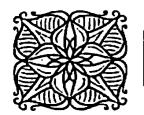


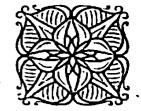


# SHOULD CHRISTIANS TAKE PART IN POLITICS?

By H. P. Barker

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## SHOULD CHRISTIANS TAKE PART IN POLITICS?

"YES, of course; and the better Christians they are, the better politicians they will be."

Such is the answer frequently given to the question which stands at the head of this paper. Certain it is that many Christians do take part in politics. They do so with a desire to advance the cause of righteousness, and to promote the well-being of their fellowmen.

For the servant of Christ, however, the question of questions should surely be: What will please my Master? His pleasure must be our guide, not only as to what we do, but how we do it. Has He any will in the matter? Does His Word throw any light thereon? This is what I invite the reader to consider.

First, however, a prior point must be raised.

#### WHAT IS A "CHRISTIAN"?

Now a Christian is more than a mere believer in Christianity. The term is used, in a general way, to distinguish such from a Jew or a Pagan. In this sense of the word many an unconverted professor of religion is a Christian.

What, then, is a true, a real Christian? Was Abraham a Christian, or Moses, or David? That they were true saints of God—the excellent of the earth—there can be no doubt. But were they *Christians?* 

It is generally taken for granted that these Old Testament worthies were Christians of the first water. But it is not so. For a Christian is one who is blessed beyond anything ever heard of in bygone days. He can speak of the Saviour as having died for him, and as having risen again. Through that risen Christ he is justified from all things. Further, the Holy Spirit dwells in him, and unites him to Christ in heaven. In common with all his fellow-believers, he is called with a heavenly calling, blessed with all spiritual blessings, and set in the place of a son, with regard to God. Moreover, the Christian is viewed as having died with Christ, and as having been raised with Him. His position is thus one of identification with Christ. Until the day comes for all this to be manifested, the Christian is to walk in the light of it, and to be a stranger and a pilgrim here.

For speaking thus the Holy Scriptures are my authority, and the statements that I make can be verified by any one who will take the trouble to search for himself. Are you sure, reader, that you are a "Christian"? Are you justified from all things, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Are you a member of Christ's body, united to Him as your Head in heaven? Are you one of those whom God speaks of as His sons?

Weighty questions these, but, wonderful though it may appear, the Christian can answer each of them with a hearty and decided "Yes."

II

In pursuit of our main inquiry, let us note it well that God, in the development of His ways with men, has been pleased to choose two peoples for His own pleasure.

The first of these is Israel. Loved with an everlasting love, and chosen from the foundation of the world, this nation was called of God to occupy a unique place on the earth, for the blessing of all other nations. Grievous, however, was its failure, and after centuries of sin and rebellion, Israel's wickedness culminated in the crucifixion of the promised Messiah. Consequent upon that fearful act, God has suspended the relationship between Himself and the guilty nation. Not that the suspension is final. Many a glowing prophecy tells of a day when God shall turn their hearts to Christ, when He will resume direct relations with them, and they shall

be the channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Meanwhile God has brought to light the purpose which He had formed long before the world began. A company should be gathered out from Gentiles as well as Jews to belong in a peculiar way to Christ, to be coheirs with Him, and to be united to Him by the closest and most intimate ties. This ("the mystery" hidden through the course of ages past) is now revealed, and the revelation of this "mystery" is one of the great outstanding features of Christianity that mark it off from all that has gone before, or will follow after (Eph. III.).

An everyday illustration may make this matter clear. An express train is due to pass a certain station in five minutes; but the stopping train stands by the platform. What is to be done? Only one thing. The stopping train must be shunted while the express runs through.

In like manner, Israel has been shunted, as it were, so that the Church (composed of all Christians, from Pentecost onwards) might occupy the rails. When the Church has gone through the course of her earthly sojourn, and reached her destination in glory, then Israel will be brought out upon the main line, and once more be the subject of God's blessing, in a national and corporate way.

These two—Israel and the Church—are often spoken of as "the earthly people" and "the heavenly people." These terms are right, and scriptural, for Israel was called with an earthly calling, and promised earthly blessings, while the Church's calling is heavenly. She is set in heavenly relationships and blessed in heavenly places. This will be more clear if we refer to some passages of Scripture which set forth the

TWO GREAT CHARTERS OF BLESSING,

the one for the Jew, the other for the Christian.

