

Episcopal Advice About the BNP? Oh really! L

Bishops, the BNP, Christians, and Politics T

Several times, in the last year or so, I have heard of Anglican bishops publicly denouncing the British National Party (BNP). The BNP is a right-wing political party whose ethos and roots are possibly to be found in the National Front (prominent in the 1970s and 80s) and, earlier, the British Union of Fascists (of the 1930s).

As a general election approaches, in Britain, we may well hear more such denunciations. Now there are many reasons why the BNP is objectionable, and good reasons why it is not an authentically-Christian activity to support it; but the episcopal denunciation has problems also. If a prominent person, whose office theoretically should put them beyond expression of a party-political or one-sided political interest, takes the step of condemning one particular party, or one variety of politics, it raises immediate questions as to why the person has chosen that particular party for condemnation, as opposed to any other, and what, having condemned (in this case) a right-wing party, his attitude is to others (say, of the left wing). Silence, regarding other parties or kinds of politics, cannot be neutral, and to condemn one, but not their opposites, is by implication to recommend the opposites; and this necessarily raises the question of what exactly is being recommended, and why.

To point, however accurately, to the moral failings of the extreme right, and keep silent about those of its opposite, the extreme left, is to raise at least the reasonable possibility, in hearer's minds, that the alternative to the far right is being, if not recommended, then at least tacitly accepted, morally speaking (why have the bishops not publicly condemned the far left? It can only, it might reasonably be thought, be because they consider it not as morally offensive (whereas in reality, by far the greatest destruction of human life, in modern times, has been caused by regimes whose basic political ground or origin is from some kind of left wing thinking; right-wing regimes/dictators, by comparison, have had a far lower body-count).

It might be said that Britain at the moment is not threatened by a far left-wing party; but when such bodies as the Militant Tendency and the Socialist Workers' Party – to say nothing of the influence of Communists in the trades' union movement – were prominent, a few decades ago, we heard nothing from Anglican bishops. Such facts suggest even to the unbiased that the answer to these questions lies in suggestions put forward by more critical (and, it will be said, more cynical) commentators: that the rulership of the Church of England, at present, has a natural affinity with the kind of easy-going centre-left ethos that is so prominent among comfortable, educated "liberal" Middle Classes, where an ultimately-secular materialist "social democratic" world-view/value-system holds sway. Once held to be "the Tory party at prayer", the Anglican hierarchy is now firmly "the *Guardian* readership at prayer" – referring to the British newspaper that most directly reflects the thinking of the Middle Class secular-materialist mindset.

Also, when my local bishop warns me against voting BNP, I shall be inclined to regard this as though I am being morally condescended to (riff-raff and nobodies such as myself obviously need ethical guidance from a higher moral plane; in fact, of course, some of the parties which the bishop may be considering to be morally more suitable (or at least, not morally condemned by him) in fact have equally bad records, as seen by the vast number of people whose lives have been totally destroyed by abortion under the present (Labour) government).

Also, the ability of church leaders to so readily make selective condemnation is itself worrying. The General Synod debates in February 2007 contained many injunctions not to condemn practising

homosexuals. Such people were to be listened to, dialogued with, and church members were exhorted to “feel their pain”. But no such approach is made to those who might support the BNP, or vote for them; their lot has been instant, unreflective condemnation – and this is of a kind of thinking elements of which (eg. intense patriotism) are *not* condemned by the Bible or traditions of Christian thought and belief. By contrast, homosexual practice is firmly proscribed by both, yet this we were asked to be tolerant of. Should it be suggested that BNP voters feel no pain, I would strongly disagree: most BNP electoral successes are found in traditional working class areas (not the “Tory heartlands”), that is, among communities of white working class people who, in recent decades, have been totally abandoned by the Establishment, and particularly by the political party that was founded to support their interests (now, they are simply condemned, by the supposed-intelligentsia, as “racists”); and such people, and many others in Britain, have to sit back quietly and watch as the country, and its long-established traditions and culture, is more or less systematically trashed – cause for pain indeed.

So when I next hear of an Anglican or Christian leader telling me not to support the BNP, I shall be less than impressed.

April 2010