



SECOND
GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



SCOTLAND



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

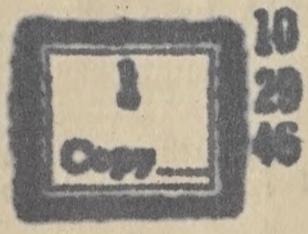
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shall not be obligatory, secular, and free, but obligatory, Christian, and free.

To close. There was never greater need for heroism in regard to our principles, our history, and our mission, than to-day. To die in reformation struggles was no more indispensable, and no more difficult, than to live properly for the reformation peoples, some of whom are well-nigh drunk with reformation liberties. The "enthusiasm of humanity," founded on God, and fed at the cross, must now be displayed in preventing liberty from becoming self-destructive. There are not many "hurrah" elements in such work, and few thanks to be won in opposing men's doing what they like to do. It is the physician and malaria, rather than the trumpet and the tournament. It is a work easily forgotten even by those who cry "Thy kingdom come."

But certain it is, that liberty must be based upon the Bible, or washed away from the shifting sands of human opinion. Its forces must be held and driven, or they will wreck the chariot. Liberty must acknowledge God and the Decalogue. It must recognize its highest claims as satisfied in the principles of that matchless Declaration of Independence, which is shot through and through with the blue thread of Mecklenburg, itself spun out of Scotch tissue, and is at once Christian and free.

The REV. PROF. LYMAN H. ATWATER, D. D., LL. D., of Princeton, N. J., read a paper as follows, on

RELIGION AND POLITICS.

Religion includes all forms in which man evinces allegiance and devotion to the Being or Beings whom he recognizes as supreme, whether Christian, Jewish, or Pagan. Politics refers to organized states, either with respect to the scientific unfolding of the theoretical and practical principles of civil government, or the means and methods of uplifting particular persons, parties, and policies to the ascendancy in any given state. These two departments, though quite distinct, nevertheless overlap and largely interpenetrate. The question is, how far has religion a place in politics in each of these senses?

Between the Vatican claim that the Church, through its supreme pontiff, is the infallible and authoritative guide of the civil magistrate in all matters affecting faith and morals, as also the supreme judge of what matters come under this category; and the counter-maxim of Hobbes that the statutes of the state are the ultimate source, standard and rule of moral obligation—a sentiment which agrees with much utilitarian and materialistic speculation in undermining intrinsic and scriptural morality—all varieties of doctrine on this subject may be found, down to that formula of demagogic diabolism, "all is fair in politics." Omitting all attempts to specify all of these, I may premise that the composition and constitution of this body, as I suppose,

preclude all discussion of State-Church establishments; that, for various reasons, I can only touch a few sides of the subject, such as pertain to all states as such, whether possessing religious establishments or not; and that my concrete references and illustrations will largely refer to my own country, in which some of the chief problems involved are finding their solution.

It is only a truism to say, at the threshold, that the state is bound to protect all in the peaceable exercise of their religion and use of property dedicated to religious purposes up to the point at which the abuse of such liberty becomes licentiousness. It is not bound to protect immoralities or breaches of the public peace committed in the name of religion, or in obedience to alleged conscientious convictions, however sincere. To tolerate polygamy, incest, free-love, or other adulterous crimes; to allow offences against life and health; to permit theft, fraud, pauper idleness and vagrancy, false witnessing, perjury, calumny and the like, on the pretext of religious liberty, is absurd. A right to the protection of society is not a right to undermine it. The state, too, can and should protect men against the wrongful deprivation of their civil rights by acts of religious bodies to which they belong—acts done under color of discipline or otherwise—in a manner contrary to their own fundamental covenants and constitutions.

The state also may be obliged to inquire into the doctrines of any religious body, at least for the purpose of identifying rights, franchises, and ownerships of property, conditioned upon adherence to certain doctrines. Yet, as respects disputed interpretations of doctrine, the decisions of the highest tribunals of the Church to which the litigants belong are, *prima facie*, and, in ordinary cases, conclusive. So our courts hold.

