

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?

Nola Leach

A recent discussion on the forthcoming General Election left me somewhat concerned about the views being expressed. They ran along the lines of 'I'm fed up with this election campaign already' to 'well my vote won't make any real difference any way, it will only be more of the same'.

I wonder how many of us would own up to feeling this way? Many voters including Christians have become apathetic and cynical about engagement with the political process. Yet we have an amazing opportunity to make a Christian difference at this moment in our nation's history. With an estimated possibility of 200 or more completely new MPs we have a unique chance to influence the vote and bring in a different parliament.

A former Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper wrote, 'In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which Christ who alone is sovereign does not declare, "this is mine!"' We believe that Jesus is Lord. It is He who sets the agenda and we have our part to play.

We long for Amos's words to be true in our society today that 'justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream' God requires His people 'to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with (our) God'. We believe that now more than ever the local church is the hope of the world. We are called to be salt and light, but what does this have to do with politics and how we vote or not?

It is true that in one sense the Bible says very little about politics. There's no prescription for a good transport policy, no advice as to whether health care should be provided by the State or the market, no suggestion as to what the best way to set interest rates might be. But politics has been defined as the 'art of living together in community' and the Bible is precise about what it means to be part of God's people living in God's world. It sets out His vision for His creation – and for the beings that inhabit it.

What a privilege that from the beginning of creation we have been given a mandate to care for God's world. This responsibility also involves choosing good stewards to order it and working and praying for the good of our land.

Politics and the exercise of political authority in our world is an extension of God's stewardship mandate – but with authority comes accountability.

Ideally, politicians should understand that human beings are created in the image of God and have a responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. It also means that as Christians living in a democracy, we need to think carefully about the representatives that we elect to carry out practical policies on our behalf, and to represent our local and individual interests. We have a responsibility to choose good stewards for God's earth. We should not simply cast our vote at random. So how do we do this?

Firstly we need to find out who the candidates are and build a relationship with them. We should ask questions of them and of ourselves. What kind of country do we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in? Which candidate would work towards this sort of society? What motivates them? What are their beliefs on a whole range of issues? What do the different political parties stand for? We need to weigh up how we think the Government should be conducting its policies in areas such as education, the running of the economy, employment and benefits, health, old people and unborn children, or prisons for example and balance the different points of views of the candidates. If the candidate has been a local MP has he/she represented the constituency well?

One way to find out what the candidates think is to host or attend a local hustings meeting where the candidates can be questioned. Another is to use resources produced by Christian organisations. CARE for example, the organisation I work for, has a dedicated election website www.makethecrosscount2010.net. We may need to recognise that there may be compromises to be made. When we live as part of a community, we must make choices that benefit the common good. Indeed, it is impossible to live as part of a community and not make concessions on a daily basis – think even of your home or church life. We must ask the important question of where and when compromises can be made, whilst maintaining integrity.

As Christians we want a spiritually healthy country. The Christian voice needs to be heard and the best way we can do that is by getting to know the politicians on many levels, not least caring for them by finding out their needs too and praying for them. Many churches already invite their MP to meet with them, perhaps sharing a meal; this too can help inform us, while bringing a positive message to those in government.

In twenty first century Britain many people take democracy for granted. Yet it is fragile. We must take inspiration from those who have fought for democracy, be informed and then involved. It is our sacred duty to vote. Let us do all we can to '*make the cross count*' at this election.

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