

**THE PULPIT: ITS RELATIONS
TO OUR
NATIONAL CRISIS:
A SERMON PP. 5-69**

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The Pulpit: Its Relations to Our National Crisis: A Sermon pp. 5-69 by N. L. Rice

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A SERMON,

PREACHED IN FIFTH AVENUE AND NINETEENTH
STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY
N. L. RICE, D. D.

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Then said he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.—
MATT. XXII. 21.

THE efforts of bad men to injure the cause of religion, and to gain for themselves a cheap popularity by destroying the influence of its faithful teachers, has given occasion to the utterance and the defence of some of the most important and precious truths of divine revelation. Thus, the attempt of the Pharisees to entangle our Lord in his talk, and in this way to convict him of disloyalty to Cæsar's government, led to the inculcation of one of those great principles of religion which is to control the conduct of his people to the end of time, namely, Fidelity to God, first and chiefly; and fidelity, secondly, to the civil

governments under which his providence may place them. Paul's defences of himself against the slanders of his enemies, contain truths of so much value, that they were placed on record for the instruction of the Church in all future time; and the false accusations against the followers of Christ, in the early ages of Christianity, called forth those Apologies for the Christian Religion, which accomplished so much for the cause of truth. Thus in every age God has made the wrath of man to praise him, by overruling the slanders heaped upon his servants, for the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul, whilst a prisoner at Rome, wrote to the church at Philippi, saying: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." And the imprisonment of Baxter and Bunyan resulted in the writing of books which have proved a thousand times more efficacious than their public preaching, in the diffusion of the doctrines of the Gospel.

It need not, then, be regretted, that slanders published in this city and in other places, have made it proper for me to depart, on the present occasion, from my ordinary course, and to speak on subjects which I seldom deem it expedient

to introduce into the pulpit, namely, *The state of the country, and my own position with reference to it.* I do this in accordance with the advice of judicious friends, and with the design immediately to publish the discourse.

1. I pursue this course, not for the purpose of stirring up the patriotic feeling of my people. There is not the slightest necessity for this. Their conduct is the conclusive evidence that their love of their country is sufficiently intense. Indeed, it would be little to the credit of any Christian congregation, to admit their need of exhortation on such a subject, in such a day as this.

It is important, however, to remark, that patriotism is not, as many seem to imagine, a Christian virtue. It is, like natural affection, the spontaneous feeling of the heart. It is as natural for me to love my country as to love my home; and as there are multitudes of men, not Christians, who tenderly love their firesides and their families, so are there multitudes of true patriots, who do not profess to be Christians. Indeed, it not unfrequently happens in both cases, that that which is natural to the mind becomes too strong. How often are fathers and mothers chargeable with a species of idolatry in the affection which they lavish on their children—

giving them a place in their hearts which is due only to God. And so do men not unfrequently love their country so intensely, as to forget or disregard the rights of other nations; and Christians, in their intense devotion to their country, in its struggles, constantly lose sight of the interests of the Church of Christ, which, in our day, is in no less peril.

It is, nevertheless, true, that Christianity exerts a most important influence on both natural affection and patriotic feeling—elevating both, and giving them a wise direction. It moderates the love of country, when it would become too exclusive, and makes men *philanthropists* as well as patriots; and it teaches them how to advance the true interests both of their own country and of mankind.

Have you ever observed, that there is in the Bible no command to love one's country? You find no such precept in the Decalogue, nor is there any such in the Gospel; nor is patriotism ever placed in any enumeration of the Christian virtues, any more than is natural affection. If a minister of the Gospel were about to preach on this subject, he might be perplexed to find a text. We do, indeed, find commands to obey the powers that be, to pray for civil rulers, and the

like; but all this is required of one even temporarily sojourning in any country. Now, since the Bible is a perfect rule of duty, as well as of faith, why do we find in it no command or exhortation to love our country? Not because patriotism is not most important, but because it is *natural*, just as it is natural for members of the same family to love each other. If a father have ceased to love his children, it is because depravity has destroyed natural affection. How can the affection thus destroyed be restored? Not merely or chiefly by exhorting him to love his family. The control of evil passions over his mind must be broken; and then natural affection will resume its sway. Purify and elevate his moral feelings; and then, and not till then, will he again love his family, and cherish the children whom he had abandoned or abused. And so, if a man have ceased to love his country, it is because this noble affection, so natural to the mind, has been smothered by selfishness and degrading passions. It is vain to preach to such a man the duty of loving his country. The reign of depravity in his heart must be subdued, and then he will again cherish the country of his birth, or of his adoption.

We cannot but admire the divine wisdom in