

Where are the leaders?

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes (Psalm 118:9).

In the first volume of his World War II memoirs, Winston Churchill reports a remarkable admission by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who served in that office from 1935 to 1937.

When challenged for not taking rearmament of Britain seriously in the face of growing threats from the Continent, Mr. Baldwin replied in Parliament with a remarkable admission of his true motives:

"I put before the whole House my own views with an appalling frankness . . . You will remember that at that time [the time of the election] there was probably a stronger pacifist feeling running through this country than at any time since the war. You will remember the election at Fulham in the autumn of 1933, when a seat which the National Government held was lost by about 7,000 votes on no issue but the pacifist . . . I asked myself what chance was there . . . within the next year or two of that feeling being so changed that the country would give mandate for rearmament? Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming, and that we must rearm. Does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain" (*The Gathering Storm* by Winston S. Churchill, page 216).

As historian William Manchester notes: "Surely this admits of but one interpretation. Tory victories were more important to Baldwin than the specter of Luftwaffe bombers overhead" (*The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill*, Vol. II, by William Manchester, page 218).

Or, as Churchill explained it: "That a Prime Minister should avow that he had not done his duty in regard to national safety because he was afraid of losing an election was an incident without parallel in our parliamentary history."

But at least Baldwin owned up to it! Too often expediency trumps statesmanship, and it goes unchallenged and certainly not admitted.

Hopefully a new Churchill awaits his call, but in any case our Western civilization faces a crisis of politics over leadership. Though distressing, such a state is common in the affairs of mankind.

Ezekiel lamented the same faults of his day when he wrote: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? . . . The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who are sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost" (Ezekiel 34:2-4).

In this time of the never-ending election cycle, candidates seem to think they have a constitutional right to elevate their importance, dominate public discourse, campaign every day of every year and then imply that they are the saviors of the human race. So we elect our Congress every two years and our president every four, only to be disillusioned and even angry that they fail to deliver the goods.

And that is as it should be because these people are not our saviors, and they are not our benefactors. For the most part their interests are reelection and legacy-building, not public service and statesmanship.

If we lean on the weak reed of human leadership, it will break in our hands and disappoint our hearts. Even Churchill was turned out of office immediately after the surrender of Germany.

It is our duty as free citizens to learn as much as possible about candidates for office and vote for the people whom we believe would best serve the nation's interest, even if what they must do is wholly unpopular.

In the end, they are all human. The psalmist had it right: "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8-9).