

Preaching On Political Issues

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It is risky business; it takes a lot of pluck, and I do not recommend it to all and sundry. The faint-hearted, the security-minded and the status seeker need not apply. Preaching on political issues is an assignment for the valiant, the stout-hearted and the devil-may-care. It is for those who take the four square gospel—its height, depth, length, and breadth—seriously and know that the stern necessity to preach this gospel emerges from compelling social awareness and political concern. Preaching on political issues is the solemn task of those who in their heart of hearts have said, “Woe is me if I preach not this gospel.”

Regardless of the urgency, however, no pastor should undertake to include political issues in his or her preaching without canvassing the possibilities and the probabilities fully and openly. Pastors must see clearly that it will be a lonely road which precious few of their fellow ministers will travel with them. They must accept the likelihood that they shall be categorized “liberals” or “activists” or “trouble makers”; and if they are young pastors, they must take into consideration what this portends for their futures. They must realize that the average congregation will not object to such political concerns as drugs, alcohol, censorship, and right to life but will grow restive when they move to economic justice, equality in educational and professional opportunity, and redistribution of wealth, and will find many and devious ways to register this restiveness. And they must surely know in opting for this component in their total ministry that, just in order to survive, they will be called upon to work more diligently, read more widely, think more deeply and serve more compassionately than their fellow pastors who are content to let this be the road not taken.

Once we have made the Big Decision, however, let us think of strategies and methodologies and of what the future might hold of marvel or surprise for us. The first recommendation that I offer is that preaching on political issues shall be a part, and only a part, of a total ministry. While it is true that for some of the congregation the barest mention of controversial issues in a random sermon becomes the “be-all” and the “end-all” of their image of the pastor, the greater part of the membership will tolerate excursions into the political arena more readily if they come infrequently, on justifiable occasions, and as expressions of a ministry that includes pastoral care, evangelism, spiritual growth, Bible teaching, careful administration, and other facets of a full-orbed ministry. For this reason and by way of example, I would...

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