

The North Branch Democrat.

HARVEY SICKLER, Proprietor

"TO SPEAK HIS THOUGHTS IS EVERY FREEMAN'S RIGHT."—Thomas Jefferson.

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POLITICAL PREACHING.

Judge Black's Reply to the Rev. Doctor Nevin.

Influence of the Pulpit Upon the Commencement and Continuance of the War.

THE TRUE PEACEMAKERS.

To the Rev. Alfred Nevin D. D.

MY DEAR SIR: Your letter addressed to me through the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin disappoints me; because I did not expect it to come in that way, and because it does not cover the subject in issue between us. But if I am silent your friends will say, with some show of reason, that you have vindicated "Political Preaching" so triumphantly that all opposition is confounded. I must, therefore, speak freely in reply. In doing so, I mean to say nothing inconsistent with my great respect for your high character in the church and in the world. The admirable style and temper of your own communication deserve to be imitated.

I fully concede the right you claim for clergymen to select their own themes and handle them as they please. You say truly that neither lawyers nor physicians nor any other order of men have the least authority to control you in these particulars. But you will not deny that this is a privilege which may be abused; you expressly admit that some clergymen have abused it "and by doing so did more than any other class of men to commence and continue the late rebellion." While, therefore, we can assert no power to dictate your conduct, much less to force you, we are surely not wrong when we entreat you to impose upon yourselves those restrictions which reason and revelation have shown to be necessary for the good of the church and the safety of civil society.

I acknowledge that your commission is a very broad one. You must "declare the whole counsel of God," to the end that sinners may be convinced and converts built up in their most holy faith. Truth, justice, temperance, humility, mercy, peace, brotherly kindness, charity—the whole circle of the Christian virtues—must be assiduously taught to your hearers; and if any of them be inclined to the opposite vices, you are to denounce them without fear, by private admonition, by open rebuke, or by a general delivery of the law which condemns them. You are not bound to pause in the performance of this duty because it may offend a powerful ruler or a strong political party. Nor should you shrink from it when bad men, for their own purposes, approve what you do. Elevate the moral character; enlighten the darkness, and purify the hearts of those who are under your spiritual charge, at all hazards; for this is the work which your great Task-master has given you to do, and he will admit no excuse for neglecting it.

But this is precisely what the political preacher is not in the habit of doing. He directs the attention of his hearers away from their own sins to the sins, real or imputed, of other people. By teaching his congregation that they are better than other men, he fills their hearts with self-conceit, bigotry, spiritual pride, envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness. Instead of the exhortation, which they need, to take the beam out of their own eyes, he incites them to pluck the mote from their brother's. He does not tell them what they shall do to be saved, but he instructs them very carefully how they shall act for the destruction of others. He rouses and encourages to the utmost of his ability, those brutal passions which result in riot, bloodshed, spoliation, civil war, and general corruption of morals.

You commit a grievous error in supposing that politics and religion are so mingled together that you cannot preach one without introducing the other. Christ and his apostles kept them perfectly separate. They announced the great facts of the Gospel to each individual whom they addressed. When these were accepted the believer was told to repent and be baptized for the remission of his sins, and afterwards to regulate his own life by the rules of a pure and perfect morality. They expressed no preference for one form of government over another, they provoked no political revolutions, and they proposed no legal reforms. If they had done so, they would have finally contradicted the declaration that Christ's Kingdom was not of this world, and Christianity itself would have died out in half a century. But they accepted the relations which were created by human law and exhorted their disciples to discharge faithfully the duties which arose out of them. Though the laws which defined the authority of husbands, parents, masters and magistrates were as bad as human perversity could make them, yet the early Christians contented themselves with teaching moderation in the exercise of legal power, and uniformly inculcated the virtues of obedience and fidelity upon wives, children, slaves and subjects. They joined in no clamors for or against any administration, but simply testified against sin before the only tribunal which Christ ever erected on earth; that is to say, the conscience of the sinner himself. The vice of political preaching was wholly unknown to the primitive church.

