

WHY COVENANTERS DO NOT VOTE

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I. EXPLANATION

We are in the midst of a great national political campaign. It is a significant hour. The issue rests on what the individual voter will do, and people have a perfect right to turn to us Covenanters and say: "Why don't you vote? Since this is a free country and ours is a government by the people, and since there are important issues to be met, why don't you take hold and help settle them? Is it through lack of patriotism, or because of indifference?

Would not there be anarchy if all others do as you do? What are your reasons?"

Such questions are to the point; and while it will not make a great deal of difference who is elected, it is after all important. Those who vote ought to have a good reason for the way they vote; and those of us who do not vote should likewise have a very good reason for not going to the polls.

Now in answering these questions, let us proceed at first by way of elimination. Let us clear the ground of any possible misconceptions that may exist in the mind of any. We will here consider certain things that are not reasons for our refraining from voting.

It is *not because of indifference* that we stay away from the polls; not because we do not care for certain issues, or certain parties, or certain men. We read the newspapers, we talk these matters over. We have our preferences. We also pray for our country, contribute to the work of reform, and agitate in behalf of a better government. We are deeply interested.

It is *not because we do not love our country.*

This tract has been shortened, but nothing has been added except a few corrections.

I challenge the average citizen to show more patriotism than does the average Covenanter. In the Civil War many of our people fought on the side of the North for the overthrow of slavery, and the preservation of the Union. Not a single instance has been shown of a Covenanter who fought on the side of the South. The Stars and stripes are dear to us. This is our country. We are patriots. Many of our young men served loyally in the World War.

We do not stay away from the polls because we think that *the Christian should not engage in politics*. We do not believe that politics is sinful in itself, that it belongs to the Devil, and that the Christian man must always stand aloof from it. What we believe is that politics under certain conditions is sinful. On the other hand, I am sure that our people believe even more than the average Christian believes, that it is a man's sacred duty in a democratic form of government to go to the polls and vote, if there is no immoral condition present. It is either a sin to vote, or not to vote; and if conditions were what we could approve, I am sure you would find that the percentage of absentees among our people would be considerably smaller than it is among people in general.

It is not because we are *opposed to the present form of government*, the democratic, the republican form, a government by the people. We believe that the republican is the best form of government.

Nor is it because we deny this government rightful authority. We think it is defective, but we do not say it has no authority. A son has no right to disobey his parents because one or both of them are not Christian people. We obey the laws of our country, not because we must, but because we ought. We recognize that the government has in some measure, at least, proper authority over us.

Nor do we stay away from the polls because we are opposed to the character of the laws of

this government. Some of them are wrong, of course; but many, perhaps the majority of them, are right.

But now let us proceed to the consideration of reasons why, when on election day many of our citizens will go to the polls, the Covenanter will stay away; and as we endeavor to explain our position, it will be the aim to give not only what seems scriptural and logical to the speaker, but what will more or less fully describe the present attitude of the Covenanter Church, and its historic position on this matter. Let us notice here a few plain truths:

Every Christian man must take the law of Christ with him into every sphere of action.

Christ is king in every sphere of your life, not only of your heart and your church, your office and your home, but your social life, and your politics. Christ has purchased the whole man, and a man's relational life must be under Christ's control. Wherever we go, whatever we do, in whatever relation we act, we still belong to Jesus Christ. We have given ourselves to him wholly. We say: "Where he leads me, I will follow, and where he does not lead me, I will not go."

Then a man can't consistently be a Christian in his own room, and a heathen behind the counter. He can't be a Christian at the prayer-meeting, and a worldling at the card table. He can't be a Christian in the church pew, and a pagan at the ballot box. If John Smith the father asks the blessings at the meals, and John Smith the carpenter puts poor lumber in the building, John Smith the man is responsible for both. If John Smith conducts family worship at home, and at the store puts sand in the sugar, John Smith the man is responsible for both.

This government is a representative government.

If it were an absolute monarchy, each man's responsibility would, except in a general

sense, be small. If it were a limited monarchy, each citizen's responsibility would be greater, but less than it now is. Ours is a republican form of government, a democracy, and therefore the people rule, or are supposed to do so.

Of course, there is much bossism, much ring rule, and much rule by parties in the present hour. We have something of an oligarchy at times, and not pure democracy; yet theoretically, and more or less in practice, the people rule, and therefore the responsibility rests upon the people, upon the voter. This is the second step in our explanation.

The authoritative standard in our government is the Constitution. Ours is a constitutional government. The Constitution is the supreme law, the basis of government. Bear this in mind as one more step in the argument.

Observe, the standard is not your own rules of conduct, or your own desires. The standard of government is not the moral sentiment that prevails among the people, and that expresses itself so fully in our laws and customs; nor is the standard the many Christian institutions and features of our national life, nor is it the great body of our laws.

The basis of our government is not political platforms; and whoever is elected will take the oath of office, not to his platform, but to the Constitution of the country.

We have a written fundamental law. That is the basis of our legislation and governmental action. We do not say that other things may not have interpreting power with regard to the Constitution, but it after all is the rule of action.

Now observe clearly that every voter must subscribe to this document. This is a representative government and every considerable officer must subscribe to this fundamental law before assuming his official position. In taking the oath to the constitution, he acts for you and me, as well as for himself.

The fundamental law of a nation must con-

tain such provisions as will honor the King of nations and also furnish a basis for the settlement of moral civil questions. This is the next step in our explanation.

It must honor Jesus Christ. If God has given the Mediator all authority in heaven and on earth if Jesus is the rightful king over all men, and of all proper institutions; if Jesus is the King of kings, and if a constitution is a nation's profession of faith; if the latter is a great object lesson held constantly before the people; if it is the highest source of legislation; then it should distinctly acknowledge the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him." We cannot properly exercise authority under Christ without plainly recognizing the source of this authority.

Moreover, a Constitution is for the settlement of moral as well as of economic questions; not only for the adjustment of such things as revenue, taxation, tariff, finances, etc. Then what about such questions as Temperance, or Divorce, or the Sabbath Day? Clearly there should be in our written fundamental law a moral basis for the settlement of such preeminently important questions.

Now, from this view point let us examine our Constitution. Take it up and read it. We find it an interesting, able and remarkable document.

Surely we shall find in this magna charta of our liberty some devout recognition of divine authority! Surely, in view of God's providential kindness in the discovery of America, in such events as the landing of the Pilgrims, and their solemn compact in the cabin of the Mayflower—"In the name of God, Amen,"—surely, in view of the statement in the Declaration of Independence about "a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," and in view of the fact that twelve of the thirteen original State constitutions contain explicit acknowledgments of God and Chris-

tianity, we shall find some devout recognition of God in this remarkable document!

We turn the pages of the Constitution and seek for some acknowledgment of God. We turn the pages carefully; but—we find no mention of him.

We look again to see if Jesus Christ the king of men and nations be recognized, and again we find no reference to him, except in date; and that can have no moral significance.

We look still further for some reference to the Word of God as a source of jurisprudence and a guide in legislation, but we find none.

Now what is our national basis for the settlement of the Temperance question, or the Sabbath question, or the matter of Divorce? Do we say these are State questions, rather than national questions? But they certainly are national questions, and provision should be made for meeting such by our national Constitution. And there are hosts of moral issues in our national life.

Let us examine the Constitution still further. We come to the oath prescribed for the President. It says, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute," etc. No reference is made here to the authority of God. Contrast this oath with that taken by John Haynes when inaugurated Governor of Connecticut in 1639—"I do swear by the great and dreadful name of the ever living God, to promote," etc., "so help me God, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." An official who took an oath like that would feel that it meant something. Compare the oath of the President with the scriptural injunction, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." An oath is not an oath if the appeal to God be left out.

As we examine further the Constitution, we observe that it states that "no religious test shall ever be required" as a qualification for office. Observe that it does not say no "sectarian" or "denominational" test. Such a pro-

vision as the latter would naturally have been proper. Of course it may be that some of the members of the Constitutional Convention intended some such interpretation to be placed upon it, but the omission of the divine name from the presidential oath and the provision that no religious test should be required for office were manifestly intended to harmonize; and it should also be distinctly observed that to have presented an oath with an appeal to God would have been a religious test. There should never be any denominational test; but there should be a moral, religious test. Does character count for nothing? We are to provide "able men, such as fear God."

It is also well to remember that the Constitutional Convention began its sessions without prayer, notwithstanding the fact that Benjamin Franklin proposed that they should ask the guidance of God in their duties. It has been stated that prayer was offered, but the historical evidence leads to the opposite conclusion.

Again, it should be remembered that the first Congress which convened under the new Constitution was sworn in with an appeal to God, but that the first act which this Congress passed was to provide an oath with it left out.

Let us now come to the application of all this in our political life. Let us keep carefully in mind what has already been said. You are approaching the ballot box. It is a solemn act. Should you not as a Christian voter think somewhat as follows—"I am a Christian man, and must take Christ with me wherever I go. This is a representative government. The man for whom I vote, if elected, will take the oath of office for me, but the fundamental law which must guide him, and me, does not recognize the authority of God, nor his law. God's name is even dropped out of the President's oath. My depositing this ballot is an agreement on my part to continue the government

on its present secular basis, Am I willing so to do?" And the Covenanter says: "No!"

2. OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

There are many objections to the Covenanter position of not voting. It is not strange that this is so. Some of these are worthy of consideration. If this were not true, all clear headed, consistent Christian people would be on our side. Let us listen then with care and patience to the consideration of some objections that have been made to the Covenanter position on voting, or that might be brought against it.

1. "There must be civil government. Society cannot get along without it. We cannot expect it to be perfect. Every man owes certain duties to the society in which he finds himself. He cannot avoid responsibility for it. Should we not all take hold and help along the government as best we may? We are not responsible for the defects in it."

On the whole I think that this is the strongest argument that can be brought against our position; but let us remember that nothing needs to exist on a wrong basis; that we are not absolved from doing wrong because it may seem to us necessary. Because the family is necessary, and marriage a duty under natural conditions, a man would not be justified in getting married on wrong conditions. He would not be justified in marrying his neighbor's wife.

We acknowledge that there are certain duties in civil life which every man is under obligation to perform. He cannot possibly avoid them, but one of his first duties is to refuse to identify himself with anything that is evil in civil affairs. He owes that to his country as well as to his God. That is true patriotism.

2. "Well you cannot mix religion and politics. It is like trying to mix oil and water, or

fire and water, or putting sand in sugar. They will not go well together. It has been tried in the Old World with disastrous results. It resulted in persecution. They must be kept apart."

Covenanters do not wish a union of church and state. Such a union would not be the same as the union of religion and the state. When church and state are united, two organizations are brought together and either the church controls the state, or the state controls the church. When a man is wedded to a woman two persons are united; but when a man is wedded to an idea the union is not of the same kind. Christian principle in the nation is what we desire.

We must mix religion and politics. We might just as well speak of not mixing religion and business, or religion and social life, or religion and the home. Boodlers don't wish to such heavy graft in erecting our Capitol at Hamsburg did not mix religion and politics. Neither do the men who hold caucuses in saloons desire to mix the ten commandments with their politics. If we do not mix religion and politics, we simply let politics go to the devil.

3. "There is so much Christianity in our government that we fail to see why you Covenanters should feel obliged to stand aloof. You seem to forget how much Christianity there is in our national life. Remember the Mayflower; early colonial documents; the Declaration of Independence; the recognition of the divine authority in nearly all of the thirteen original State constitutions; the inscription on our coins, "In God We Trust;" the chaplains in the army and navy and Congress; the oath in courts of Justice; the Bible in so many of our public schools; the Thanksgiving Days appointed by the President and State Governors; the resolution adopted by the United States Senate in 1863; and the more recent statements of our Supreme Court, that this is a Christian nation.

Why you Covenanter friends seem to forget that our government is simply undergirded and permeated by the principles of Christianity."

Yes, and we might offset this in great measure by recalling the fact that the Constitutional Convention declined to ask God's guidance in its most important work, and that in 1797 in a treaty with Tripoli we said, "The government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." Also, we should remember the Sabbath Mail service conducted by the government, and the twenty-five different legal grounds of divorce that are found in our country, as well as one thousand other plain failures on the part of the government to harmonize with God's law.

But what we want to say just here in answer to this objection is this, that these Christian features, for which we are profoundly grateful, are not the basis of government, not the test of citizenship, but it is the Constitution. That is the foundation, and about Christ it is silent.

4. "The lack of reference to God in the fundamental law is only a small matter. It is just the name of God in the Constitution. Don't quibble. There is nothing perfect here anyhow. Don't stay out of the government on a mere technicality. You would not do any Christian work, if you waited until all conditions were perfectly satisfactory."

We reply by saying that the error in our governmental life is not small, not technical, not indifferent, but is fundamental, vital. Do you mean to say, Christian brother, for a moment, that the omission of God from the Constitution, and of Christ, and of reference to his law, and the removal of God's name from the Presidential oath, are small matters? We answer that such omissions are tremendous, deep-seated, far-reaching matters.

Observe that our objection is not to errors of administration. The governor of a State

may fail to bring lynchers to justice. The mayor of our city may fail to close up disorderly houses. But we are not staying out of the government because of such failures as these; nor is the Covenanter objection merely to bad legislation. We do object to the twenty-five grounds of divorce; but such objections, if the Constitution were right, would not be sufficient to keep us from participating in the government.

5. "You Covenanters pay taxes, and you pay them even for conscience' sake. Thus you recognize the government by supporting it. Does this not make you responsible for it?"

Of course we do pay our taxes as has been stated, not because we must, but because we should. We are protected by the government, and enjoying this protection and our liberty, we feel that we should render a proper equivalent. Remember we do not deny this government some authority. We believe that we should obey its proper laws. Observe here, however, that a taxpayer is not necessarily a member of the governmental firm. The alien, the minor, even the non-resident, all pay taxes; and our being taxpayers does not make us members of the governmental society.

6. "But here are Biblical examples for you Covenanters. There was Joseph in the land of Egypt and he was a man of fine character. He was a prime minister under Pharaoh. There was Nehemiah who held office under the King of Persia; and there was Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and also Daniel, who held office in Babylon. If these men held office under these heathen governments, surely you Covenanters must be immaculate, if you cannot hold office under such a good government as that of the United States."

But notice, my voting friend, that these were not constitutional governments, not representative governments. They were not carried on by voting on the part of the peo-

ple. These officials were not asked to swear solemnly to support a written constitution of government that contained no recognition of the authority of God. There is no reason to assume that in the discharge of their official duties they were called upon to take any such position as this. We have no evidence that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who faced the burning fiery furnace rather than worship a golden image, would have accepted on oath a fundamental law that contained no recognition of the authority of the Lord of heaven?

7. "But the Constitution has a provision for its own amendment. You don't swear to keep it just as it is. Nobody claims it is perfect, and you can accept it, intending all the time to secure as soon as possible the changes which you think to be necessary."

Yes, it is a good thing that the Constitution has such a provision. It is not perfect. It has had twenty-one amendments already and will no doubt need more but it is to be kept clearly in mind that the officer and voter accept it as it is, not as they hope it will be, nor as they intend to make it. You are not freed from its present stipulations because you intend to change them as soon as you can. Let us keep in mind that the candidate elected will swear to support not his own conviction, nor even his party platform, but the Constitution.

8. "Well, then, you Covenanters should not live in this country. If you cannot help to conduct the government on its present basis, you should go somewhere else and leave this country to those who feel free to carry on the government."

It is a trifle, just a trifle illogical, and we may say unchristian and unbrotherly, to turn to the man who can't take part in the government because God is not acknowledged in it, and say to him he ought to get out of this country and go some place else.

9. "I think such an amendment to the Constitution as your Covenanters desire would be an infringement upon the rights of others who do not agree with you, such as the Jew, the secularist, and the infidel. You have no right to enforce your convictions on them."

