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was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength and honour, and glory, and blessing. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

DISSENT FROM UNSCRIPTURAL POLITICAL SYSTEMS.

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MEMBERS of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in all lands occupy what is known as the position of dissent from the civil governments under which they live. This political attitude, differing widely from that of other Christian citizens, calls for and is capable of receiving clear, logical support. To state and defend this position is the task now to be undertaken.

I. It is important that the position of political dissent be clearly and correctly stated. Thousands of citizens, because of indifference, take no active part in politics. But this is not political dissent. Thousands, in the exercise of the right of expatriation, remove from one country to another; but they may or may not be political dissenters. In every country there may be found those who have exercised this right, and who have not become naturalized in the country of their adoption, and who therefore take no part in politics. But the position of these aliens and that of political dissenters are not the same. It is sometimes said that political dissent is the giving-up of political rights, because of the sinful conditions on which those rights are to be secured and exercised. But this statement overlooks the fact that the act of dissent is itself the exercise of a political right, and in certain circumstances may become the most important of political duties.

In defining the principle of dissent it is maintained that the nation derives all its authority from God, is subject to the dominion of Jesus Christ, and that the moral law is binding in the sphere of politics both upon the nation itself and upon individual citizens. In every nation there are certain well-

established and well-known principles according to which the functions of government are performed. These principles may be formally stated, as in the Constitution of the United States; or they may find expression in various acts, treaties, and decisions, as in Great Britain. In either case there is a settled compact, and there should be a distinct recognition of the Scripture principles of civil government in its relation to God, to Christ, to the Bible. Political dissent, as we hold it, is a refusal to accept the compact by which the nation has chosen to exercise the functions of civil government, because of its unscriptural character.

II. The method of applying this principle is next to be considered. Dissent is a principle that has many applications in the social sphere. In every public assembly a vote with the minority is a dissent from the action of that assembly. In matters of sufficient importance the dissenter may claim the right to have his dissent recorded in the minutes of the assembly.

There are many voluntary associations both right and proper in their aims, principles, and methods, but being composed of fallible persons are liable to err in judgment. Members of such associations may record their dissent in such cases and still retain their membership. But when such a society becomes immoral, either in its principles, aims, or methods, the consistent dissenter must come out and be separate. So long as a Church is Scriptural in its constitution, though it may make mistakes, dissenters may retain their connection with it, satisfying their consciences by recording their dissent from any action which they deem unscriptural. But when the Church abandons fundamental principles in doctrine, government, or worship, so that she is no longer Scriptural in her constitution, consistency requires that dissenters come out and be separate, and that they form an ecclesiastical organization on Bible principles.

Only in a limited measure does dissent in the Church and

in purely voluntary associations illustrate political dissent. In the political sphere as elsewhere a minority vote is a dissent from the action taken. We may record our dissent too by petitioning the government to right whatever we conceive to be wrong in its constitution, laws, and administration. But the nation sustains a different relation to the land from that sustained by voluntary associations and by the Church. Political dissent, when carried to the point of separation from the existing political or governing society, must differ from ecclesiastical dissent in a similar case in that a new rival society cannot be formed unless a successful rebellion is inaugurated. But political dissent is not rebellion nor the equivalent of rebellion. On the other hand, it is consistent with the purest patriotism and the most loyal devotion to our country. The problem for the political dissenter is, how to adjust his relations to the existing government so as to stand aloof from the governing society, in so far as it is immoral, and yet not occupy the position of rebellion or disloyalty. In the solution of this problem it should be remembered that there is a three-fold relation ordinarily sustained by the people to the government, namely: under, over, and in the government. As individual citizens, we are all under the government, and are subject to its constitution and laws. When these require immoral action there is a species of dissent which we must practice, on the principle that we must obey God rather than men. But this is not the kind of dissent now under discussion.

The nation as a moral person of which we are all members is over the government. Though civil government is a divine institution, the existing government in any land is the creature and servant of the sovereign political body called the nation. This government we may alter at will. As members of the nation we are to bear our share of responsibility for the character of the government, using every proper means to make it better, and opposing every effort to make it worse.

Dissent does not alter our relation to the nation. God is the creator of nations. It is in families and nations that we all have our being. Dissent can no more separate us from the nation than from the human family.

