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THE DEFENSE
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The Preservation
OF THE
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A . . .
RELIGIOUS POLITICAL
MOVEMENT.

ITS LOGICAL OUTCOME.

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A Religious Political Movement.

IT is well known that the most disastrous schemes, those fraught with the most crushing effects upon the peace and safety of communities and governments, have been conducted under the garb of religion. And the most extensive and relentless of these have been in the name of the Christian religion. Mark, it is not asserted that these organized and persistent efforts for the achievement of power have been urged on by Christianity, but *in the name of Christianity*. Nor is it maintained that those who originally paved the way for such excesses ever contemplated or comprehended the possible results of what were deemed desirable reforms. Such developments do not culminate in a day.

Everyone who has read the New Testament, whether he believes in Christ or not, knows that the many aspirations for power, and their terrible results, which have risen in the church and spread distress in various parts of the world, would not have been sanctioned by Christ himself. When the people would have taken him and by force made him king, he evaded their attempt and hid himself from them. When brought before the judgment-seat of his country and charged with designs to usurp the temporal kingdom, he declared that his kingdom was "not of this world;" and the judge who condemned him (Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea), was constrained to pronounce the accused innocent of any fault, giving him over to the mob only because he feared them.

Here is the strongest possible evidence that Christ himself never sought political prestige in his day. He evaded it when pressed upon him, and was declared innocent by the one most directly interested personally, when brought to trial upon such a charge. Moreover, his course is held up as an example for his followers for all time; and during the lives of his immediate successors, the same principle prevailed.

In the light of these well-authenticated statements, attention is called to a thoroughly-organized religious movement in the United States, whose object is to get control of the government in the name of Christianity. The scheme is under the auspices of an organization known as the "National Reform Association." It is sometimes called the "Religious Amendment Party," because of its purpose to secure a religious amendment to the Constitution of the United States. This object is popularly called an attempt to "put God in the Constitution." In the words of the association's platform, the aim is—

"To procure such an amendment to the Constitution of the United States (or its preamble) as will suitably acknowledge Almighty God as the author of the nation's existence, and the ultimate source of its authority, Jesus Christ as its ruler, and the Bible as the supreme rule of its conduct, and thus indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all Christian laws, institutions, and usages on an undeniable legal basis in the fundamental law of the land."

This society has been in existence twenty-five years, has rapidly grown in numbers and influence, containing among its numerous vice-presidents men in high station

of almost every profession. It maintains a corps of agents and lecturers, besides sustaining periodicals devoted to the cause it advocates. The idea of "national reform" is quite captivating, and to the unsuspecting individual who inclines to favor anything proffering reform, without close inspection, may cover almost any covert project.

It is not, however, charged that all who are connected with this association have any sinister motive in view; on the contrary, it may be admitted that even a majority of them are actuated by what they deem a conscientious desire to advance the cause of Christianity as they understand it, and to improve the government in accordance with their conceptions of reform. But it is certain that many are deceived by the idea that all evils may be remedied by civil law, and are ready to appeal to the civil government as the regulator of every relation in life. Many have been lured into sympathy with the objects of this society, as they appear on the surface, and as the projectors no doubt originally comprehended them, who have not looked forward to the logical outcome if successful.

Mr. J. H. Waggoner, who attended the National Convention of the association held at Pittsburg, Pa., in 1874, and has made thorough investigation of the subject by comparison with like principles as developed in other countries in past ages, has given the following analysis of the inevitable logical results of such a movement, if fully carried out:—

"1. The Constitution of the United States must be so amended as to permit laws to be made which shall legalize the laws and institutions of Christianity, or of that which they may claim is Christianity. They ask that

these laws, institutions, and usages shall be 'put on a legal basis.' Of course to be put on a legal basis they must be made matters of legal enforcement. That this is the object of that association, real and avowed, we promise to clearly show.

"2. To carry this amendment into effect, any person who refuses to obey the laws and usages of Christianity must be subjected to penalties for his neglect or disobedience. As no law can exist without a penalty, no institutions or usages can be placed on a legal basis without authorizing penalties for their enforcement. This is undeniable.

"3. A person can be convicted of a misdemeanor only before a court of justice, on the text of the law and the hearing of evidence.

