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A REPORT OF THE  
CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP CONFERENCE,

DEVOTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF

POLITICAL LOYALTY TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,

HELD IN THE

ALLEGHENY COVENANTER  
CHURCH.

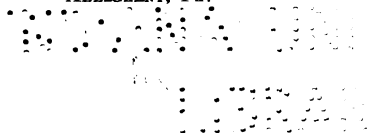
CORNER OF SANDUSKY AND NORTH DIAMOND STREETS.

MONDAY AND TUESDAY  
FEBRUARY 24TH AND 25TH, 1902.

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## The Blighting Effect upon Spiritual Life of an Oath to an Unchristian Constitution and to Unscriptural Laws.

The Rev. Dr. R. J. George,

Mr. Chairman and Fellow Christians:

The deliberations of this Conference have reached an intensely practical point. It has been shown that the Lord Jesus Christ is a royal Saviour, and that by the appointment of God the Father He is the Governor among the Nations.

It has also been shown that the Constitution of the United States is unchristian in that it makes no recognition of the Kingly authority of Christ, or of the supremacy of His law; and in that it contains provisions which are contrary to the revealed will of God. It has been shown further, that loyalty to Christ forbids a Christian to swear to an unchristian Constitution, and it has been demonstrated that the voter is responsible for the official oath taken by his representative.

The question is now raised, what is the effect upon the spiritual life of an oath to an unchristian Constitution and to unscriptural laws? The question does not concern the officeholder alone, that would confine it to a comparatively small number; but as the voter is responsible for the official oath of his representative; the question has to do with the great body of Christian voters who through their representatives bind themselves under the sanctions of an oath to accept this unchristian Constitution as the supreme rule of their political life and swear to maintain and administer the unscriptural laws made under it.

My proposition is this:

An Oath to an Unchristian Constitution and to Unscriptural Laws has a Blighting Effect upon the Spiritual Life.

I will first consider this proposition from the point of view of the effect of such an oath on the relation of the soul to Christ. And on this I remark:

I. An oath to an unchristian Constitution makes impossible the full surrender of the soul to Christ.

The first condition of a vigorous and healthy spiritual life is entire surrender to God. On this point there is no difference of view among

Christian teachers. If any part of the life is withheld from Christ that part is blighted in its spirituality.

I have seen a blighted tree. Portions of its top were leafless, fruitless, dead. No life-giving influences from the tree entered those withered branches. The tree was not wholly dead, but it was blighted. These withered branches, cut off from vital union with the tree, not only were blighted themselves, but they had a blighting effect upon the whole tree. This illustrated the inevitable result which follows when any part of the life is separated from Christ. It is a scriptural illustration. Our Lord says: "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit; for apart from me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." (John 15 : 5, 6. R. V.).

Now I do not affirm that an oath to a Christless Constitution as the supreme rule in political affairs separates the life wholly from Christ, but I do affirm that such an oath makes it impossible that the life shall be wholly surrendered to Christ, and that that part of the life which is held back from Christ is blighted, and the political sphere of life being spiritually blighted, has a blighting effect upon the whole life.

Many of you are familiar with the noble words of Dr. Terrett on this subject. Speaking on "Christ the Nation's King," he says:

"Christ claims the man, the whole man for himself in obedience and service. But man is whole only in his relations, domestic, social and political. Man is born to be a citizen. He was made for the nation as truly as for the home. He is not, cannot be, all that he ought to be as a man until he is all that he ought to be as a citizen. If it be true then that man belongs by nature in political relations, who shall say that in these relations he is emancipated from the authority of Jesus Christ. If he be Christ's servant he will show it here. He cannot be Christ's servant and not show it here. The best of man's life is his relational life, and in all his relational life he belongs to Christ. By what argument shall we be justified in saying that while a Christian man is bound to submit himself to Christ's authority, yield himself to Christ's influence, and open himself to Christ's inspiration, in his domestic relations, in his social relations, in his business relations, that in his political relations he is justified in recognizing some lower law, and in acting under the impulse of some poorer motive. If man belongs in the nation he is bound to serve Christ there as much as anywhere. This is man's largest sphere; these are man's noblest engagements, solemnest obligations. Shall he not here, if anywhere, acknowledge Christ's authority and seek to do His will? Christ cannot spare a single inch of manhood. He has redeemed, and He can

use it all." (National Reform Documents, Philadelphia—Conference 1888). Of like import are the words of Prof. Joseph Kyle, of Xenia Theological Seminary, in an address to the young people of his church on "The Separated Life." "What is your political life?" he asks. "This also must be 'holiness to the Lord!' We are to be 'holy in all manner of conduct!' This injunction has to do with one's political action, as certainly as with his business conduct or his religious duties."

