**“A Lesson from Ezra” American Sentinel 1, 5.**

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While the so-called “National Reformers” continually deny that their movement has any likeness to a proposed union of Church and State, they do not deny that they want to make such changes in our national Constitution as will place all Christian laws, institutions, and usages on an undeniable legal basis in the fundamental law of the land. It is true that they insert the words “of our Government,” after “usages;” but as our Government has no Christian usages, all understand that the usages of the Christian church are referred to. The design of the National Reform party is, then, to so change the Constitution that Christian usages may enforced by civil law. It is not necessary for us to call it a union of Church and State; will simply remember that the avowed purpose is to make it possible to compel people to follow certain Christian usages, and this by the power of the law of the land. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.1}

Since the advocates of this state of affairs are fond of referring to the Bible for precedents for their proposed scheme; and since they imagine that they are following in the footsteps of the ancient worthies; we invite them to a brief consideration of the course which was pursued by one excellent man of old, “a ruler in Israel.” {AMS May 1886, p. 35.2}

Ezra was undoubtedly a man of God. He was a man of stern integrity and of the most sincere piety. Moreover, he was a statesman, well versed in the ways of courts, and was also a brave soldier, and a skilled leader of men. When, after a long delay, and much discouragement, the Jews were confirmed in the privileges granted them by Cyrus, king of Persia, Ezra was the one to whom the work of restoring Jerusalem was intrusted. The Jews had been captives in a foreign land, but God had worked upon the hearts of the heathen king, so that they were allowed to return to their own land and re-stablish the worship of Jehovah. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.3}

With quite a train of followers, Ezra set out for his own country. But the way was long and dangerous, and there were many even of the subjects of the king of Persia, who wished only evil to the Jews and their work. Here was the time, if ever, for Ezra to invoke the aid of the king, and secure a company of soldiers to protect him and his companions. But he did no such thing. After getting his people together, he halted at the river of Ahava (Ezra 8:15-18), and sent for the priests of the Lord. As soon as the priest had arrived, Ezra proceeded as follows:- {AMS May 1886, p. 35.4}

“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath are against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this; and he was intreated of us.” Ezra 8:21-23. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.5}

The result is told in the following words:- {AMS May 1886, p. 35.6}

“Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.” Verse 31. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.7}

This is our text. The application is plain. Ezra says: “I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.” Ezra felt that if he should ask the king for protection, it would be virtually a denial of his faith. The Jews had told the heathen of the power of Jehovah, no doubt quoting the words of Moses: “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” And now if Ezra should ask kingly protection, the heathen would say, Where is your God? If he is so powerful, why do you not depend upon him, instead of seeking the protection of an earthly monarch? Such questions would have been well put. Ezra knew it; he knew that to ask for protection from the king would be to proclaim the weakness of Israel. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.8}

The same principles will apply to-day. The Christian religion is from God. Christ, its founder, said that he spoke only the words of God. He said also, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.” John 18:36. If Christians in the nineteenth century, contrary to the precept and example of their leader, appeal to force, they simply proclaim their lack of faith in God. The National Reformers will, it is true, disclaim any design to appeal to force in support of Christianity; but laws are for nothing, if they are not to be enforced. No custom is made legal, unless it is desired to enforce that custom. To “enforce” means to support by force. And therefore when Christian usages are placed on a legal basis in the fundamental law of the land, it is nothing else than an appeal to force of arms, if necessary, to support those usages when they are violated. But such an appeal to force would be a virtual proclamation that God had departed from those making the appeal. It would be a confession of one of two things: Either that the ones making the appeal had no faith in God’s power to care for his own cause, or else that the customs in whose support civil authority was invoked, did not have the support of divine authority. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.9}

It is just as plain now as it was in the days of Ezra, that religion is lowered in the eyes of the world, when civil power is invoked in its behalf. To place Christian institutions on a legal basis in the law of the land, would be to put them on a level with human institutions. Therefore it is in the interest of religion that we oppose this proposed Constitutional Amendment. As Christians we do not want to see any institution or usage that is really Christian, and which therefore bears the divine impress, sunk to the level of “a police regulation.” Christian institutions have the support of God, and therefore do not need the support of the State; and if the institutions which it is proposed to enforce are not really Christian, then certainly should condemn the movement. E. J. W. {AMS May 1886, p. 35.10}