

THE FIRST QUESTION: “How have we arrived at our present position?”

It is helpful to view this in 3 stages of development.

(a) Evangelism (b) Social concern (c) Political engagement.

I will address these under 3 historical movements.

• **The First Movement: “The Biblical Position”**

In the ministry of **Jesus** evangelism and social responsibility were joined together. Jesus went about “teaching, preaching” (Matt 4:23; 9:35) and went about “doing good” (Acts 10:58). Throughout the history of the church both these ministries have been linked together.

In the 18th century **Wesley** was both a “preacher of the gospel and a prophet of righteousness.” Among subsequent evangelical leaders **William Wilberforce**, was instrumental in the abolition of slavery.

• **The Second Movement: “The Great Reversal”**

David Moberg who wrote the book “The Great Reversal” gives at least 4 reasons for the evangelical divorce from social involvement in the early 20th century (a) The **battle against theological liberalism** when evangelicals became preoccupied with the defence and proclamation of the gospel (b) resistance against the so-called “**social gospel**” (c) pervading **pessimism following World War I** (d) The spread of **eschatology that emphasised the present evil world as beyond redemption**. Things will get worse and worse and only the Second Coming of Christ will put everything right. This led to disengagement with society except for the purposes of evangelism.

• **The Third Movement: “Reversing of the Great Reversal”**

as David Moberg puts it began to occur in the 1960’s. **Carl Henry** (USA) and **Sir Norman Anderson** (UK) were two of the prominent movers in this process.

The turning of the tide came with the **First Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation** in Switzerland in 1974 which concluded with the

Lausanne Covenant, Section 4 of which deals with Nature of Evangelism and Section 5 with Christian Social Responsibility. In 1982 the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) was held in Grand Rapids (USA). (It was jointly sponsored by Lausanne Committee and World Evangelical Fellowship). Its report stated “The gospel is the root of which **evangelism** and **social responsibility** are the fruits.” The Lausanne Covenant speaks not only of **social responsibility** but also **social-political involvement**:

The Grand Rapids Report distinguished between social service and social action and tabulated it as follows.

SOCIAL SERVICE	SOCIAL ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆Relieving human need ◆Philanthropic activity ◆Seek to minister to individual & families ◆Works of mercy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆Removing the causes of human need ◆Political& economic activity ◆Seeking to transform the structure of society ◆The quest for justice

Socio-political action is described as going beyond **persons to structures** e.g. improving the condition of slaves (social service) abolition of slavery (social action).

THE SECOND QUESTION: “What do we mean by politics?”

The word has acquired a lot of negative emotional baggage but it denotes

1. **the life of a city** (polis); living together in community and
2. **the science of government** concerned with policy development and the embodying them in legislation.

Was Jesus and the Early Church involved in politics? According to Definition 1 yes; according to Definition 2 no. Let me hasten however to add that because Jesus and the Early Church were not involved in politics in the narrower sense of government is this a valid reason for us in the 21st Century not to be involved? I will **enlist the support of two evangelical giants**.

First **John Stott** declares, “It is no good saying that Jesus and his apostles were not interested in politics,

and that they neither required nor even commended political action, let alone engaged in it themselves. It is true. They did not. But we have to remember that they were a tiny, insignificant minority under the totalitarian regime of Rome. The legions were everywhere, and were under orders to suppress dissent, crush opposition, and preserve the *status quo*. The first century Christians **could not take political action**; is this the reason why they *did not*? **At least the fact that they did not because they could not is no reason why we should not - if we can**. The question is: would they have been politically active if they had had the opportunity to be and the likelihood of success? I believe they would. **For without appropriate political action some social needs simply cannot be met**. The apostles did not demand the abolition of slavery. But are we not glad and proud that nineteenth century Christians did? Their campaign was based on biblical teaching regarding human dignity, and was a legitimate extrapolation from it. The apostles did not build hospitals either, or require them to be built, but Christian hospitals are a legitimate extrapolation from Jesus’ compassionate concern for the sick. Just so, political action (which is love seeking justice for the oppressed) is a legitimate extrapolation from the teaching and ministry of Jesus”.

