

VOTING – A RESPONSIBILITY OR A PRIVILEGE?

IN A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN more noted for its mud-slinging than its clear delineation of issues, Americans by the millions cast their vote for “None of the above” by staying away from the polls.

Patriots, aghast at the low percentage of voter turnout, loudly berate the non-voter for his “abrogation of responsibility.” This, then, raises the question regarding voting—is it a responsibility or a privilege?

REASONS VARY

THERE ARE MANY REASONS for non-voting. When issues are ill-defined, large numbers of voters feel insufficiently informed to make an intelligent choice. Charges and counter charges of corruption and incompetence cause others to feel that neither candidate is worthy of their vote. Inconvenience, apathy and just plain laziness are other contributory factors.

But there is one other factor that is seldom discussed—the Christian conscience. Thousands of sincere Christians refrain from casting their votes because of deep-seated convictions that to do so would run contrary to their Christian obligations. “I have already voted for Jesus Christ.” “My citizenship is in heaven.” “My kingdom is not of this world.” “I cannot endorse the non-Christian conduct of any of the candidates.” These are just a few of the many voiced objections to voting. But are they valid?

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

THE ONSET OF CHRISTIANITY saw the followers of Jesus in an awkward political position. By birth, the vast majority of them were Jewish. By circumstance, they lived as a subject people under Roman domination. Their natural patriotic feelings were, of necessity, divided.

Their situation was further complicated by the teachings of Jesus himself. His concepts were revolutionary.” Traditional Jewish beliefs were centered on this world and, in particular, on their land of Palestine. Under God’s direction, they formed a kingdom, with such illustrious rulers as David and Solomon. Even when captive to others, they often rose to political prominence, as in the cases of Joseph, Daniel and Esther.

But Jesus came preaching, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) He showed the strength of his teaching by refusing kingship when offered—“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again himself into a mountain alone.” (John 6:15)

The twelve apostles, likewise, both lived and taught this concept of non-involvement with the governments of earth. Paul put it most succinctly in Philippians 3:20—“But our citizenship is in heaven.” (NIV)

They viewed their role on earth as being “ambassadors for Christ.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)
Likewise, then imprisoned, Paul speaks of himself as “an ambassador in bonds.”
(Ephesians 6:20)

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

THE ROLE OF AN AMBASSADOR well describes the position in which the early Christian viewed himself. He was intently interested in the people around him. But he did not view them as fellow-citizens of the same country. He did not choose to be involved in their governmental situations. To him, it would be a conflict of interest with another government with which he identified.

There is no record of political involvement by the church of the New Testament. Writers of church history concur that it was not until the early part of the fourth century that Christians began to take an active part in the governments around them. This change was brought about by the conversion to Christianity of the emperor Constantine, and the mistaken hope that his conversion would somehow introduce the “kingdom of God” which Jesus preached. Subsequent history amply shows the fallacy of this anticipation.

“THE CITY OF GOD”

IT WAS AUGUSTINE’S *“City of God”* which codified the position of Christianity towards political involvement. Based upon the conviction that Christians themselves must establish God’s kingdom on the earth, it urged them to become activated in social and governmental issues. The result was a marriage of church and state in the Holy Roman Empire. The unchristian acts of this Christian empire are a matter of history, again exposing the fallacy of their position.

Dissident groups of Christians broke free from time to time, and many, such as the Waldenses, Hutterites and Hussites returned to the non-political position of New Testament times. The vast majority of the Christian community, both Catholic and Protestants, however, clung to their involvement with civil authorities.

In harsh terms, the results of this involvement are prophetically summarized by the Apostle John in Revelation 18:3—“the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her.”

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

THE NON-INVOLVEMENT BY MANY sincere Christians is often mistaken by their contemporaries for apathy. “You are so spiritual, you are of no earthly good” goes one of the charges. Yet it is just this point which forms the focal point of the Christian argument.

