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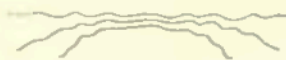
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Evils of Religious Legislation.



THERE is an old saying that "there are none so blind as those who will not see." It seems impossible to impress upon the minds of the National Reformers the distinction between religion and morality, or, even, that there is a difference between religion and crime. Legislation against crime is not religious legislation. Civil government *cannot*, if it would, enforce morals. It takes cognizance of overt actions only! It cannot sway the convictions; it cannot reform the conscience; it cannot renew the heart. If it attempts to coerce the conscience it usurps authority which belongs only to God, the *supreme moral Governor*. In its attempts to do so, it may persecute; it may make a class of its citizens act the hypocrite, but it cannot reach the heart on matters of morality, and much less on those of religion.

The demand of these professed reformers is that the Government shall legislate upon and decide religious questions, as well as civil. Yet the *Statesman* has the effrontery to place in its prospectus the declaration that it is opposed to a union of Church and State. This reminds us of the declaration of certain professed reformers (all *change* is reform with some people), who were accused of trying to destroy the marriage relation. They denied the charge, saying they believed in marriage, that is, they believed in "a heart union of two persons, marriage with-

out the aid of judge or minister; and that when the union of heart ceased, the marriage is annulled, without the aid of a court to divorce them" ! To that kind of marriage they were not opposed, neither is the vilest libertine that walks the earth, because it imposes no restraint on his passions. But that is not marriage. If such a practice obtained the institution of marriage, and family relations, would be broken down.

And so with the Religious Amendmentists. They give the expression, "Church and State," a signification to suit their purpose, and theoretically oppose that, while they zealously advocate exactly that state of things which existed in the Old World, in which Church and State were closely united. The relation of the State toward the Church in the time of Constantine, which all denominations recognize as the union of Church and State, was exactly the relation for which they are now pleading. Later, under the Popes of Rome, the full result of Constantine's arrangement was realized, and we challenge the advocates of a religious amendment to the Constitution to show that the same result will not follow the arrangement for which they plead. Such a result is the natural outgrowth of their proposed arrangement.

It is always unsafe to intrust the control of civil government to the church—to any church—because it is contrary to the institution of the Head of the church. It is an unauthorized, and, therefore, an unhealthy, combination. It leads to churchly worldliness and worldly ambition. It is subversive of true piety and spirituality in church service. The National Reformers propose that the pulpits and the churches shall make "the final decisions" in matters both *civil and religious*. We have proved this, by their own language. But that would be

churchly usurpation. The highest office that Christ ever bestowed upon his servants is that of "ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5 : 18-20), and this only in regard to the gospel proclamation. We challenge the *Statesman*, and all its partisans, to produce a single sentence in the teachings of Christ and his apostles which will warrant them in taking upon themselves the offices of legislators and executives, to which they aspire. They are clamoring to have the church exercise usurped authority, and profess that it is for the honor of Christianity. We object to their demands, because they are dangerous to the institutions of our Government and to both the civil and religious liberties of the people.

In the *Christian Statesman* of September 16, 1886, there is a quotation and comment as follows :—

"If Congress does not find in our Constitution a basis for Sabbath legislation, then let us elect a Congress who will find such a basis."—*Hon. John Cole, Tingley, Iowa.*

"You are more unreasonable than the Egyptians, for they did not compel the Hebrews to hunt straw where there was none, but you would require Congress to find in the Constitution what is not there, a basis for Sabbath legislation. The Constitution puts the true religion on the same level with all false religions, by prohibiting the establishment of religion or any interference with its free exercise. How can polygamy be suppressed without prohibiting a certain form of religion."

Here is considerable "food for reflection," and several points worthy of careful consideration.

1. Mr. Brunot, president of the National Reform Association, publicly declared that the sixth article and the first amendment of the Constitution are necessary as safeguards against a union of Church and State. But the *Statesman*, and the entire body of workers in behalf of the proposed Religious Amendment, are unceasing

in their opposition to these two provisions of our Constitution. They go so far as to say (and very foolishly, too) that the first amendment forbids the suppression of polygamy ! And therefore, according to the showing of their president, they are trying to break down the barriers against a union of Church and State. And this is just what we have affirmed; they are opening the way for such a union, and when it is opened we may read the result in the history of the Papacy.

2. They demand that the Constitution shall put a difference between the true religion and all false religions. But in order to do this it must first decide *what is* the true religion. This, as we have before shown, would take religion out of the domain of individual judgment, of conviction, of conscience, and decide for every individual, and that *authoritatively*, what is the religion that we must accept ! They demand that the civil government shall interfere in the free exercise of religion. But they say they want to enforce the religion of the Bible, against all false religions, or those not of the Bible. But there are several hundred religions professedly based on the Bible. Which shall be enforced as the true one ? Whose religion shall be suppressed ? The Mormons profess to base their entire system, polygamy included, on the Bible. To carry out such schemes, it will not be sufficient to declare that the Bible shall be adopted as the source of the only religion of the commonwealth. Such a declaration would determine no disputes on religion; would settle nothing. As we have before said, so we now say, Not the Bible, but *somebody's construction of the Bible*, will be adopted as the religion of the land. It will be a religion based altogether on human judgment and human authority, and not at all on the authority of the word of God.

