

# THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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## I.

### THE REVISED CONFESSION.

THE Northern Presbyterians have published their Revised Confession of Faith, and it is proper for other Presbyterians, not of that communion, to review the changes which have been made, with a view to ascertaining whether they are alterations in the mere superficialities or in the substantive body of the Calvinistic system. The hilarity with which the revision has been received by such diluted Calvinists as the Cumberland Presbyterians, together with the promptness and enthusiasm with which they offered organic union on the basis of these changes, awakens apprehension, and calls for cautious examination.

An inventory of the changes which have been made will show that the Northern Presbyterians have, (1) explained their former doctrine of Predestination, (2) interpreted their doctrine of the salvation of Dead Infants, (3) restated their doctrine of works done by unregenerate persons, (4) amended their doctrine of Oaths, (5) withdrawn their charge that the Pope of Rome was Antichrist, (6) added a new chapter on the Holy Spirit, (7) and added a new chapter on the Love of God, and Missions.

We are not going to take up these points in detail, but elect, for animadversion, the changes which seem to affect the integrity of the Calvinistic system.

We quote now the new language which is the basis of our fault-finding:

Of course, these expressions stand on record as parts of history. They show what was thought in the past to be true. But we are not to be bound by anything that we now know was not true. As Christian brethren we are to join in this union, confident in each other's character, and unwilling to dishonor our past by preserving its mistakes and prejudices; while, at the same time, we honor the fidelity of the fathers to truth as they saw it.

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### CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

“There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God.”—  
ROMANS xiii. 1.

IT is the glory of the religion of the Bible that it touches human life at every point, and wherever it touches, its effect is to purify, elevate and ennoble. It touches the individual life of man, making every man who receives it and lives it a better man. It touches the domestic and social life, expounding the right relations between husband and wife, parents and children, man and woman, friend and friend, by the observance of which, and in no other way, the home may be made happy and society kept pure. It touches the commercial life, laying down those principles of integrity, honesty and regard for the rights of others, without which commerce ceases to be peaceful industry and becomes a brutal struggle for supremacy or for bare existence. It touches the civil life, laying down those basal truths on which civil government is founded, and defining the mutual relations and duties of the governing and the governed.

Many seem to think religion has nothing to do with our civil life or with politics, for politics in its true sense is the science of civil government and the conduct of state affairs. We are reminded that our Federal and State constitutions expressly prohibit the union of church and state; and, therefore, any mingling of religion and politics is stoutly resisted in some quarters as a crime against our liberties, and the cry is often raised, “Don't mix religion and politics; you cannot do it if you would, and you must not do it if you could;” and so it has come about that there is practically no religion in the politics of our time and country.

But an important distinction is needed here. We rejoice in the separation of state and church. History proves that the union is an

impractical and often a very hurtful one. But there is a difference between the church and religion. The church stands for and ministers to religion, but it is not religion. The church also stands for a powerful organization, whose purpose is primarily spiritual and not temporal. This ecclesiastical organization has no place in politics; the latter is not in its sphere. Ecclesiasticism and politics should ever be kept separate.

But if we separate politics from those great principles of Bible morality and religion which should govern all departments of human life and activity, we rob politics of the only salt that can keep it from utter corruption and death. And already this has been done to such an extent in some sections that many of our best men morally and religiously will not touch politics for fear of being defiled, and many who enter politics leave their religion behind, while the immoral and irreligious have come to regard politics as their peculiar field. In this way a bad state has become worse, so that a distinguished United States Senator of wide experience and observation could say, some years ago, that "the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount have no place in practical politics, and honesty in modern politics is an iridescent dream." Especially is this true of municipal government in America, for American cities of the larger class are said to be the worst governed in Christendom.

Now the Bible conception of civil government would change all this; it would lift politics out of the mire, purify it with the salt of morality and religion and make it what it ought to be, the administration of public affairs by our best men in the interest of the prosperity and safety of the state. Let us get that conception.

The basic truth in the Bible conception of civil government is this: Civil government is an ordinance of God. According to the Bible, God has ordained two great institutions for the wellbeing of the human race, viz., the church and the state. We always think of the church as of divine origin, a Christian institution, and of its ministers as of divine call and appointment. But the state is also of divine origin, a divine institution. It stands side by side with the church, of distinct sphere and purpose, but both equally divine as to origin and authority.

All authority and power have their source in God. One of our presidents has given us the phrase, "Government of the people, by the people and for the people," and a grand sentiment it is; may it be fully realized in this beloved republic of ours! But we quote it

so often, and emphasize it so strongly, that many have come to think the people are the beginning and end of civil government, the final source of all authority and power. This is a great mistake.

