

law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:5-9).

When Israel and Joshua heeded this exhortation and encased themselves in the armour of God's Word they succeeded; they failed when they neglected to obey God and were exposed to their enemies the Canaanites. Our great consola-

tion is that the Captain of our salvation has already won the battle, and that, if we follow his example, we shall, as Paul says, be "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

Points for thought and discussion

- *How vigorously is your ecclesia witnessing to the Truth, knowing that, if God is for us, who can be against us?*
- *Is the Brotherhood witnessing effectively to those in authority—rulers, church leaders, etc.?*
- *Are there gaps in your personal armour, and, if so, are you using the Word of God to develop and complete your armour?*

Conscientious objection

John Morris

CONSCIENCE IS that inner voice that forbids a particular course of action. "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people" (2 Sam. 24:10), and, in the presence of the woman taken in adultery, the scribes and Pharisees were "convicted by their own conscience" (Jno. 8:9).

The servant of God must strive always to have a "good conscience" (Acts 23:1; 1 Pet. 3:16), "a conscience void of offence toward God" (Acts 24:16). He will cultivate a 'sensitive conscience', what Paul refers to as a "weak" conscience (1 Cor. 8:7-10), and he will be careful how he acts "for conscience sake" (10:25-29; Rom. 13:5; 1 Pet. 2:19).

Military service

Our conscience objects to any action contrary to the commandments of Christ, hence the expression 'conscientious objection'. In its usual context, this is shorthand for the revulsion which the disciple of Christ feels towards acts of violence against a fellow human being, and even the bearing of arms. A brother or sister is a conscientious objector because he or she has chosen to declare to the authorities an unwillingness to be called up for military service in time of war, and a willingness rather to face the consequences,

including the hardships of alternative national service and the scorn of those who see the disciple's stand as a mark of weakness rather than strength of character.

A conscientious objector is not a pacifist. Those who appeared before tribunals often had to explain why God allowed participation in war in Bible times and may sanction it in the age to come, and yet forbids it now. In the Old Testament, in spite of the specific command not to kill, great men such as King David were involved in the slaying of individuals and whole armies. Yet God's distaste for David's actions is evident: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My name" (1 Chron. 22:8).

The law of Christ is unambiguous, and, whilst the false church has found it convenient to cooperate with the state, to bless war, and to encourage the individual to take up arms, the follower of Jesus Christ has taken his Lord's commands very literally: "Love your enemies . . . do good to them that hate you" (Mt. 5:44); "avenge not yourselves" (Rom. 12:19); "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24); "Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21). Brethren down the ages,

from the first to the twenty-first century, have suffered for their stand, but the objection to arms has been an element of their faith admitting no compromise.

Other tests of conscience

But is conscientious objection only about military service? This is the subject which immediately comes to mind, but it is not the only area where a disciple's conscience may be tested. Christadelphians have a conscientious objection to involvement in politics, and specifically voting. Most consciences are troubled in the matter of jury service (though here the objection has not been universal). Many disciples seek to avoid trade union membership, or at least make clear their objection to any political activity and their abhorrence of strike action.

In all avenues of life, faithful disciples eschew acts of protest and demands for their personal rights; they do not go along with the assertiveness of the age.

However, there are situations in the modern world where the issues are not quite so clear. There are careers or tasks which one disciple finds offensive to his conscience and about which another disciple may have no qualms. Christadelphian doctors and nurses, in today's complex world, are sometimes faced with very difficult decisions, in connection with a procedure for abortion, for example, or treating a patient for drug addiction. With further experience we shall doubtless come to a consensus regarding such areas of concern, yet each new generation (if the world continues) is bound to encounter new challenges, and they must be discussed.

In the final analysis, it is our own conscience that must decide whether or not we raise a particular conscientious objection. Though consistency throughout the Brotherhood is desirable, in the end, conscientious objectors are those who have taken a *personal* decision to act in a certain way, for reasons based on careful Scriptural study and prayer.

To vote or not to vote?

Edward Carr

THERE ARE three ways in which the believer *could* deal with the issue of voting in political elections:

- vote for whom we think God would choose
- vote by casting lots
- not vote at all.

The last of these three has long been the course taken by Christadelphians; the second has been advocated sometimes, by a minority,¹ particularly under systems of compulsory voting; the first is contrary to the very faith that we hold and the Scriptures that form the basis of that faith.

Separation

Although there is no direct commandment regarding voting, the spirit of the teaching of Scripture is very clear: we are to be separate from the present evil world. The Lord Jesus Christ was quite emphatic in his declaration to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jno. 18:36); and his command to his disciples equally definite: "seek ye the kingdom of God" (Lk. 12:31). Our duty is to seek God and His Kingdom which is to come, not to try to influence a world over

which we have no authority, however well intentioned: "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Dan. 4:17). It is God Who determines the course of the kingdom of men; it is He Who gives power and authority, not us by the casting of a vote.

The higher powers?

Do we then, in not voting, disobey the command to "be subject unto the higher powers . . . [which] are ordained of God" and thereby resist "the ordinance of God" (Rom. 13:1,2)? In answer to this difficulty two points come up:

- 1 In seeking to "be subject unto the higher powers", by casting a vote, we could in fact find ourselves resisting not just the ordinance of God but God Himself. The Lord may see fit to choose a course of action we would never choose or could never foresee. He may appoint those to whom we ourselves would never dream of giving authority: Pharaoh,

1. See, for example, Brother C. C. Walker, *The Christadelphian*, 1926, pp. 30,113,212.