Look first at Deuteronomy xxvIII. Read carefully the first few verses, and note the character of the promised blessings.

"All these blessings shall come on thee." What blessings? Verses 3 to 13 tell us: "Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store." And so on.

Is it not easy to see that the blessings which were promised to Israel, conditional upon their obedience, were blessings connected with prosperity on earth?

Now turn to Ephesians 1. 3. How different the blessings here described! "Blessed be

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Who are the "us" of this verse? Christians. Our blessings are spiritual and heavenly in contrast to the temporal and earthly blessings promised to the obedient and godly Israelite.

Christians are not promised earthly prosperity. On the contrary, the most godly Christians have often been the poorest. Take Paul, for instance. He says of himself: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place" (I Cor. IV. II). Could anything be more unlike being blessed in the basket and the store than this?

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Christian's citizenship is a heavenly one. Philippians III. 20 distinctly says so. The word translated "conversation" there has more the meaning of "citizenship," and is closely connected with our word "politics." "Our citizenship," we read, "is in heaven."

Again, Christians are said to be "heavenly" in I Corinthians xv. 48. That is, we belong to the company that is distinctively heavenly.

A Christian may say, "I wish I were more heavenly," and the desire is right if conduct and ways are in question. Would to God

that we were all more heavenly. But our many shortcomings should not be allowed to weaken this great truth, that as to relationships, blessings, prospects, position, we, Christians, ARE, by the purpose and call of God, a heavenly people. Unlike Israel, we belong to heaven, our citizenship is there.

#### III

There is one other great fact to be considered before we treat more directly of the question which we have in hand.

#### THE REJECTION OF CHRIST.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth He found men engaged in building up a great world-system. Religion had its place therein, but there was no room in the structure for Christ. He would not fit in anywhere. He was "the Stone which the builders rejected" (Matt. XXI. 42).

Men are still building, and we see the great edifice of the world-system all around. What a wonderful system it is! There is room for almost anything in it. But mark it well, the gates of this great system are bolted and barred against *Christ*. The world-builders of former days refused Him a place, and Stephen charged them with being His betrayers and murderers (Acts VII. 52).

For the loyal heart this tremendous fact will

colour everything. Never should we forget that we are sojourning in a scene where our Lord has been refused and put to shame. Have we sufficiently taken this into account? Does not this one terrible fact turn the world into "the valley of the shadow of death" for us Christians? How can we share in its hopes and ambitions when He whom we love has been thrust out?

Moreover, the world has owned His great enemy, Satan, as its prince and its god. Politically, Satan is the world's prince (John xiv. 30). Religiously, he is the world's god (2 Cor. iv. 4).

Can we not, therefore, understand that the present age is an evil one? It is so called in Galatians I. 4. It is the age of Satan's rule. The Christian, however, is not of this world. Read the emphatic words in John xvII. 16, that assure us of this. Nor is the Christian set in the world to improve it. His business is to witness for the One who has been cast out, and "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (or age).

Let the fact of Christ's rejection have weight with you, dear fellow-Christian, and ask yourself, Is it loyalty or treachery to be anything but a *stranger* in the world which has refused Him a place?

#### IV

We have, I think, gone a long way towards answering our question, Should Christians take part in politics? We have considered facts and principles that must surely show that only one answer is possible.

But there are other things to which I now invite the reader's attention. First, let us see what we can learn from the

#### LIFETIME OF CHRIST ON EARTH.

It was an era of great political agitation. Judea had been annexed to the Empire of Rome, and a Roman governor represented the hated pagan power in Jerusalem. National feeling ran high. Phariseeism was watching its opportunity to put itself at the head of an endeavour to throw off the galling yoke. Under the circumstances would it not be expected that the Lord Jesus should express His views as to the political situation, and lend the weight of His influence either to the national party whose aims were patriotic and religious, or to the Roman party, represented by the Herodians? On one occasion members of these two opposing parties attempted to obtain an expression of political opinion from the Lord by a cleverly-framed question. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" Would He advise them to patiently endure the Gentile yoke, or to strenuously oppose it?