All officers of government and all who vote for them are in the government. All such accept the political compact and agree to administer it as it is. While political dissent does not change our relation as citizens under the government, nor separate us from the sovereign national body that is over the government, it brings to view a fourth relation, namely: outside the government. Before taking this position we should make sure that the circumstances demand it. In politics, as elsewhere, there are degrees in the application of the principle of dissent, since there are degrees in the heinousness of the evils because of which we dissent. Not every political evil requires the dissenter to take his stand outside the government. There are three classes of national sins, namely: sins in the constitution, sins in the legislation, and sins in the administration. Each of these may be divided into two classes, namely: those which relate to fundamental principles and those which relate to subordinate matters. While there are thus presented six general classes of national sin, only one requires dissent by separation from the governing society. If the evils are solely in the administration, whether they relate to matters fundamental or not, we are to retain our place in the governing body, and strive for reformation by securing an administration in harmony with the Christian constitution and laws. In the Hebrew nation, and in Scotland during the period of the Covenants, the work of reformation had for its object not the amending of the constitution, but the bringing of the administration back and up to the constitution. The Sanquhar and other similar declarations disowned, not the constitution but the administrator of it, who trampled it under his feet. If the evils of the government are only in the legislation,

dissenters may still remain in the governing body in so far as they are not required to support immoral legislation, and in that body labour for a reform of the laws. If the evils of the government are constitutional, but relate to minor rather than to fundamental principles, the dissenter may still retain his place in the government, and labour in the ordinary way for the amendment of the constitution. But if the evil is both fundamental and constitutional, the consistent dissenter will come out and be separate from the governing political body. And this is the kind of dissent required to-day.

III. We are now to consider reasons by which this position is sustained.

On no other position can we free ourselves from responsibility for the nation's sins. This statement is made, of course, with reference to a nation whose sins are fundamental and constitutional. There are multitudes of evils in political life to-day which call for reformation. The evils of intemperance, Sabbath breaking, the wrecking of families by an unscriptural divorce system, are sustained by law. There are evils in connection with our city governments, evils practiced in legislative bodies, in courts of justice, and at the ballot box. But the position now maintained, and on the basis of which separation from the governing body is advocated, is that there is fundamental evil in the constitution of government, and these public crimes are only symptoms of the deep-seated constitutional disease.

In the United States we have a written constitution which may be read in half-an-hour. It is the nation's fundamental law. All statute law must rest upon it. To it all national and State officers are sworn. To determine whether or not it is Scriptural is an easy matter. It contains no recognition of God as the source of authority, of Jesus Christ as the Ruler of Nations, and of the Bible as supreme law. Even the form of oath prescribed in Article II., Section 1, is destitute

of any appeal to God. In this document there is no basis for moral legislation touching the Sabbath, the saloon, the family relation, or any other moral issue. While the United States has many Christian features, no authority has ever yet pronounced the government to be Christian. The Supreme Court once declared the nation to be Christian, but they borrowed the expression from our National Reform literature, in which the Christian character of the nation is employed to prove, not that the government is Christian, but that it ought to be. The treaty made with Tripoli in 1797 declared that "The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." The evil, therefore, being both fundamental and constitutional, the political dissenter must, if he would be consistent, take his stand outside the governing body.

The argument with reference to Great Britain is substantially the same with certain minor differences. In the United States there is an unwritten constitution, the principles of which are embodied in the written constitution, and which give character to the administration. In the British nation there is an unwritten constitution, the principles of which are embodied in Acts of Parliament. While the British constitution is not formulated as in the United States, it is none the less definite and clear. It contains no recognition of God as supreme, of Jesus Christ as Ruler of Nations, and of the Bible as supreme law for the nation. While much of the legislation is in harmony with the moral law, much of it, on the other hand, is in conflict with that law. This immoral legislation is constitutional. The British Government does not ignore Christianity or seek to place all religions on a level, as is the case in the United States, but it sustains an unscriptural relation to religion. The Scriptures are hostile not only to certain features of the Churches that are established in Britain, but also to the very form of that relation which here exists between Church and State, so that, even if there were here a Church and State in all other respects sustaining

a Scriptural character, they are both unscriptural in the relation they now sustain to each other. By this relation the Headship of Christ over His own Church is eclipsed by the recognition of the reigning sovereign as the Church's head. By this recognition the freedom of the Church is invaded. Moreover, the British nation is chargeable with the sin of Covenant-breaking. The Covenants, National and Solemn League, were once part of the constitution of this empire, but they have been abolished as part of that constitution. It is not maintained that the nation did not possess the right to restate the principles of these covenants, to eliminate what might be without defection omitted, and to add what might be wanting to make their statements complete. But no new statement was given. On the contrary, there was the rejection of certain Bible principles and the substitution of certain human theories. In addition to all this, and as confirmatory of it, the oath to be taken by members of both Houses of Parliament binds to the "Preserving and upholding the supremacy of our Lady the Queen, Her heirs and successors, in all matters civil and ecclesiastical, within this realm, and other Her Majesty's dominions." Since these unscriptural conditions exist, how can those who are aware of them free themselves from guilt? Thousands of people in this island dissent from the Established Churches, that they may be guiltless in the matter of ecclesiastical relations. But if consistency requires dissent and separation from an Established Church which is unscriptural, why does it not require dissent and separation from the government by which it is established? Surely the government is the greater sinner of the two?

