



CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS

Christians and Politics

A Devotional by Preston Manning

Preston Manning gave a devotional on October 7, 1981, to the CCCC conference held in Regina, SK. The devotional was based on the three temptations Jesus experienced in the desert after his baptism. The transcript of the full devotional is in the CCCC Educator Spring 1982 edition. This is his conclusion.

The Last Supper

In closing, therefore, I would like to focus our attention on some words recorded in Luke's Gospel, the 22nd chapter, on the last occasion when Jesus was together with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion.

Despite the three years that they had spent with Jesus, despite all the teaching on the difference between his approach and the approaches of this world, "the political itch" was still very much in evidence. For we read that even at that sacred and solemn supper "there was also strife among them concerning which of them would be accounted the greatest." And it was when Jesus perceived again this ever-present concern for position and influence that He made (what for me at least is) His clearest explanation of His approach to the acquisition of power.

He said, "You've observed how the Kings of the Gentiles—those with political power but no personal relationship to God—go about getting power and exercising it. Now listen to me. *It shall not be so among you.* Your approach is *not* to be patterned after their methods, but after my example."



What is his example in this regard? He tells them in words that night. He illustrates His words with a symbolic act. And the next day He goes out and shows them with terrible clarity exactly what He meant.

These are His words. “I am among you—not as one who grasps for power, but as one who serves. And he who would be chief among you (i.e., he who would gain power and influence with others) let him be the servant of all.”

Then He who had the moral and spiritual authority to command their service washes their feet as an example, and goes out into the night to sacrifice Himself for the sake of those whose hearts He wanted to win.

In other words, I see him looking into the eyes of these well-meaning and politically ambitious men, and saying something like this: “Is it power and influence that you are after, power and influence to accomplish God’s will and do good for others both spiritually and socially? Well, then, we will seek power. But not after the fashion of the Zealots and the hermits—dedicated and sincere as they may be.

“But we will seek power and influence by the way of the Cross—by the self-sacrificial giving of ourselves to others and for others.

“And if you’ll do it My way, you will gain a power and influence which exceeds that of kings and interest groups and mystics and revolutionaries. For the power and influence that is gained by the way of the Cross is nothing less than the power of the Spirit of God. This is the way in which God Himself works. For He who is the source of all power so loved that He **gave** of himself...And as the Father hath sent me, ‘so send I you.’”

Application

What does this mean in practical terms? I’m still in the process of trying to work that out. But I think you can see some of the obvious practical implications.

Do we feel led of the Spirit to become involved in the politics of our country or province or city? Then let us go and be involved in politics. But let us not proceed naively, accepting without

question the means and tactics suggested to us by the conventional wisdom or the subtler wisdom of the diabolical consultant. And let us be sure that our real motive is to give ourselves sacrificially to others and for others as God directs, and not simply a desire to advance our own interests and convictions (even our own religious interests and convictions).

And have we been led by the Spirit of God to be involved in gaining public support, especially financial support, for the work of God? Then let us pursue that involvement. But let us resist the urgings of the diabolical consultant who advises us to use the Devil's combine to harvest the Lord's crop. And if we need to offer inducements to get people to give, let the first and foremost inducement be the example of our own personal and collective sacrifices for the Lord's work and for others.

It all sounds so very Christian and so very spiritual, you say. But does His way work? Can I get elected? Can I raise a million dollars?

Well, take one last look at our model. Did the way of the Cross work for Him and His followers?

He came on the scene as the son of a humble carpenter in a tiny village in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire 2000 years ago. Yet today, all the political power and influence represented by that Empire lies in the dust, while His words, His example, His Spirit, and His life continue to influence millions of persons. His obscure band of followers were once described by the Pharisaical party as "unlearned and ignorant men." Yet they, through following His example, unleashed and exercised a power and an influence which literally turned their world upside down.

May God give us the wisdom and the courage to follow in His footsteps.