But whatever may be maintained in respect to the right of the state to exact from its subjects an unwilling support of any particular form of religion, neither it, nor the rulers who are its organs and representatives, can be exempt from the obligations of religion. No state, no rulers can wage war against God with innocence or impunity. We do not here inquire whether a state transcends its function and commission indeed when it attempts to impose the support of any form of religion upon its subjects. However this may be, the state is not without obligation to obey God in all that it is warranted or undertakes to do. It is not at liberty to violate any principle of morality, or of the decalogue, the divinely articulated summation of morality. The manward part of the decalogue touching obedience to parents and superiors, and their reciprocal duties to inferiors, the protection of life, chastity, property, truth—every rightful privilege and possession of man—underlies all legislation pertaining to social life, and the relations of men to each other. This, directly or indirectly, includes the great mass of legislation. No lawgiver can set these aside without treason to the state, to conscience, and to God. None can fail in all legitimate ways to promote the outward observance of them without

recreancy to a sacred trust. No ruler of a state, moreover, can positively set at naught the first, or Godward part of the decalogue, without defiance of God. It is vain to claim otherwise from whatever side we view the subject. Does a man acquire a right to deny or insult God, when acting as a ruler or magistrate, which would be impious if done by him as a private citizen?

As no man in any sphere, or on any occasion, can be free from the obligations of morality, so, be it remembered, morality and religion interpenetrate. Not that man by abjuring religion can rid himself of his conscience, or sense of right and wrong. The atheist cannot do this, even if he profess or attempt to do it. But morality severed from the light and sanctions of religion is greatly maimed and paralyzed, while religion torn from morality is a monstrosity and a misnomer. Either without the other is a fleshless skeleton. But as conscience must always and everywhere dominate the man, it must itself in every sphere, private, public, personal, official, political, be guided by the oracles of God. In every capacity man is bound, "whether he eat, or drink, or whatsoever he does, to do all to the glory of God." He can no more escape this obligation by being a statesman or politician than he can get out of himself. To eliminate the moral, and so far forth, the religious element from the state, is to strike out its life. It is no proof to the contrary to say, as is often said, that the state deals alone with the temporal and earthly, the Church with the divine and heavenly. For the very aim and foundation of any proper state is moral; it is the securing to all their rights relatively to each other and itself. And what is a right but the fact that it is right that a given privilege, opportunity or faculty be secured to us? And is it not the function of the state to secure such rights, and prevent their infringement by others? The very aim of the state is to promote justice between its subjects, and between them and itself, and, on the international side, between itself and other nations.

The state itself indeed cannot enforce inward rectitude, or all its fit outward manifestations; but it can and ought itself to refrain from all unrighteousness. It can raise the appreciation of morality among the people, and educate them to higher moral standards by its own scrupulous adherence to them; by its own protection of the innocent, and manifestation of a due abhorrence of abominable crimes in its treatment of their perpetrators; so that, while tempering justice with mercy, it should not turn it into a farce by a sickly and overstrained philanthropy. It is only another aspect of the same thing to say, that the end of the state is to secure to the citizen the power of being and doing morally right. His rights, whether of free speaking, intercourse, locomotion, or whatever else, are rights to do right. So far as the state falls short of this moral ideal, like all organisms, she and all her members or citizens must strive to lift her up to her normal standard.

With those who accept the Bible as the true standard of life and manners, this view of the moral constitution and end of the state is

past all doubt. "The powers that be are ordained of God," as to their rightful origin and authority, if not as to the manner of their appointment and investiture with office. They are to be obeyed not merely "for wrath" or terror of punishment, but "for conscience' sake." They are to be for "the punishment of evil-doers and the praise of them that do well." They are not to be "a terror to good works, but to the evil." "Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." Further proof that neither morality nor religion can be disowned or discarded by the state is superfluous. In all this the Scriptures only reaffirm, in an unperverted form, what is rooted in the intuitive convictions of the race. Atheism and infidelity are alone equal to extirpating all religion from the state.

How far, and in what ways then, may the religion of the Bible manifest itself in the public or political acts of a people that discards all state religious establishments, all union of Church and State?

