

Democracy in the Light of Scripture

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At the present time two great ideas prevail in the world, as far as its national, political, and social life is concerned. They are radically different, and upon the surface wholly inconsistent the one with the other, yet the present drift of things would lead us to suspect that a way may yet be found by which they shall be brought together in a certain kind of amalgamation; and the voice of the prophetic Scriptures confirms us in this expectation.

The two great ideas are respectively the democratic and the imperialistic. Both have fairly arrived on the scene.

Democracy presents itself to us as the finished product of the wisdom of the ages. History gives us, it may be said, the long and dismal record of human experiments in the art of government, and profiting by past experience the democratic idea has been evolved, and now holds the field amongst enlightened nations. It is — to use Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase — "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." In practice it comes to this, that the people are to be governed by a *majority* of the people — for they are never unanimous, and hence the minority must give way — and that majority should rule by its accredited representatives for the good of *all* the people and not for the majority's interests only. Whether it really does so is of course another thing.

The imperialistic idea has as its watchword that "union is strength." In national life it leads to groups of nations and powerful alliances and leagues. In politics it expresses itself in groups of parties to achieve together what they cannot hope to enforce singly. Socially it produces giant trusts, federations of industries, unions. It even threatens to appear in the religious world in the form of a federation of "churches." It is really a reversion to the old idea which animated the ante-diluvians in their schemes at Babel. (See Genesis 11: 1-9).

Our present concern is not at all with the political advantages or disadvantages of Democracy; we do wish, however, to get the light which the Word of God sheds upon it, thereby discerning its true character, and anticipating the sure end to which time will carry it.

In the first place then we must enquire of Scripture as to what God's way for the government of the earth may be. He has of course a mind on the subject, and the more clearly we apprehend it the more shall we be in a position to judge of any and every theory that man has proposed.

In the beginning, Adam, as yet unfallen, was placed in the position of sole authority. He was God's image or representative and had dominion over the lower ranks of created beings (Gen. 1: 26). No thought of authority over other men comes in here. This point was not raised until sin had come in. His authority, such as it was, was absolute, and his responsibility was to God alone.

Sin having invaded creation, a long period elapsed during which there was no further authority delegated to man by God, and hence no man had any authority over his fellow men. That age terminated in the flood.

The first post-diluvian age opened, however, with a further delegation of authority. Noah and his sons after him were responsible to maintain God's rights in man, especially as regards the sacredness of human life. (See Gen. 9: 5 and 6). God hereby delegated to certain men authority over men even to the execution of capital punishment. Patriarchal authority was thus established.

Among those who soon thereafter cast off the fear of God, not liking "to retain God in their knowledge," as Rom. 1: 28 puts it, this authority evidently changed its form. It was no longer patriarchal in character, but fell into the hands of men of prowess and renown, such as Nimrod (Gen. 10: 8-10), and after the confusion of speech at Babel, nations with their "kings" appear (Gen. 12: 15; Gen. 14: 1 and 2).

However, those who still feared God adhered to the patriarchal order until God set His hand to deliver Israel from Egypt, and raised up Moses. This marked a new departure. Moses was invested by God with an authority in the midst of Israel far beyond anything that Noah received. True, at first his authority was rejected. The wrongdoer "thrust him away saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" (Acts 7: 27) but we read also, "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush" (verse 35). Moses was indeed "king in Jeshurun" (Deut. 23: 5), but it was a kingship of an informal order. Properly speaking, Theocracy was established in Israel with Moses as the spokesman and mediator, and therefore in that sense king.

For centuries such authority as was administered in Israel was of that order, but the power of it declined; those who wielded it were far inferior in faithfulness and in force. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34: 10).

The resultant feebleness led to an outcry for a king like the nations (1 Sam. 8: 5), and after the episode of the wilful king of the people's choice, God raised up David and established kingly authority on a proper basis. He was to be ruler over God's people, and the executor of judgment on their enemies (2 Sam. 7: 8, 9). He was also to "feed" Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands (Ps. 78: 71, 72). David's authority was absolute, and he was to *rule*. He was to *execute judgment if* and as needs be, but also to *feed* his subjects and to *guide* them. His rule was to be absolute but wholly beneficent.

With the failure of David's descendants the glory of it departed, and at last God transferred authority into Gentile hands. It was entrusted first of all to Nebuchadnezzar, as stated in Daniel 2: 37, 38, and though the great king's dream, as recorded in that chapter, foreshadowed the changes that would supervene as to forms of government, yet it showed that the authority that lay behind government, whatever its form, would remain in Gentile hands until the sudden execution of divine wrath on all man's pride and abuse of the entrusted power should be an accomplished fact. Then should appear the kingdom which "shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2: 20), and that kingdom is to be vested in the Son of man, who will wield absolute dominion for the blessing of men (Dan. 7: 13, 9). He will be pleased, however, to take up and use in connection with His government the saints "of the Most High" or "of the high places" (verses 18, 22), and also a "people" who will possess the kingdom "under the whole heaven," i.e., on its earthly side. This people of course is Israel.

This rapid sketch of the course of government amongst men is enough to show that one feature marks it all through. The ultimate authority is always God — and God alone.

No man has any prescriptive right to exercise authority over his fellows except he has received it from God. Hence in such passages as Rom. 14: 1-6 and 1 Peter 2: 13-15 obedience to the ruling authorities is enjoined upon the Christian. The Apostle Paul tells us "There is no authority except from God; and those that exist are set up by God" (New Translation).

Turning now from government as presented to us in Scripture to the practice of it by those to whom it has been entrusted on earth, we at once see that it has been terribly abused, as has all else that has been entrusted to fallen man. Tyranny and self-seeking have everywhere flourished, and history is a

record of the long and painful struggles by means of which nations have turned from one form of government to another, or have introduced modifications into their various governmental systems, in the vain hope of evolving ideal conditions. Of all these changes Democracy is the latest, and its advent is not surprising to anyone at all versed in the abuses which gave it birth.