History has shown only too clearly the failure of governments, even so-called Christian governments, to change the hearts of men and bring true peace to the earth. And yet, this was precisely the promise at the birth of Christ in the words so oft quoted on Christmas cards—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will to men.”

This “Kingdom of God” will not be established by man, but by Jesus himself at his second advent. In the meantime, all the faithful Christian can do is to be a good ambassador for that foreign realm, that heavenly kingdom. He must represent its interest, and these often conflict with those of present governments.

It is because of his futuristic views that his hopes are frequently scoffed at by the skeptical as “pie in the sky.” It was this very lack of willingness to become socially and politically involved that caused Karl Marx to denounce Christianity as “the opiate of the people”—lulling the people to accept injustices while waiting for some future vaguely defined “Kingdom of God.”

RESPECT FOR LAW

ALL OF THIS DOES NOT MEAN that the faithful Christian should be disrespectful of the laws of the land in which he lives. As a faithful ambassador is obedient to the laws of his host country, so should the Christian be to the rules which dictate conduct in the country where he finds himself.

The Apostle Paul states it directly in Romans 13:11—“Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God.” Nor does the Bible prohibit prayers to this end, but rather so enjoins them in 1 Timothy 2:1-3—“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”

DON'T COMPLAIN ON WEDNESDAY

“IF YOU DON'T VOTE NEXT TUESDAY, don't complain next Wednesday.” This pre-election warning to those not planning to vote is well taken. If the Christian chooses not to cast his ballot on Tuesday, he does lose his right to complain about the results of the elections on Wednesday. It is not the proper role of the Christian to criticize a government which he was not willing to help correct. He may compare it with the ideals set forth in Scripture, or with his preferred “Kingdom of God,” but he must be willing to submit to the decisions of his peers, and live peaceably under the government which they have chosen. Nor is it his prerogative to criticize other Christians who, in their consciences, feel free to vote, and do so. Voting, then, is a privilege, though not necessarily a Christian responsibility.

*For further information of this subject, we recommend the book, **The New Creation** which is available for \$2. This topic is specifically covered on pages 593 to 595 of this book.*

{WHEN CHRISTIAN NATION FIGHTS CHRISTIAN NATION...

WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?

FROM TIME TO TIME in the passage of human events, the course of history takes puzzling turns. Perhaps none is more difficult to resolve than when one Christian people take up the sword against another Christian people.

The great religious wars that racked Europe in the 17th century, the conflict between the professed Christian powers of the Allies and the Axis in World War II and the religious conflict in Northern Ireland are all somber illustrations of this fact.

Let us briefly look at the latter since it is the most current illustration of our subject. A cadre of the IRA plant a bomb, killing several British soldiers. A counter-attack takes a number of civilian lives on the other side. Yet, in the morning both groups of fighters may well have been in their respective churches, imploring the aid of God in their struggle.

When Christian nations fight Christian nations, whose side is God on?

The answer in most cases is simple enough. Neither! The reason is equally simple—Christian nations do not fight Christian nations. The very act of taking up one's sword against his brother is un-Christian in the first place. The direct response to Peter's defense of the Lord seems especially appropriate: "Put up thy sword again into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." (Matt. 26:52)

The background of Jesus' ministry furnishes a reason for this counsel of the Lord. The Jews to whom he ministered, including his disciples, had been raised under a discipline of immediate rewards for well-doing, and punishment for evil-doing. They were used to not only economic prosperity for keeping the law, but to the protecting power of God, through which he would strengthen their hands against their foes.

But Jesus came with another message. "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:38, 39)

The discipline of Jesus was self-denial and self-sacrifice. It was accepting a wrong, rather than resisting it. It was the "turn the other cheek" philosophy of the Sermon on the Mount.

Such a course was advised not because oppressions were just, or evil was good; but because the present is not the time for the redressing of every wrong. Jesus' message was his kingdom. That kingdom would provide the solution for present injustices. In the meantime, the suffering of it to be so now would produce the proper meek and humble character to better appreciate the golden age soon to come.

