**“State Recognition of Christianity” American Sentinel 1, 10.**

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The advocates of the so-called “National Reform” claim that we do them in justice by asserting that they are working for a union of Church and State, and that if their movement shall succeed they will persecute people for conscience sake. They say that we either misunderstand the principles of “National Reform” or else we willfully misrepresent them. We claim that we do neither. We get our ideas of the “National Reform” movement from its official organs, and give the people the utterances of its advocates just as we find them publish. True, they deny that they are working for a union of Church and State, and we publish their denial; but unfortunately for them their arguments go to show that Church and State union is the real object of their ambition. {AMS October 1886, p. 76.1}

In the *Christian Nation* for July 7 and 14, 1886, we find an article bearing the same title as the one at the head of this article. It is by the late Wm. Sommerville, of Nova Scotia, and is edited from the original manuscript by the Rev. R. M. Sommerville, New York. The *Christian nation* is devoted to the interests of the “National Reform” movement, and was endorsed by the Annual Convention of the National Reform Association, Pittsburg, Pa., April, 1885; consequently what ever we find in it may be regarded as official. {AMS October 1886, p. 76.2}

The article in question starts out with the statement that the Bible is a revelation from God: that it will make wise and the salvation all who receive it; that no one can know by intuition what the Scriptures teach, but that they must be searched, and that the obligation to search the Scriptures rests upon all men. To these propositions we give a most hearty assent. We also agree with Mr. Sommerville that there are “great difficulties to be encountered in the study of the divine word,” and that for these difficulties the word itself is not responsible, but that they arise from education, from the current of public sentiment, from its bearing on our worldly interests and prospects, and from a determination to find in it what it was never intended to teach. We also believe that “the great difficulty, and that from which all others derive their existence or their force, is the depravity of the human heart, and our natural enmity to God. There is the reluctance to submit the judgment, the every thought, to the teachings of the spirit. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because there spiritually discerned.” {AMS October 1886, p. 76.3}

These propositions are sound, but the conclusion which Mr. Sommerville presumes to draw from them is unsound to the same degree. He says:- {AMS October 1886, p. 76.4}

“This consideration suggests the imperative obligation to place men who have the spirit at the political health. Those who are expected correctly to apply the word of the Spirit are such as have the Spirit. The seventy elders who are called to assist Moses in the Government of Israel, are made partakers of the Spirit of the Lord, by whose directions they are brought forward. When Moses made asks successor, he is directed to take Joshua, a man in whom was the Spirit, and to lay his hands upon him and to set him before all the people. Those who are appointed to take charge of the temporal affairs of the primitive church must be men honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. The recognized minister of God must, all cases, be one who has the Spirit of God.” {AMS October 1886, p. 76.5}

Let us be sure that we do not misunderstand this matter. It is imperatively necessary that only men who have the Spirit should be placed at the political helm. If this were carried out, it would involve the striking out of the Iast clause of Article Six of the United States Constitution, which reads, “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Now since religion and the church are inseparable; it follows that what Mr. Sommerville considers as “imperative obligation” is nothing less than the union of Church and State. {AMS October 1886, p. 76.6}

Indeed, the latter part of the paragraph which we have quoted would indicate so close a union of Church and State that they will be identical. He would have the civil rulers correspond to the seventy leaders appointed to assist Moses in the government of Israel. But the Government of Israel was a theocracy, and in a theocracy the Government is the church. Among the Jews there were not two distinct organizations, the Church and the State, but every circumcised Jew was a member of the church, and circumcision was the badge of nationality. What Mr. Sommerville here implies, other national reformers openly assert, namely, that this Government ought to be modeled after the Jewish Government, and that this will be the case when their movement succeeds. Mr. Sommerville says, “Those who are appointed to take charge of the temporal affairs of the primitive church must be men of ‘honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.’” Remember that he is not giving a homily on the Christian church, but is writing about recognition of Christianity; and if the sentence which we have just quoted has anything to do with his subject, it means that the civil rulers of the United States should be regarded simply as ministers to take charge of the temporal affairs of the church. And this agrees exactly with what Mr. Foster says in a *Statesman* March, 1884: “The State and its sphere exist for and to serve the purpose of the church. If this does not imply union of Church and State we would like to have the National Reformers tell us what in their estimation would constitute such a union. {AMS October 1886, p. 76.7}

We would not be understood as implying that there was anything wrong in the Government of Israel. That form of government was instituted by the Lord himself. He chose the Jews as his peculiar people, and constituted himself their sole ruler. The men who were directly over the people were not chosen by the people but were appointed by the Lord, and they received directly from the mouth of the Lord instruction as to how the people should be governed. But none of these things can be paralleled in the United States, even though the National Reformers succeed in changing the Constitution to suit their own ideas; for the Lord has nowhere stated that he has chosen the people of the United States as his own peculiar people. On the contrary, we are told that he is “no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Moreover the National Reformers themselves do not claim that in the proposed new order of government God will himself appoint the rulers, for they expect that the rulers will be elected by the people, just as they are now. And they certainly are not so wild as to suppose that the rulers whom they may elect will be in personal connection with Heaven. Therefore while their proposed amendment will indeed be a union of Church and State, the union will not have the sanction of God, but will be an unlawful union. It will be in his sight adultery. By that unlawful union the church will be in the condition described in Revelation 18:1-3. {AMS October 1886, p. 76.8}

