**“Is Religion a Proper Subject of Legislation?” The Bible Echo 12, 13, pp. 99, 100.**

IN the first centuries of the Christian era, when the Roman Empire filled and ruled the world, to profess the name of Christ a person was compelled to renounce every other relationship in life. He could not attend a wedding or a funeral of his nearest relatives, because every ceremony was performed with reference to the gods. He could not attend the public festival, for the same reason. More than this, he could not escape by not attending the public festival, because on days of public festivity, the doors of the houses, and the lamps about them, and the heads of the dwellers therein, must all be adorned with laurel and garlands of flowers, in honour of the licentious gods and goddesses of Rome. If the Christian took part in these services, he paid honour to the gods as did the other heathen. If he refused to do so, which he must do if he would obey God and honour Christ, he made himself conspicuous before the eyes of all the people, all of whom were intensely jealous of the respect they thought due to the gods; and also in so doing, the Christian disobeyed the Roman law, which commanded these things to be done. He thus became subject to persecution, and that meant death, because the law said:— {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 99.1}

“Worship the gods to all respects according to the laws of your country, and compel all others to do the same. But hate and punish those who would introduce anything whatever alien to oar customs in this particular.”—*Neander, Church History. Vol. I. Section First. Part I. Div. III, par. 2*. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 99.2}

And further:— {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 99.3}

“Whoever introduces new religions, the tendency and character of which are unknown, whereby the minds of men may be disturbed, shall, if belonging to the higher rank, be banished; if to the lower, punished with death.”—*id*. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 99.4}

This was the Roman law. Every Christian, merely by the profession of Christianity, severed himself from all the gods of Rome, and from everything that was done in their honour. And everything was done in their honour. The great mass of the first Christians were from the lower ranks of the people. The law said that if any of the lower ranks introduced new religions, they should be punished with death. The Christians, introducing a new religion, and being from the lower ranks, made themselves subject to death whenever they adopted the religion of Christ. This is why Paul and Peter, and multitudes of other Christians, suffered death for the name of Christ. Such was the Roman law, and when Rome put the Christians to death, it was not counted by Rome to be persecution. It would not for an instant be admitted that such was persecution. It was only enforcing the law. The State of Rome was supreme. The state ruled in religious things. Whoever presumed to disobey the law must suffer the penalty; all that Rome did, all that it professed to do, was simply to enforce the law. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.1}

If the principle be admitted that the state has the right to legislate in regard to religion, and to enforce religious observances, then no blame can ever be attached to the Roman Empire for putting the Christians to death. Nor can it be admitted that such dealings with the Christians was persecution. The enforcement of right laws can never be persecution, however severely the law may deal with the offender. To hang a murderer is not persecution. To hunt him down, even with bloodhounds, to bring him to justice, is not persecution. We repeat, therefore, that the enforcement of right laws never can be persecution. If, therefore, religion or religious observances be a proper subject of legislation by civil government, then there never has been, and there never can be, any such thing as religious persecution. Because civil governments are ruled by majorities, the religion of the majority must of necessity be the adopted religion; and if civil legislation in religious things be right, the majority may legislate in regard to their own religion. Such laws made in such a case must be right laws, and the enforcement of them therefore can never be persecution. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.2}

But all this, with the authority and all the claims of the Roman Empire, is swept away by the principle of Christ, which everyone then asserted who named the name of Christ, that civil government can never of right have anything to do with religion or religious observances,—that religion is not a subject of legislation by any civil government,—that religion, religious profession, and religious observances must be left entirely between the individual and his God, to worship as his own conscience shall dictate,—that to God only is to be rendered that which is God’s, while to Cesar is to be rendered only that which is Cesar’s. This is the principle that Christ established, and which, by His disciples, He sent into all the world, and which they asserted wherever they went; in behalf of which they forfeited every earthly consideration, endured untold torments, and for which they freely gave their lives. It was, moreover, because of the establishment of this principle by Jesus Christ, and the assertion of it by His true disciples, that we have to-day the rights and liberties which we enjoy. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.3}

A. T. JONES.

**“Numbers and Rights” The Bible Echo 12, 13, pp. 100, 101.**

NUMBERS and rights no relation to each other. This is contrary to the general idea; but it is nevertheless true. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.4}

Rights are God-given. They do not pertain to men because men are associated together in large numbers; nor are they determined by that fact. The rights of man have their basis in the purpose of the Creator; and that purpose is independent of the number of those to whom it pertains. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.5}

Every individual is bound by his relation to his Creator and to his fellowmen. But his relation to his fellows is not independent of his relation to God. In other words, it is a duty which man owes to God, to love his neighbor as himself. It is a part of the law of God that a man should not steal, kill, commit adultery, bear false witness, or do anything that would invade the rights of his fellowmen. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.6}

**THE BASIS OF NATURAL RIGHTS**

In fulfilling the purpose of God in our creation, we must of necessity fulfill every obligation which we owe to mankind. And to fulfil that divine purpose, it is necessary that we should possess and exercise certain rights. An all-wise Creator has accordingly endowed all men with those rights; and these rights, being thus inherent in the individual, are unalienable. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.7}

The purpose of the Creator is that every being whom he has made should be upright and perfect in all his ways, a free agent, and should live a life of unmarred happiness. Because of the fall, this purpose can never be fully realized in this world, but it will be perfectly accomplished in the world to come. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.8}

In this world progress is made toward the attainment of this purpose by development of character. God does not want automatons, nor slaves. God would stultify his own name if he should create beings of such a nature. He could not do less than create beings of the highest and most perfect type; nor could he be satisfied with anything else. He will have no one love and serve him from fear, or because he could not do otherwise. Such a tribute would be of an inferior nature, and therefore entirely unsuitable as an offering to the infinite God. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.9}

**THE BASIS OF LIBERTY**

In order that man may develop a perfect character, he must have liberty. In order that his tribute to God may be voluntary, he must have freedom of choice. Accordingly men are left free by the Creator either to love and serve Him, or to ignore Him and serve themselves. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.10}

This individual freedom of choice comprises within its limits the inalienable rights of mankind. When this freedom is denied, the highest interests of the individual are attacked; and if the attack be successful, the gravest injury to mankind results. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.11}

It matters not, also, whether this freedom be denied by some individual despot, or by the doctrine that rights are determined by the judgment of majorities. The so-called “public conscience” cannot take the place of the individual conscience. The individual who surrenders his conscience surrenders his very soul. He surrenders faith; for Christian faith is not mere assent to the truth, but it is belief which is manifested by works. See James 2:14-20. And with the surrender of faith, goes also the right to eternal life itself. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.12}

**THE BASIS OF A DESPOTISM**

The doctrine of the “greatest good to the greatest number” when so applied as to demand the yielding of the individual conscience to the will of the majority, becomes but the means of erecting a despotism. The theory that the majority must rule, is a very plausible one in this day, and a correct one so far as concerns those matters in which all have a common interest, and which are subject to human control. But it does not apply within the sphere of rights. And it is a fact also that the majorities in this world are made up not of leaders, or persons of independent judgment, but of followers: so that what appears to be the judgment of the majority, is very often only the will or opinion of the few by whom the majority are led. This is especially true in matters where the people do not feel their immediate interests to be directly affected, as in questions of religion. A religious despotism can be all the more readily established by a few influential bigots because the public are generally willing to let others (their spiritual advisers) think for them in religious matters, and thus be spared the trouble of investigating and deciding for themselves. This is human nature; and the religion of human nature is popery.—*American Sentinel*. {BEST March 29, 1897, p. 100.13}