

The Rector's Message: Church and Politics

If the title of this article doesn't elicit groans and a sense of weariness, I will be surprised. Most people I know would prefer to keep these two things far apart from one another. We tend to think that Church elevates the mind and spirit while Politics takes us away from God. Perhaps this helps to explain why so many churches choose to avoid dealing openly with "controversial issues." Just this week, I had lunch with a former parishioner who was visiting from out of state. In the episcopal cathedral he now attends, he says that they never bring up "church politics." As an Incarnational Christian, I believe that this policy is unwise, centrally because we are to serve God in every aspect of life, and to leave out these messier bits is to cut short our mission.

As we face the opening this month of the state Supreme Court case concerning Church property, and there are significant issues for Christians in our state and national elections in early November, I offer the following quotations which address our understanding of Church and Politics. The final one is from an e-mail I sent to a friend who had sent me links to some particularly mean-spirited blogsites concerning a candidate for national office.

"Those who treat politics and morality apart will never understand the one or the other."
John Viscount Morley

"To let politics become a cesspool, and then avoid it because it is a cesspool, is a double crime." Howard Crosby

"The penalty that good men pay for not being interested in politics is to be governed by men worse than themselves." Plato

"The good of man must be the end of the science of politics." Aristotle

"Why cannot you Catholics leave politics alone? - that is the cry which greets us everywhere, and sometimes wearies us . . . Now, I think it is very often a fair answer to that question to say that the Church is quite prepared to leave politics alone when politics will be content to leave the Church alone" Ronald Knox

"The struggle between Church and State is not yet dead. Already people are expecting the Church to alter her laws of kindred and affinity to match the State's laws . . . The sword will pierce our hearts too—not the bared sword of forcible oppression, but the more deadly weapons of contempt, criticism, ridicule, protest, oblivion. Mutilated creeds, half-hearted devotions, up-to-date formularies, will be pressed upon our acceptance . . . When the crisis comes . . . We shall need all the prayers [and] self-discipline of St. Thomas . . . To see that the spiritual crown . . . of inner meekness and humility is not taken away from us." Ronald Knox

"Morality, in Rousseau's view, was rooted in neither reason nor revelation, but in the natural feeling of compassion. Indeed, he is in an important sense the father of the politics of compassion. As we now know, however, compassion is a shaky foundation on which to build a just society. Compassion, unlike charity, is not a virtue acquired by self-discipline and habitual practice. It is only a feeling, and a fleeting one at that. It yields not only to self-preservation, but to self-interest." Mary Ann Glendon

"Beware of politics by blogsites! There are too many of every conceivable perspective, and the net effect of paying them too much attention is cynicism and giving up on the political process because all candidates are terrible. And if one only views blogs of one's own political persuasion, this only serves to further the divide between people of differing views and makes cooperation ('reaching across the aisle') even more difficult."

Faithfully,

Fr. Bausch+

