

THE DAVIDSMEYER MEMORIAL LECTURES

II. What I Expect of My Pastor Outside the Pulpit

(Condensed)

THE HONORABLE NORMAN A. ERBE

The Honorable Norman A. Erbe, son of a Lutheran minister, is Governor of the State of Iowa. In 1941 his studies at the University of Iowa were interrupted by a tour of duty as a B-17 bomber pilot with the 8th Air Force. His decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross. Resuming his law training, he received a J. D. degree in 1947, and entered law practice in Boone, Iowa. Governor Erbe is a member of the Lutheran Laymen's League, American Legion, and American Bar Association. Special Assistant Attorney for the State Highway Commission (1954-1956), Attorney General (1956), he was inaugurated Governor of the State of Iowa, January 12, 1961.

I SHOULD LIKE to visit with you for a little while this afternoon about another role of the pastor outside the pulpit—that of a citizen. I should like to expect from my pastor that he be a good citizen of his community, state, and nation.

It is not suggested that the pastor must take an active part in partisan politics nor to speak out on every issue. The issues on which he takes a public position probably must be left up to the judgment of each individual pastor. However, it may be hoped that members of the congregation will draw sufficient inspiration and moral courage from the pastor's preaching and teaching to be good citizens themselves. Good citizens are active ones—to the extent of each person's ability and time available for participation in public affairs.

Every community and state, as well as our nation, needs the participation of good Christian men and women. If the people of a nation are to govern themselves, the people must participate in this government. This does not mean that all people must seek public office, but they must vote and make their voices heard in the councils of government. To do this intelligently, they must keep themselves informed.

A Well-informed Citizen

A wise politician once said: "Never underestimate the judgment of the people, but never overestimate the amount of information they may have on any given subject in public affairs."

I should like for my pastor to keep himself well-informed about national, state and local affairs. Equally important, he should encourage members of his congregation and other people in the community to do likewise.

The education of all our citizens so that they may have a better understanding of the operations of government and a better knowledge of public issues is extremely important. Only with such knowledge can people judge whether their government is good, mediocre, or poor, whether statements on questions of concern to all are true, partly true or entirely false and whether promises are possible of achievement and at what cost to them.

Every citizen must be capable of making such decisions wisely and must be keenly conscious of his duty to keep informed about public affairs and to participate in them if our system of self-government is to operate at its best. . . .

Moral Foundations of Nation

When our nation was founded, it drew its strength and being not only from great political and social thought, but from spiritual convictions and from a deep and abiding faith in Almighty God. From our religious faith came the great inspiration that men should be free: Free in worship, free in conscience, free in speech. . . .

These liberties cannot be sustained without religious faith. From that faith spring our moral standards. These moral standards are sustained by faith alone. Without these supports liberty degenerates into license, and is lost.

I should like for my pastor to understand the great moral foundation of our system of government. It is important that a pastor understand these fundamental principles underlying a free government and be prepared to discuss them, both from the pulpit and in his daily contacts with others.

I should like to discuss for a moment a requisite of government in a free people. This is morals in government. It has been dis-

cussed ever since the days of Socrates in free Athens. George Washington expounded it in his Farewell Address to a free America. . . .

Self-government by a people is based upon moral and spiritual concepts. And the government of a free people must in itself express the highest ideals of the people. If it fails in its standards, it injures the morals of the whole people. It destroys its own foundations of free government.

First, let's look for a moment at the importance of the electoral process and the necessity for absolute honesty and integrity in election practices. In any discussion of morality in government, I believe that the starting point is the election process. This is the entire foundation upon which our democratic system is founded and all of us have a duty to do everything possible to insure the highest degree of honesty and integrity in the conduct of our sacred democratic process. . . .

What can we do? One thing that can be done is for persons of high Christian ideals to work actively within our political parties to clean out those persons who seek to manipulate the ballot boxes or the voting machines. The dishonest politician cannot succeed where he is under the scrutiny of honest workers in a political party.

Another thing that can be done is for persons of integrity to volunteer to work on election day to man the voting booths and insure that the sanctity of the ballot box is not violated by anyone. If the voting booths are properly staffed with competent persons of high morality, then we won't have vote scandals.

Here, there is a role for Christian leadership, for the memory and concern of the public in matters of this kind is relatively fickle. We read about it one day and are greatly angered, but no one seems to do anything about it and sooner or later we tend to forget about such things. The scandals become a thing of the past.

What we have here is a lack of sustained moral indignation—a lack of perseverance—to get rid of this terrible corruption. Here is an important place for leadership by men of religion.

I should like for my pastor to understand that this problem can occur and to know what can be done about it.

Preserving Our Political Heritage

Next, I want to say a few words about our political heritage and equality of rights and the importance of every American having

an equal right to vote. This area involving our sacred democratic electoral process merits our special attention. It concerns the right of every person to vote regardless of race, creed or color. . . .

The numerous differences of her citizens in racial origin, religious faith, and political creed have contributed greatly to the enrichment of American life, to the fertilizing of our culture, and to the fostering of the ideals of religious and political freedom. National unity in the midst of cultural pluralism has become the ideal of our American democracy.

To preserve that ideal it is of supreme importance that tolerance, respect, good will, and friendship prevail among our citizens of various racial origins, of different religious creeds and diverse political faiths. When such differences are made the breeding grounds of suspicion, antagonism, prejudice, and hatred, they disfigure American life, impair the social order, and menace the unity of the national effort in peace and in war.