"4. The court is necessarily constituted the judge and exponent of the law; and, therefore, if disagreement arises as to the meaning of the law, or as to what constitutes a misdemeanor in the premises, the court is the authority, and the sole authority, to which appeal must be made.

"5. And, therefore, if a question arises as to what is or what is not Christian law, usage, or institution, it must be determined by a court of justice! Or, if it be said that it need not be left to the decision of a civil court, but such questions may be referred to an ecclesiastical court, then the reply is: No matter what is the nature of the court by which such questions shall be decided, the fact remains that the subject of Christian faith and practice will be removed from the domain of individual conscience, and placed in the hands of a legal tribunal, which shall decide what is and what is not Christian faith and prac-

tice,—what we may and what we may not believe and practice as professed Christians!

“6. There are many different churches and religions, or forms of religion, in the land, and no constitutional provision or judicial decision can declare that *all these* are conformable to Christian faith and practice. To so decide would be equivalent to making a law that everyone should do as he pleased, in reference to Christian usages, which would amount to no law at all. And that is just the opposite of that for which the amendment party is striving.

“7. It needs no extended argument to show that if the avowed object of that association is carried into effect, *somebody's religious rights* and privileges will be trampled down. It would, then, of necessity, be decided that nobody has any right to hold to a religious usage contrary to the decisions of the court, and *dissenters* must abide the consequences. And it would make no difference how small were the minority whose consciences were held in restraint by a legal tribunal, it would still be *religious oppression*, a thing so odious in the eyes of every *true American citizen*.

“8. And inasmuch as all creeds and faiths cannot possibly be embraced in such an amendment to our Constitution,—cannot possibly be alike upheld by the decisions of the courts, said decisions being based upon one and the same law,—if the object of that association is ever carried out it will be only by an *established religion* in our beloved land, wherein we have hitherto rejoiced over the despotisms of the Old World, in that our government has protected the liberty of conscience of all her citizens, in all her borders. Now we do not care what the ‘re-

form' may be called which seeks this object, or under what specious pretense it may be carried into effect, it will be nothing less than a complete union of civil and ecclesiastical power in one and the same State or in the same court; a union of 'Church and State' in all the odiousness of such a combination; for it ever has and ever will be only odious and oppressive. And the tribunal which decides what may and what may not be held as Christian usage or institution, and enforces its decisions by requisite penalties, can be no less than *the Inquisition revived*.

"That the aims and objects of this association are not misapprehended, and have not been misstated, can be abundantly proved by their own language. In the Fifth National Convention of the association, held in Pittsburg, Pa., in February, 1874, Prof. C. A. Blanchard delivered an address on 'The Conflict of Law,' which was enthusiastically received by the convention, in which occurred the following words:—

"'Constitutional laws punish for false money, weights, and measure, and of course Congress establishes a standard for money, weight, and measure. *So Congress must establish a standard of religion*, or admit anything called religion.'

"But this can only be accomplished by an entire change in our government; by a complete 'union of Church and State.' And, in addition to the points here stated, there is the following most decisive objection to the movement:—

"9. If Christian institutions be put on a legal basis, not only will the rights and consciences of dissenting denominations be trampled underfoot, but those having no

Christian faith will be compelled to conform to these institutions without having any religious convictions. They readily concede that you cannot compel a man into Christian belief, or make a man a Christian by law; and they say they have no intention to make the effort. No; they only wish to compel them by law *to act as if they were Christians*. However deeply it may be regretted that we cannot by law compel people to be Christians, it is but slight relief to pursue a course which will compel them to be hypocrites!

“ 10. To accomplish all this,—to establish a legal standard of religion,—it will be an unavoidable necessity that the government shall be administered by professed Christians only. And it needs no great insight into politics and human nature to foresee that every political hack and office-seeking demagogue in the land will *join the church* as a means to elevation to office. If the churches were not already corrupted by worldly influences they would not seek this alliance with the State. But what must be the corruption in religious bodies when union with a church becomes a prerequisite to office under the government? ”

Those who argue that religious persecution would be an impossible thing under this republican government, are reminded that such an amendment would entirely change the possibilities in that respect; and the opening of the door would be a virtual bid for such things to come in. Our freedom from the excesses of political religion is only guaranteed by the fact that it has not yet the law to sustain it. Once the ground is prepared through the enactment of fostering legislation, the excesses will grow as rapidly in American soil as anywhere else. Our safety lies in persistent prevention.