is equal. Democracy holds that before the law each man is equal. This parallel is no coincidence because the development of democracy grew out of the acceptance of Christian principles. If we surrender our political rights of free speech, free press, and free assembly in the misguided notion that by surrendering them we can achieve some type of improved economic order, we not only commit political suicide, but we betray our own faith in Christianity and in the dignity which we believe, as a faith, is vested in every person.

The recent war was fought to defend these principles. We won the military phase of that war, but that was only a beginning. We are now engaged in the far more important struggle of winning a peace which will establish our democratic ideals not only in America, but throughout the entire world. A tremendous job challenges the Christian student. He must become politically alive. He must school himself in the politics of our society. He must add to his faith in Christianity and democracy an understanding of the

basic forces and imperatives which are shaping our nation and world. Once informed, he must become an active participant and bring into the political arena the militance and zeal of a crusader for the cause of righteousness.

To be more specific, the Christian student must become involved in political party organization, in campaigns and elections. He must learn the nature and method of operations of many movements now so vigorously seeking to influence legislation. He himself must become, in a sense, a lobbyist--a lobbyist in behalf of legislation and administrative programs which give meaning to democracy and which extend political and economic security for the masses of people.

Our objectives are achieved through the ballot, through the election of men and women to office who are committed to democratic ideals, and through additional activities which reach into every home and persuade the people that the ideals of Christianity and democracy are the only ideals that can offer them a meaningful life.

Our political parties desperately need honest, sincere members who understand the problems of our day and who are willing to devote time and energy to their solution. Any person who wishes to participate in politics will find his services heartily welcomed and he will be immediately assigned to some important aspect of the particular movement with which he identifies himself.

It is by no means necessary for the student to identify himself with a political party. There are scores of independent

and non-partisan educational and political committees which offer many opportunities for the same type of service.

Whatever avenue the Christian student chooses, however, he must evaluate his political activities in terms of his devotion to the philosophy of Christianity and democracy. This means continuing study and thought. He must never permit himself to accept without independent thought the dictates of any leader. He must always remain flexible in his attitudes but forever committed to the principles of democracy.

The strength of democracy is in the sound thinking of its citizens and in the effective application of the Christian principles of justice and humanity. This is the challenge that faces the Christian student. The world today, in a crisis state, yearns for a rededication to the principles for which the Christian student must forever strive.



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org