It is true that Paul counselled obedience to the government of Nero; and I am aware that modern clergymen interpret his words as a justification of the doctrine that support of an existing administration

is "part of their allegiance to God." Several Synods and other ecclesiastical bodies have solemnly resolved something to that effect. But they forget that what Paul advised was simply submission, not active assistance, to Nero. The Christians of that day did not endorse his atrocities merely because he was "the administration duly placed in power." They did not go with him to the theater, applauded his acting, or praise him in the churches when he kidnapped their brethren, set fire to a city, or desolated a province. Nor did they assist at his apotheosis after his death, or pronounce funeral sermons to show that he was greater than Scipio, more virtuous than Cato, and more eloquent than Cicero. Political preachers would have done this, but Paul and Peter did not do this.

There is nothing in the Scriptures to justify the church in applying its discipline to any member for offenses purely political much less for his mere opinions or feelings on public affairs. The clergy are without authority, as they are often without fitness, to decide for their congregations what is right or what is wrong in the legislation of the country. They are not called or sent to propagate any kind of political doctrine. The Church and the State are entirely separate and distinct in their origin, their object, and the sphere of their action; inasmuch that the organism of one can never be used for any purpose of the other without injury to both.

Do I therefore say that the Christian religion is to have no influence on the political destiny of man? Far from it. Notwithstanding the unfaithfulness of many professors, it has already changed the face of human society; and it will yet accomplish its mission by spreading peace, independence, truth, justice, and liberty regulated by law, "from the sea to the uttermost ends of the earth." But this will be accomplished only by reformation and elevating the individuals of whom society is composed; not by expatriating communities against each other; not by any alliance with the governments of the world; not by any vulgar partnership with politicians to kill and plunder their enemies.

Every time you reform a bad man and bring his character up to the standard of Christian morality, you make an addition, greater or less, to that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and subtract an equal sum from the sin which is a reproach to any people. Sometimes a single conversion is extremely important in its immediate effect upon the public interest of a whole nation. No doubt the acceptance of the truth by Dionysius the Areopagite had much to do in moulding the subsequent laws and customs of Athens. The conversion of Constantine was followed by the instant abrogation of all laws which fettered the conscience. In the reign of Theodosius the people of Thessalonica rose against the Roman garrison and killed its commander. For this act of rebellion the Emperor decreed against them the curse of an indiscriminate war, in which the guilty and the innocent were confounded together in one general slaughter. His spiritual guide, philosopher, and friend at the time was Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, who boldly denounced his cruelty, refused to give him the sacrament, or even to administer it in his presence, compelled him to take his seat among the penitents on the portico of the church and induced him to humble his diadem in the dust for eight months in succession. The conscience of the Emperor was thoroughly awakened; his subsequent reign was distinguished by justice and mercy, the integrity of the empire was preserved in peace, and the great Theodosian code, the product of that bitter repentance, is still read and quoted for its admirable union of humanity and policy. Ambrose produced these consequences by acting in the true capacity of a Christian minister; for he reformed the criminal by a direct appeal to his own heart. A political preacher in the same circumstances would have inflamed the sanguinary passions of the monarch by exaggerating the treason of the Thessalonians and counselling the military execution of all who presumed to sympathize in their sufferings.

You will see, I think, the distinction I would make. A Gospel preacher addresses the conscience of his hearers for the honest purpose of converting them from the errors of their ways; a political preacher speaks to one community, one party or one sect, and his theme is the wickedness of another. The latter effects no religious purpose whatever; but the chances are ninety nine in a hundred that he excites the bad passions of those who are present, while he classes the absent and undefended. Both classes of preachers frequently speak upon the same or similar subjects, but they do so with different objects and aims.

I will make my meaning more clear by taking your own illustrations. You believe in the first day of the week as the Sabbath, and so believing your duty undoubtedly is to exhort all persons under your charge to observe it strictly; but you have no right to preach a crusade against sea Jews and Seventh-day Baptists, to get intolerant laws enacted against them for keeping Saturday as a day of rest. If drunkenness be a sin which easily besets your congregation, you may warn them against it, and inasmuch as abstinence is always easier than moderation, you should advise them to taste not, touch not, and handle not; but your position gives you no authority to provoke violent hostilities against tavern keepers, liquor dealers or

