

# Should Not Church and State Co-operate ?



Co-operation is the need of the hour. The world needs it to be rid of international war. The nation needs it to get rid of class war. And to put an end to war external and internal there must be co-operation between the two greatest institutions, the church and the state. While these lack a common purpose and principle of action, neither the world nor the nation can be at peace.

Not in the two thousand years since Jesus died to bring peace to the world has this common purpose been realized. In the first period the church ruled the state. The pope made and unmade kings at his will. When kings were weak they submitted. When they were strong they rebelled. But in neither case was there co-operation between the church and the state.

In the second period, after the reformation, a change came. In most cases the state ruled the church. The rulers in the church were appointed by the state. The creed of the church was made, or sanctioned, by the state. Instead of the church being the master, as in the earlier period, it now became the servant of the state.

The third period is the present. A very few countries of the world are still in the first stage. A greater number are still in the second. But both of these conditions are passing. All countries seem to be following the example of America, where the church and state are independent in function, as they should be, but also independent in their working principles. Can this be regarded as a final and satisfactory solution of this relationship? On one thing the people of

this country are agreed. We shall not go back to either of the former conditions under which church and state were united. That needs the argument.

But is it not evident that the present condition is not ideal? Evidently we have not yet reached a condition under which these two institutions may co-operate. Must we conclude that such a relationship is impossible? Must there be continued lack of harmony between these two divine institutions? This does not seem either reasonable or necessary.

### Present attitude of church and state to each other.

Jesus Christ claims to be the ruler of both church and state. Of the former, he says he is the Head; of the latter, he claims to be the King. The church admits his claim to be its Head. The state denies his claim to be its King. Instead of owning his authority, the state owns the will of a monarch, or of the people as supreme.

Jesus Christ declared that his will, the Bible, is the law for men in every relation of life. The church accepts this law as the rule of its life. The state does not. The state does not own any authority above itself. It claims to be sovereign.

The church teaches the Bible as the law for its members. The state, in most cases, allows the Bible to be read in its schools without comment. At times it is studied as literature. But in America, the state does not allow the Bible to be studied in her schools as the law of life for her citizens. More than that, the state does allow to be taught in its higher schools and universities a philosophy of life, which, if generally accepted by students, would cripple or destroy the church. The schools of the state may not avowedly teach the doctrines of Christ, but they may and do teach the doctrines of agnosticism.

To this condition Christian citizens have submitted because they had not seen the outcome. Now they are being aroused to the fact that the faith which is taught to their children in the church is being undermined in the schools.

### This condition not permanent

Lincoln said, "This country can not remain half slave and half free." History has verified his saying. We can not continue indefinitely to teach agnosticism in the universities and higher schools, and Christianity in the church. One or other must finally prevail. Which shall it be? Either the church must accept the teachings of the state schools as its own, in which case the church presently, and the state finally, will cease to exist, as have the institutions of the past that have forgotten God.

The other possibility is that the state will accept the belief in Jesus Christ and the Bible which is taught in the church.

This would enable the church and the state to co-operate. They could work each in its own sphere, performing its own functions, for the glory of God and the common good.

### What is necessary for co-operation?

The small boy on the street knows that no game can be played unless the players have a common rule of the game. Neither can two institutions co-operate while they have opposing rules of life. They must adopt a common rule. This is quite as true in regard to church and state as elsewhere. Shall the church accept the agnosticism taught by the state? Or shall the state accept the teaching of the church in regard to Jesus Christ as the ruler, and the Bible as the law of life? If the latter way is chosen, it would mean the more abundant life of both. In the coming time Americans must choose between these two ways.

### What does a union of church and state mean?

When it is proposed that the nations shall own Jesus Christ and his law of life, objection is at once raised that this would mean the disastrous union of church and state that we have rejected. If it would mean that, we do not want it. But it may be that it does not mean that. It may be that it means the opposite of such union. Co-operation is not union. Let us see exactly what a union of church and state has meant. This is what we want to avoid.

1. It means that the church is dependent on the state in the choice of officials. For instance, the prime minister of England appoints the heads of the Church of England. The same is true in each country where the church is dependent on the state.

Now let us suppose that the Bible were taught in the state schools—would that enable the United States government to appoint the Methodist Bishops or choose the Presbyterian Moderator? Or even suppose that Jesus Christ were owned as the ruler of the nation's life, as he is of the life of individual citizens—would that enable such a thing to be done? Is there any specific thing in the way of government interference with the church that would be reasonably possible under such conditions, that is not possible now?

What could it do except enable state and church to co-operate through having a common rule of life?

2. A union of church and state means that the church is dependent on the state in legislation.

Again referring to England, the Book of Common Prayer, which for centuries has been used in the Church of England was adopted by Parliament. In Germany, it was the government which fixed the creed of the established church. Now, if Congress were acting according to the Sermon on the Mount, as it would be under obligation to

do if the Bible was taken as the official standard, would that fact give any possible pretext for interference with the Lutheran standards of belief? Would owning Jesus Christ in any way change the sphere of congressional action? What congress may do is decided already by the clauses of the Constitution dealing with its powers. Suppose that an acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus Christ was made a part of the Constitution by the nation—would that change the sphere of Federal or State action? If so, where? And how? May it not be that men have been crying "Wolf!" where there isn't any such animal?

3. A union of church and state means that the church is dependent on state agencies for support.

In England, the money which supports the church is mainly raised by agents of the state. The same thing has been true in Germany. In this country, each congregation must raise money for its own support, as well as additional funds for the general work of the church.

Let us suppose again that the Bible was taken as the law of the land on moral questions; suppose that its precepts were taught in the schools—would that add the church budget to the annual tax levy? Would that enable a pastor to collect his back salary from the city, or the country? Would the community be compelled to make repairs on the church building? Where and how would it at all affect the present methods by which the church gets its support?

### Co-operation not union.

Finally, is there anything in the claim that owning Jesus Christ by the nation as its King, the place which he claims as his right, would in any way bring about the historical union of church and state? It does not appear that it would. Indeed, it would so strengthen the state in the conscientious loyalty of its citizens that there would be no reason for such union.

But what it would make possible is cooperation.

That is what the world needs. We shall have peace when we are united under the Prince of Peace. In this lies the possibility of the co-operation which will end strife, both national and international.

There is no danger of a union of church and state in America. For that we are thankful. But it does not seem wise in order to get quit of this objectionable union of the church with the state that the state should discard religion also, as has been done. One may throw out the bath water without also throwing out the baby with it. The state needs religion as certainly as the church and for us that religion is Christian. A pagan state and a Christian church can not permanently exist together.

It was through the union of the church with the state, either as master or servant, during the last thousand years, that trouble came to the church. But we also recall that in the first three centuries after Christ it was the opposition of the pagan state to the Christian church that caused the persecution. If persecution should arise in the coming years for the followers of Christ, it would seem much more likely from this cause than from any other. Does this seem impossible? Scarcely when one recalls the sufferings of conscientious objectors to war even unto death during recent years. A state may persecute again as it has been done before. Only the sincere acceptance by the state of the Lordship of Jesus Christ will assure to the citizen that legal appeal, not simply to a mob mind, but to the moral standard of the teachings of Jesus. With such standard, persecution could find no basis in the law of the land. Church and state and citizen may have the peace of God when they own the will of God.

That is God's price of peace. It can be had at his price.

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