What an opportunity for a politician! Representative men of both the leading parties in the State waiting eagerly to hear His answer! What would the great Teacher advise? Would He side with the Government, or counsel a movement on the lines of "passive resistance," or what?

It was soon seen that the Lord Jesus had nothing to say to the politics of the day. His mission amongst men was to urge the claims of God upon conscience and soul. So, pointing to the coin used for the payment of the imperial tax, He asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?"

"Cæsar's," was the reply.

Then said He, "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Probably this answer was received with murmurings by the Pharisaic party. "What a lack of patriotism!" they may have exclaimed. "Why did He not urge the people to fight for freedom, and to resist tyranny?" But it is impossible to recall the incident without seeing that the Lord Jesus deliberately refused to take any part in politics. Rather than do so, He would let people esteem Him unpatriotic.

V

On a previous occasion the opportunity had arisen for Him to place Himself at the head of an enthusiastic multitude bent on asserting the independence of Galilee, the northern province of Palestine. His power to feed five thousand men with a mere handful of bread and fish had so impressed the multitude, that with one accord they decided that He should be their leader and their king. They were even prepared to compel Him by force to accept the position (John vi. 15); but it was not for that that He had come to earth. He would not take part in the movement that was afoot. He withdrew into the solitude of a neighbouring mountain. He was no politician. To serve God and to save men was His object.

VI

On another occasion the question of arbitration was brought up. A quarrel had arisen, and the Lord Jesus was asked to act as arbitrator. What would you have done under such circumstances? Would you have argued, "Here is an opportunity for promoting peace and righteousness, and for doing good amongst men"? Would you have consented to arbitrate? Notice that your Master refused. "Man!" He said, "who made Me

a judge or a divider over you?" (Luke XII. 14). Other, and higher, business than that was His.

One may ask, "Do you then think arbitration wrong?" No. To arbitrate is better than to quarrel. Let the world settle its strifes by arbitration, rather than by war, by all means. The point is, that the Lord Jesus left that sort of thing to others. He did not condemn arbitration, but He took no part in it. It belonged to a sphere of things which was outside the "Father's business." And the path that the Master trod is surely the path for the disciple.

#### VII

In the early days of Christianity slavery was an established institution, and many were its cruelties and horrors. It might be thought that the servants of Christ would certainly start a campaign for its abolition; but the Epistle to Philemon shows that the Christians of those bright, early days did not lift up a finger to alter the state of things. Onesimus, a runaway slave, had been converted through Paul's preaching at Rome. Instead of using the occasion to expatiate on the evils of slavery, the Apostle deliberately sends the runaway back with a courteous message and a loving request that the Christian master would receive the returned runaway as a brother in Christ.

No Christian could be indifferent to the cruelties inflicted upon the unfortunate slaves, either in ancient or modern times. And the horrors of the slave trade, who shall tell? Nor is this diabolical commerce a matter of the past. On the West Coast of Africa, where flies the flag of Portugal, the hideous traffic still exists. But the Christian's resource is God Himself. Not by agitation, or by joining in a political propaganda; not by getting up petitions to Parliament, or by assembling mass meetings; but by going into God's presence with the burden of the world's woe upon his heart, and then coming out of that presence to carry the tidings of Christ to men. In this way the Christian will rightly seek to serve his Master. At least, so we gather from the pages of the New Testament.

#### VIII

In these days when Socialism, Radicalism, and Democracy are watchwords upon so many lips, it should not be forgotten that Christians are exhorted to "honour the King." Who was on the throne when such counsel was given by the Apostle Peter? (I Peter II. 17). Not a gracious sovereign like Queen Victoria, not a peace-loving monarch like King Edward VII; Nero, one of the worst tyrants the world has ever seen, the murderer of his mother

and his wife, the embodiment of every vice and cruelty, was the wearer of the imperial crown. But Christians were not to join in any movement for the dethronement of the emperor, or the substitution of a better form of government. They were to go on in quiet obedience, suffering for righteousness' sake, if called upon to do so, and withal holding the king in honour because of his high office (1 Peter II. 13–17). Those in power are there by the ordinance of God (Rom. XIII. 1), and the Christian's duty is not resistance, but subjection.

