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## NATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

A NEW quarterly publication, entitled *Sunday Reform Leaflets*, has been started in Columbus, Ohio, by Rev. Dr. Edward Thomson, formerly Pacific Coast secretary of the American Sabbath Union, now general manager of the Sunday League of America, another member of the "National Reform" combination. This initial number of the *Leaflets* is entitled "Is This a Christian Nation?" In this particular document the imagination seems to have been strained to the utmost to sustain the delusive Christian-nation theory. It is the purpose of these comments to note a few of the more extravagant assertions. Of the men who composed the Constitutional Convention the editor says:—

**The Constitution which these great and good men made at that time is a distinctively Christian document.**

The reader should bear in mind that the author of that expression has been for several years a prominent factor in the American Sabbath Union, which is a close ally, if not indeed a direct offspring, of the National Reform Association, which for about thirty years has been combating the *unchristian* character of the Constitution, because it does not recognize God. This association arose from the ranks of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, one of whose prominent tenets is to refrain from voting until the godless character of the Constitution has been changed. So we see that the testimony of these yokefellows in political Christianity fails to agree on this prominent point in their Christian doctrine. Following is another paragraph, which contains a number of absurdities:—

**In the first article of our Constitution, we find a Sunday law: The President of the United States "shall have ten days, Sundays excepted, in which to consider each bill" that comes before him from Congress.**

**Our fathers expected the President to be a Christian man, and the White House a Christian home—where Sunday would be a day of rest and worship, and they proposed to protect the Chief Executive in the enjoyment of this privilege.**

Yes, that Sunday law, if you choose to call it such, was designed to protect the President in his right to observe Sunday if he wanted to do so, but there is no intimation of a compulsory observance. He can sign bills all day Sunday if he so desires, and the bills are not thereby invalidated. So the Constitution, "Sunday law" and all, protects the President in his right to keep Sunday or not to keep it, just as he pleases. If "our fathers expected the President to be a Christian man," why did they insert in the Constitution the provision that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States"? See Article VI, paragraph 3. Again we quote from the *Leaflets* as follows:—

**They [our fathers] plainly intended this should be a Christian nation of the best type, as is evident from an examination into the various departments of our government.**

We can better learn what our fathers "plainly intended" by reference to some of their own utterances. George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison were the first four Presidents under the Constitution. Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were leading members of the convention that framed the Constitution, Washington being chairman. Adams was at the time doing important diplomatic service in Europe; however, he was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and the first Vice President under the new Constitution. The actions or expressions of these men would naturally be deemed better evidence of what was "plainly intended" by themselves and associates than any assumption on the part of Church-and-State enthusiasts of the present day.

During the last year of Washington's second term as President he had executed and signed a "treaty of peace and friendship" with the Government of Tripoli, in which it was expressly stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." By the time the treaty had been forwarded to Tripoli and returned,

Washington's term of office had expired, and John Adams was President. By President Adams the treaty was promptly presented to the Senate and ratified. So that these two prominent "fathers" showed by this act that it was "plainly intended" by them that this should "*not, in any sense,*" be regarded as a Christian nation. Now, as to the political force of a treaty entered into by the United States, we submit paragraph 2 of Article VI of the Constitution: "This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and *all treaties* made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, *shall be the supreme law of the land*; and the judges of every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding."

The editor of *Sunday Reform Leaflets* says that "George Washington stood before the people with one hand upon the Bible and the other lifted to heaven, and, in this most solemn manner, he was sworn as first President of the United States." Well, suppose he was; he was not obliged to be thus sworn. The Constitution provides the following form of "oath or affirmation:" "I do solemnly swear (*or affirm*) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Suppose George Washington to have been a Christian in the strictest sense, it does not follow that he expected to make every other citizen acknowledge Christianity as the true religion. Washington evidently had sense enough to know that no action of a civil government could make individuals Christians, and therefore no such action could make a nation Christian. Washington had no doubt read the history of Rome, and knew just what kind of a Christian nation that was after it had been so declared by the Emperor Constantine and the Senate. The more of a Christian Washington was, the better he would know that civil laws and civil court decisions could not produce Christianity, either in individuals or nations.