The Scripture argument for dissent is exceedingly clear. We are enjoined not to follow a multitude to do evil (Ex. xxiii. 2); not to be conformed to the world (Ro. xii. 2); not to be partakers of other men's sins (1 Tim. v. 22); not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but to come out from among them and be separate (2 Cor. vi. 28); to abstain from every form of evil (1 Thes. v. 22).

Multitudes of Scripture texts could be added to these, in which the duty of keeping ourselves free from the sins of society is enjoined. It should be noticed that in all these texts the principle taught is, not that we are to abstain from immoral individual acts, but that we must so adjust our relations to the social body as to free ourselves from responsibility for its sins.

The position of dissent is enforced by the fact that it is conducive to clear moral vision. To become closely allied with sin destroys the ability to see its sinfulness. Those who are the deepest in politics are the most blind to the political sins of our day. To lose the power of vision with respect to political unrighteousness is likely to be attended by the obscuring of moral vision in other departments of social life. To see sin as it is we must stand aloof from it. We separate and dissent from the sins of the government because we perceive them, and we perceive them all the more clearly because we separate from them.

Another reason for the position of political dissent is that it is the position on which the most effective reform work can be done. Dissent is sometimes spoken of as though by itself it freed the dissenter from responsibility for the nation's sins. This is a mistake. The dissenter more than any other citizen is bound to work for national reformation. To him it is given to see more clearly than others the need of moral reform. The position of dissent is the proper attitude for striking national sins a deadly blow, and woe to the people who take this position and fail to strike! Upon them will rest the curse of Meroz.

If the position of dissent can be successfully controverted it must be on one of the six following propositions:—

1. That the existing constitutions of government are Christian. The fallacy of this position consists in confounding a government having Christian features with a Christian government. If the argument presented above as to the

unscriptural character of both the British and the United States' constitution is true, the effort to overthrow the position of dissent on this ground is futile.

2. That there is no binding obligation resting upon the nation to acknowledge Christ and the Divine law, that there is consequently no sin in failing to make such a recognition, and therefore it is no sin for individuals to accept the existing compacts of government. This position simply means that the secular theory of civil government is true, that it is a mere human device deriving all its authority from men, that it is not put under Christ as Mediator, and that in politics there is no moral standard. Against such a position we have the almost unanimous testimony of political science, the voice of the Churches and the Word of God.

3. That while the existing governments are sinfully defective it is not a sin to vote and hold office under them. To enforce this position the cases of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah are quoted. But these men were not required to accept and administer an unscriptural compact of government. The objection overlooks the fact of the two-fold responsibility for national sin. There is first of all the sin of the composite moral being the State, which is one and the same in all the ages of its existence, and on which rests the guilt of the fathers until repentance and reformation take place. There is also the sin of individual citizens, who become partakers with the nation in its sin unless they dissent from it.

4. That while existing civil governments are not Scriptural we must vote, hold office, and perform all other political duties to secure the desired reformation. This position means that it is right to do evil that good may come; that the end sometimes justifies the means; that the way to national reformation leads through transgression of the moral law. Moreover, it discounts the value of testimony. Moral reformers would stultify themselves by taking such a position.

5. That the position of dissent is a hindrance to our Chris-

tian work. If dissent is a Bible principle it cannot be a hindrance when Scripturally applied. Christian work has two great departments: first, a saving work for individuals; and second, a reforming work for society. Dissent is the act of the individual and has its place in our work for the building up of individual Christian character, and in developing stalwart Christian reformers. Nations and governments cannot dissent, and in our work of reformation, not dissent, but "Be wise," "Serve the Lord," "Kiss the Son," is the message. The objection, therefore, is groundless.

6. That we are so completely allied with the nation that there is no escape from responsibility for its sins by dissent or otherwise until reformation is accomplished, and that it is vain therefore to dissent. This position completely merges the individual into the political society, destroys individual responsibility, confounds the distinction between nation and government, conflicts with the moral law, and tends to sear the conscience. It is also in conflict with the teaching of that Word which says: "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

We therefore continue to occupy our position of dissent from unscriptural political systems, accompanying it with diligent reform work, and with the prayer: "Arise, O God; judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all nations."

PSALM XLVII.

ALL people, clap your hands; to God
 With voice of triumph shout:
 For dreadful is the Lord most high,
 Great King the earth throughout.
 God is with shouts gone up, the Lord
 With trumpets sounding high.
 Sing praise to God, sing praise, sing
 Praise to our King sing ye. [praise,

For God is King of all the earth:
 With knowledge praise express,
 God rules the nations: God sits on
 His throne of holiness.
 The princes of the people are
 Assembled willingly;
 Ev'n of the God of Abraham
 They who the people be.

For why? the shields that do defend
 The earth are only His:
 They to the Lord belong; yea, He
 Exalted greatly is.

Rev. Andrew Holmes, Ballybay, pronounced the Benediction.