#### IX

I am well aware that many very estimable Christians will dissent from my thesis. They hold that it is not inconsistent for them to take part in the politics of the day. They maintain that Christians should do their utmost to give a moral complexion to public life, and to introduce wholesome influences into the political arena.

Those who argue thus might learn a lesson from the case of Lot. He was a righteous man (2 Peter II. 7), but he made a great mistake. Becoming a resident in the wicked city of Sodom, he accepted a position of authority there. He "sat in the gate of Sodom." That is, I suppose, he became one of the city magistrates. Probably his desire was to see justice take the place of injustice,

to sweeten the putrid atmosphere of Sodom's civic life; but the endeavour ended in awful failure. His testimony was nullified, his voice of warning fell on deaf ears, and the destruction of the city left him a penniless fugitive, to end his days miserably in a mountain cave. How serious the lesson to be read in this narrative!

"But," says some one, "is it not right to try to get the best men elected as members of Parliament? Will not better laws be passed, and the country be better governed, by good men than by bad?"

Well, it may be thought so, but the contrary is often the case. It is significant that when the time came for God to choose a governor for the world, He chose a violent, tyrannical man, Nebuchadnezzar. This man was set up as the first great Gentile head of the nations, when Israel, by disobedience, had forfeited the favour of God. Instead of being left under the rule of the kings of David's line, God gave His wilful people into the hand of the Gentiles, and appointed Nebuchadnezzar (the "head of gold") to govern them. God is behind the scenes, and can carry out His will through the wickedest of men, as well as through the best. Let Christians, then, occupy themselves with the business of their Master, and leave the world to attend to the business of its master.

X

It is abundantly clear to any student of the Scriptures that Satan has the control of the great world-system. It is not even yet fully developed, but future developments are foretold on the prophetic page. The nations of Europe have a leading place in the wonderful system organized by the devil.

They will ultimately take the form of ten kingdoms, which will form a close confederation, and be ruled over by a great popular emperor, called in Scripture "the Beast." The Jews, returned to their land of Palestine (though still in unbelief), will receive as their king a lawless, wicked, unscrupulous man, known as "the Antichrist." The Beast and the Antichrist will form a league, and then fearful things will come to pass. A whole volume might be written upon the terrible things that will happen in those last days; awful will be the sufferings and unspeakable the judgments poured out then upon the "dwellers on earth." Let the reader turn to the pages of Daniel and Revelation for further details. This is the climax to which the politics of the day are moving on.

But if Satan-is working out this great system which he dominates, God, too, has a great system in view, a system of which *Christ* is the blessed centre. I do not now refer to

heaven, or to the eternal state, but to what will be set up during the period generally known as the "millennium," or the thousand years of blessing and glory.

From Daniel II. we learn that the great world-system will be shattered, as by "a stone cut out without hands." The stone will become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. This surely portrays that which will take the place of the world-system upon its destruction. The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom. Many a prophecy shows that Jerusalem shall be the metropolis of that wonderful kingdom, and restored Israel shall be the nation through which the rule of right-eousness shall be established to the ends of the earth. Then shall men beat their swords into ploughshares, and shall learn war no more.

But the Christian has his portion in a sphere higher and more glorious still. The world to come has its heavenly, as well as its earthly, side; and in that heavenly part, the kingdom of the Father, where as sons we shall be eternally at home, will be our portion. All the glories of Christ in connection with the blessing of men on earth will be for us to adoringly contemplate, but we ourselves shall be with Him, dwelling in the Father's love, and knowing as we are known.

Wonderful to relate, that scene of love and life is ours to enjoy even now. We are not

actually there, but in the Spirit of God we have the power of entering in and tasting the joys of that realm of bliss. He unfolds its glories to our hearts, and gives us to contemplate Him who is the Centre of it all, the beloved Son of the Father.

Christian reader, what do you know of all this? Sure am I that if you knew the joy of that blessed home life, you would be lifted clean off the plane of politics. You would be dwelling, by the Spirit of God, in a sphere where earthly pursuits have no place. And you would seek to spend the time of your sojourning here, not in joining in that which belongs to the world-system, but in doing the will of God, and serving the interests of the One who is rejected here, but exalted there!

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