Comparing it, however, not with its predecessors, but with the ideals of Scripture, which are to be fully realized in the millennial age, we at once see that it is more hopelessly condemned than any other form of government which has yet appeared; for the reason that it frankly and unblushingly deposes God as the foundation and source of authority and puts man — i.e., "the people" — in His place. The gulf between these two is as wide as that between heaven and hell.

To the thoroughgoing Democrat only one question really matters, viz., What is the will of the people? To ask what may be *right* — what, in other words, may be the will of God, is quite irrelevant. What the people desire is to be regarded as the right thing, and the functions of a truly democratic government are to carry out the people's desires, to be the humble servants of the people's will — whether right or wrong.

In this matter, as in all others, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ provides the Christian with a supreme test. At that solemn hour Pontius Pilate the governor was the representative of Caesar, and at his autocratic bar Christ was arraigned. Yet in an unusual moment of weakness autocracy abdicated its functions. The record runs thus: —

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matt. 27: 24).

"And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Luke 23: 23, 24).

As Caesar's representative, Pilate washed his hands of the whole business, whilst, acting as executive officer of a democracy which held sway for just a brief hour, he "*gave sentence that it should be AS THEY REQUIRED.*"

Viewed as a setting forth of democratic principles, this might be passed as all *right*. Viewed from every other standpoint, it was the most outrageous *wrong* of the world's history.

Reverting again to Nebuchadnezzar's dream as recorded in Daniel 2 we may now be better able to grasp the significance of the clay which entered into the image when the feet of it were reached.

Daniel's vision in Daniel 7 sets forth the course of the four great Gentile empires in their dealings amongst men, and they are pictured as wild beasts in their powers of destruction. Nebuchadnezzar's dream, on the other hand, gives us the same four empires but as setting forth the character and quality of their governments, and hence what marks them is a steady deterioration in the metals that appear.

God started the "Times of the Gentiles" with an ideal form of government, though the man who wielded its power was far from ideal. That it was an ideal form is proved by the fact that God will revert to it for the millennial age, when the ideal Man appearing, by whom He will "judge the world in righteousness," all will soon be peace and blessing.

As the empires developed, men deviated from the golden ideal, and introduced human modifications, and the government became silver, brass, and iron, as more and more divine thoughts were forgotten and human policies came to the fore.

It is, however, in the last stage of the last empire — the Roman — that we find for the first time the introduction of clay — a non-metallic substance. This was an evident prediction that before the end there should be introduced into the prevailing governmental system, a principle which should be not so much a further modification of the old, as one radically and fundamentally different. Because of it "the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken" or "brittle" — see margin. Daniel's interpretation of the clay and iron mixed is "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."

The "they" of this passage appears to mean those in whose hands authority for the time being rests.

We have no hesitation in seeing here a prediction of the uprising and prevalence of a democracy in the last days. The authority which finds its source in God, and that which finds its source in man, are as different from one another as gold or iron or any other metal from clay. The two things may be mingled — they are in part inextricably mixed in our modern theory and practice of government, but only weakness and brittleness is induced, and soon will come the death-blow administered by the stone "cut out without hands."

If any have difficulty in reconciling what is said above with the prophecies concerning the coming Satan-inspired head for the revived Roman empire, we would ask them to remember that in practice the transition from democratic to imperialistic forms is very easy. Let a man of transcendent genius appear, who seems to embody in himself the very spirit of "the people," and nothing is easier than for him to assume for himself the powers that theoretically belong to the people, and the people, fickle and easily led, will be glad to have it so. The career of Napoleon I. springing out of the French Revolution is a case in point. The coming "beast" of Revelation 13 rises "out of the sea," i.e., the masses of the people in a state of agitation and unrest.

It is therefore more than likely that this coming "super-man" will quite ardently uphold democratic institutions in theory whilst carrying on autocratic rule in practice — iron mixed with clay.

The reader who has patiently followed us up to this point may be inclined to ask what we hope to achieve in writing all this, if we have, as we say, no political ends before us. We therefore avow without hesitation that our aim is a far more thorough heart-separation from this present evil world for ourselves and all believers.

Full well we know that nothing but an abiding sense of the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord can effectually lift our souls above the level of the world and its thoughts, yet the exposure of world politics and schemes by the light of Scripture has its value, and this has been our present endeavour.

The lamp of prophetic scripture is said in 2 Peter 1: 19 to be shining in a dark or "squalid" place. Let the lamp cast its rays on the much-vaunted principles of social democracy and how squalid they appear. The sticky clay may be gilded but it certainly is not gold! The enlightened Christian will not waste much enthusiasm upon it.

And what clear light it sheds upon the vexed question of whether a Christian should vote and interest himself in politics generally. We are asked to accept the position of being a little cog in that machine called "the people" which has usurped to itself that function in the sphere of government which belongs to God alone. Shall we do it? YES! — if we believe in the modern humanistic "gospel" which humanizes Jesus and deifies man. But if we believe that salvation is not of the people but of the Lord, NO!

The world system is doomed. Let there be no hesitancy in our witness to this fact. Out of the impending catastrophe souls are being rescued by the abounding grace of our Lord. It is ours to seek them, bearing witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us then not waste time in vain attempts to shore up the tottering fabric, but let us busy ourselves in that which is the great work which our Lord has allotted to us. To be thoroughly for Him and His interests, is to be thoroughly outside the world system and its hopes.

We look, not for a perfected system of democracy, but for "the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3: 20, 21), and as for this earth, we look for the setting up of the kingdom of Christ by the God of heaven, which shall never be destroyed but shall stand for ever.