It is clear that this will largely depend on the kind and degree of religious convictions and sensibilities that master the people, and those in control of the government. The effect of these will appear in legislation. Men will put themselves into their action, private and public. No theories of the absolutely non-religious character of the state can drive out of their political action their moral and religious sentiments—observe I do not say their sectarianism. This has been conspicuous in the whole history of the United States, both in respect to the national and local State governments. These have very largely given expression and effect to the moral sense of the people, as that is inspired and moulded by a dominant Christianity. For notwithstanding technical objections to the contrary, the United States are essentially a Christian nation.

It is not necessary to this that an explicit or formal profession of Christianity should be made in the constitution or written ground-law of the nation, desirable as that may be. There are institutions which are mightier than written constitutions, though their charters are unwritten in any scroll of parchment. The Constitution of Great Britain has its life in such institutions which live and reign in the minds and hearts, the manners, habits, social usages and laws of the nation—her institutions of education, learning, religion and charity. An individual Christian does not lose his Christianity by omitting the phrase, "In the name of God; amen," from his last will and testament; nor does a nation lose its religion by not making a formal profession of it in its written constitution. The admission into our United States Constitution of the day and year of our Lord is not as meaningless as some would have it. At this point neutrality is impossible to a nation and its rulers in respect to revealed religion. Man is not, as we have seen, at liberty, in his private or public capacity, to break or defy the law of God. But not to rest on the Lord's day from labors other than those of necessity and mercy is thus to violate that law. To stop secular labor and recreation on that day

is so far forth to recognize it as the Lord's day, instituted in his revealed word. Although it would be quite right for the state to set apart by law one day in seven, on account of the ascertained benefits of such rest to man's physical and spiritual being, yet this is not the sole or supreme ground of the obligation. It is imperative because the Lord commands it, whether men can discern sanitary, hygienic or other worldly advantages resulting from it or not.

Now, this observance of the Lord's day is established, not only in the customs and habits of the people of the United States, but by legislation; and in the practice of our National and State Legislatures and other officers, at least so far as the discharge of their official functions is concerned. Herein we have the most visible and unquestionable manifestation of a nation's attitude towards divine revelation. So in requiring the oath, confirmed by kissing the Bible, with due provision for relief of conscientious scruples, the religion of the nation is evinced. So also in the rites which the vast majority of the people observe on the most solemn occasions, such as weddings and funerals, whether they are in visible connection with any Church or not, they are on the side of Christianity. This is far from saying or intimating that the majority of these are real Christians, even by profession, or that they all believe, or profess belief, in the Christian religion; but they are nominal, and to a great extent real, believers in Christianity, as against any opposing system. It is not meant surely that there is not a deplorable amount of Sabbath-breaking, intemperance and profaneness, scepticism and flagrant iniquity. But it is meant that in the predominating belief, usages and sentiments of the people, and in the manifestation thereof, this is eminently a Christian, as distinguished from an atheistic, infidel, pagan or Mohammedan country.

The United States are a Christian nation also, as the recognized test of the legislation of the country is its conformity to the moral law, and this, too, as interpreted and applied by the Christian sentiment of the country. Not that immoral measures are not sometimes proposed or even adopted by our National or State Legislatures. But they are always urged on some pretext of right. They are opposed and denounced on the ground of their moral obliquity, whatever else may be urged against them. And once they are proved and conceded to be morally wrong or anti-Christian, they are hopelessly defeated.

The Christian sentiment of the country opposes and often prevents unrighteous wars. It demands that its sons, who serve it in the army and navy, as also its prisoners, be not left in the condition of heathen, but shall be ministered to, nay that the sessions of Congress shall be opened with prayer, by Christian chaplains, with due provision for religious liberty, whether this can be smoothly reconciled with some abstract theory or not. It finds expression in laws for the prevention of intemperance, Sabbath desecration, profaneness and sacrilege; in the summons by our chief magistrates, State and national, to observe annual days of thanksgiving, and special days of fasting, in great national crises, which are accepted with scarce a whisper of opposition

from any quarter, and hearty, positive observance by multitudes. It also appears in the explicit and thankful recognition of God and his providence as the source of all national blessings, in the annual messages of our governors and presidents to their respective legislatures.

