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ELEPHANT EXTINCTION?

Public opinion polls this year have proclaimed that Republican Party affiliation has declined to its lowest level in the last four decades. Only one person in five considers himself a Republican.

The rapid drop-off in the party of the elephant has been exceeded only by the geometric increase in the deaths of the elephant itself. During the 1970s, the spectacular 1,000 percent increase in the price of ivory has resulted in so many killings in order to market the tusks that it is predicted that the elephant may be extinct by 1985.

When an organization is faced with a fall-off in membership, it can go in one of two directions (but not both). One way is to ease u n qualifications for membership, loosen up discipline, liberali.ze dogma, and make it easier to affiliate.

That is the direction taken by many churches today whfch have abandoned their former strict adherence to the Ten Commandments and to requirements of fasting and other self-discipline.

Such overtures to the moderates and the moderns, however, are not attracting more followers. The churches that have relaxed their dogma and discipline are not the ones that are expanding membership and missionaries today.

The other direction an organization can go when it confronts the problem of a declining membership is to proudly proclaim principle over pragmatism, faith over uncertainty, discipline and dedicatfon over easy-does-it, and eternal verities over situation ethics.

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In 1976, the Republican Party .chose the former road. It nominated Gerald Ford, not because he would make a better President or a better candidate than

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his challenger, but because it seemed more expedient to go along with the incumbent and not rock the boat. The pragmatic gamble proved to be a poor one.

When the Republican National Committee voted overwhelmingly and enthusiastically in New Orleans to oppose ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty, it at long last appeared to take the high road of principle rather than listen to the siren call of those who want to muddy up the issues so as not to alienate any possible voter.

The Republican resolution decisively denounced the Carter foreign policy as "fragmented, reactive, inconsistent and dangerously weak}' The resolution itself was decisive, active, consistent with Republican tradition, and courageously strong.

The resolution of the Republican National Committee followed hard on the heels of similar action by the Young Republican Federation. All 50 state chairmen unanimously came out in opposition to the Canal Treaty.

There are those who try to read these Republican votes against the Canal Treaty as a revival of the 1976 Ford-Reagan contest. It is unlikely that any of the party officials involved in the Canal controversy have\ any desire to fight that battle again.

It is much more likely that these party officials are just expressing their genuine opposition to President Carter's expensive giveaway policies, their resentment at the way Mr. Carter has tried to put over the CAnal Treaty by such high-handed tactics as making a major media event out of a flamboyant treaty signing, and by boldly trying to use the treaty power to override Article IV, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution which gives to Congress (both Houses) complete and exclusive authority over U.S. territory and property.

Future commentators may note that the New Orleans meeting of the Republican National Committee was where the fortunes of the Republican Party bottomed out and started up the ladder again.

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