

“For the Living of these Days” — Fosdick

Recently the Instant Messages editor of the H-T asked respondents to report on what they would like to hear, respectively, at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. I submitted responses on both occasions, each in the form of a confession of failures and a resolve to make amends. I employed this liturgical form to call for fundamental changes of heart and direction.

While I see sharp differences between the two parties, and have a decided preference, neither inspires confidence that the enormous challenges of the day will be met. As a Christian ethicist I try to assess political candidates, their campaigns, and their performance records, in accordance with standards of justice and compassion that are congruent with most if not all major faith traditions. I also appeal to empirical evidence and reason, and to the lessons of history and experience, as do properly practicing ethicists of all stripes and denominations.

The greatest peril we face is the rise of the corporatist national security state. In religious terms, we are threatened with idolatry of the nation-state, which seeks to claim our ultimate loyalty. In a democratic republic the people and their leaders must not allow secret agencies and corporate powers to usurp individual rights and liberties, yet that’s happening now.

A related threat is the widening gap between the powerful rich and the ordinary citizen, including the poor. Power tends to corrupt, and corruption is commonplace in our public life. The powerful never willingly relinquish their power. We cannot rely on the good graces of the corporatist-military-industrial elites to set things right. Our founding forebears resorted to revolution to secure for us the blessings of liberty. It’s not clear we have that option anymore.

Then there is global climate change. The last decade has included nine of the ten hottest years on record. That’s an unmistakable trend. Expect massive social dislocation, upheaval, and starvation worldwide in the coming years. The politicians fiddle, the corporations keep extracting and polluting, the militaries keep destroying, while the planet burns.

Current trends to marginalize labor unions and public sector workers, privatize public goods and services, militarize policing, debilitate public education, eviscerate social services, and transfer wealth upwards to “the haves and the have-mores” (GWB), put human welfare and our democratic way of life in most serious jeopardy. It’s a fundamentally divine calling to contend against this world’s principalities and powers, to swim against this tide.

Copyright 2012 by Byron C. Bangert