Coming now to politics, in that looser popular sense which obtains in countries where rulers are chosen by popular election, and which refers to the means employed to secure the triumph of particular persons, parties, or policies at the polls, we must content ourselves with the fewest words. Religion touches politics here as it forbids us to further unrighteous measures by any means, or the best policies by unrighteous means. It rules out all lying, slander, fraudulent or venal voting; all procuring votes, or support for men, parties, or measures by bribery. It demands the support in the main of that political party, which, on the whole, in the conscientious view of the voter, makes most for righteousness and the public good. But here perplexity often emerges because the best political parties are apt to be mounted by political leaders, who consider them as a personal possession to be used chiefly for the honor or emolument of themselves or their friends. They look at the sacred convictions which command votes for the party very much as the speculator looks upon the views abroad which determine the prices of the commodities in which he speculates. At length corrupt men, with corrupt party machinery, become a fungous growth upon the party, of which it must rid itself, or die, certainly as to its usefulness. How shall the right-principled members of the party free it of these deadly incumbrances? Their bare protests are apt to be unavailing. How shall they make them more than *brutum fulmen*?

First, they can attend the primary meetings of parties at which candidates are nominated, and seek by their influence and votes to promote the nomination of good men. Sometimes this suffices to correct the evil. Oftener it fails, because it is so easy for the selfish and unscrupulous to pack such conventions with ignorant and unprincipled voters who outnumber them. Failing here, they can form an independent body at the polls, who, when no great party issues are at stake, can defeat unworthy nominees. Here they can make themselves felt to good purpose; for party managers will not generally court defeat by setting up candidates so unworthy as to repel the independent voter. All Christians, all good men, should become a force in politics, and make themselves efficient in elevating the moral standard of parties, politics and legislation.

It is a question of much gravity and delicacy, how far the Church, by its teachings as an organic body, or through its pulpits, should touch the subjects connected with politics. It should not plunge into the mire of mere partisan conflicts. It cannot mingle in the details of mere party strife without fleshly contamination, so losing its savor as the salt of the earth. This, so far from eternizing the temporal, secularizes the eternal, and carnalizes the spiritual. None the less, however, should the pulpit no wise be dumb on great public issues

and policies for or against righteousness, mercy and truth. The ambassador of God may not seal his lips in regard to great abominations, because these happen to be espoused by some political party, or made planks in its platform. When a Church becomes so subject to the "throne of iniquity," pillared on wealth, rank, social prestige, or the tyranny of political parties that it dare not "cry aloud and spare not" against lawless violence, drunkenness and its guilty causes and promoters; culpable neglect of the public health and safety, or traitorous hindrance to the government when it bears not the sword in vain against evil-doers, rebellion, anarchy, unjust foreign aggression; refusal to submit international differences to arbitration rather than the sword; unscriptural divorces; the tolerance of polygamy, and the circulation of obscene and polluting literature; fraud, oppression, extortion, the violation of national faith; against the abominations connected with such trades as make merchandise of the souls and bodies of men; against adulterating food and drink into poisons; against expulsion of industrious foreigners by blatant sluggards and more blatant demagogues; it may well ask itself, what is its mission? why cumbereth it the ground?

When nations and their governments have tolerated or winked at unrighteousness, the Church has too often lacked courage to protest against it. But, when the conscience of the Church and ministry has been awakened from such deadly torpor, and borne due witness against great abominations, it has aroused the nations from their self-indulgent iniquities, and that lethargy of conscience which reposed on that doctrine of the pit that "gain is godliness, or godliness is only gain." It scarcely needs to be added, that religion enters politics, as it is the province of the Church to instruct rulers, that they rule in righteousness; and to pray for them, that they may bear rule so wisely and well, that all may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

The REV. DR. BLAIKIE.—It was the understanding, in the Business Committee, that if we could spare ten minutes at this meeting an opportunity should be given to the Rev. Mr. Duff, from Tasmania, to say a few words about his Church. Mr. Duff has come, I suppose, as far as any man, to be present at this meeting; and I move that ten minutes may be allowed him now to make a brief statement.

The motion was agreed to, and the REV. ROBERT S. DUFF, M. A., read the following paper on

TASMANIA.

Moderator, Fathers, and Brethren: As Tasmania holds a comparatively lowly place among the Australian colonies, being overshadowed by such powerful neighbors as Victoria, New South Wales, and New