But Mr. Sommerville continues:- {AMS October 1886, p. 77.1}

“Civil rulers, then, are not sent to Rome or to Geneva, to Canterbury or Edinburgh, for information whether an association claiming to be the church, and presenting its creed, form of worship, and laws, is to be accepted; but, with all confidence, to the Word. There is no more difficulty pressing on the magistrate than on any other individual in determining what is to be his course, that he may honor the Sovereign at the head of his body, the church.” {AMS October 1886, p. 77.2}

This is in perfect accord with his idea that the State and the Church are to be identical, for he would have “an association claiming to be the church, and presenting its creed, form of worship and laws” accepted by the civil rulers. True he says that the rulers should go to the Bible to determine the proper creed, for of worship, and laws of the church that should be accepted by them, and says that the magistrate should have no more difficulty in determining his course in such a matter than any other individual; but when we consider how differences of opinion there are on these points, even among those who profess to be led by the Spirit, we can see only one way in which a magistrate could solve the problem with ease, and that would be to accept and uphold the creed, form of worship, and laws of that association which elected him to his position. {AMS October 1886, p. 77.3}

Sommerville proceeds: “Knowing then, the church, what is his [the magistrate’s] duty respecting it?” and answers his question as follows:- {AMS October 1886, p. 77.4}

It is the duty of civil rulers, in subordination to Christ, to recognize the church, its ordinances and its laws. It is not merely that the existence of such an organization is owned and tolerated, but a statutory arrangement, confessing the divine origin of the church, and the divine obligation resting on the Nation to accept its doctrine and order, and engaging to regulate their administration in conformity with its Constitution and object.” {AMS October 1886, p. 77.5}

The answer is plain enough even if it is not grammatically expressed. Civil rulers are to recognize the church, its ordinances, and its laws. This recognition, moreover, is not simply an acknowledgement of the church’s existence, but is to take the form of a statutory arrangement to enforce the ordinances, and laws of the church “in conformity with its Constitution and object.” The meaning of this is made still more clear by the wirer. He says further in the same article:- {AMS October 1886, p. 77.6}

“Civil rulers owe it to their supreme Lord and to society to encourage and to stimulate the church in its work of faith and labor of love, and, when it may be necessary, to give pecuniary aid to its ministers, that the gospel may be preached in every part of their dominions, and to all classes without respect of persons.” {AMS October 1886, p. 77.7}

And then he adds:- {AMS October 1886, p. 77.8}

“But shall we take-is it right to take-public money to teach principles, enforce laws, and introduce customs to which many members of the community are conscientiously opposed? Most certainly. The gospel from its very nature is aggressive, contemplates the rectification of corrupt, disorderly, and degraded human nature, casts down every high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of God, and brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” {AMS October 1886, p. 77.9}

The latter part of this last paragraph is eminently true. The gospel is indeed designed to purify corrupted, disorderly, and degraded human nature, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And the church is the channel through which the design of the gospel is to be effected. But Mr. Sommerville says, as quoted above, that it is the duty of civil rulers to enforce the ordinances, and laws of the church in conformity with its Constitution and object; which is equivalent to saying that it is the duty of the State to compel men to accept the gospel. In other words, what the church ought to do by persuasion, Mr. Sommerville would have the State do by force. {AMS October 1886, p. 77.10}

Note carefully the first part of the paragraph last quoted. Mr. Sommerville says that it is most certainly right to take public money to teach principles, enforce laws, and introduce customs to which many members of the community are conscientiously opposed. This can mean nothing less than that according to National Reform principles it is right to compel people to accept customs to which they are conscientiously opposed, and to make them contribute the means for this purpose. For he does not say simply, that it is right to take public money to *teach* principles to which many members of the community may be conscientiously opposed; that might be endured; but he says that the State may enforce church laws and customs, in opposition to the conscientious convictions of some of the citizens, provided, of course, it is only the minority that are thus opposed. But in any government the laws are enforced not upon one class of citizens but upon all; the law knows no difference in persons. Therefore we are justified in concluding that if Mr. Sommerville and the *Christian Nation* are competent exponents of National Reform doctrine, that doctrine contemplates nothing less than the *compelling* of every individual in the United States to conform to one certain set of religious laws, customs, and usages. This cannot be endured by freemen. {AMS October 1886, p. 77.11}

If in this article we have in any way misrepresented “National Reform” we shall esteem it a favor if some of its devotees will tell us wherein. If we have not, then it is as clear as the noonday sun that “National Reform” means a union of Church and State. National Reformers cannot deny this conclusion without recalling their indorsement of the *Christian Nation*. E. J. W. {AMS October 1886, p. 77.12}