The truth of these presentations of the claims of Christ upon man in every sphere of his life and especially in the political sphere will not be questioned. Every Christian conscience responds to these words. If we would have fullness of spiritual life we must be wholly Christ's. Has it a blighting effect upon the spiritual life for one to reject the authority of Christ over him in his business life? Most certainly it has. Has it a blighting effect upon the spiritual life for a man to separate his family life from Christ? It cannot be otherwise. How then can it fail to have a blighting effect upon the spiritual life for him to exclude Christ from his political relations? It cannot fail. I do not hesitate to affirm that no one can attain to the highest degree of spiritual life which God has made possible to man who does not give his life wholly to Christ, and that no man can give himself wholly to Christ who separates his political life from Christ's authority by swearing to an unchristian Constitution

From the point of view, therefore, of its effect upon the relation of the soul to Christ we are forced to the conclusion that an oath to an unchristian Constitution has a blighting effect upon the spiritual life.

The second point of view from which I will consider the proposition is that of the effect of such an oath upon the relation of the soul to the holy law of God. On this I remark:

II. An oath to unscriptural laws binds the soul to a false standard of morals.

There can be no healthy spiritual life without conformity to the divine rule of holy living. There is only one perfect standard of morals, and that is the moral law as revealed in the Bible. When, therefore, one takes an oath to unscriptural laws, he binds himself to conform to a false standard of morality. Such an oath can be kept only by doing that which is immoral in the sight of God. An oath to a Christless Constitution, as we have seen, renders impossible the entire surrender of the soul to God. That is bad enough. But there is a deeper depth, when under a Constitution from which all reference to Christ is excluded, and which makes the will of the people the supreme law of the land, there have grown up systems of wicked laws "made in pursuance thereof," and when Christian voters, by the official oaths of their representatives, have sworn that they will maintain and ex-

ecute these laws which are contrary to the law of God, it is impossible that their spiritual life can escape the blighting effect of this unholy alliance. I shrink from the conclusion, but I find no evasion for me. If one binds himself by his church covenant to render obedience to the law of God everywhere, and always, and then in his political relations binds himself under an official oath to obey laws which are contrary to the divine law, he is compelled to violate either his official oath, or his sacramental vow. And broken oaths and broken sacraments have an awfully blighting effect upon the spiritual life.

Take for illustration the laws establishing and maintaining the Sunday mail service. Those laws are in open violation of the command "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!" The man who swears to execute these laws by carrying or distributing the mails on the Lord's day binds himself and all whom he represents to live in habitual disobedience to God. Has it a blighting effect upon the spiritual life for one to engage in deliberate and voluntary desecration of the Sabbath from year to year? To ask the question is to answer it.

Another great body of unscriptural laws which has grown up under our unchristian Constitution is the shameless divorce system. Christian citizens through the official oaths of their representatives have sworn that they will administer these laws which are in acknowledged antagonism to the law of God. Thus the land is full of adultery. Is not the flagrant disregard of the seventh commandment destructive of the spiritual life?

Some years ago I had a conversation with a judge from one of our western states on this subject. Having learned that I was a Covenanter minister he expressed himself strongly in opposition to the position of political separation, which, of course, I endeavored to defend. I inquired how many grounds of divorce were established by the laws of his state? He replied that the law specified eight causes. "How many grounds are fixed by the law of Christ?" I asked. He answered: "There is only one, the sin of adultery." "How then," I said, "do you as a judge administer a law that is in direct violation of God's law of marriage?" He replied that he interpreted the law very rigidly and that persons seeking divorce avoided his court as far as possible. "But," I said, "when they do appear before you and establish their claim to a divorce on grounds which the law of your state specifies but which the law of Christ forbids, what do you do?" He replied: "I do not hold myself responsible for the law, but I am bound by my oath of office to grant the divorce." Now here was a Christian judge who had bound his soul under the solemn sanctions of an oath to a false standard of morals and who in fulfillment of his official oath felt himself compelled to trample underfoot the divine law of marriage and the sacred institution of the family.

