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CONSTITUTION—ITS AMENDMENT.

ADDRESS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CORRESPONDENCE.

(PREPARED BY ORDER OF THE ASSOCIATION.)

To the Christian People of the United States:

FELLOW CITIZENS—An accomplished American statesman has said that the Bible contains the only genuine moral constitution of society, and its principles are the only safe foundation of all civil and political establishments. General Jackson, on his death-bed, said, pointing to the Bible: "That Book, sir, is the rock on which our Republic rests—the bulwark of our free institutions."

The terrible national calamities into which we have fallen, indicate that we do not, *as a nation*, possess those moral qualities which secure the permanence and welfare of the Commonwealth. There is no adequate solution of our perils and sufferings that does not refer them to a moral cause. There can be no adequate cure that does not include, as its chief element, moral reform.

While this reform must find its principal sphere in the hearts and homes of the people, and its chief agents, an open Bible and an earnest Church, it partly depends upon the people in their organic capacity, and upon the government, as the agent in all national acts. Many Christians are convinced that we have failed to give our civil institutions that definite and practical religious character which is worthy of a Christian people and essential to national permanence and prosperity. We are not aware, that in the formation of our government, by any act or any declaration we recognized the divine origin of the institution we then set up. While we have distinctly asserted, and jealously maintained, the right of the people to set up forms of government for themselves, we have not acknowledged—it would seem we have not felt—that the constitution of government is an act of obedience to God, and that all legitimate civil authority is ultimately derived from him. Neither have we recognized the moral responsibility of the nation in its organic character, nor its obligation to accept and obey the will of

God revealed in his word. And this defect is made painfully conspicuous by the omission of the name of God even from the form of oath prescribed in the Constitution, which simply reads, "I do solemnly swear or affirm." We present the sad spectacle of a Christian people, who, in their organic capacity, neither recognize God nor "swear by his name."

In view of the grave character of this defect, and in order to secure unity of effort among all Christians in accomplishing the needed reform, an organization has been formed, entitled "The National Association for the Amendment of the Federal Constitution." The object of the association is to secure such Amendments to the Constitution, that the preamble shall read substantially as follows:

"We, the people of the United States, (humbly recognizing Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among nations, and his revealed will as of supreme authority,) in order to constitute a Christian government, and in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, (and secure the inalienable rights and blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to ourselves, our posterity, and all the inhabitants of the land,) do ordain, &c."

We also ask for any change in the body of the Constitution, which may be necessary to give effect to these amendments in the preamble.

THESE AMENDMENTS RIGHT AND NECESSARY.

We respectfully submit to your consideration, whether these amendments are not simply an appropriate recognition of the relations which all just human authority sustains to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. Is not any thing less than this wholly inconsistent with those relations? We propose the recognition of God, not only because he is the supreme ruler of all men and all organizations, but because it is he who has given the institution of civil government to man, and the just authority of the magistrate is derived from him. "There is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God." It is surely fitting that a Constitution framed by a Christian people should recognize a higher source of civil authority than the mere will or consent of the citizen. And in presenting civil government thus, as a divine institution, we enforce, by the highest possible sanctions, its claims upon the respect and obedience of the citizen. The true strength of a government lies in the conscientious regard felt for it as the ordinance of God. Thus only is the magistrate clothed with his true authority, and the majesty of the law suitably preserved. "The sanctions of religion," says De Witt Clinton, "compose the foundations of good government."

The moral character of a government has a powerful reflex influence on the moral character of the people. Especially is this felt in a popular government, where the people are brought into

constant contact with it, study its history, admire its provisions, and drink deeply of its spirit. An irreligious government begets an irreligious people. It must be deplored that in the Constitution so universally and so justly admired and loved and studied by the American people, there is nothing to turn the mind of the nation to God, to inculcate reverence for his authority or respect for his word.

We propose the recognition of Jesus Christ, as he is the sole actual governor of the world. God "hath put all things under his feet." He wears the title—"King of kings, and Lord of lords." Kings and judges are commanded, "Kiss the Son." And it is predicted, as among the blessings of the future, that the kingdoms of this world shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." The recognition of God which we propose can only be suitably made through him who is the One Mediator between God and man, and national blessings can only be obtained through him who is the only channel of the divine blessing and favor. And such recognition of God in Christ carries with it, of necessity, the recognition of "His revealed will, as of supreme authority."

THESE AMENDMENTS ARE JUSTIFIED BY OUR OWN NATIONAL HISTORY.

