

Should the Church Speak out about Political Questions?

Recently there was great confusion on the proper role of churches. Little was done to clarify the confusion. The Church's one and only task is to preach the Gospel of salvation for souls in the kingdom to come. Trying to make this world a better place must be left to the kingdom on the left. In Jesus' words, we must "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. The great trouble is that many church leaders buy into political questions, (land rights and aboriginal reconciliation are just two examples), on the plea that it is the church's responsibility to promote social and moral justice. We should refuse to speak out on questions such as conserving forests, or saving whales, because in those cases God's commandments are not being flagrantly flouted, as they are, for example, in the cases of abortion and euthanasia. Land rights are political and legal questions.

Besides, there is quite clearly danger for church leaders in doing what they have been doing. If church leaders speak out on political questions, they are bound to alienate some of their members, and they can justifiably have happen to them what did happen, when a person in government took the attitude, "If the churches interfere in our domain, we shall encourage people not to support the churches." That is simply common sense. The churches should be rendering to God the things that are God's. If Archbishop was given the title of an Australian national treasure because of his involvement in social causes, he has not been doing his proper work as a clergyman!

In the church we say that we expect our people to agree on questions of God's Word and what is taught. What groups they support as a means of trying to make the world a better place, through their local Lions Club, or some political party, or whatever, is none of the church's business. We may encourage them to do their best as responsible Christian people, but must then leave it there.

People who say that only Christians have a right to be in government are equally mistaken. Christians may have keener consciences than many others have because they know the Word of God. However, governments operate on the basis of compromise and common sense, and Christians have no monopoly on common sense.

That does not mean that we do not care if people in our community are treated unjustly. It is our Christian duty to help the suffering and the injured, and treat them as we would hope to be treated ourselves in similar situations, in Jesus' name. Trying to change or improve the political structures, and produce a most just society, however, are simply not the church's tasks.