We should not forget that back of the people and above the people God over all is the final source of all power. No man, and no body of men, can rightly possess or exercise authority over their fellow-men except as God delegates this authority to them. "There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." When the Saviour of men stood before the judgment seat of Pilate, the Roman governor, the latter represented Tiberius Cæsar on the imperial throne of Rome, back of whom were the invincible Roman armies and the limitless resources of a worldwide empire; but when he said to the divine prisoner before him, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee?" the reply was, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." We have the history of only one nation written by the inspiration of God, viz., that of ancient Israel. In this history God is represented as giving the people their civil rulers, as well as their ministers of religion. He called to his high office Moses the lawgiver and statesman as truly as he did Aaron, the priest. He gave them Joshua, the military chieftain, Gideon, the judge, and David, the king, as truly as he gave them Eleazar and Zadok, the priests, or Elijah, the prophet, and he gives every nation its civil magistracy. By him "kings reign and princes decree justice."

The state is, therefore, an institution of God as truly as is the church. He instituted it for his own wise and beneficent purposes. It is as truly essential to human well-being as is the church under present conditions. When men are left without civil government, "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes," anarchy is the result. So true is this that the poorest government on earth is better than no government at all would be.

From this fundamental truth that civil government is ordained of God, certain other truths follow as corollaries. Let us notice some of these.

1. God's law for the state is the law of righteousness. God himself is righteous, and every ordinance of his is for righteousness, and is under the law of righteousness. Civil government is designed of God for his glory and human good. It is designed to protect and encourage the good and to be a terror to the evil. Mr. Gladstone said that it should be the aim of government "to make it as easy as possible for a

man to do the good, and as difficult as possible for him to do the evil," and this agrees with the Bible when it says, "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil."

Now, for civil government to pursue an unrighteous end, to use unrighteous methods, to become oppressive and hurtful, instead of helpful to the governed, to discourage the good and encourage the evil, this is a perversion of the very end of its being, and every such government must fall and come to an end. God has no use for it, and he will set it aside. A striking illustration of this truth is seen in the history of ancient Israel. Whenever a king and his administration "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," they grew and prospered; when they "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," they grew weak and failed, and when the evil course was persisted in, they perished, and when the nation failed to secure and maintain a righteous government it perished also.

The history of all nations confirms this truth. The world empires of Egypt, Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome fell, crushed by the weight of official and private unrighteousness, set aside of God as useless. A few centuries ago Spain was the foremost nation of Christendom; it was almost true of her as of England to-day, that the sun never set on her possessions. But Spain forgot God's law, and became unrighteous; she oppressed God's chosen people; she harbored the horrible inquisition; she treated the weaker peoples of the old and the new worlds with unspeakable cruelty and injustice, and for years Spain has been a dying nation. Frenchmen are among the brightest and bravest of people; but France forgot God's laws of righteousness, her king perpetrated the massacre of St. Bartholomew's day; she slew thousands of her best citizens in cold blood; she banished by cruel edicts many thousands more; she oppressed and despised the common people, till finally these in desperation arose and hurled the government from its seat and went to the opposite extreme of anarchy; they sought to abolish God and eradicate religion; they enthroned a young woman—an opera singer—as the Goddess of Reason and worshipped her. Meantime, lawlessness was triumphant and the streets of the cities of France ran with blood, and had not France quickly come back to righteousness and to God she would have perished from off the map of the world. The Bible is true when it says, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." The strong points of a government are its righteous points; the weak points of a government are its unrighteous points.

The same thing is true of a city or any civil community. Yet some think that Sabbath desecration, race track and other forms of gambling, low dives and other abodes of vice are good for a city. It is said these things bring to a city people and business and money, and help to make it great, and so the cry goes up for a "wide-open" town. How can these things be good for a city, when by universal acknowledgment they are bad for the individual? They constantly sink individual men and women in shame, crime and death. How can that be good for a city which is death to the individuals who compose the city? Good people do not believe in the "wide-open" theory. They do not believe in the "wide-open" man or woman, receiving into heart and life the vices of humanity; they do not believe in the "wide-open" home, where sin is welcomed and free-loveism and divorce abound; they do not believe in a "wide-open" church, where open wickedness is condoned and purity and character count for naught; nor do they believe in a "wide-open" town, where acknowledged vices are invited, encouraged and protected. These are sources of weakness, not of strength. "Wide-open" in this sense is but another name for Christ's "Broad way that leadeth to destruction." Not in a year, perhaps, nor in a decade, nor even in a century, but in the end these things lead a city or a nation to destruction, for "the eternal ages are God's." All civil government is ordained of God; it must obey his law of righteousness or perish.

2. Whoever renders service to the state renders service to God, for the state is God's institution; and it claims the service of all good men. In our republic every man ought to cast his ballot in every election as conscientiously as he prays; it is a Christian duty. A desire to hold office in the state is not blameworthy as some suppose, but praiseworthy, provided the motive be right. The inspired apostle, speaking of office in the church, says, "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." It is also true that if a man desires office in God's other institution, the state, he desireth a good work. But we despise a man if he seek office in the church of God simply through personal ambition or for "the loaves and fishes." Such a man cannot render the church the highest service, for he is not serving the church, but himself. Neither can a man render the state the best service who seeks and enters its offices simply from motives of personal ambition or of selfish gain. All honor to the public official whose dominant motive in holding office is to serve God and the state, and not himself!