The principles which we here present are not new in American politics. We are able to plead many precedents, which must have the weight of authority with the American people. Our country was originally settled by men of high religious character, whose only motive in seeking a home in the wilderness was the freedom and safety of religion and the glory of God. They left the impress of their character on the civil institutions which they set up. In the cabin of the Mayflower, and before landing on Plymouth rock, the Pilgrims agreed upon a constitution of civil government, in which they declared "the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith" to be among the ends of their organization. This Constitution, beginning "In the name of God, Amen," invokes, says Webster, "a religious sanction and the authority of God on their civil obligations."

The Constitution of the first government established in the limits of the present State of Connecticut, declares that "where a people are gathered together, the word of God requires that there should be an orderly and decent government established according to God."

The first form of government that existed in Pennsylvania asserted "the origination and descent of all human power from God." and the first legislative act of the Colony, passed at Chester in 1662, recognized the Christian religion, while it established liberty of conscience, and declared that the glory of God and the good of mankind are the reason and end of government, which is, therefore, a venerable ordinance of God. And the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, in 1824, on a trial for blasphemy, referring to this early statute, says: "Christianity—general Christianity—is and

always has been a part of the common law of Pennsylvania: not Christianity founded on particular tenets, nor an established Church with tithes and spiritual courts, but Christianity with liberty of conscience to all men."

The State Constitutions of the era of the Revolution present the same characteristics. In 1780, the Constitution of Massachusetts declared "that the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend on piety, religion and morality." And in the Convention of that State, met in 1820 to revise the Constitution, Mr. Webster said: "I am clearly of opinion that we should not strike out all recognition of the Christian religion. I am desirous that in so solemn a transaction as the establishment of a Constitution we should express our attachment to Christianity—not indeed to any of its peculiar forms, but to its general principles." But it is needless to multiply examples; for of the thirteen States existing originally, not one had failed in its Constitution to make recognition, more or less explicit, of the authority of God and the claims of his law. And it is a matter of deep regret, that when we were enabled, after the triumphant assertion of our independence, to set up a statelier governmental structure, we left out that which constituted the chief strength and glory of those earlier commonwealths.

We would cast no imputation on the well known Christian character of many of the eminent men who framed the Federal Constitution. We know that many who were foremost in its formation regarded their success as owing only to the favor of God. And in the first Congress held after the adoption of the Constitution, the Senate unanimously requested the President to appoint a day of thanksgiving for the blessing of God therein vouchsafed to the nation. Why then did the framers of this instrument not incorporate in it a distinct recognition of God and of his law? Hamilton is said to have exclaimed, when asked the reason of this neglect: "I declare we forgot it." But the only satisfactory explanation is found in their known anxiety to avoid the unsound and hurtful union of Church and State, and in their conception of civil government merely as a social compact and not as the ordinance of God. In guarding against unequal and unjust discriminations between citizens of various religious belief, they have absolved the citizens from all profession, even of the fundamental moral truths on which civil government rests. In guarding against the doctrine that constitutions, if established at all, are granted to the people by their rulers, and asserting the right of the people to frame their own Constitution, they forgot that the people were still dependent on the power of God, and that their national authority and rights are conferred by him.

Whatever explanation we put upon this unfortunate omission, it cannot be considered presumptuous, after the experience of nearly three-quarters of a century, to propose amendments to any constitution, however admirable and beneficent. It has already been amended in some particulars. The present rebellion has led

to a general conviction, that additional amendments are necessary to secure universal liberty, and prevent even the possible recurrence of the evils which we now suffer. We propose, that the Constitution be made unmistakably *Christian*, as well *free*.

THESE PRINCIPLES ARE IN ACCORD WITH MANY OF OUR
NATIONAL ACTS.

There are well established features in our government, which are consistent only with such principles as we seek to introduce into the National Constitution. Through our whole history Chaplains have been appointed by Congress, prayer is offered daily during its sessions, and the nation is called at intervals by both Congress and the Executive to thanksgiving, or fasting and prayer. A recent resolution of the Senate on such an occasion recognized the mediation of Jesus Christ, and the President called us to give thanks "for preserving and redeeming grace." We have gone to the Christian religion for the only bond we have for the integrity of the ruler, or the fidelity of the citizen—the divine ordinance of the oath. Such acts can have no meaning unless as a nation we acknowledge God. If such implied recognition of God be proper and becoming, no objection can be urged against the express recognition which we propose. Its necessity will be felt when we remember, that one chief magistrate once refused to appoint a day of fasting and prayer in an hour of public calamity, because the nation in its constitution recognized no God, and another, in contracting a treaty with a Mohammedan power, hesitated not to declare that "The Government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion. It has in itself no character of enmity against the laws and religion of Mussulmans.*" Surely our Christian character should be so well defined, that the chief magistrate of the nation could not doubt or ignore it, so clear that all the world should know us as a nation whose God is Jehovah.