Do the Christian voters of these United States realize that they are responsible before God for all the infamous divorces granted in accordance with the laws, by judges acting in fulfillment of the official oaths taken by them as the representatives of those who have chosen them. Again, I say, I shrink from the conclusion, but I see no possible escape from it. These shameless divorces are granted by thousands until our infamous laws are become a stench in the nostrils of all Christendom. The fact is our nation has become so degraded by this legalized uncleanness that we are on the verge of licensing the vilest forms of prostitution. On the verge! did I say? Alas! we have gone over the verge and to our everlasting disgrace the flag of our country is floating over the vile dens of licensed prostitution under the supervision of the military authorities in our new possessions. Such is the blighting effect upon the spiritual life of an oath to unscriptural laws.

To illustrate this point still further, I will relate an experience under the liquor license law of this state.

I spent seventeen years in pastoral work in a good sized town where for the first seven years of the time there was not a licensed saloon or hotel. The judge of the court was a man of high Christian character, prominent in the church. Applications for license were made as regularly as the March court convened, and they were as regularly resisted by the foremost citizens of the place and refused by the judge. We had one good temperance hotel, and the judge held that as long as that was sufficient to accommodate the public, he could under the law refuse all applications for license. But the town grew. The demands of the public increased. The temperance hotel passed into other hands. Then the judge issued the license and we had a whisky hotel. The town was up in arms. An indignation meeting was called. Denunciations were bitter. In defense of the judge it was said that he was just as much opposed to the liquor traffic as any citizen of the town, but that he held himself bound by his official oath to grant the liquor license whenever it was shown that the house for which the application was made was necessary for the accommodation of the public. The judge believed now when he granted the license, that the liquor traffic was a curse upon the town, just as he had believed before when he refused it, but he was sworn to the immoral license law, and for his oath's sake he granted the license. In granting the license the judge was not acting for himself. He was the representative of those who elected him to the office. The official oath which bound him to license the saloon bound them, and when the act was done in accordance with the law and in fulfillment of his official oath it was their act as truly as it was his. The awful fact is that the great body of Christian citizens are by the official oaths of

their representatives sworn to legalize, authorize, protect and foster the accursed liquor traffic, and in the name of God, I do declare that such oaths are "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell," and that they are not only blighting the spiritual life of the church, but they are blasting it with the brimstone flames of Gehenna.

Christian men! is it not time that the church would arise in the name of Jesus Christ as King and in the power of His might and would break asunder the bonds which are binding her to this body of sin and death?

"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee, the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust, arise, sit on thy throne, O Jerusalem, loose thyself from the bonds of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion." (Isa. 52 : 1, 2 R. V.).

From the point of view therefore of the effect of an oath to unscriptural laws upon the relation of the soul to the holy law of God—we are forced to the conclusion that such an oath, has a blighting influence upon the spiritual life.

The third point of view from which I will consider the proposition is from the effect of such an oath on the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. And on this I remark:

III. An oath to an unchristian Constitution and to unscriptural laws prevents the enjoyment of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

To fallen man there is only one source of spiritual life and growth. "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the spirit giveth life." Whatever hinders the full enjoyment of the influence of the Holy Spirit has a blighting effect upon the spiritual life.

Much is said and written in our times concerning the fullness of the Spirit. Religious teachers represent it in different ways. Some say there is one act of faith receiving the Spirit for conversion and a second act of faith at another time receiving the Spirit as a spirit of power for service. Others distinguish it as the first and second blessing. Others again, speak of the second experience as the infilling of the Spirit. The Scriptural doctrine seems to be this: That the believer, through the act of saving faith, receives Christ and in receiving Christ receives the Holy Spirit, and that through abiding in Christ he receives the fullness of the Spirit's power. "Abide in me, and I in you." To expect to receive a "second blessing" by which we will become "spirit filled" is a vain conceit if we are not abiding in Christ. The fullness of the Spirit is the result of living union with a living Redeemer, as living branches in a living vine.

Rev. James N. McConkey, in an excellent treatise on "The Three-fold Secret of the Holy Spirit," impressively sets forth this truth. He



says: "A child of God, brought by the Spirit under conviction as to this truth, sees God's claim upon his life, and lays it at His feet, a living sacrifice. In answer to that surrender there comes to him from God a fullness of power, blessing, and spiritual life, beyond his fondest imaginings, and his spirit rejoices in the riches of his fuller experience. So manifest is the Spirit's presence in his heart, so consciously is he filled with this life, that he feels as though he had reached a new state of spiritual power and experience which will never leave nor diminish. But by and by there comes a change. The brightness of the experience seems to dim, its power begins to wane, its manifestation to diminish. He still continues to "claim" what he feels is gone, to profess what he does not possess, in the hope that this may bring back the blessing. But at last he breaks down in despair and henceforth refers to all this as a "lost experience," a blessing which he once enjoyed but which has now fled away. In such a case—only too common—what has happened? It is not that the Spirit has ceased to reveal Himself in His former fullness. It is not a question of lost indwelling, but of lost manifestation. The Blessor has not left, but the blessing has. The manifestation of the Spirit's fullness was perfectly satisfactory to him in kind and degree, but not in permanence. It failed in continuousness, slowly fading away like the flush of the twilight in a sunset sky."

It would be difficult to draw a more striking picture of a blighted life. Why is it? There are two absolute human conditions of the fullness of the Spirit. The first is a life wholly surrendered to God, and the second a life of implicit obedience. "And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him." (1 Jno. 3: 24.) Now suppose the act of faith in receiving Christ is followed by an oath to be governed by a Christless Constitution, will not that tend to quench the spirit? and an oath to unscriptural laws in direct disobedience to the law of Christ, will not that grieve the Holy Spirit whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption? I do not say, that the new life will be destroyed, for it cannot be, but it will be blighted because it will fail of the fullness of the Spirit and of the full fruitage of the Spirit's work.

From the point of view, therefore, of the effect of such an oath upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, we are forced to the conclusion that it will have a blighting influence upon the spiritual life.

While I thus speak I grow sick at heart. If you could only say to me: "The facts are all against you, there is no evidence anywhere that any blighting influence has fallen upon the spiritual life of the church," how glad I would be to be convinced of my mistake. But you cannot. The evidence is too painfully manifest. Men may differ as to the cause, but they cannot differ as to the fact. The church's

growth is arrested. Her zeal is growing cold. Her treasures are depleted. She is shorn of her strength to cope with the evils which, like the giants of Philistia, are defying the armies of the living God. There must be a cause. The cause is widespread, affecting the whole church. It is persistent, it goes on from year to year. All efforts to bring about a revival of religion are fruitless. At the opening of the new century, conferences were held, committees were appointed, calls for prayer were sent out and answers came back: "We will pray," "We will pray." Weeks, months, the year went by, but the revival came not. Why? There may be various causes, doubtless there are. But disloyalty to Christ in political life is an adequate cause for the decline of religion which marks our age, because it renders impossible the enjoyment of the Spirit in His fullness. "The Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified."

For centuries before the Reformation the spiritual life of God's people was blighted by anti-Christian Rome. Reformers arose seeking to reform the church from within. Reforming councils were held at Pisa, and at Basel, and at Constance, with the avowed purpose of reforming the church "in head and members." But it was all in vain. At last the spiritual life sank so low that Rome sent out her emissaries selling indulgences for men to live in sin, much as our government licenses evil for revenue. The Reformation came as a mighty protest against an anti-Christian Church trafficking for gain in the bodies and souls of men. The Reformers separated themselves from all complicity with the evil, and with that came the revival of religion which saved the church and gave Protestantism to the world.

Beloved, when I think of the ministers and members of the church in the United States crying to God for a revival of religion, while at the same time they are bound by the official oaths of their representatives to an unchristian Constitution which refuses the Kingly crown to their Lord, and are sworn to unscriptural laws which profane the Sabbath and destroy the family, and perpetuate the awful crime of the liquor traffic, I verily believe the answer of God to the prayer of His people is this:

"Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Then will the church "revive as the corn, and grow as the vine and send forth her roots as Lebanon."