

"What Difference Does It Make?"

Bernard Shaw in *The Apple Cart* makes the character Boanerges say, "I talk democracy to these men and women. I tell them that they have the vote; and that theirs is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. I say to them, 'You are supreme, exercise your power.' They say, 'That's right: tell us what to do,' and I tell them. I say exercise your vote intelligently by voting for me! And they do. That's democracy and a splendid thing it is too, for putting the right men in the right place."

Democracy has always received its share of criticism. It has been said that democracy is at the mercy of demagogues who by their rhetoric and promises corrupt or confuse the voter.

Politicians in Western democracies have lost the esteem of the public. The Canadian electorate is frustrated. Cynicism abounds. The recession and high taxation have put a damper on hopes for full employment for our youth. Pressure groups influence party programs. Politicians compete for the favour of the voters by slogans and promises. Public opinion polls have become more decisive in policy-making than moral absolutes. There is no longer a public moral consensus. The average citizen feels that he has precious little influence in national affairs. He wonders whether politicians serve the people or themselves.

Does voting and other political involvement still make a difference? What happened to promises made in previous elections? And aren't the opposing Political candidates no more diverse than Tweedledum and Tweedledee? The low percentage of those voting in federal and provincial elections suggests that many confine their political role to that of spectators. In our television age, the attractiveness, looks and mannerisms of a candidate have become more important than substance. Conservative powerbroker Dalton Camp said, "Politics is largely made up of irrelevancies." Broadcaster Al Boliska described a political candidate as a person who stands for what he thinks the public will fall for. What has gone wrong? In our day, the increasingly rapid processes of secularization, which call in question the Christian view of the world and society, have led to politics without God. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote: "More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that is why all this has happened.'" Forgotten God? Is that the real reason for our current political malaise? It was Dostoyevsky, who more than a hundred years ago wrote that if there is no God, 'then everything is permitted. I believe, therefore, that our political crisis needs a Christian response.

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