I should like for my pastor to be aware of these differences and alert to the problems that may result and to provide the leadership outside of the pulpit to prevent them.

Religious leaders across the country have become increasingly concerned over infringement on the right to vote and the related problems of racial strife. . . .

Many Christian people last year read with great concern about the tenant Negro farmers in Tennessee who apparently were dispossessed because they sought to register to vote. Until relatively recently, the problems of denial of the ballot box to the Negro people have not been looked upon as a problem of particular concern to the Christian religion.

However, I submit that this is of prime concern to the Christian in the community. In the first place, protecting the rights of man is a fundamental precept of Christianity. Moreover, we Lutherans have every reason to be concerned with the rights of minority groups, for we well remember that Martin Luther in his day was a member of a minority group.

Unfortunately, not very many individuals have the inner courage to stand alone in the face of social and economic pressure. Here is a place for the Christian in government to stand up for that which is morally right. And if a few people stand up, more and more will

follow. I think the writer of the song "Stout-Hearted Men" was right when he said: "Start me with ten who are stout-hearted men, and I'll soon give you ten thousand more."

I would hope that my pastor might provide the inspiration and example of courage to his congregation that they might stand up for what is morally right.

Encouraging Good People to Participate in Government

I have said that I believe the overwhelming majority of persons in government are dedicated public servants. However, there unfortunately are those who are not. Many incidents have revealed a lack of morality in governmental service. Of course, wherever there are public expenditures, there is always a possibility that someone who seeks a pecuniary gain will try to tempt government employees through direct or indirect means. Thus there is a need for encouraging persons of high moral character to enter into government service, whether as elected officials, appointive officials, or employees of civil service.

I should like to expect that my pastor would encourage good Christian people to participate in government service.

Another area of morality in government concerns the political philosophy of an elected official. By nature, most elected officials have one thing in common: they are always worried about the next election. During a term of office, there are always complications that arise because of the many pressures exerted by one group or another. It is, therefore, very easy for a person worried about being re-elected to become too concerned with the interests of special pressure groups and with the advice of so-called experts on local politics rather than being primarily concerned with the welfare of the people as a whole.

The honest official in government is a person who seeks to be versed or experienced in the science of government and whose creed is that he is a public servant and that he must do what is best for the people as a whole. This is the highest kind of morality in government. This, in effect, is the philosophy of the Christian in government. The famous 19th century English writer and statesman, John Morley, attributed to Rousseau (not a Christian), one of the great comments on the relationship between politics and morality: "Those who would treat politics and morality apart will never understand the one or the other."

When citizens are dishonest with each other the damage is mostly held within themselves. Also it may affect their life hereafter. But when government is dishonest it infects the morals of the whole people.

If morals cannot be sustained in self-government either one of two things ensues: civilization rots, or the people turn to dictatorial government to clean up the mess.

Morality in government amounts to more than the abstinence from immoral practices. There are positive moral obligations of the community expressed through the government to the people.

There is the moral obligation to war unceasingly against poverty, ignorance, disease, and prejudice; to relieve the suffering of the unemployed; to provide for the aged and the unfortunate; to prevent abuse in business, to protect the weak against the strong.

I would like to expect my pastor to enunciate these positive moral obligations. . . .

Challenge of Communism

Today our American republic faces the greatest challenge in its history from atheistic philosophy whose chief doctrine is that the end justifies the means.

Former President Dwight Eisenhower has said: "Telling the stark truth about Communism is the best way to make our own citizenry and other peoples appreciate the blessings of liberty. We should encourage all individuals who are well informed on Communist tactics and strategy to expound freely and often on this subject. Unless the nation's leaders move with wisdom and restraint, the fanatics of both the right and left so belabor each other as almost to monopolize the issue, leaving the nation to preoccupy itself with the evils of extremists instead of the evils of Communism."

If the Christian church is not to fight Communism, then who on earth is left to resist this evil which is determined to destroy all virtue, decency, thrift, love, friendship and the dignity of the individual?

If civilization is to be saved, you—and all of us—must fight hardest of all on the front of human decency, on the front to maintain standards of human rights, behavior, and morals. . . .

Most of the action on the front of human decency must be expressed through government. But the driving power behind government must come from us, the people. From you must come the insistence that government reflect our best instincts, or finest ethics. Our public leaders are guardians of our birthright, trustees and protectors of our honor as free men. You must insist that America practice what she preaches. . . .

There have been ages of moral confusion before now . . . the world has survived these confusions and men have grown in stature and in safety. But how? Because of some men who stood solid. They stood not because they knew the solutions to all these confusions, not because they even had the power to find solutions. They stood firm and they held the light of civilization until the furies passed, because they individually held certain positive principles of life, or morals, and spiritual values. . . .

We may hope that the inspiration and example of the pastor may result in the people standing up for what is right.

What are these verities?

Despite the growing complexity of civilization they stand out in simple concepts. They can be expressed as truth, justice, tolerance, mercy, and respect for the dignity and personality of the individual man. They can be expressed as sportsmanship, fair play, self respect, and good taste. They can be more inspiringly expressed in the immortal words of Christ on the Mount. In these concepts alone is the answer to the world yearning for control of these growing powers over matter.