

Duffield, George

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS.

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AN HISTORICAL SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Coates' Street Presbyterian Church,

PHILADELPHIA,

ON

FAST DAY, JANUARY 4, 1861.

BY

GEORGE DUFFIELD, JR.,

PASTOR.

WITH COPIOUS NOTES, AND AN APPENDIX.

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*"The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs  
in the affairs of men."*—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

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Hon. C. Sumner.  
(Class of 1850)

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter : so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it :

If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ;

If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.—*Jeremiah* xviii. 3-10.

## A P P E N D I X .

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### A.

“The convention for forming a Constitution, for the State of Pennsylvania, met at Philadelphia, on Monday, 15th July, 1776, and elected Dr. Benjamin Franklin, President. By solemn resolution they directed Divine service to be performed before them, by the Rev. Wm. White, since Bishop of Pennsylvania, and offering to Almighty God, their praises and thanksgiving for the manifold mercies, and the peculiar interposition of his special providence, in behalf of the injured and oppressed United States, they prayed for His Divine grace and assistance in the important and arduous task committed to them.”—*Gordon's History of Pennsylvania*, p. 539.

The following document was evidently prepared to assist the deliberations of the convention; it has never before been published, and only within a few months narrowly escaped destruction. Whilst “rummaging” as Mr. Jefferson says, among a mass of old papers, we were fortunate enough to discover and save this well considered testimony of one of the Chaplains of the Old Continental Congress.

### WHO SHOULD BE OUR RULERS ?

*Query.*—May a community of professing christians, of right require any profession of the christian faith of those appointed to bear rule among them, previous to their admission to office, or make a profession of christianity, a suspending term of their being admitted to any of the principal offices in the state ?

Though every sect of christians are through human weakness, liable to mistake, and ought therefore to exercise mutual charity and forbearance towards each other; neither may any person have any injury done him, in his name, person or estate, or be subjected to any pains or penalties for his religious sentiments, whilst in no way tending to the hurt of the commonwealth; yet, that they may, and ought to require a profession of christianity in general, such as a belief of the Holy Scriptures, to be of Divine authority, and salvation by Jesus Christ, of every of their principal officers of state, previous to their

admission appears—if not absolutely incumbent—yet by far the most probable and eligible sentiment, from the following considerations :

1. Officers in the State are to be considered as the servants of the public, employed by the Body, to perform certain services for them, and for which service, they receive that reward or hire, which the community agree to give; though officers are the servants of the State, it is yet the highest honor the State can confer on any of its members, to repose confidence in them, to transact for them the public concerns.

2. No man, or set of men, has any natural right to any office in the State, more than he has a natural right to oblige or demand his neighbor to hire him to perform any service he has to do, and consequently none of his natural rights are infringed—if the community think proper not to employ him, more than the farmer infringes on the natural rights of the laborer, when he chooses to employ another rather than him.

3. Every community has an undoubted right to choose whom they will employ, to perform any service for them, equally as the farmer has, to choose whom he will employ to perform any labor for him. And as they have a right to choose as they please, whom they will employ—So,

4. They have for the same reason, an equal right to make such regulations as they see proper, respecting the persons they will agree to employ in their service, so that these regulations infringe on no man's natural right, nor inflict any penalty on those they may not think proper to employ.

5. For a society of professing Christians, to agree to employ none in any of their principal offices of service in the State, but such as profess christianity, appears to be no more than a proper mark of respect paid to themselves, as a body, and to the christian religion they profess, and cannot therefore, in that point of view be condemned.

Whereas, on the other hand, to act a contrary part, must appear in the eyes of the far greater part of the community, treating christianity with a degree of neglect, and has a direct tendency to sink it lower in the public esteem, and induce many through the influence, a connection of ideas has on the mind of man, to hold it on a par with Infidelity, in other respects as well, also, as in that wherein they would thus see it placed by the Constitution of their government.

6. Good morals are essentially necessary to the health and prosperity of the State.

Whatever measure therefore, appears best adapted to preserve and promote the morals of the state ought to be embraced.

Christianity is much better calculated to preserve and pro-

mote good morals than infidelity; as much therefore, as christianity is better calculated for this great essential purpose, so much more advisable and prudent it is, to have christian magistrates and officers, rather than infidels, especially when we consider,

7. The experience of all ages has confirmed the observation, that the principles and practice of superiors, and especially of rulers, have great influence on those of inferior rank; as in the history of the Jews; the complexion of the people at large, as either moral or profane, may generally be known by adverting to the character of the rulers that were over them, and it is ever to be expected, that every man will endeavour according to his opportunities for that purpose, to promote the sentiments he himself has embraced, and induce others to join him in practice.

