

THE CHURCH AND KINGDOM OF GOD.



THE CHRISTMAS SEASON brings to mind the mission and teachings of that Divine man whose birth into the world is now commemorated. His forerunner proclaimed, concerning His advent, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" The enemies of Christ and His cause declared this to be treason against imperial Rome. And the cruel death to which the Messiah was put followed the accusation. Yet the Kingdom that was announced by the Baptist and the Nazarene, was in no sense inimical to any earthly government, but tended to make its adherents better citizens and more useful to the state because of their attachment to the Church and Kingdom of God. They were to "render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's" while they "rendered unto God the things that were God's."

It is the same in the restoration of the church and kingdom in the latter days, preceding the second advent of the world's Redeemer. It is again announced that "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand," and as a preparatory work the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been organized, by Divine authority and commandment. And history repeats itself in the old cry of "treason" and the charges that the "Mormon" organization is imperium in imperio. Yet it does not attempt to exercise the powers of a secular government, but its influence and effects are to strengthen and promote fidelity to the law and loyalty to the nation where its followers reside.

The phrase "church and kingdom" is frequently used by speakers and writers in reference to the system called "Mormonism." It is solely an ecclesiastical organization. It is separate and distinct from the state. It does not interfere with any earthly government. Its members, however, are also citizens, entitled to the same rights and privileges as other persons who are not of their faith. Its officers are not deprived of anything appertaining to citizenship in consequence of their ecclesiastical calling. Their duty to God is not incompatible with their duty to their country; on the contrary, the former implies and emphasizes the latter.

The religion of the Latter-day Saints relates to present conduct as well as future happiness. It influences its votaries in everything that affects human character. It is for the body as well as for the spirit. It teaches people how to live and act in this world that they may be prepared for the realities of the world to come. The Church, therefore, instructs in things temporal as well as things spiritual, so far as they relate to the Church, its properties and institutions and the association of its adherents. But it does not infringe upon the liberty of the individual or encroach upon the domain of the state. The free agency of man is a fundamental principle which, according to the tenets of the Church, even God Himself does not suppress. Therefore the Church does not dictate a member's business, his politics or his personal affairs. It never tells a citizen what occupation he shall follow, whom he shall vote for or with which party he shall affiliate.

In the case of such Church officers as are expected to devote their time and talents constantly in its service, and upon whom it depends for the prompt performance of such obligations, it requires that they shall, before entering into secular pursuits that would prevent them from attending to their Church duties, first acquaint their presiding officers with their desires and obtain permission to carry out their intentions, in order that no confusion or failure in the order and work of the Church may be occasioned thereby. This requirement necessarily extends to the acceptance of political office, but not to the choice of party or the liberty to engage in such political or other activity as would not interfere with the services due to the Church. Every officer as well as member of the Church is entirely free as to political opinion and action, and may resign any position that is in restraint of perfect liberty.

The early settlement of Utah by the Latter-day Saints or "Mormons" was the result of persecution and hostility to their religion. The Church leaders were the Pioneers in this colonization. They directed the movement and the work of founding and building cities and industries, for the formation of a new commonwealth. When the Territory was organized by Congress they were placed in public office as the logical and fitting incumbents. The President of the Church, the leading pioneer, was appointed Governor by the President and Senate of the United States. Other prominent Church leaders received civil appointments, and the most active Church officials, being engaged also in promoting secular improvements, were elected to territorial and civil positions. This condition of affairs fostered the notion that "Mormonism" united church and state. The unanimity that prevailed in the choice of these public servants while the people of Utah were practically of one faith and party, further favored the impression abroad that they voted as they were required by the Church. But the ecclesiastical and political systems were kept distinct, and their affairs were separately conducted and maintained.

It does not follow, because a man who is elected to a national, state or municipal office is also a minister of religion, that a union is formed between church and state. And if there is anything of that nature in the case of an ecclesiast in one of the orthodox churches holding a political office, it is different with the officials of the "Mormon" Church, who, as a rule, follow secular pursuits for their livelihood and engage in business like other citizens. They do not form a separate class even among their coreligionists, but the Priesthood of the "Mormon" Church is held by the large majority of its male members. And the Church exacts no special duty from any person who is elected to a political office nor imposes upon him any requirements that conflict with those of his secular oath or obligation. It interposes nothing between him and his full fidelity to the government which he is elected to serve.