We are glad, in conclusion, to adopt the language of "The Book for the Nation and the Times," whose author truly says:

"The sins of our people are many and great: such as Sabbath desecration, drunkenness and falsehood; a sad want of family government, and hence a lamentable disregard of parental authority; a reckless spirit of insubordination generally; with national pride and self-sufficiency. But there is ground to believe, that all these in a measure spring from our national forgetfulness of God—that this is the fountain whence flow these evil streams. In order to have healthful streams, we must purify the fountain; casting into it the salt of divine and eternal truth, concerning God, his law, his claims, and supremacy over us as a nation. We commenced to build aside from the true foundation, and numerous evils must be the consequence. Let us begin anew, where we ought to begin, recognizing the rightful authority of God over us, and acknowledging our subordination to that authority. This

* Treaty with Tripoli. Art. xi. Laws of the United States, vol. 4.

will be to begin at the beginning, and will have promise of a happy continuance; it will be laying a foundation for law, order and stability in every department of the social fabric. When the fountain is purified by a recognition of our proper relations to God and His government, it will have a healing and saving influence on all the streams of our civil and social life."

Fellow citizens, if it be really our duty thus to recognize God, our failure to do so is among the causes of our national calamities. The hour of chastisement is the hour for repentance, and the true path back to prosperity and peace is the path of amendment and reform. The President, in his recent proclamation of a fast, called upon the nation to pray that we "may not be destroyed by an obstinate adhesion to our own counsels, which may be in conflict with his eternal purposes." The inspired invocation, "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name," urges us to pay this timely homage to the Governor among the nations. The seasonableness of the movement at the present time is confirmed by the earnest and systematic effort in many quarters, to bring our State governments to know less and less of Christianity and its institutions. It is a gratifying evidence of a healthful sentiment in other quarters, that the present constitution of New Jersey, as revised in 1857, indicates a disposition to return to the original idea of a Christian State.

In this movement, prompted by pure Christian patriotism, participated in by various Christian denominations, all of whom are opposed to any sectarian establishment of religion, we invite the co-operation of every lover of his country, and every follower of Jesus Christ. We invite all ministers of the gospel to proclaim to the nation the claims of Him whose ambassadors they are. We invite the co-operation of all ecclesiastical bodies in this effort to return to our fathers' God, to honor our common Redeemer, and to secure the best interests of our land.

The Memorial and proposed Amendment were modified, and now stand as follows:

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled:

We, citizens of the United States, respectfully ask your honorable bodies to adopt measures for amending the Constitution of the United States, so as to read in substance as follows:

"We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among the nations, and his revealed will as of supreme authority, in order to constitute a Christian government, and in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the inalienable rights and blessings of life, liberty and the

pursuit of happiness to ourselves, our posterity, and all the inhabitants of the land,—Do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

And we further ask that such changes be introduced into the body of the Constitution, as may be necessary to give effect to these amendments in the preamble.

"WHY NOT VOTE?"

THERE are but few Covenanters who have not heard the above question more or less frequently addressed to themselves, or some of their brethren, during these autumn days. The following extract of a letter from a veteran in Grant's army before Richmond, is a good specimen of the outside pressure brought to bear upon members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to induce them to vote at the coming momentous election. An article directly to the point has already appeared in this magazine. That there may be "line upon line," however, on this important subject, the extract is given together with a reply.

[EXTRACT.]

"Reformed Presbyterians, if I understand them, regard it as perjury, or something as bad, to vote under the Constitution of the United States. I cannot see how it is so. I admit the Constitution is not what it ought to be, but it is open to amendment; and how is it to be amended but by the vote of the people of the United States? When this rebellion is crushed—which I hope and pray may be done speedily—we will have a new Constitution, or the old revised to suit the times. Slavery is even now as one of the evils that have been. The rebels themselves admit that if it did not seem like yielding to the Yankees, they would abolish it. Louisiana has by the vote of the people made herself a free State. Maryland is about doing the same thing. Now, I ask, is it not the duty of every citizen who has the right of suffrage, to use that right in this coming election when there is so much to be gained or lost by it? Who can doubt what would be the fate of the nation if the Democrats—traitors, as I shall call them, judging them by the platform they stand on—should get the power. I have not the least doubt your church to a man would vote for Abraham Lincoln, if they were to vote. But I presume you will say, that we are not to do evil that good may come. Now, if the Republicans should lose the election, and it could be proved that if Reformed Presbyterians had cast their votes, it would have been otherwise, would you not feel as if you had fallen short of your duty as a citizen of the United States? Please write and give light on this subject."

[REPLY.]

MY DEAR FRIEND:—Your letter is a proof that a soldier's duty