To admit therefore, an Infidel to authority and rule in the State, as it gives weight and influence to his sentiment and example, so it has in the same proportion a direct tendency, to promote infidelity and sap the foundation of good morals in the state, and thereby do it a material and essential injury; nor can the effect be doubted, when we consider how naturally prone mankind are to be, much more easily and powerfully influenced by evil sentiments and examples than good ones.

This appears the language of reason, and though I am well aware how readily many are disposed to a Deistical contempt of that Sacred Book, to sneer at an appeal to the Holy Scriptures, yet, as I believe them to be from God, and designed to make us wise for our own true good here, as well as eternal happiness hereafter, I am not ashamed to apply to them in the present case, and assert it most consonant to the declared will and command of the Eternal God; that a State composed of professing christians, should place over them, rulers and officers professing christianity. And here it is necessary to observe that the Scriptures were not designed for any one particular nation of people, but as a rule of direction, for the professing people of God, in all parts and ages of the world. And although in the directions given to the Jews, there were some things of a particular nature and particularly designed for that people, exclusive of all other nations under heaven in every age, yet, whatever general directions were given to them, founded in and consonant to the reason of things, these were as much designed for us as for them, and are equally obligatory on us. Who will venture to say that the great charter of blessings confirmed to that people, *Deut.* 28: and sanctioned by heavy penalties; those denounced in case of persisted in Rebellion against the the authority of God, was not equally

designed to inform us as them, of the way wherein to secure national prosperity and avoid national calamity and distress? and has not the experience of all ages, agreeable hereto, confirmed the Sacred Remark—*Prov.* xiv. 34, that “Righteousness exalteth a nation,” &c.? This then, being granted, which cannot with reason be denied, it will follow that the directions given to that people to regulate their conduct, in choosing their chief magistrate, and established by God himself as a part of their Constitution, ought at least to have some respect paid to it by christians, in choosing those who are to bear rule among them; it is certainly, more probable we shall act agreeable to the mind of God in paying a regard to it, as far as our circumstances coincide with those of the people to whom it was given, than by treating it with absolute neglect. These directions are therefore, transmitted down to us, *Deut.* xvii. 18. Let any one read the passage and then say whether an Infidel Magistrate can by any means be supposed to answer the character; or whether its most plain and natural meaning, if it has any respect or meaning to us at all, is not that as professing christians we ought to choose officers professing christianity, for,

1st. He is to be of their Religion, that is a Jew, incorporated in that body and professing the Jewish Religion, no matter of what tribe or order, save only that none of the tribe of Levi, are to be chosen. This is all the exception made, and it is a good exception, still, nor will any of the clerical order desire it, unless they have forgotten the apostolic injunction, “Give thyself wholly to these things,” 1 *Tim.* iv. 15.

2d. He is to study the word of God, for though the expression, (*Deut.* xvii. 18,) has a special reference to the judicial law of that people, it cannot with propriety be restricted to that. It was the whole law which was with the priests and Levites, but this was the whole of the Divine Revelation, is still of excellent use to form even the highest officers of the State, for a faithful discharge of their trust to the commonwealth as well as to form the individual for usefulness here and glory hereafter.

3d. He was to learn to fear the Lord—but how is this most likely to be obtained to have rulers that are taught to fear God? Is it by choosing Infidels or by choosing Christians?

4th. He was to set an example to the people—and this example was certainly not for nothing, but that it might have influence; it was therefore as much the people’s duty to observe and follow the example of their rulers, as it was theirs to set it. But what example shall we expect from Infidels? Are they likely to walk in the law of the Lord? &c., or ought we to choose examples of infidelity to set before us and our children to copy after?

A second direction from the sacred pages, 2 Samuel xxiii. 3. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in *the fear of God.*" This is an express command of God, and delivered in terms so general, as render it impossible to be restricted to the Jews, but equally designed for us as any other portion of Sacred Writ. And will any say that an Infidel answers to this character, or is likely to rule in the fear of God? The 101st Psalm is generally understood as descriptive of those the Psalmist, by divine direction, was determined to employ in the service of the State; and such are characterized, v. 6, by walking in the perfect way. But is it possible to suppose infidelity can be that "perfect way?" Or if the Psalm should be understood of domestic servants, will not the argument hold much stronger with respect to those who are to serve the State?

In Isaiah xlix. 23, it is promised among the singular blessings that shall attend Christian States in the day of their greatest prosperity, that their rulers shall be "nursing fathers," &c., to the Church of Christ. But are Infidels likely to be these nursing fathers? Or when we know God generally accomplishes ends in the way of means adapted to these ends, shall we use the means that are most directly opposed to it, in order to obtain the so valuable and desirable ends?

Under the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is express in this matter, by the Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. vi. 1—7, which cannot be understood as forbidding Christians to go to law at all, for then would the Holy Spirit manifestly contradict himself, and condemn the use of what he elsewhere terms an "ordinance of God." Neither is it to be restricted merely to the condemning of a litigious disposition, for there would then be no need of saying anything about judges, whether Heathen or Christian, as a litigious temper has nothing to do with the judge, but is still the same, whatever the magistrate be. But the charge against them is in express terms, not for going to law, but for going to law before infidel magistrates and judges, and not before Christians, as v. 1, and then even when there were no Christian officers in the State; for which reason he urges them to choose judges among themselves, by mutual consent, and submit to them the decision of their debates, rather than apply to infidels for justice; nay, even to sustain loss, and bear the injury which otherwise they had no right to bear, rather than appear before a heathen or infidel bar, which must appear to any candid inquirer the very design of the apostle's address; for to understand it, as some pretend to do, as an injunction to settle matters by arbitration, and not to go to law, is begging

the question, and deriving their argument from the corrupt administration and unrighteous delay of justice, which is the only reason that gives arbitration the preference, inasmuch as were proper judges appointed, and they faithfully to attend to and discharge their duty, there could be no more proper, just, or expeditious method devised of deciding debates. And, besides, there is not a single syllable in the text about a corrupt administration or unjust delay of justice, but the matter is entirely and precisely about the judges, and that only.

Upon the whole, both reason and revelation, if I am not greatly mistaken, will be found with united suffrage to declare that if it is not an absolutely incumbent duty, it is at least highly becoming, and right, and fit that a community of professing Christians should admit none but such as profess Christianity to principal places of trust, as Rulers in the State, and this, I am well persuaded, will be found to be the sentiment of a very great majority of the sober thinking part of all denominations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, nor can any with the least shadow of justice allege that this tends to establish, or give a prerogative to any one sect of Christians above another, inasmuch as all that is contended for is only in addition to the belief of one Eternal God, the Creator and Governor of the world, proposing also a belief in Jesus Christ the Saviour, and that the holy Scriptures, as contained in the Old and New Testaments, are of divine authority, and given as a rule of faith and manners, leaving to every man and to every sect and denomination to understand the Scriptures, and explain and receive the doctrines contained therein, in the best manner they can for themselves, according to the measure of light where-with they are indued, without any human exposition or interpretation of others being imposed upon them; but the rights of conscience fully and equally secured to all of every denomination.

Arguments, I know, and some of them at first view plausible, are offered on the other side of the question.

1st. It is said the Church and State ought to be kept entirely separate, and no connection admitted between things civil and religious, as they have no connection in nature, and many mischiefs have flowed from blending them together. If this be so, then great care must be taken to establish nothing of morality, for this is one grand essential constituent of religion, which consists in loving God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves; doing to all men as we would wish them in like circumstances to do to us. If any say the good of society requires this, I answer this is only giving up the position, and saying that though civil and religious things are to be kept entirely apart, they are yet in many things so inseparably connected



that it is impossible to separate them one from the other. If this be so, we can then have no Sabbath established in any State, however composed entirely of professing Christians, unless it be somewhat of a political Sabbath, and entirely dissimilar to the word of God, for as the observation of a Sabbath is a part, and that a very material and foundation part of true Religion—for any State, therefore, to establish the observation of a Sabbath, is so far to blend Religion with their civil constitution; which, according to the above position, ought by no means to be done, but the two be kept entirely separate from each other.\* Nay, further, as the observation of a Sabbath is a part of revealed religion, and depends entirely on the divine authority of that revelation which enjoins it, we cannot establish the observation of a Sabbath without previously admitting, and equally establishing the divine authority of that revelation on which the Sabbath depends. We must, therefore, inevitably either admit and establish in our civil constitution the divine authority of the Scriptures, or we must utterly reject the Sabbath from amongst us, save as any one may choose of his own accord to observe the day. There is no alternative in the case. Admit, then, the Sabbath rejected, as on the above position it absolutely must be, and no one obliged to observe it, I leave it to any man who has observed how difficult it is with all the care that can be taken to have a Sabbath observed, I leave it to him to judge what our situation in a few years will be. Whether we shall be likely to have a Sabbath among us at all, but in this respect be purely heathen, and the Sabbath entirely gone, though the wisest and best of men in every age have esteemed the observation of the Sabbath of essential use to promote not only piety towards God, but morality toward men, and the great good of society; and God himself laid it down as a first grand foundation principle in the Jewish constitution, instantly after bringing them forth out of Egypt. The truth of the case is, it is impossible to run a line of distinction between things civil and religious, so as to separate the one from the other, in any civilized State. They are in many respects what God and nature have joined together, and man may not put asunder. The only culpable connection is when, instead of establishing purely the inspired standard, human creeds and compositions are established, and an unequal and equally unjust prerogative or preference is given to any one sect or denomination over or beyond others, or when any pains or penalties are inflicted for religious sentiments, in no wise interfering with the common good and safety of the State.