There is no such thing as "the oath of an Apostle," or "the oath of an Elder," or of any other officer in the "Mormon" Church. Nor is any person belonging to it required to take an oath, obligation, covenant or agreement against or to the injury of any government under the sun. All statements to the contrary are mistakes or wilful untruths. The Church and Kingdom of God promotes obedience to the laws of the land, and recognizes the national Constitution as of Divine origin, in that it was framed by wise men raised up by the Almighty for that very purpose. Its principles are to be upheld, and the authority it confers is to be respected and sustained by every Latter-day Saint. This has been taught in the Church from the beginning, in public and in private, and is established as one of its "Articles of Faith." Such statutes as at any time were resisted by "Mormons" were opposed because they were believed to be contrary to the Constitution, and were tested in the manner provided in that sacred instrument. The result has been acquiescence in, at the cost of much humiliation and suffering to many individuals.

The Bible, which is one of the written standards of the "Mormon" Church, teems with predictions and promises of the establishment of Divine rule on the earth; of the advent of a reign of righteousness extending over all the face of the globe. Christ is to be King and all nations and peoples are to serve and obey Him. That is to be the Kingdom of God in very deed. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is set up preparatory to that Kingdom. Its gospel is "the gospel of the kingdom." Its principles, ordinances, authority and gifts are of heavenly origin. It is therefore the spiritual "kingdom of heaven," bearing within it the influence and power that are to open the way for the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the universal dominion of the Son of God. Church members are commanded by Divine revelation, to "be subject unto the powers that be, until He comes whose right it is to reign." They are thus enjoined by the same authority: "Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that obeys the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land." The twelfth article of faith, taught to children in the Sunday schools, to the young people of both sexes in the Mutual Improvement Associations, and to all communicants in the Church is: "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law."

The courts of the Church are entirely ecclesiastical. They adjudicate between Church members in matters of dispute and in the promotion of Church discipline. Litigation among them is deprecated, and it is deemed wrong for brother to go to law against brother. But no penalty is enforced other than disfellowshipment, or excommunication as the extreme punishment. The courts of law are recognized in their secular capacity, and their decisions are honored and observed.

Sermons, dissertations and arguments by preachers and writers in the Church concerning the Kingdom of God that is to be, are not to be understood as relating to the present. If they are so presented as to convey the idea that the dominion to come is to be exercised now, the claim is incorrect, no matter by whom set forth, because it is in direct conflict with Divine revelation to the Church. Such opinions do not weigh at all when placed in the scales against the word and command of Almighty God.

The Church and Kingdom of God does not use any compulsion over the souls of men. Nor does it claim any right so to do. The Priesthood which it bears is Divine authority to administer in behalf of Deity in the truths and ordinances of salvation. Those who hold it are warned against seeking to exercise unrighteous dominion, and instructed that it can only be maintained "by persuasion, by longsuffering, by gentleness and meekness and by love unfeigned." The presiding authorities therein regulate the affairs of the Church by "common consent," and their jurisdiction is within, and not without, its ecclesiastical limits. Every member of the organization in every place is absolutely free as a citizen, and is not restrained of any liberty enjoyed by non-members.

The attitude of this Church toward other religious societies is thus clearly set forth in the eleventh article of our faith: "We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may." In this spirit we act toward all the nations and kingdoms of the world. We have no quarrel with any of them. In proclaiming "the kingdom of heaven's at hand," we have the most intense and fervent convictions of our mission and calling, and intend to stand by them under all circumstances and conditions. But we do not and will not attempt to force them upon others, or to control or dominate any of their affairs, individual or national. We regard all people as the children of the Eternal Father, and therefore as our brothers and sisters. We seek their welfare, we endeavor to enlighten them, we desire their happiness, progress and salvation. We abhor tyranny, we resent oppression, but we do not believe in retaliation for real or supposed injuries. We seek to enjoy and exercise the spirit that inspired the world's Redeemer who, we believe, will eventually be its King. And with that feeling we proclaim that the motto of this Church and Kingdom of the latter days on this Christmas day in the year of our Lord 1903, is, as of old, "Peace on earth, good will to man!"

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