distillers. If any of your hearers be ignorant or coarse enough to desire more wives than one a piece, you should certainly teach them that polygamy is the worst feature of Asiatic manners, inconsistent with Christianity and dangerous to domestic happiness; but you cannot lawfully urge them to carry fire and sword into the Territory of the Mormons merely because some of the Mormons are in this respect less holy than you. If the holding of slaves, or bond-servants be a practical question among the members of your church, I know of nothing which forbids you to teach whatever you conscientiously believe to be true on that subject. But in a community where slavery is not only unknown but impossible, why should any preacher make it the subject of his weekly vituperation? You do not improve the religion of the slave-holder by traducing his character, nor mend the spiritual condition of your own people by making them thirst for the blood of their fellow-men?

If any person, to whom the service of another is due by the laws of the State in which he lives, shall need your instructions to regulate this personal conduct towards the slave, you are bound in the first place to tell him, that as long as that relaxation exists he should behave with the utmost humanity and kindness; for this you have the clear warrant of the Apostolic example and precept. In dealing with such a person you may be as much further as your own conscientious interpretation of the Bible will carry you. If you are sure that the divine law does, under all circumstances, make the mere existence of such a relation sinful on the part of the master, you should induce him to dissolve it by the immediate emancipation of his slaves; for this is truth to you, which you believe to be true. But where is the authority for preaching hatred of those who understand the scripture differently? What privilege can you show for exciting servile insurrection? Who gave you the right to say that John Brown was better than any other thief or murderer, merely because his crimes were committed against pro-slavery men?

I think the minister, in his pulpit discourses, is forbidden to touch at all upon that class of subjects which are purely political, such for instance as the banking law, tariff, railroad charters, State rights, the nationalization laws, and negro suffrage. These are questions of mere political expediency; religion takes no cognizance of them; they come within the sole jurisdiction of the statesman; and the church has no more right to take sides upon them than the civil government has to use its legislative, judicial or executive power for the purpose of enforcing principles wholly religious.

In short, if I am not entirely mistaken, a Christian minister has no authority to preach upon any subjects except those in which divine revelation has given him an infallible rule of faith and practice; and, even upon them he must speak always for the edification of his own hearers, "rightly dividing the word of truth," so as to lead them in the way of all righteousness. When he does more than this he goes beyond his commission, he becomes a scurvy politician, and his influence is altogether pernicious.

The use of the clerical office for the purpose of propagating political doctrines under any circumstances, or with any excuse, is in my judgment, not only without authority, but it is the highest crime that can be committed against the government of God or man. Perhaps I ought not to make this broad assertion without giving some additional reasons for it. In the first place it is grossly dishonest. I employ you as a minister, pay your salary, and build you a church because I have confidence in your theological doctrines. But you may be at the same time wholly unfit for my political leader. Now, you are guilty of a base fraud upon me, if, instead of preaching religion, you take advantage of the position I have given you to ventilate your crude and ignorant notions on State affairs. I have asked for bread and you give me a stone; instead of the fish I bargained for, you put in my hand a serpent that stings and poisons me.

It destroys the unity of the church.—There is no room for rational dispute about the great truths of Christianity; but men will never agree upon political subjects, for human government is at best but a compromise of selfish interests and conflicting passions. When you mix the two together you break the church into fragments, and instead of "One Lord, one faith and one baptism," you create a thousand warring sects, and substitute the proverbial bitterness of the *odium theologum* for the "charity which thinketh no evil."

No one will deny that a union of Church and State is always the cause of bad government, perverted religion and corrupt morals. I do not mean merely that legal union which exists in European countries. That is bad enough; but you have less common sense than I give you credit for, if you do not see, that this adulterous connexion assumes its most polluting form when the church is voluntarily prostituted by her own ministers to a political party in a popular government.

The evil influence of such connexions upon Church and State is easily accounted for. Both of them in combination will do what either would recoil from if standing alone. A politician backed by the promise of the clergy to sustain him can safely defy honesty and trample upon law, for do what he may, he is assured of clerical support here and of heaven hereafter. The clergy, on the other hand, and those who are under their influence, easily acquire

the habit of praising indiscriminately whatever is done by their public men. Acting and reacting on one another, they go down together in the direction of the pit that is bottomless; and both are found to have "a strange alacrity at sinking."

