

What's up with politics?

A cabinet fell, elections for local councils were held, national elections are coming up. What's up with politics? More and more parties are lacking a traditional rank and file. Probably this is still the largest with the Christian parties, but there as well it is falling apart. Each time the constituent votes all over again.

Rambling after the front man

The front man of a party has a major part in this. This happens by the grace of a media-culture. For example the size of a party rambles along with the political leader, which can be measured from Agnes Kant and Alexander Pechtold for example, although with an opposite effect. I am not glorifying the times of the traditional rank and file but constituents are watchers now, which have to be attracted by rhetorical ability. This is a captivating and attractive game - charismatic speakers inspire. But it is dangerous as well. We can not live of rhetoric. It is about staking pickets in the right direction in this tough reality.

Parliament as arena

We have a parliament. That is something good. We may speak in freedom, in the interest of good politics. This asks for politeness, for respect, for the intention to look for the good together. It asks for good arguments and readiness to be convinced by good arguments in order to achieve good policy. Parties are useful in this, because they have means to get in touch with 'the people'. However, the current practise is so far removed from this. They are hardly listening to each other. Even when they are addressing each other, they are really speaking for the camera. Because a point has to be made. This causes the tone of debating to become harder. This is dangerous. The free word becomes propaganda. The parliament becomes the arena for the struggle for power.

Feeding discord

Politicians play too much on discord. Which is largely available. So continuously an image is created as if the present rulers (ministers etceteras) are sitting on their hands and are only squabbling. The idea is then: choose us and it becomes better. Now this is really short-term-politics. Those who are in power next will only get more of the same. Thus discord is only increased and governing becomes an impossibility.

Small steps to justice and righteousness

Adapting to discord is also done by suggesting to have the solution. Over and over messiah-figures appear, who claim to know it all. They have the solution. This is the core of populism. This is dangerous. Politics is a cold business and has limited meaning. It is time to state this again with emphasis. Politics is not the area of permanent revolution, but the area of small steps. Based on justice and righteousness. In order to limit evil, because elimination begets an even greater evil. To protect threatened life and give the underprivileged a push in the right direction.

This is what I have understood from the Christian tradition. Which seems to become more and more relevant all the time.

March 6th 2010 – dr. Arjan Plaisier, secretary of the general synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands