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J. M. McCaleb

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FROM
A CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT

BY

J. M., McCaleb



FROM A CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT.

God being supreme must have the first place in the hearts of his creatures. Having the power to kill and to make alive he must have homage over every human being. I am a Christian first, and second a citizen of my country. The Christian viewpoint is not national but universal, not for one nation but for all and without respect of persons.

Always remembering he is first subject to the law of God, a Christian should submit to the laws of the country where he dwells, maintaining an attitude of passive submission to law rather than an active participation in political affairs. In case he is called upon to do that which is a violation of Christian principles, he cannot do otherwise than decline and submit himself to whatever penalty, if any, the powers may see fit to inflict. His rule of conduct must be to bless those who persecute him and to return good for evil.

Recently a friend expressed surprise that the Christian nations of Europe should be at war. I suggested that it is because they go on the principle of, My country first and Christ second. He replied by saying it was the same in Japan. It is not only the same in Japan but in every other country whether called Christian or not.

But it is worthy of note that the Founder of the Christian religion made no effort to liberate his country from the Roman yoke nor in any way attempted to build up the nationalism of the Jewish commonwealth. He was not so much a lover of his country as a lover of mankind. He took no part whatever in the political affairs of his people. Once they attempted to make him king but he resolutely declined. His disciples in like manner held aloof from the affairs of state. Peter taught that the Christian should, "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," but with the reservation that when the ordinance of man ran counter to the ordinance of God, "We ought to obey God rather than man."

For three centuries the Christians maintained that a follower of the Prince of Peace should hold aloof from government offices and decline to use the sword save the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Tertullian who was born within fifty years after the death of the Apostle John, wrote, "The image of Cæsar, which is on the coin, is to be given to Cæsar, and the image of God which is on man, is to be given to God. Therefore the money thou must indeed give to Cæsar but thyself to God, for what will remain to God if all be given to Cæsar."

The name Cæsar was the title of the Roman

emperor and applies to the ruler of any earthly government whether he be called king, emperor, or president. Tertullian adds, "The Cæsars themselves would have believed in Jesus Christ if they had not been necessary for the world, or if Christians could have been Cæsars." This accords perfectly with the words of Jesus when he says, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight."

Neander, one of the most celebrated church historians of the nineteenth century says of the early Christians, "It was far from their imaginations to conceive it possible that Christianity should appropriate to itself the relations and offices of the state. The Christians stood aloof from the state, as a priestly and a spiritual race and Christianity seemed able to influence civil life only in that manner, which it must be confessed is the purest, by practically endeavoring to instill more and more of the holy feeling into the citizens of the state."

Gibbon in his classic work, the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire writes as follows: "If we seriously consider the purity of the Christian religion, the sanctity of its moral precepts, and the innocent as well as the austere lives of the greater number of those during the first ages who embraced the faith of the gospel, we should naturally suppose that so benevolent

a doctrine would have been received with due reverence, even by the unbelieving world. That the magistrates instead of persecuting would have protected an order of men, who yielded the most passive obedience to the laws, though they declined the active cares of war and government."

A. D. 284-300. "A sentence of death was executed on Maximilianus an African youth, who was produced by his father as a sufficient and legal recruit, but who obstinately persisted in declaring that his conscience would not permit him to embrace the profession of a soldier."

"On the day of a public festival Marcellus a centurian threw away his belt, his arms and the insignia of his office and exclaimed in a loud voice, that he would obey none but Jesus Christ the eternal king, that he renounced forever the use of carnal weapons, and the service of an idolatrous master. He was condemned and beheaded for desertion.

"The humble Christians were sent into the world as sheep among wolves, and since they were not permitted to use force even in the defense of their own religion, they should be still more criminal if they were tempted to shed the blood of their fellowmen in disputing the vain privileges or sordid possessions of this transitory life.

"The Christian subjects of Armenia and Iberia formed a sacred and perpetual alliance with their

Roman brethren. The Christians of Persia in time of war were suspected of preferring their religion to their country." (Civil Government.)

Such quotations from Gibbon and others could be greatly multiplied, but these are sufficient to show the attitude of Christians toward earthly government during the first three centuries. Even down to the days of Luther there were thousands throughout Europe called Waldenses, Wickliffites, Hussites, Donatites, Albigenses, etc. who stood aloof from all government affairs. And since the days of Luther down to the present time there are thousands of others both in Europe and America who hold the same convictions. Space forbids giving more than one example during the rebellion of the South (U. S. A.) 1861-4:

"To His Excellency the President of the Confederate States of America," Whereas, a large number of the members of the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout this and the adjoining counties of the State of Tennessee, feel a deep sense of responsibility they are under to recognize the Bible in its teachings, as the only infallible guide of their life, and the supreme authoritative rule of action, and as being of superior authority and more binding upon the subjects of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, than the rules and regulations of any human government or power, they would most respectfully represent,

1. "That they are fully satisfied that God, through the Scriptures of Sacred Truth, demands of his servants that they should submit quietly, heartily, and cheerfully unto the government under which they may live, in all cases, except when compliance with the civil law would involve a violation of the law of God. They are deeply impressed with the truth that when there is a conflict between the requirements of worldly government and the law of God, the duty of the Christian, is, upon the peril of his well-being to obey God first, let the consequences be to him what they may.

2. "They are firm in the conviction of the truth, that no man who regards the authority of God, the spirit and the letter of the Sacred Scriptures in their proper division and application, the life and teachings of the Son of God or his Holy Apostles, as given for the guidance of his followers, can in any manner engage in, aid, foment, or countenance the strifes, animosities, and bloody conflicts in which civil governments are frequently engaged, and in which they often involve their subjects.

"The measure and limit of their duty to, and connection with the governments under which they live, as laid down in the Sacred Scriptures, is not an active participation in its affairs to destroy or upbuild, but simply a quiet and cheerful submission to its enactments, in the payment

of tribute and any demands on our property, or time, modified only by the first and highest obligation to God.—*Civil Government by David Lipscomb. Page 129.*

There is but one human race and all sprang from the same ancestral stock. "God made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth," says Paul. Even Huxley says, "I am one of those who believe that at present there is no evidence whatever for saying that mankind sprang originally from any more than a single pair." Darwin is also of the same conviction and says, "I have no doubt that all the races of man are descended from a single primitive stock." All men then by creation have a common Father and are blood brothers. All true hearted brothers regard the rights of each other and are more willing to give than to take. This ought to be the rule on the broad principle of general good will and friendship. Much more from a Christian viewpoint must it be recognized since Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is inconceivable that a Christian merely for the sake of territory or any other kind of earthly gain should engage in a bloody strife, such as is going on in the world at the present time.

The patriotic spirit as now defined and practiced, is at variance with the Christian spirit. It is natural to love ones native country in a

peculiar sense, just as it is natural and proper to love ones own family ; but there is great danger of carrying this to a hurtful extreme. No one should become so intensely interested in the members of his own family that he be lead to trample on the rights of his neighbors. The same may be said of patriotism. The love of country and our own countrymen should never become so self centered and intense as to lead us to trample on the rights of mankind in general. When love of country leads us to destroy our fellowmen it ceases to be love and turns into fanaticism.

There are said to be about seventy-five thousand Japanese in the United States ; but among all this number I do not know of even one who is giving himself to the moral and spiritual uplift of the American people. On the other hand a large per cent of Americans in Japan are giving their lives for the moral and spiritual uplift of the Japanese people. Thousands of dollars come to Japan every year for the same purpose but none goes to America. This is truly significant. But what does it signify ? That the American people just naturally have more inherent goodness than the Japanese ? Not this. But what it does signify is a different principle of action, a different outlook on life. The national spirit of this people has become so intense that they are self-centered, so much so that it is hard to rise above it to a

height that enables one to get a broader outlook, and to feel a genuine interest in the welfare of mankind.

The Kokumin Shimbun, recently recommended that Japan create a better feeling with China by the establishment of schools and other benevolent institutions in that land. An excellent suggestion, but if it is ever acted on it will be either by the Japanese Christians or those prompted by Christian influence.

It is by training that children learn to be "patriotic." In whatever country it may be, children are taken at a tender age and taught, by various methods that their first duty is to love their country and be ready at any call to lay down their lives in its defense. This sentiment becomes so deeply implanted in the nations that they come to believe it an honor to destroy others in the interest of their own native land. Many even go so far as to defend by force of arms a cause they believe to be wrong and somehow persuade themselves that they are justified in so doing. As a notable example I cite the case of General Robert E. Lee of the Southern Confederacy, U. S. A. He believed it wrong for the Southern States to secede from the North, yet, seeing it was inevitable, he joined the South and lead its armies against the Union. To give another example of more recent date, on June 7th., 1917 there was a general parade of the old

soldiers both North and South in Washington City. A sign was carried by some of them on which was written in letters two feet high, "Damn the man who aint for his country right or wrong." President Wilson watched the procession and saw this sign. I have seen no words of disapproval from the American people. It expresses a widespread sentiment not only in America but throughout the world. This is "patriotism." With such views in the heart people will hardly give themselves unselfishly for the betterment of others of a different nationality.

But for nearly two thousand years, or since the life of the Prince of Peace, we find scattered among the nations those of a different spirit. They are not seeking to maintain ancient customs nor the material upbuilding of their country, but the spiritual welfare of mankind. They hold that the material things of this present life are of secondary importance and that only those things spiritual are of real value and will endure. They believe that the chief duty of man is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Some of them leave their homes, friends and native land for other countries where they spend themselves and their possessions for the good of other people who speak a foreign tongue to their own and have customs hard to follow. What prompts them to do this? Not because of any natural goodness they may possess, but

because of Christ who dwells in them and who has said, "Go teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." From him they have learned to place spiritual values above all temporal interests and that ones chief joy is in pointing perishing souls to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Some, it is true, have learned the lesson imperfectly and become too much involved in the things of the world. But the pure religion of Jesus Christ does not entangle itself with the affairs of this life. The Christian though living in the world is not of it. He engages in the peaceful occupations by which to make an honest living for himself and family and to have some with which to help the poor and to advance the cause of righteousness. He cannot engage in any occupation that would injure his neighbors, such as gambling making or selling intoxicants or keeping a house of ill fame. He follows the golden rule laid down by the Great Teacher, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." He refrains from war and violence under all circumstances and endeavors to live up to the holy precept, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefull use you.

J. M. McCALEB