\* See "*Sunday Laws; or, Shall the Sabbath be protected?*" An Essay published by the Presbyterian Board, Philadelphia.

2d. It is said, to exclude an Infidel from being admitted to stand candidate for any office in the State, is infringing his natural right, and impliedly inflicting a penalty on him for his conscience sake, and in a matter purely respecting religion, and which ought to have nothing to do with things of a civil nature.

To which I reply—If no man has a natural right to any office in the State, there is no natural right infringed in not electing him to that office. If it be said, though he has not a natural right to the office, he has a natural right to be admitted to stand a candidate for it, it is replied, the collective body have certainly as good a natural right to determine on the qualifications of those they will agree to choose into that office; and if there be any clashing of natural rights, or if a natural right on the one side stands opposed to a natural right on the other, Reason says, that of the individual ought to give way to that of the collective body. Nor is his being excluded by the want of a qualification judged proper by the community, to be esteemed a penalty inflicted, whilst no injury is done him in name, person or estate, but he enjoys in peace and safety all his civil and religious rights and liberties, save only that the community have not thought proper to appoint him a ruler over them.

3dly. It is said, It may be depriving the community of the service of a very capable, useful and worthy member, to which I answer, in the language of the Apostle to the Corinthians—Can it be supposed there are not wise men to be found among a whole State of professing Christians—no, not so many as to afford a sufficient number to fill the most important offices of the State? If it be so, the Christian religion must have greatly dwindled away in that State, and the time come near at hand when it will be proper to give it up to the direction of Infidels.

4thly. It is said—It would be depriving the people of a free choice. If the people have before laid down and agreed upon such a regulation, they are deprived of nothing but departing from a rule which they themselves have considered as salutary, and necessary to be observed.

5th. It is alleged—That the prudence of the people would so direct them that there could be no danger of a majority being chosen of such as disbelieve in Christianity, and that two or three, or any small number, could do no harm.

It is a remark made by the wise man, that one sinner destroyeth much good, and it might hold in this case as well as in others. And if it would be prudent in the people to guard against a majority of their representatives or chief officers being Infidels, one would think it not a very imprudent step to

establish a rule that, without doing injury to any man, would effectually prevent it.

It is scarce worth mentioning a certain commonplace objection, which, though really an insult on the meanest understanding to offer, is yet made against requiring a subscription of a profession, as calculated only to make men act the hypocrite, by declaring what they do not believe, inasmuch as the same objection equally militates against requiring any profession, or declaration of anything, or enjoining an oath of fidelity on admission into any office: for a man may certainly as easily act the hypocrite in professing allegiance to the United States of America, declaring against the right of the King of Britain to govern these States, or solemnly swearing that he will discharge the trust of office committed to him, as in making a profession of believing the Scriptures; that if for this reason the latter should be rejected, all ought by right to be renounced together.

I shall close my remarks on this subject at present with observing, old customs and institutions with which we have long been acquainted are like old friends, whom we shall not hastily cast off, without weighty reasons urging thereto. We have tried now for near a century an institution, the same in substance with that above pleaded for, formed by the celebrated founder of this State. No inconvenience has ever arisen from it. It has obtained universal esteem, is interwoven into our earliest thought of the matter, and grown up with our judgment; under this the people will feel themselves contented and happy; whether the case will be the same with the proposed alteration is greatly to be questioned, or rather the negative is certain, and the experiment, if made, will but too probably in its consequences verify in the State of Pennsylvania the Prophet Hosea's remark, chap. viii. 3 and 4—"Israel hath cast off the thing which is good, they have set up rulers but not by Me."

GEORGE DUFFIELD.

The above piece was written at the time of forming the Constitution of the State of Pennsylvania, and though I wish to exercise all the charity I can for all mankind, and abhor the idea of subjecting any person to any, even the least injury on account of his religious sentiments or tenets in things pertaining to another world, so that he behave himself as a good citizen, yet, on a calm review of the case, at this distance of time, I cannot but think the arguments here adduced have weight, and that, on the whole, it is the safest line of conduct.

G. D

PHILADELPHIA, *Sept.* 5, 1787.