Next **James Packer** concurs. He states, “The New Testament does not speak about active political participation, for the very good reason that this was not an option for first-century believers. The Roman Empire was not a democracy, and many if not most Christians were not Roman citizens. They were a small minority from the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum and were viewed as eccentric deviants from the older eccentricity of Judaism. They had no political influence nor any prospect of gaining any. So the only politically significant things they could do were pay their taxes (Matt 17:24-27; 22:15-21; Rom 13:6-7), pray for their rulers (I Tim 2:1-4), and keep the peace (Rom 12:18; I Thess 5:13-15).

Present-day representative democracy, however, opens the door to a wider range of political possibilities and thereby requires of us more in the way of responsible commitment than circumstances required in New Testament times”.

Furthermore, Packer speaks of the pietistic inhibition of some Christian absolutists:
“Absolutists, as I here use the word, are those Protestants, Roman Catholics, or Orthodox, who believe that God’s unchanging truth is given to the church in Scripture, and that only by obeying this truth can one please God. These people are *pietistic* in their concern about achieving holiness, avoiding sin, winning souls, practising fellowship with Christians, and opposing all the forces of anti-Christianity on the personal level.

Pietistic inhibitions take the form of political passivity and unwillingness to be involved in any level of civil government. Some will vote but not run for office, others will not even vote, and all incline to treat political issues as not directly their business. Their stance as Christian citizens is thus one of withdrawal from, rather than involvement in, the political process.”

THE THIRD QUESTION: “What should be the extent of Christian political engagement?”

We may list them as action points

- 1. Everyone** should be well **INFORMED**. We need Christian researchers who could make information on various issues available to Christians in easily understood form. We have been guilty in the past of generating more heat than light!
- 2. Everyone eligible** should **VOTE** in elections.
- 3. Everyone** should **PRAY** for those in authority according to I Tim 2:1-4 & Rom 13:1-7.
- 4. Many** if not everyone should seek to **LOBBY** their members of Parliament on critical issues. There is a great opportunity for evangelical co-operation (consider Evangelical Alliance in UK).
- 5. Some** should seek **POLITICAL OFFICE** or work in political parties. If Mordecai’s are not **within the decision-making body** Hamans most

certainly will be. Consider also the vocation of Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Nehemiah. Godly people who held political office.

6. Some should make **SUBMISSIONS** on behalf of their constituents.

7. The church as church does need to exercise great discretion as to the nature of its political engagement; Its members may belong to various political parties. The church must nevertheless raise its PROPHETIC VOICE.

(a) We have **circumscribed** prophecy to its predictive, eschatological aspects (Book of Daniel and Revelation) and

(b) In charismatic, Pentecostal circles to prophecy that edifies the church (I Cor 13:3,4). We have neglected the most widespread dimension of prophecy. **Where are the prophetic voices that address social, economic political as well as moral issues of the day?** (O.T. Prophetic Books).

CONCLUSION

Jesus expected his disciples to exert influence in society. He spoke of them as the **‘salt of the earth and the light of the world’** (Matt 5:13-16). The political sphere which exercises such pervasive influence in the life of every citizen remains substantially ‘unsalted’ and ‘un-illuminated’. In a democracy we have an urgent duty to re-enter the public arena to preserve and promote law and order for the welfare of society and to restrain evil (Rom 13). We need the Law and the Gospel. Our minds need to be renewed to think Christianly and our resolve stiffened if we are to be relevant and make a difference as people with **dual citizenship both in earth and in heaven.**

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Should Christians Be ENGAGED in Politics?

If so to what extent?

By Rasik Ranchord

A non-partisan educative but non-directive approach

INTRODUCTION

Most of us would come under the broad category of Evangelical Christians who subscribe to James Packer’s 6 evangelical fundamentals:

1. The Supremacy of **Holy Scripture**
2. The Majesty of **Jesus Christ**
3. The Lordship of the **Holy Spirit**
4. The Necessity of **Conversion**
5. The Priority of **Evangelism**
6. The Importance of **Fellowship (church)**

THREE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

The matter of Christian engagement in politics evokes all kinds of strong reactions. To some it is like waving a red rag to a bull, others are highly suspicious or sceptical; still others consider it a dirty business, many are adamant church and politics don’t mix; mention the word politics and the mental shutters come down. By and large it has been a no-go area. To find a way forward we need to address 3 crucial questions.

1. How have **we arrived at our present position?**
2. What do we **mean by politics?**
3. What should be the **extent of Christian political engagement?**

2 EXTREMES TO AVOID:

- **Privatising our faith and**
- **Politicising our faith**