

## The Influence of Government on Religion

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Evangelization is dear to the heart of every true Christian. We all believe in preaching the Gospel. We would all like to be the means of bringing sinners to salvation. To be certain that we had saved one soul would be greater joy to us than success in any other line of effort. We all believe in evangelization.

On the other hand Christians are not generally in favor of preaching politics, even when it means the discussion of moral issues in political life. The relation of the nation to the Lord Jesus Christ and His law does not appeal to them. National sin, national repentance and national forgiveness do not seem to most Christians to belong to the Gospel.

Few see any object in preaching beyond the needs of the individual soul. As long as the preacher discusses "abstract piety and foreign missions," he is regarded as in the line of his duty, but to discuss the evils in society and the sins common to most people is considered wide of the mark. Preaching politics may be interesting, but is condemned as sensational.

Yet this is written to prove that in order to save the world it is necessary to preach politics. It is necessary to reprove sin wherever it is found and to offer

salvation in Christ wherever it is needed. We aim to prove that the preacher who does not apply the Word of God to rectify and purify political life is making a vital mistake. When he fails to face moral issues in political life, he fails not only to save his country, but to save with an eternal salvation the great body of men who might otherwise have been reached. "The people cannot be going to heaven while the nation is going to hell."

We are to consider the influence of politics on evangelization. Let us remember that while part of the people belong to the church, they all belong to the state. The people are divided among the Churches; they are one in the state. The government represents the unity and force of the state. Love of country, national pride and loyalty are all on its side. The state makes law for all and law is a steady and pervasive influence. The government generally has public education in its hands; it controls the course of study and the teachers are its employees. The highest places in the land are political. The President is the most influential man in the United States. The papers we read are generally political. A man's political party is next to his Church, if it be not first.

All this political influence cannot but tell on the character of a people. It controls the atmosphere which men breathe. It furnishes much of the environment of life. It distinguishes the German from the Frenchman, the Frenchman from the Englishman and all of them from the American. It moulds its citizens into a unity and goes far to decide their

destiny in this world and in that which is to come.

Here is the influence of politics on evangelization. This influence is real and decisive. It always has worked and it always will work, whether we will or not. The attraction of gravitation worked before Newton as well as since. The air has always been full of sound waves. History is full of proof of the dominant influence of politics on evangelization.

#### Proposition

We lay down the following proposition: The position taken by a government with regard to morals and religion will in the long run, if unchecked, bring to its own likeness a majority of the people. Not all the people, but a majority will come to the position of the government.

#### Influence of the Kings of Israel

Bible history affords strong proof, not only because it is true, but because it looks at events from the moral and religious standpoint. Israel just out of the house of bondage in Egypt was ignorant, degraded, idolatrous and inclined to rebel. The great leader, Moses, appointed and supported by the Lord, controlled its government for forty years. In that one generation he had trained the best people that Israel ever saw. The political leadership of Moses opened the way to the evangelization of Israel.

Concerning the government of Joshua we have this record, twice repeated, "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the

works of the Lord that he had done for Israel." To serve the Lord means to be converted. The government was right with the Lord and the people were evangelized.

Besides his other functions Samuel was a great civil ruler and he organized Israel into a United people. His appeal to the people toward the close of his life when they wanted a king was wholly with regard to his government of civil matters. Under the influence of his government the people rose in morals and religion.

David was a king after God's heart and Israel served the Lord in his day with increasing fervor. Their willing sacrifices for the coming temple showed how deep his influence had gone. His reign became the standard for all that followed.

Of his descendants Asa followed the Lord as did his father David and there was a great revival of religion. Hezekiah succeeded the wicked king Ahaz and followed the Lord. Again there was a great revival. Josiah succeeded the wicked Manasseh and led in a great revival. In none of these instances do we read of persecution on account of belief; the influence of the government seems to have been enough. As the government went, so went the people.

On the other hand when there was a wicked king and an evil government, the people were not evangelized and they turned from the Lord. The most striking instance in the Bible is the example of Jeroboam, the first king of the northern ten tribes. Twenty-three times it is recorded of him that he

made Israel to sin. Every king of the ten tribes followed the sin of Jeroboam until their people were slain or carried into captivity. Jeroboam did not persecute; he made idolatry convenient, fashionable and national. Influence was sufficient.

