

SOME PREACHERS TURNING CHURCH INTO POLITICAL ARENA

THE WASHINGTON STAR, WASHINGTON, D. C.

By Genevieve Clark Thompson

The Father of our Country showed real concern over the political use of the pulpit in his day.

No act of our founding fathers was wiser than the firmness with which they separated church and state in our republic.

Therefore, as a Christian, imperfect indeed, and 'standing in the need of prayer,' I deeply deplore the clergy, in their clerical character, taking part in political controversies.

I do not suggest that ministers should be deprived of their civil rights. But their political activities should be carried on in the hurly-burly of the political arena, not from the sanctuary of the pulpit or ecclesiastical guilds, and as American citizens, not ministers of God. They should not use the pulpit as a barricade and the priestly cloth as a shield but should stand forth and take blow for blow even as other men. It would be a more manly posture.

It is unfair to impose their political views upon people who go to church to worship God and who are unable to reply unless our churches are to be turned into debating societies, which would be an unseemly spectacle indeed.

A friend of mine, a devout woman, daughter of one of the most eminent clergymen of his time, is so disturbed by the political gyrations of her pastor that she says she feels like worshiping in the fields. And in another congregation close by, financial support has been withdrawn already by at least one member. These are ominous signs in the wind which wise men would do well to heed.

The clergy, of all people, should remember the beautiful passage from Ecclesiastes beginning, 'To everything there is a season, such a time to every purpose under heaven.' And surely no man of the cloth can forget the response made by our Lord when the Pharisees sought to entangle Him in the politics of His time, 'Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.'

To expound their political philosophy and denounce the civil authorities in their priestly character is a gross impropriety serving neither church nor state. The most likely result of their political effort will be to split their churches asunder, a consequence which all Christians must contemplate with dismay.

With all due respect, I should like to remind these reverend gentlemen that as the source of ultimate power of our Republic is in its citizens, so the ultimate power of the churches is in their members. A shepherd without a flock is a sorry figure.

As an Episcopalian (dues-paying and church-attending) I have been shocked and mortified by the conduct of some clergymen on political matters. Another Episcopal layman, George Washington, so objected to his pastor's political preaching prior to the Revolutionary War that he absented himself from church for some time. Incidentally, if the politics of the majority of the Episcopal clergymen had then been followed we would still be colonial subjects of the British Crown.

The question presently before the voters is not a religious question. It is a civil one. And in political or government questions no churchman, high or low, speaks for me.