ATTRACTING VOTES

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

A recent report has documented the evil plight of many aboriginal people in the midst of affluent Australia. In a comment on public reaction to the report, one leading politician is reported to have said 'There are no votes in the aboriginal issue'.

It's a cynical remark, isn't it? Because the aborigines do not constitute in themselves a voting power, and because the white community is unprepared to insist on the government taking action, nothing will be done. It shows politicians up in a deplorable light. The rights and wrongs of a matter do not enter into their concerns; the whole question is, will they still have a job, will they remain in power? If this is a common political attitude, politicians reveal themselves as unprincipled, self-seeking knaves, with no compassion or courage.

But, wait! Who has created this situation? After all, the politician said 'there are no votes in the aboriginal issue'. Politicians are only responding to their perception of the electorate. It is we who lack compassion and a desire for justice. It is we who do not care about the poor and the lonely and the weak in our midst. The Bible expresses God's special concern for such people - but we are so engrossed in the task of exploiting the land God has given us that we have no time to think or do anything for the under-priveleged. We cannot, therefore, blame politicians. They are exactly like us, and they respond very well to the society they serve. That is why it is increasingly hard for them to take a moral stance on any issue - it's votes that matter, not right and wrong.

But where does that leave the aboriginal people? It would be wrong to be negative about what has been accomplished. It seems to me, as a mere outsider, that the last 15 years have seen fruitful efforts at help and improvement, including aboriginal legal and medical services. However the status and position of aboriginal people in our midst is a national shame. On the whole they are poorly housed, poorly educated, and poorly paid. Their access to proper medical services is severely limited. Their ability to find jobs in a tight employment market is highly restricted. Perhaps most important in a way, the majority of their white fellow citizens either do not care or actively denigrate the aboriginal people. This is shameful. Our treatment of minority groups in the community is of special interest to God.

Why don't you make clear to your local member that the government's treatment of aborigines is a voting issue - or, better still, it is an issue in which he should be vitally concerned, simply as a matter of God's justice?

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