Another striking instance is the influence of Ahab and his Zidonian queen, Jezebel. They introduced the worship of Baal. So powerful was their influence that Elijah thought himself the only faithful believer left and the Lord knew of only seven thousand in all Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Of all the kings of Judah who went astray we have the same history of prevailing influence. Of David's grandson, Rehoboam, we read, "It came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord and all Israel with him." And all Israel with him; this is the invariable sequence. In the same line of defection were Jehoram, Joash, Ahaz and Manasseh, wicked kings who led their people into immorality and idolatry. In each case the majority of the people went with them and Judah came to the judgment foretold by the prophets.

In every instance, good or bad, without exception, the position taken by the leader or king who controlled the government carried with it the majority of the people. This is the conclusion that stands out in the whole record; as goes the government in morals and religion, so goes a majority of the people. The position taken by a government in morals and religion will in the long run, if unchecked, carry with it a majority of the people.

### **Influence of Jewish Leaders**

In New Testament times the same principle holds. When Christ came, the Romans, whom the Jews hated, held sway. But their own government which they loved, had still much power vested in the Sanhedrim which was composed of priests, mostly Sadducees, elders, mostly Pharisees, and scribes who were lawyers.

John the Baptist came preaching repentance and preparing the way for Christ, but these rulers did not believe in him. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing the sick and living a holy life. For a while the common people heard Him gladly, but the rulers were against Him and finally the people followed their lead. Jesus was despised and rejected of men. He came to His own and His own received Him not. Again the position taken by a government carried with it a majority of the people.

### **Influence of Governments in the Reformation**

We have an excellent opportunity of trying out this principle in the history of the Protestant Reformation. Luther was in many respects the greatest as he was the first of the successful Reformers, but had it not been that the Elector of Saxony and the German nobles protected him in the Diet of Worms, his fate would have been that of John Huss in the Council of Constance, a century earlier. It is a striking fact that in Germany wherever the government favored the Reformation, the majority of the people became

Protestant and are that yet, and where the government adhered to Rome the people remained Roman Catholic and are that yet. The Reformation made great progress in France while the government seemed indifferent. There were twenty-five hundred great Protestant congregations in France, the singing of Psalms became popular and nearly half the French people were considered favorable to the reformed faith. But Rome became active. Francis First, brilliant and popular, turned to the priests. The Duke of Guise and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, determined Romanists, got possession of the army and the slaughter of Protestants began. The struggle lasted nearly a hundred years with the government generally working for Rome, and France is Roman Catholic or infidel today.

England under the leadership of Henry the Eighth broke with the Pope and the Anglican Church was organized with Henry at its head. It was further reformed under Edward the Sixth and Elizabeth. From that day to this it has been the Established Church of England and most Englishmen are in its fold. Where is the exception to the rule that the position taken by a government in morals and religion will in the long run, if unchecked, bring to its own likeness a majority of the people?

### **May the Proposition be Reversed**

Objection may be made to this conclusion on the ground that governments and people naturally go together, since government is the agent of the people, and that the proposition might with truth be reversed.

In that case we might say that whatever way the people went the government would follow. That would be in accord with the popular principle that the people rule. Let us review the argument with this objection in view and see where the truth lies.

Did Israel lead Moses, or did Moses lead Israel? Israel tried on occasion to lead Moses and failed. Moses led Israel. Did Israel lead Joshua and the elders, or did Joshua and the elders lead Israel? To ask that question is to answer it. Did the people lead Samuel, or did Samuel lead the people? All through his life he led and gave way at last only because the Lord told him to do so.

The Bible tells us that Jeroboam made Israel to sin. So Ahab and Jezebel led Israel into the worship of Baal. In Christ's day the priests, elders and scribes stirred up the people against him. In Luther's day the German nobles saved him and led the people in accepting his teaching. In France the king and nobles crushed the Reformation. In England Henry was the leader. In all the cases we have cited the government led the people.

#### **Checking the Influence of Government**

We have put the exception, "if unchecked," into our proposition. There have been cases where a strong, determined and enthusiastic opposition on the part of some of the people has checked and at last overcome the influence of the government. The Christian religion overcame the Roman government, and Christianity, in name at least, was recognized as the state religion. But this victory cost a terrific struggle

through ten great persecutions and three hundred years of effort and suffering. The Christian church was greatly demoralized in the struggle. Paul was the outstanding leader and it is noteworthy that he seemed to seek and spend his strength in political centers. He began in Damascus, the capital of Syria, tried in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaea, preached in Antioch, another capital, in Antioch in Pisidia, Philippi, in Thessalonica, in Athens, in Corinth, in Ephesus and finally in Rome, the political center of the empire. He even had converts in the household of Caesar. He seemed to believe that the position of the government would go far to decide the position of the people.