No man can serve two masters faithfully; for he must hate one if he loves the other. A minister who admires and follows such men as those who have lately ruled and ruled this country, must necessarily despise the character of Christ. If he glorifies the cruelty, rapacity and falsehood of his party leaders, he is compelled by an inflexible law of human nature to "deny the Lord who bought him."

The experience of fifteen centuries proves that political preachers are the great curse of the world. More than half the bloody wars which at different periods have desolated Christendom, were produced by their direct instigation; and wherever they have thrust themselves into a contest commenced by others, they always envenomed the strife and made it more cruel, savage and uncompromising. The religious wars, so-called, had nothing religious about them except that they were hissed up by the clergy. Look back and see if this be not true.

The Arian controversy (the first great schism) was followed by wars in which millions of lives were lost. Do you suppose the real quarrel was for the insertion or omission of *filioque* in that part of the creed which describes the procession of the Holy Ghost? Did a *homoousian* slaughter his brother because he was *homoousian*? No, it was not the difference of a diptong, but the plunder of an empire that they fought for. It was the politics of the church, not her religion, that infuriated the parties and converted men into demons.

The Thirty Years' War in Germany is often supposed to have been a fair stand up fight between the two leading forms of Christianity. It was not so. The religious difference was a false pretense of the political preachers for the promotion of their own schemes. There was not a sane man on all that continent who would have felt himself impelled by motives merely religious to murder his neighbors for believing or disbelieving in transubstantiation. If proof of this were wanting, it might be found in the fact, that long before the war ended, the sectarian cries were abandoned, and Catholics, as well as protestants, were fighting on both sides.

It is utterly impossible to believe that the clergy of England and Scotland, if they had not been politicians, would have thought of waging bloody wars to settle questions of election and reprobation, fate, fore-knowledge, free-will, and other points of metaphysical theology. For would they, apart from their politics, have encouraged and committed the other horrid crimes of which they were guilty in the name of religion.

Can you think that the Irish were invaded, and conquered, and oppressed, and murdered, and robbed for centuries, merely because the English loved and believed in the Protestant religion? I suppose you know that those brutal atrocities were carried on for the purpose of giving to political preachers in England possession of the churches, cathedrals, glebe lands and tithes which belonged to the Irish Catholics. The soldier was also rewarded by confiscations and plunder. The Church and the State hunted in couples, and Ireland was the prey which they ran down together.

Coming to our own country you find Massachusetts and Connecticut in colonial times under the sole domination of political preachers. Their treacherous wars upon the Indians for purposes wholly mercenary;—their enslaving of white persons, as well as red ones, and selling them abroad, or "swapping them for blackamoors"; their whipping, imprisoning and killing Quakers and Baptists, for their conscientious opinions; and their base treatment of such men as Roger Williams and his friends, will mark their government through all time as one of the cruelest and meanest that ever existed.

Political preachers have not behaved any better since the Revolution than before.—About the commencement of the present century they were busy in their vile vocation all over New England and continued it for many years. The wilful and deliberate slanders habitually uttered from the pulpit against Jefferson, Madison, and the friends who supported them, were a disgrace to human nature. The immediate effect of this was the Yankee plot to secede from the Union, followed by corrupt combinations with a foreign enemy to betray the liberties of the country. Its remoter consequences are seen in the shameful rapacity and bitter malignity which, even at this moment, are howling for the property and blood of an unarmed and defenseless people.

You and I both remember the political preaching which ushered in and supported the reign of the Know-Nothings, Blood Fubs, and Plug-Ughs; when Maria Monk was a Saint and Joe Barker was Mayor of Pittsburgh; when pulpits resounded every Sunday with the most injurious falsehoods against Catholics; when the public mind was debauched by the inculcation of hypocrisy and deception; when ministers met their political allies in sworn secrecy to plot against the rights of their fellow-citizens. You cannot forget what came of this—riot, murder, church-burning, lawless violence all over the land, and the subjugation of several great States, to the political rule of a party destitute alike of principle and capacity.

I could easily prove that those clerical politicians, who have tied their churches to the tail of the Abolition party, are criminal on a grander scale than any of their predecessors. But I forbear partly because I

have no time, and partly because it may, for aught I know, be a sore subject with you. I would not excite your wrath, but rather "provoke you to good works."