We reply, first, that a nation has rights of its own, and duties of its own. It is a moral person, and responsible to the moral Governor. Shall a nation, because of the objections of some, forget its own obedience to God?

The Lord Jesus Christ has rights. It is God's purpose that to him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. The day is coming when all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. He has purchased this exaltation by his death on the cross, and we have no right to withhold from him the honor which is his due.

10. "If all men did as you do, anarchy would result. Some people must carry on the government. If all good people did as you do, affairs would go into the worst hands."

Do we not see also that this objection is on the basis of apparent necessity; that the end justifies the means? If it is wrong to engage in governmental activity in the present hour, no argument will justify it. Are we so afraid of God's work failing that we must do wrong to keep it from failing? Yet we do not fear to meet this argument. We must leave consequences with God. "Do right though the heavens fall," but we know that they never fall. It is not our business to take care of God's work by the sacrifice of conscience.

"I am glad to think
I am not bound to make this world go right;
But only to discover and to do with cheerful
heart
The work that God appoints. I will trust in
him
That he can hold his own; and I will take his
will,

Above the work he sendeth me, to be my chiefest good."

11. "You Covenanters are simply throwing away your votes. You are free citizens, and yet you do not care to take part in the great privileges which this government offers you."

There are many others who throw away their votes. Many million people throw away their votes, and few of them apparently for conscientious reasons.

No man who votes for a right principle throws away his vote.

12. "You Covenanters are not doing anything. You simply fold your hands, and sit idly by while others carry on the government. You let others do the work, and you enjoy the fruit of their labors. Yours is a do-nothing policy. You are drones in the political beehive."

We are not afraid for a moment to meet this argument, or rather accusation. The most prominent thing about it is that it is untrue, tremendously false. Let us endeavor to consider in how many ways a man can serve his country. 1. He can lead an orderly life. 2. He can help in the enforcement of law. 3. He can pay his taxes. 4. He can agitate for moral reform. 5. He can contribute of his means to such reform. 6. He can pray. 7. He can sacrifice time and strength for his country. 8. He can fight in its defense.

In how many ways according to this analysis can a man serve his country? Eight; and the Covenanter serves in every respect. Does he lead an orderly life? Not many of them are found in jail. He helps in law enforcement. He pays his taxes. He continually agitates for reform. Covenanters have often fought in defense of their country, and yet, because we do not vote, we are sometimes told that we do nothing.

Is there any other body of people in this country that is doing more to present important truth in the political sphere and to

place our nation on a permanently prosperous basis than the Covenanter Church?

The position of protest is a position of power. Remember Elijah, how he spoke the truth to Ahab. Shadrach and his friends in the hour of danger in Babylon did not acquiesce until the storm would pass by, but boldly said, "We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Would they have acted more wisely and effectively to have yielded, and then in some quiet hour to have approached the king with their message? Peter and the other Apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than man." The strokes of Luther's hammer as he nailed the ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg are still heard in the world. The old time Abolitionists would not accept the Constitution because they believed it supported slavery. They asserted that it was a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell. They refused to vote or incorporate with any political party; and a prominent leader of their day has said that they did more to overthrow slavery than all other influences combined.

A great difficulty in connection with this whole subject is that men fail so much to take the Christian viewpoint in politics. We have lurched so far from the approval of the union of church and state, that we have come to a great measure to the conception of civil government as entirely worldly. We have been afraid of mixing religion and politics that we have given politics over to the devil. We have become so sensitive to the right of conscience that we have forgotten the rights of Christ. We have been so concerned for the rights of the minority that we have forgotten the right of the majority. We have so considered

claims of the Jews and the secularist that we have forgotten the rights of the Christian. We have so considered the rights of the individual that we have overlooked the rights of the nation. In our concern for the rights of man we have forgotten the rights of God.

He is the true patriot who refuses to identify himself with any evil in his country's life, and when some future historian shall write the history of the United States he will trace a golden thread back to those who in these days were willing, even at the price of criticism and scorn, to stay out of the government because Jesus Christ was left out.



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