### 3. Officers of the civil government are ministers of God.

We are familiar with the thought that officers of the church are ministers of God, and we call them by this name. The Bible calls officers of the state by the same sacred name. The Apostle says of the civil officer, "He is the minister of God to thee for good," and again, "He is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." And again, of civil officers, "They are God's ministers attending continually upon this very thing," *i. e.*, managing the business of the state. There is a sense, therefore, in which officers of the state are as truly ministers of God as are officers of the church, called of God to represent him in the exercise of power in government.

Now, we demand that church officers be men of pure, honest, righteous character. We should make a similar demand of officers of the state, from the highest to the lowest of those who exercise any authority in the making or execution of our laws. This is not an unreasonable nor impossible demand. Many offices in the judicial, legislative and executive branches of our government are filled by men of this character. One of the best chiefs of police in the South is a man of stainless character, who represented the church to which he belongs in its highest court, and his predecessor was a Christian gentleman of the same type. One of the bravest patrolmen that ever served on the police force of any city, and who lost his life in the fearless discharge of his duty, in one of our large Southern cities, was an honored officer in his church, and a teacher in his Sunday-school. All honor to such men and to those who appoint or elect them to office.

But what are we to think when men of openly profane and wicked life are chosen or appointed to responsible offices in the state? A violator of the laws chosen to enforce the law? A blasphemer of God's holy name chosen to be a minister of God? What a travesty! The ballot-box has been called our American "Ark of the Covenant." It is the sacred palladium of our liberties, civil and religious. The men who bear it and guard it should be clean, honest, righteous men, as it is written, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." What are we to think when notoriously wicked and even criminal men are appointed to bear this sacred vessel, the priceless gift of God to our nation? When God's ideal of the state is so perverted and trampled under foot, is it surprising that lawlessness and crime run riot? Is it not surprising that the government stands at all?

But let us not despair. There was a time in the history of the church when those filling many of its offices, even the highest, were men of notoriously corrupt life, and the church tolerated it, in a blind, helpless sort of a way, even as we now sometimes tolerate such men in state offices. But nearly four hundred years ago the death knell of this condition of things in the church was sounded; and now, in our country at least, no man of profane and unholy life is tolerated in the ministry of the church. May we not hope for a reformation and a revolution in public opinion that will demand that those who seek to be ministers of God in the offices of the state shall also be in character worthy of him whom they represent?

4. To righteous officers of the state we should render obedience, tribute, honor. Says the Bible, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." To violate or resist or disobey the laws of right civil government is to resist the ordinance of God. This is the teaching of Christianity. No man can be a good Christian, and at the same time be a bad citizen. But if the powers that be become disloyal to God, forsake him, misrepresent him and require of us a wrong thing, then we must resist them and obey God. When the king of Babylon commanded the Hebrew youths to worship the image he had set up, they refused, and they were right. When the king of Persia ordered Daniel not to pray to the God of his fathers, Daniel was right to disobey him. When the authorities commanded the apostles not to preach in the name of Jesus, they replied it was right to obey God rather than man, and they continued to preach. But when ruling justly, righteously and in the fear of God, we must obey the powers that be, even as we obey God, whose ministers they are.

We must also pay tribute, as says the Bible again, "Render tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom." These are taxes on land and goods, and taxes are for the maintenance of the divine institution of civil government, and for the support of God's ministers, its officers. We should pay them fully, honestly, cheerfully. No Christian will evade paying his just dues.

Once more, we must honor our righteous ruler. "Honor to whom honor," says the Bible again. As a nation, we fall short at this point. Ours is an age of irreverence for things secular and divine. How severely our rulers are arraigned! How contemptuously they are spoken of! The modern cartoon, doubtless, has its legitimate uses. It is a kind of pictorial satire, and Elijah used satire; not, however, against the servants of God and their country, but against



the enemies of God and of the country, the idolatrous priests of Baal. But no public official of to-day, however righteous, can escape the hideous cartoon if he be of the opposite political party. This is a great abuse of the cartoon and is hurtful. The cartoonists are thought by many to have been in part responsible for the assassination of our late President, Mr. McKinley, a noble, Christian gentleman and a righteous ruler. He was unmercifully lampooned and cartooned by certain newspapers as a pusillanimous nobody, under the leading strings of a United States Senator, who was his master and boss. This is the stuff that anarchists feed on. What wonder that one of these madmen, inflamed and inspired by these false caricatures, should think he was doing the country a good service in ridding it of so worthless and contemptible a ruler! God's word to his ancient people and to us is this, "Thou shalt not revile the judges nor curse the ruler of thy people." And an inspired writer, describing the deeply wicked of his day, said, "They despise dominion and speak evil of dignities." If our public officers are not worthy of our honor, let us, without passion, but resolutely, replace them with others that are. This is not only our privilege, but our duty under our form of government. But let us remember that no man is perfect; all have their faults, and when we have rulers that are upright in character and life, and are making an honest effort to administer the affairs of state according to God's law of righteousness, let us uphold them, support them, obey them, honor them, and, above all, pray for them. With such rulers and such citizens, peace, purity and prosperity will abound throughout our borders and we will be "that happy people whose God is the Lord."

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