

Will America's Real 'Third Party' Please Wake Up?

According to the latest polls, only 1 percent of voters will cast their ballot for a third party candidate, which means that all the talk of a protest vote against the two main parties will amount to little or nothing. Yet there is already a viable third party in America. It simply needs to awaken to its calling.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of this "third party" as well—although not in those terms—saying that it "must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

King was speaking of a group of multiplied millions of Americans whose ultimate "citizenship is in heaven" (to use the expression of Paul in the New Testament), a people who are called to go against the grain and challenge the status quo, to be champions of justice and compassion, to lead the way in societal change.

He was (and I am) speaking about followers of Jesus who take their faith seriously and live it out holistically, those who make up the church from a biblical standpoint (as opposed to Christians in name only). It is this entity that King believed "must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool."

For the most part, though, we have fallen short of this lofty calling (and I say "we" because I count myself among this company of Jesus' people, for better or worse), becoming pawns of the political system more than pioneers of political reform, puppets more than prophets.

Rather than us changing the society (Note: I did not say taking over the society), society has changed us. The things

that would have outraged our grandparents now entertain us, and for a supposedly “heavenly minded” people, we are as bogged down in materialistic hedonism as almost anybody else. Even among evangelical Christians, recent surveys indicate that 80 percent of our young people are having sex out of wedlock while our divorce rates mirror those of the secular world.

How can we be “the conscience of the state” when we have lost our own conscience? How can we call ourselves **pro-family** and **pro-life** with so much immorality (including addiction to pornography), no-fault divorce, and even abortion in our ranks?

What’s interesting is that many skeptics, scoffers, atheists and agnostics—those who are rolling their eyes as they read this article—actually affirm what I am writing, albeit in a backhanded way.

What I mean is that it is often those who mock our faith who are the first to call us hypocrites, recognizing that if we really believed what we preached, we would be living differently. In fact, society as a whole actually expects us to live differently, and the average American still expects Christians to help the poor, live wholesome lives and transcend partisan politics.

Of course, there are some Christians who, as the old saying goes, are “too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,” but that is actually a violation of the teachings of Jesus. (Judaism is less prone to fall into that trap, and we do well to remember that Jesus was Jewish teacher not a member of the Christian clergy.)

A more balanced perspective is this: Because we understand that what happens in this world has eternal implications for good or for bad, we recognize the importance of life in this world and are on the front lines of bringing about positive

change while at the same time resisting societal decay. This is part of what Jesus meant when He told His followers that they (we!) are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Would anyone deny that Jesus, who talked much about heaven and hell and the world to come, constantly emphasized the importance of caring for the needy in this world along with reaching out to the marginalized?

Practically speaking, because our first allegiance is to God we will serve our nation as the best possible citizens, and because our greatest affiliation is to proven, biblical values, we will identify with those values first and with a political party second.

Yet all too often, white evangelicals have given themselves to the Republican Party and black evangelicals to the Democratic Party, even when those parties have failed us. It's time we step higher.

Yes, I will vote on Nov. 6, primarily backing Republican candidates, and I see voting as both a responsibility and a privilege. But, as I have written several times before, I am not putting my trust in the White House or Congress or the Supreme Court to change America. I am looking to the committed followers of Jesus to be the primary agents of change, the ultimate counter-culture, counter-establishment party.

Simply stated, if tens of millions of American Christians truly followed the teachings and example of Jesus, there would be a groundswell of compassionate and constructive care for the poor, there would be wholesale educational reform, the multiplication of strong families, a new esteem for the importance of every life, beginning in the womb, the reduction of our prison population and even the revamping of our prison system, along with economic growth and a massive increase in philanthropy, among other things.

So, yes, I'm voting on Nov. 6, but more than that, I'm looking for the third party to arise.

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