Thomas Jefferson has left on record very emphatic declarations showing what the fathers "plainly intended" when they laid the foundation of the government. In a letter dated January 23, 1808,

during his second term as President, he said: "I consider the Government of the United States *interdicted by the Constitution* from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises." In harmony with this principle he refused to proclaim either fasts or festivals. He declined to even *recommend* a day of fasting and prayer. In the letter above quoted he says: "I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies, that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them, an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the Constitution has deposited it."

James Madison has left documentary evidence of what was "plainly intended" by the Constitution so far as he was concerned. In a convention in his native State (Virginia) he uttered the following sentiment: "There is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion; its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation." And in a memorial to the General Assembly of the State in 1785, against a bill proposing a general tax for teaching the Christian religion, we find the following expression of his views on religious liberty: "Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and to observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to them whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us. If this freedom be abused, it is an offense against God, not against man. To God, therefore, not to man, must an account of it be rendered."

In a letter on this subject to General Lafayette, Mr. Madison said: "The memorial was *so extensively signed by the various religious sects*, including a considerable portion of the old hierarchy, that the projected innovation was crushed."

But the editor of *Sunday Reform Leaflets* gives us a further modern construction of what the constitutional fathers intended:—

It is said Congress is prohibited from establishing religion, in the First Amendment to the Constitution. But what was understood by an "establishment of religion," when that amendment was adopted, was a State church, and nothing else was thought of at that time. That phrase was in common use, and applied universally to the State church, which had recently been disestablished in Virginia. Congress was thus prohibited from taxing the people for the support of the old "Church of England in America," or for the support of any other branch of the Christian church. But it was not understood as prohibiting the support of Christianity.

This expression is well refuted in the quotations from Mr. Madison which immediately precede it, but we will add a little more from the abundance that is available. In the same memorial from which we have already quoted, Mr. Madison said: "Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish, with the same ease, any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects."

Again, in a letter to Mr. Edward Livingston, speaking of religious liberty, Mr. Madison wrote as follows: "Notwithstanding the general progress made within the last two centuries in favor of this branch of liberty, and the full establishment of it in some parts of our country, there remains in others a strong bias towards *the old error*,—that, without some sort of alliance or coalition between government and religion, neither can be duly supported. Such, indeed, is the tendency to such a coalition, and such its corrupting influence on both the parties, that the danger cannot be too carefully guarded against. . . . Religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together."

And in a letter from Mr. Madison to Edward Everett there occurs this expression: "Religion is essentially distinct from civil government, and exempt from its cognizance; a connection between them is injurious to both."

Another extract from the *Sunday Leaflets* is as follows:—

**Congress is continually acknowledging God, and at every session appropriating money out of the public treasury for the more firm establishment and propagation of the Christian religion. Each House of Congress has its chaplain, a minister of some Christian church. He prays at each day's session, visits sick members as a pastor, and buries, with**

**Christian burial, any that may die during the session, performing the functions of a pastor, each house being, in a certain sense, a Christian church.**

It is well to prefix the qualification, "in a certain sense," but we may well ask, In what certain sense? Of all the pastoral burlesques, the *pastorate* of the Houses of Congress takes the lead. We have heard of all sorts of criminality, immorality, and debauchery on the part of members of Congress, but we never yet heard of any disciplinary measures by the *pastor*. Some of the worst congressional scandals have been in connection with the "Christian burial" of members. If we are to consider congressional chaplains as pastors, is it not high time their denominations, or the country at large, were calling them to account for the demoralized condition of their charges? It would be interesting to know how many members of Congress recognize the pastoral relation of their chaplain. By the way, if the chaplains are pastors of the House of Congress, is it not the duty of the members to pay the salaries of their pastors? That is the way the common people have to do. Perhaps the chaplains are *missionary pastors* "in a certain sense," but we have evidence that this chaplain business is a deviation from the "plainly intended" principles of "our fathers."

