

A Second Look At Tommy Douglas (1904-1986)

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?” Mark 8:36

On November 30, 2004 CBC Television hosted a contest in which Canadians elected **Tommy Douglas** as the greatest Canadian. Our ears stood at attention when we heard that he was a **Baptist pastor turned politician**. It is always encouraging to hear that a public figure is a Christian. But ... was Tommy Douglas a real Christian? After doing some digging, I have come to the conclusion he probably never was a true Christian; certainly not a Bible-believing Christian.

Concerning the fact that he was a great Canadian who cared for the needs of the people, there is no question. Tommy Douglas pastored Calvary Baptist Church in Weyburn, Saskatchewan from 1930 to 1935. It was during this time that the Great Depression plagued Canada, and Douglas, a proponent of the **Social Gospel**, turned the basement of the church into a “distribution centre for the unemployed”. He then entered politics, and in 1935 was elected an MP under the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). In 1944 he turned his sights on provincial politics, serving as Premier of Saskatchewan from 1944-1961. He introduced many social programs, the most notable being free health insurance, which became the model for the national medicare program, earning him the title of “The Father of Medicare”. In 1961 Tommy Douglas returned to federal politics to lead the CCF into becoming a national party known as the New Democratic Party (NDP) — a party that has become the enemy of righteousness and the traditional family. He retired from parliament in 1979, having been in politics for 44 years.

Now for the rest of the story. Douglas graduated from Brandon College, which was run by the Convention Baptists. According to historian Ian McLeod, “the College was regarded by many as an outpost of modernist thought and teachings, one who recognized that ‘the great motivating force in society is love for your fellow man’ ”. (Note the absence of Christ as the only Saviour)., and tensions ran high between many congregations in the Baptist Union of Western Canada”. In the book, Canada: Portraits of Faith (p.111), Ian McLeod states, “Douglas left college with an **almost agnostic view of Christian doctrines** ... he rejected fundamentalism as ‘fairy stories’ and regarded Christ as the greatest of **moral teachers**.”

Interestingly, Douglas’s counterpart in Alberta, **Ernest Manning** (1908-1996), was also a politician and a Baptist preacher. Manning was in politics for 48 years, from 1935 to 1983, serving as MLA, Premier, and Senator. Manning was a **Bible-believing Christian**, who sought to win the lost to Christ. He helped found the Fundamental Baptist Church in Edmonton (no longer existing) and preached weekly on the radio program “Canada’s National Bible Hour”. Manning was also concerned about social issues, espousing **social conservatism**, which “encouraged strong individual, corporate and religious initiatives in addressing social issues”, rather than government control.

Unfortunately, Tommy Douglas apparently never repented of his leftist Social Gospel views. Before he died he said, “You’re never going to step out of the front door into the Kingdom of God. What you’re going to do is slowly and painfully change society until it has more of the values that emanate from the teachings of Jesus or **from the other great religious leaders**”. Sadly, all of his good works will not save him. *“For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works ...”* (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

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