

Publishing Editor's column

NO ONE with any interest in world affairs can fail to be aware of the morass America and her allies, Britain in particular, have got themselves into in Iraq and Afghanistan. It seems to have been envisaged that the removal of a brutal dictatorship in Iraq and the removal of an extreme Islamic régime in Afghanistan would result in the people of these countries eagerly seizing the opportunity to embrace democracy, and for democracy to spread to other countries in that area currently ruled by dictatorial régimes of one sort or another. This idea has proved to be a grave miscalculation. Iraq and Afghanistan are both countries divided with deep divisions caused by tribalism and religion. In these circumstances democracy does not work; either the largest group gains power and imposes its will on the rest or there is chaos because no effective government can be formed from the various parties.

Although imposing democracy on other nations is proving to be very difficult, democracy is now accepted as the norm in many countries. Most readers of this magazine will live in democratic countries simply because a key feature of democracy is freedom of speech and of belief. We are rightly critical of the growing evil in our countries, and blame this on democracy, but let us not forget the benefits we enjoy from it. Without democracy we would very likely not have had the opportunity to come to the Truth, and we could therefore regard democracy as having been brought about by God to enable the Truth to spread in these last days. This does not, of course, mean that we should take part in the processes that make up a democracy, like voting, but it does mean that we should be thankful for the blessings that it provides and be prepared to carry out with good grace the responsibilities which living in a democracy place on us, as long as these do not conflict with what God demands of us.

It is the case, however, that true democracy does not in fact exist. What is termed a democracy is a country where people merely have the right to elect those who will represent them in running the country. There is no opportunity for people to decide themselves by majority vote what should be done. As Christadelphians we deplore the erosion of moral standards in the countries in which we live, and which are enshrined in the laws of our countries, but it is not because people voted for them that these laws exist. To take two examples,

neither the legalisation of homosexuality nor the abolition of corporal punishment in schools would have come about if people had been able to vote on these issues. Rather, a cultural, political and intellectual élite has imposed humanistic ideas contrary to Biblical teaching upon the societies in which we live, and these are then promoted by the media and educational and religious institutions until they become generally acceptable.

Winston Churchill once said that democracy is the worst way to run the world, and then added 'apart from all the other ways', thus acknowledging that democracy had its faults but less so than other methods of governing. I would venture to say that this comment applies to our ecclesias today, as was effectively recognised by Brother Roberts and his contemporaries when they introduced the *Ecclesial Guide*. This was on the basis that, in the absence of the Spirit-guided eldership that existed in the early ecclesias, there is no other practical way to run ecclesias (except perhaps when they are very small).

We need, however, to be clear as to why we run our ecclesias on democratic lines. In the world it is accepted that democracy in itself is a good thing, due to the wide acceptance of what are termed 'the natural rights of man'. This is not a view we hold. Theocracy, not democracy, is how the world is to be run; not rule by popes, patriarchs and mullahs, sinful men without an understanding of the Truth, but the rule of the Son of God, who after a truly righteous life has been given the power and authority to rule the world in the Kingdom he is to establish. We run our ecclesias as we do because it seems the best way available to us, not because there is something inherently right about it.

It follows from this that we need to be very careful about how we use democracy. Having the right spiritual qualities should be the predominant criterion for electing brethren to leadership, and the upholding of Divine principles and the spiritual welfare of brethren and sisters should predominate in decision-making. Every effort should be made to achieve a consensus on important matters, and self kept firmly under control. In so doing we can avoid the evils which besmirch democracy in the world, and prepare ourselves for our future role in helping Christ to provide the world with a truly righteous government.

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