ELECTIONS AND EVANGELISM

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Politicians need to learn to tell better stories; to inspire us with a picture of the future which is rooted in present reality but which points us where they believe we need to be. Evangelists already have a better story; they just need to tell all of it.

Category: Politics

If you live in the UK, it can't have escaped your notice that there is a general election looming. If you are anything like me, you might also be thinking that you don't think you can stand another two months of campaigning. Should I emigrate? Hide the radio? Only watch Eurosport on the TV?

Don't get me wrong. I don't think the election is unimportant. I'm keenly interested in politics and the future of our country and I can hardly wait for election night itself; it's going to be fascinating seeing how it all pans out. It's not politics that bothers me, it's political campaigning. Let me mention a fewÂ of my particular bugbears.

Don't TellÂ Me to Fear the Other Guy

All of the major parties are spending vast amounts of time and money telling us why we shouldn't vote for their opponents. Ask a politician about their party's policy on some subject or other and they will answer by telling you how the other lot get it all wrong and how the will wreck the country.

I hate to disappoint our elected representatives, but I can actually work that sort of thing out for myself. I am capable of reading and listening to arguments about different policies and thinking through the implications. The difficulty is getting any one to tell us their policies - they are too busy warning us off the opposition.

Don'tÂ Promise the Moon

As far as I can tell, all of the parties are promising to lead us into an era of prosperity. Taxes will be lowered, spending will be increased (at least on those things that we care about), houses will be built and all schools and hospitals will be above average.

I'm sorry, but I'm not convinced - see my comment above about being able to evaluate what politicians are saying.

Don't Undervalue Human Beings

The first two issues are the ones that irritate me the most; the ones that are likely to get me turning from the news to watch the second half of a handball game from Lithuania. However, it is this one that really worries me. Politicians of all parties have an increasing tendency to judge success or failure purely in economic terms and in the process, they reduce humanity to economic units; cogs in a machine. There is more to people than how much they earn, how much tax they pay, how many benefits they receive or whether they deserve to receive more or less.

It's not that I don't care about poverty and inequality; I do. But these things are a symptom of a deeper malaise and they won't ultimately be solved by moving money around. Our problem is that we have lost sight of the value of humans as being created in the image of the Triune God; created for relationships, with the capacity to work and care for the planet and to reflect the nature of God by being creative in their turn. I don't expect our politicians to share my Christian anthropology, but we desperately need a vision for people which extends beyond simply fixing the economy and

making sure that people have enough food to eat - that's a start, but it ain't enough.

As I was musing on these things; I was struck by how much the three issues that I have highlighted here are reflected in what sometimes passes for Christian evangelism. There are those who try to frighten people into the Kingdom by simply talking about how dreadful the alternative is. Others promise a Christianity of health, wealth and happiness, devoid of a cross and following a suffering saviour. All too often, preachers reduce human beings to people who need salvation as an individual ticket to heaven, ignoring the rich nature of our relationship to God, other human beings and the planet and missing entirely the broad sweep of the Bible story.

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