To this they may not reply that all religion is based on human judgment, inasmuch as, with the largest liberty, everyone depends upon his own judgment as to what the Bible teaches. That is just as it should be, for religion is a matter of the conscience, and rests between a man—every man—and his Maker. Because a man is fallible and liable to err in regard to the teachings of the Bible, shall he therefore bow to the authoritative decisions of somebody who is also fallible, and equally liable to err? According to the teachings of the National Reformers, we must answer, Yes, he shall. But when that answer is made, we have passed entirely over to the position and the teachings of the Church of Rome. We have then no recourse but to accept the infallibility of fallible men. And, from their doctrines, the National Reformers cannot evade these conclusions.

3. Our model reformers profess the intention to retain the republican features of our Government. But the majority will elect their officers, and they will then, as now, elect those who will carry out their will on all political questions. The majority will always have it in their power to decide *what religion* shall be enforced by the Government. They may cause the religion of the nation to be changed at their pleasure. *The religion of the nation will then be put upon the market at every general election*, for there will then be religio-political parties; and as political questions are now canvassed on the stump, in the saloon, and on the street, so will religious questions then be canvassed. Our reformers talk as if they could maintain the republic, and yet settle the religion of the country once for all time. Is there a single question of religion that has ever been settled, that remained settled in the minds of the people? Are not the people changing in regard to religion as well as to political questions? Would not candidates be put up on this and that religious issue? By such an arrangement, religion would become contemptible, and one of two things would follow: Religion would be cast out of the Government as an obnoxious thing, and sink lower in the public esteem than it has ever stood; or, a tribunal

would be instituted, analogous to the Pope and his cardinals, who should decide all questions for the people, and their decisions would have to be taken as final. In a word, the outcome would be a public repudiation of religion, or the adoption of a second Papal system.

4. The National Reformers persist in their affirmation that polygamy is "a certain form of religion." We affirm that it is an immorality—"a certain form" of crime. Polygamy is, and always was, contrary to God's original institution of marriage; it originated with wicked men; it was tolerated but never approved by the Lord; Christ gave no place to it in his comment on the original marriage institution. It is subversive of that institution—a denial of the terms in which the institution was given. It is subversive of the family and of society, and is therefore uncivil as well as immoral. Marriage is not a "Christian institution," but is of original obligation,—given before the fall of man,—and, of course, would have continued if man had not fallen,—if the system of Christianity had never been required. It is, therefore, an institution which the Government ought to defend and maintain. Most of the States—perhaps all—have had laws against bigamy and polygamy, but it remained for the wise men of the National Reform Association to discover that these laws are contrary to the Constitution!

If any doubt that these self-styled "reformers" ignore all distinction of crime and religion, let them read the following words, found in the *Christian Statesman* of September 16, 1886:—

"If Government cannot deal with religious questions, it cannot deal with the crime of murder, adultery, or theft, for these are religious questions."

We have no language at command to express our astonishment that men in this age, with every opportunity to be educated upon ethics, will put on record such declarations. And more especially men who pretend to a knowledge of Christianity. Is it possible that these people really believe that all laws against crime, against murder, adultery, and theft, are religious laws, and un-

constitutional under our present Constitution? Such is their teaching. If these are religious questions, and if enacting a law against murder is "religious legislation," then we must look again for conclusions. We must conclude, then, that the Constitution does not need amending, because it now warrants, and always has warranted, religious legislation, because it has warranted laws against murder. Or, otherwise, our Constitution does need amending, in order that we may legally punish for the crime of murder; because laws against murder are religious laws, and those now existing are unconstitutional, because our Constitution prohibits religious legislation!

Must we, indeed, inquire if there is any distinction between crime and religion? Is there no limit to liberty short of licentiousness? Are men truly sane who demand a Religious Amendment to the Constitution, and demand the abolition of the first amendment of the Constitution, which forbids interference in questions of religion, in order that murder, adultery, or theft may be legally restrained, or punished? These people are so wedded to a theory that they will put forth the most preposterous propositions, and expect the people to accept them without questioning.

There is one thing in regard to which we think all must agree: When men ignore the most evident and well-established *principles*, they are not safe administrators of the laws which rest upon or grow out of these principles. And there is no association of men of the present age—we will not except those who entirely deny the Bible—who toy with principles, and make them subject to their caprices, more than do the National Reformers. We have reason to hope that we shall never see their wild schemes adopted by the American people. We consider it only our duty to do all in our power to warn the people, if, by any means, such a calamity may be averted.

J. H. WAGGONER.

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