

Well, you don't have to be a politician, like myself, to know what Mr. Reid and Mr. Nicholson meant by that. It is always safe, politically, to say that you are against sin. It sounds well. Whereas to be precise on a controversial issue is often - well, controversial.

Furthermore, when there could be two views on an issue, political or domestic, prudence may in certain circumstances suggest vagueness and imprecision. In our pre-war foreign policy, it often did.

But there is an opposite danger; that of confusing precision with rigidity. There are certain situations in which too rigid a formulation of policy, and too precise an expression of it could prove costly and conceivably even disastrous. Yet in times of strong popular passion, bold and sweeping assertions may appear momentarily popular, and may prove alluring to the demagogue. If a complex issue is popularly seen in the over-simplified colours of black and white, the easy course may be to make dogmatic pronouncements - to proclaim loudly that whatever the circumstances, you yourself will stand rigidly on the side of righteousness, or at least on the side that appeals most to public opinion of the moment. There is, in fact, a tendency today to reduce democracy to a sort of competition in popular superlatives - either for or against.

There are occasions, of course, and issues, when a man or nation "must decide, in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side". But there are others, and they are the more numerous, when the merits of a situation are by no means so simple, or the right solution so clear-cut and easy to find; except, of course, for those who are sure that on our side all men are wholly saints, and the others irredeemable sinners.

Self-righteousness is still a cheap and easy temptation. Just as absolute monarchies could be a prey to hypocrisy and insincerity in their courtiers, democracies are not necessarily inoculated against the same unamiable characteristics in those who seek power.

There is also the danger of the well-meaning but limited mind creating rigidity - and thereby preventing growth - because its imagination of the moment is not equal to the almost infinite variety of fact and circumstance in any given situation.

I could give current examples, but perhaps I shouldn't.

Judging from the debate this spring in our House of Commons on external affairs, some Canadians might have considered it desirable officially to state, as indeed has been stated elsewhere, that we would never recognize Communist China.

There was a popular song of the 1930's, which ran, "I'll never say 'never again' again". As I recall, it was a young man in love who learned that wisdom. The same lesson can, however, apply to diplomats or foreign ministers. It may look vigorous, and decisive, and courageous, to burn bridges in front of you - but it is seldom wise. It is certainly not the historical approach to international problems!