#### **Is the Influence of Government of Value?**

It is a common remark by Christian ministers, when this subject comes up, that we do not want or need the influence of government in favor of the Christian religion. If by this they mean that they do not want the use of force, they are right. Men cannot be saved by force. Or, if they mean that we do not want the state to establish a church, they are right. Church and state have different spheres. But if they mean that we do not want or need the influence of government and law in favor of Christian morals and the Christian religion, they are seriously and vitally wrong. The state is a creature of God and should recognize and serve its Creator. All its authority comes from Jesus Christ, to whom all authority is given, and the state should recognize and obey Him for its own sake. That would be exerting its influence in favor of the Christian religion.

All legitimate influence in the world is under obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ and ought to be exerted for the salvation of man. Christ is exalted "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, and all things are put under his feet, and he is the head over all things to the church." Where did any minister get the right to absolve "principalities and powers, and might, and dominion" from the obligation to serve Christ and to further the interests of His cause among men?

How the government should serve Jesus Christ may be a matter of dispute, but that its duty is to serve Him is clear. Matthew Henry says, "It is not the duty of the state to save souls, but to produce an atmosphere in which souls may be easiest saved. Gladstone was aiming at the same truth when he said, "It is the duty of the state to make it as hard as possible to do wrong and as easy as possible to do right." The state provides the conditions in which the church does her work and these conditions go far to determine the result. When the church is working in a state that has little or no religion and no morality except what policy suggests, she cannot make great headway.

#### Application

In what relation does the Government of the United States stand to the Lord Jesus Christ, to Christian morals and to the Christian religion? If we can answer that question, we can tell where the majority

of the people of the United States stand, or will soon stand. The position of a government brings to its own likeness, sooner or later, a majority of the people.

When we study the Government of the United States we can see at once that it is a respectable government. The world respects it. The Stars and Stripes is a most honorable flag. We all love it. The Government of the United States is an honest government. It pays its debts. A United States bond is as good as gold. The Government of the United States is a truthful government. It is straight forward and above board in its diplomatic dealings. It has no secret treaties. It has a general regard for justice among men. It was founded "to establish justice." It has a real regard for human rights and human welfare. The Amendments to the National Constitution prove this.

But the Constitution and Government of the United States do not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ, the Governor among the nations, the Lord of all, the King of kings and Lord of lords. They do not even recognize the authority of Almighty God from whom all blessings flow. Justice Brewer wrote the opinion of the Supreme Court that ours is "a Christian nation," but he said nothing about our Constitution or Government. Later he declared in a published address that "government has nothing to do with religion." In this we believe he made a mistake. Government protects the free exercise of religion, does not tax property used for religious purposes and authorizes ministers to perform marriage ceremonies. But our Government does not accept the law for governments found in the Word of God, except in some far off way, as the first day of the week not being counted in the ten days given the President to consider a bill. The Constitution forbids any requirement of religion in those

holding office and omits an appeal to God in the oath required of the President.

That is, the Government of the United States is respectable, honest, truthful, just and humane, but it does not know the Lord Jesus Christ, nor submit to His will. It derives these qualities from a source which it does not acknowledge.

#### Proposition True in America

Now what is the present moral and religious position of a majority of the people of the United States, are they not in general respectable, honest, truthful, just and humane, but do not profess the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor submit to His will.

Is not our proposition true in our own country and among our own people?

If, therefore, we wish to evangelize a majority of our people, we must try to Christianize our political life. Uncle Sam has many good qualities which he has borrowed from Christianity, but he is not a Christian. We must undertake his conversion for he has too much influence on his children and on his neighbors to be allowed to remain an unbeliever.

Christianity is a positive thing and in accepting it one must take a positive position. A government is not Christian merely because it take no position and tries to be neutral. To be Christian one needs to be regenerated and to come out for Christ. That is the reason why we propose a Christian Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. If the people of this country adopt such an Amendment, they will come out for Jesus Christ and one of the results that will follow is that this stand will have so great an influence that a majority of the people of the United States will accept the Lord and be evangelized. For the position taken by a government with regard to morals and religion will in the long run carry with it a majority of the people.

WITNESS COMMITTEE

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