The second reason why Christian nation need not fight Christian nation is equally simple. Nations are not Christian. Individuals are. A Christian is one who has a personal pact with God. This contract or covenant is based upon his acceptance of Christ as a personal Savior, and the personal commitment, or consecrations, of his all to the service of his God. It is the same with him as it was with his Lord at his baptism: "I come to do Thy will, O my God."

In the time before Jesus, God did not so deal with men. Then he had a collective covenant with the nation of Israel. Thus he could say of them, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth." (Amos 3:2)

The present is quite different. Now God's dealings with man are individual. It requires individual belief, individual conviction, and individual commitment. Note the simplicity of Jesus' call to discipleship in Matthew 16:24—"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Thus, he who asks the question of our title, states a fallacy. Christian nations do not fight Christian nations, for there are no Christian nations. Neither do individual Christians fight individual Christians, for to do so would, in itself, be un-Christian.

For a deeper investigation of the subject of how the evils of the present world will be dealt with in preparation for God's kingdom of peace, we recommend the FREE 32-page booklet, ARMAGEDDON, THEN WORLD PEACE, available by request.}

TWO KINGDOMS IN CONTRAST

THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A VIVID PORTRAYAL of the contrast between thee Kingdoms of this World and the Kingdom of God is found in the second chapter of the book of Daniel.

Before examining this text, let us first view the situation in the world at the time it was written. For over 500 years the kingdom of Judea, with its sister state of Israel, had enjoyed a theocratic rule in the land of Palestine.

Though often plagued with idolatry and apostasy, there was at least a nominal attempt to govern by the laws of God himself. As time progressed, the nation and its rulers slid further and further from its original ideals. After a short-lived reform under King Josiah, God saw fit to remove his protecting hand from the Jewish nation for a time.

The strongest military power of the time, Babylon, under their powerful king, Nebuchadnezzar, overthrew the Jewish capital of Jerusalem and set up a series of puppet kings, taking thousands of the Jewish people captive to Babylon. Among these first

captives were four young Hebrews, known in the Bible as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Because of their intelligence, they were inducted into governmental service—Daniel rising to the greatest position.

One year later the king had a troubling dream. As was the custom of the time, he called in his counselors to interpret his dream, though he could not even recall the details of the dream itself. When they proved unable, Daniel was brought forth, and both recalled the dream and gave its interpretation.

The dream was of a giant metallic image. The head was of gold, the arms and breast of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of a mixture of iron and clay. Interpreting the dream, Daniel explained that it was a prophecy of four universal Gentile governments which would hold sway upon the earth, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar.

Speaking to the king, as head of Babylon, Daniel said, “Thou art this head of gold.” (verse 38) Then he went on to explain that the other kingdoms would be inferior. History has shown these kingdoms to be those of Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, which deteriorated into the iron-clay mixture of church and state, known as the Holy Roman Empire.

**{SIX METALS
SIX KINGDOMS**

Gold.....Babylon
Silver.....Medo-Persia
Brass.....Greece
Iron.....Rome
Clay/Iron.....Church/State
Stone.....God’s Kingdom}

THE MIGHTY STONE

BUT THE DREAM DID NOT END THERE. Verses 34 and 35 record, “Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”

We are not left in doubt as to the interpretation of this action of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. In verses 43 through 45, Daniel continues, “And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut

out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

The identity of this “stone” with the incoming “Kingdom of God” is further confirmed by Jesus himself in Matthew 21:42-44—“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

The development of this kingdom of God to both replace and tower above all of the kingdoms of this world is further elaborated on in Isaiah 2:2-4—“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

With such a prospect identified with the incoming Kingdom of God, and such a poor track record for the kingdoms of this world, is it any wonder that Christians prefer to yield their patriotism and their political alliance to the former?

*This topic of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and related vision of Daniel in chapter seven are dealt with thoroughly in **The Divine Plan of the Ages**, which we are glad to make available at no charge upon your request.*