Apart from the general subject there are two or three special ideas expressed in your letter from which I venture to dissent.

You think that, though a minister may speak from the pulpit on politics he ought not to indicate what party he belongs to. It strikes me, that if he has a party, and wants to give it ecclesiastical aid or comfort, he should boldly avow himself to be what he is, so that all men may know him. Sincerity is the first of virtues. It is bad to be a wolf, but a wolf in sheep's clothing is infinitely worse.

You represent the Church as an unfinished structure and the State as its scaffolding. I think the church came perfect from the hand of its divine Architect—built upon a rock, established, finished, complete—and every one who comes into it by the right door will find a mansion prepared for him. It needs no scaffold. Its founder refused all connection with human governments for scaffolding or any other purpose.

You say (in substance) that, without sometimes taking political subjects, a minister is in danger of falling into a "vague, indefinite, and non-committal style," which will do no good and bring him no respect. The Gospel is not vague, indefinite or non-committal upon the subjects of which it takes jurisdiction, and upon them you may preach as loudly as you please. But I admit that in times of great public excitement—an important election or a civil war—men listen impatiently to the teachings of faith and repentance. A sermon which tells them to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God, is not an entertainment to which they willingly invite themselves. At such a time a clergyman can vastly increase his personal consequence, and win golden opinions from his audience, by pampering their passions with a highly seasoned discourse on politics. The temptation to gratify them often becomes too strong for the virtue of the preacher. I fear that you yourself are yielding to it.—As a mere layman I have no right to address a Doctor of Divinity, but I hope I am not over presumptuous when I warn you against this specious allurements of Satan.—All thoughts of putting the Gospel aside because it does not suit the depraved tastes of the day, and making political harangues to win popularity in a bad world, should be sternly trampled down as the suggestions of that Evil One, "who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning."

Faithfully yours, &c.

J. S. BLACK.

York, July 25, 1866.

A BIT OF A SILVER.—California has long been celebrated for "big things," animal and vegetable, and the following adds to the list:—

Before Justice F., at San Juan, Nevada County, was brought a Hibernian, charged with assault and battery upon a fellow-countryman. Many witnesses were examined; and, finally, Jimmy C. was called to the stand.

"Mr. C., state what you know about this case."

"Well, your honor, Barney and Patrick had a bit of a quarrel about some wood they had been cutting. They were standing near the wood pile in front of the house, and after jawing a little, Barney picked up a bit of silver, and give Patrick a little tap on the head, and he went over on to the wood pile—and that was all there was about it."

Justice F.—"You say Barney hit Patrick on the head with a bit of a silver.—What kind of a silver was that?"

"Well, your honor, 'twas a small thing—a bit of a chip."

"But we want to know how big was it; give us your idea of about the size of it."

"Well, your honor, (after some hesitation.) I think it was about two feet long, and about as big round as my wrist!"

WHO IS OLD.—A wise man will never rust out. As long as he can move and breathe, he will do something for himself, for his neighbor or for his posterity. Almost to the last hour of his life, Wellington was at work. So were Newton, Bacon, Milton, and Franklin. The vigor of their lives never decayed. No rust marred their spirits. It is a foolish idea to suppose that we must lie down because we are old. Who is old? Not the man of energy; not the day laborer in science, art or benevolence; but he only suffers his energies to waste time, and the spring of life to become motionless, on whose hands the hours drag heavily.

Mr. Jenkins was dining at a very hospitable table, but a piece of meat near him was so very small that the lady of the house said to him—

"Pray, Mr. Jenkins, help yourself to the meat. Don't be afraid of it!"

"No, indeed, madam, I shall not be, I've seen a piece twice as large, and it didn't scare me a bit."

At Adrian, Mich., a lady saw an engine house with a steeple, and innocently asked a gentleman attendant, "What church is that?" The gentleman, after reading the sign, "Deluge No. 8," replied, "I guess it must be the Third Baptist!"

Why are seamstresses not admitted into so-called fashionable society? Because the shoddy and codfish aristocracy think there is no gentility in them, what sew ever.