

The Minister as Politician

(The Church, Guide to the Reformed Tradition: Wallace Alston, John Leith, Ed.

1. The contemporary minister lives and works within a free, pluralistic, secular, mobile, industrial, technological, urban society, in which people decide to join or not to join a church with little or no social, economic, or political consequence. (p. 115)
2. In a 1969 book, entitled *The Gathering Storm in the Churches*, sought to reflect on the condition of the church as a human community in the light of the increased politicization of the institution over contemporary social and political issues. Author Jeffrey Hadden, reported that churches are involved in a deep and entangling crisis that threatens to disrupt or even to alter the nature of the church itself. Hadden identifies three ingredients of this crisis:
 - a. the crisis of meaning and purpose; referring to the absence of a consensus in the church as to what the church is and what it ought to do. (Some think the church should be a context of comfort – others that it is a context of challenge.
 - b. the crisis of belief – doubt and uncertainty on the part of church people as to what the Christian faith is and means. many Christians are not so much concerned about forms of worship or right forms of church government as they are about whether or not there is a God at all, or about whether Jesus was the revelation of God or just another good man.
 - c. the crisis of authority, refers to the absence of any clear norm or criterion with reference to which the mission and faith of the church may be clarified and molded into a Christian consensus. IN an institution in which the meaning and purpose of the organization, the faith and values on which it is based, and the power to lead, are questioned and obscured, the leadership task will likely be a profoundly political affair.
3. Four observations about the minister who answers this calling:
 - a. First the minister, like the politician, is accountable to a constituency. but in two directions at once : theologically to the faith of the church, and pastorally to the people of the church.
 - b. The minister must be an effective communicator and teacher. How does the minister shape the mind of the constituency in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - c. The need for a sense of calling that transcends mere professionalism and gives the ministry the identity of a sacred calling.
 - d. Finally, the ministry requires considerable courage. There are times when the minister fails to develop a Christian consensus within the constituency, when conscience calls the minister to stand over against the membership of the church, and when the minister must run the risk of losing a grip on the job.