

**WHAT HAS RELIGION TO DO
WITH POLITICS? THE QUESTION
CONSIDERED IN LETTERS TO HIS
SON BY D. R. MORIER**

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DAVID RICHARD MORIER

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"It is no part of my argument that religion has nothing to do with politics, or that we ought not to be guided by religious views and motives in legislation. My opinion is quite the contrary. I BELIEVE THAT RELIGION OUGHT TO INFLUENCE US IN THE SMALLEST DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, AND IN THE HIGHEST LEGISLATIVE CONCERNS. I believe that Christianity, far from having nothing to do with legislation, is the source of the most enlightened laws which modern times have produced. I believe that it is owing to Christianity that the slavery which prevailed in the ancient world was abolished in an early part of the modern ages. I believe that it was Christianity which inspired Mr. Wilberforce, and those who acted with him, to make that attempt which finally succeeded for destroying the slave trade, which was a disgrace to any Christian country. My belief is, to speak of no particular law, but of the general spirit of institutions,—that, whereas ancient republics and states, the more they became civilized became the more loose in their morality,—the more bewildered by vain theories of philosophy, and the more corrupt in their moral practice: modern nations, on the contrary, having Christianity to guide them, will, in proportion as they become more civilized, so far from falling into those corruptions, and being less governed by the moral law, as in early and remote ages, become more subject to the rules of morality, and will more acknowledge the supremacy of the divine law. Therefore, holding these opinions, it can be no part of my case that religion has nothing to do with politics, or that Christianity should be kept out of sight in our discussions."

Extract from Lord John Russell's Speech, 4th of May, 1848, on the Third Reading of the Jewish Disabilities Bill.

"I have said that the Christian religion has made its conquests not by any exclusions, not by forcible means, not by acts of Parliament, but by the conviction that it was Divine—by the exhibition of its virtues, by the lessons it taught to mankind, and by the gentle, insinuating influence it exercised on all who came within its reach.

"The constitution is inseparably bound, I am ready to admit, with the interests of Christianity, and the most valuable feature of the constitution is, that it insures the predominance of Christianity."

Extracts from the Marquess of Lansdowne's Speech, 25th of May, 1848, on the Second Reading of the Jewish Disabilities Bill.

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LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

MY DEAR B.,

You remember, and, no doubt, concur in the sentiment expressed by Arnold in the Preface to his History of Rome:—

“If there be no truths in moral and political science, little good can be derived from the study of either: if there be truths, it must be desirable that they should be discovered and embraced. Scepticism must ever be a misfortune or a defect: a misfortune, if there be no means of arriving at truth; a defect, if, while there exist such means, we are unable or unwilling to use them.”

B

Believing with Arnold, "that political science has its truths no less than moral," I believe, moreover, that the only sure basis of political as well as of moral truths, is to be found in God's supreme law, as revealed to mankind in the Christian Scriptures; and as I am persuaded that the well-being of society can be effectually promoted only by the universal recognition of the Christian principle as the rule of government, I add, with Arnold,—“ I cannot regard them with indifference; I cannot but wish them to be seen and embraced by others.”

It is to give effect to this wish, so far as I am able, that I have determined to adopt this mode of communicating to you, and to others who may take an interest in the subject, the notions which, you know, I have long entertained respecting the relation which the Christian religion bears to the science of government. Many years since they were reduced to writing, nearly in the form in which you now have them, in answer to the question put in familiar conversation,—“ *What has Religion to do with Politics?*”

In proposing to you to accompany me through this inquiry, I have no pretension to have struck out any new and original ideas.

The conclusions I have come to may probably appear to others, as they do to me, mere truisms, belonging, it may be, to that order of truths, of which Coleridge has observed that they "are considered so true as to lose all the powers of truth, and lie bedridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors."

But yet they are the honest result of independent meditation, not gathered from books; and, in so far as they may agree with the conclusions of others who have had the advantages of academic leisure and extensive reading, for which a life spent in active public business abroad affords too little opportunity, the agreement would make it probable that such conclusions were not at variance with the truthful relations which it may be presumed were designed to exist between the reason of man and the objects on which it is exercised.

On this account, therefore, I trust that they may assist you in forming a judgment on one

of the most important subjects that can employ the mind of one just about to enter on the active scene of life, especially at a juncture of the world's affairs, when the first principles of social order are called in question, and when projects for the eradication of social evils are as multiform as the errors and vices from which those evils have derived their growth.

LETTER II.

THE PRINCIPLE ASSERTED.

MONTESQUIEU, in answer to Bayle's assertion, that a state, composed of Christians, could not subsist, observes:—

“Pourquoi non? Ce serait des citoyens infiniment éclairés sur leurs devoirs, et qui auraient un très grand zèle pour les remplir; ils sentiraient très bien les droits de la défense naturelle; plus ils croiraient devoir à la religion, plus ils penseraient devoir à la patrie. Les principes du Christianisme, bien gravés dans le cœur, seraient infiniment plus forts que ce faux honneur des monarchies, ces vertus humaines des républiques et cette crainte servile des états despotiques.”

In another passage the same writer exclaims, —“Chose admirable! la religion Chrétienne qui ne semble avoir d'objet que la félicité de l'autre vie, fait encore notre bonheur dans celle-ci.”

The wonder is that so acute and profound