In the letter to Edward Livingston, before referred to, Mr. Madison said: "I observe with particular pleasure the view you have taken of the immunity of religion from civil jurisdiction in every case where it does not trespass on private rights or the public peace. This has always been a favorite principle with me; and it was not with my approbation that the deviation from it took place in Congress, when they appointed chaplains, to be paid from the national treasury."

The editor of *Leaflets* continues the chaplain question a little further, in the following enthusiastic outburst:—

**The "boys in blue" that leave the touch of mother and the sweet influence of home and church are provided with Christianity at government expense. With every regiment of our soldiers, and with every squadron that sails the deep and carries the stars and stripes, there goes a minister of the Christian religion, who draws his salary out of the national treasury.**

The writer has not had any experience in the navy, but he knows that if that paragraph were read to "the boys" in the army garrisons, it would create no little merriment. The Christianity that is provided "at government expense" is decidedly a creature of the imagination so far as the army is concerned, and it would be hard to conceive of such a Christianity in any other circle. The writer spent about two years at the Presidio of San Francisco, during which time the command numbered from 500 to 1,000 persons. He was a personal friend of the post chaplain, and knows that said chaplain never pretended to visit the quarters of the enlisted men. He would visit the post hospital if sent for, or if some acquaintance were confined there. He was supposed to preach every Sunday, and fulfilled that duty about half the time. When he did preach, although quite a talented man and good speaker, his audiences did not average over a score, and they were mostly women and children. It was a rare thing to see half a dozen soldiers present, and there were seldom more than two or three officers there. Those who had had much experience said it was so everywhere—the chaplaincy was the veriest sinecure.

But that was in war times, when the brethren of this "Christian nation" were doing their best to annihilate one another, and "Christian" ministers were wielding carnal weapons on both sides of the bloody contest. Perhaps the Christianity "provided at government expense" then was of a lower grade than that which is supplied at the present time. There is one difference, but whether it be an improvement or not the reader may judge. In those days citizens were appointed as sutlers, with the privilege of selling beer and other goods in garrison or on the march. Now the government keeps a "canteen" at each post, and this "Christian nation" conducts a beer business on its own account; and we have the humiliating spectacle of army officers ("at government expense") dealing out the intoxicating beverage to the "boys in blue."

A few chaplains did speak out against the "canteen" disgrace, but ere long there came general orders from headquarters of the army that if they did not cease to criticise the government, they would be court-martialed. We have not heard of any of them resigning their positions, or being court-martialed, and the presump-

tion is they hold their peace with reference to the greatest evil with which they are brought in contact. Query: What can be said of the Christian influence of a minister who dare not protest against a flagrant evil indulged by his particular flock, through fear of losing his position? When the editor of *Leaflets* says of the chaplain that he "draws his salary out of our national treasury," he has told the whole story.

Whoever can look upon the workings of this government, in any of its departments—which are in large measure manipulated in the selfish interests of parties, monopolies, cliques, and scheming individuals—whoever, we say, can seriously ponder these things and call it Christian work, must have very crude ideas of Christianity. Christian duty is thus set forth by the Lord himself: "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." On this principle, how will our "Christian nation" account for its army and navy? How will it account for the annihilated Indians? How about the vast territory wrnched from her next-door neighbor, Mexico?

Alas! there can be no just claim of Christianity where the Spirit of Christ does not dictate the action. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Rom. 8:9. How, then, can a nation be Christian without that Spirit? It is not enough that it be so labeled by a human court, no matter how high its dignity may be. Human Supreme Court decisions will not count in the final judgment.

W. N. GLENN.

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