

THE FAITH OF
THE PRESIDENT

PRESENTED

by

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on

*The
Back to God*

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THE FAITH OF THE PRESIDENT

... He is God's servant for our good. ...
Romans 13:4

A candidate for the presidency of the United States must be at least 35 years old, 14 years lived within the country for at least 14 years, and he must be a "natural born" citizen. Last of these qualifications, though it seems innocent enough - the matter of being "natural born" - is in fact a bit of a puzzle. Just what it means has not been legally defined, and in the case of at least one potential candidate some years ago, whether or not he qualified at this point was open to discussion.

But there are no doubt other qualifications for such high office which are even more difficult to define than the matter of one's natural birth." And one feels, however, that the tumultuous conditions are over and Miami Beach has returned to its normal rhythm. That the opportunity to discuss these other qualifications would be welcome. There are matters of personal integrity, wisdom, knowledge of man and of the world, and the matter of religious faith which must, I suppose, have some bearing on the way a man conducts himself when discharging the responsibilities of the first office in a land.

You may have noticed that I mentioned the matter of religious faith, and I suppose at that point I am guilty of very bad taste indeed. For on the North American continent at least, and both of its great countries are having their national elections this year, it is a little gauche to talk about the religious faith of public figures, especially of political people. To suppose that one's faith might influence a person in his di-

charge of public office is, apparently, akin to suggesting that the man is guilty of dishonorable conflict of interest, while candidates for public office often claim some kind of membership in a religious body, they ordinarily disavow any connection between their faith and their views of public policy.

Now, it is rather strange really that we would be shocked if a political figure would say, believe that God is the sovereign ruler of the world and its affairs, and I want fervently to worship and serve Jesus as Lord. I believe that man is the image bearer of God and I believe the Bible is the Word of God and I intend to express this deep religious faith of mine in everything I do " It is strange that we do not expect such a declaration, for there is scarcely any other element of human life that is more connected to morality and ethics than politics is. Since high level national policy ultimately affects the lives of millions at home, and possibly millions overseas as well, it would, one might think, behoove a person openly to declare his intentions to seek and do the will of the Lord if he were a believer in Christ.

But it is true, isn't it, that we have developed, for the most part, a theory of government that has succeeded in convincing many of us that religion must carefully be kept out of the process of government. In America the slogan "separation of church and state" has become the reigning simplicity that blinds most citizens to the complexity of the relationship between religion and government. True, there are still chaplains in the armed forces, in the houses of legislation, and there are prayer breakfasts and the like, but there is little deliberate effort to have the deep religious insights that prevail

Now, simple obedience certainly in order so long as a government reflects the good teaching of the Word of God. But what happens when the government contradicts the teachings of the Scripture? What happens when, for instance, one form of education which is confessedly non-Christian is judged the only kind worthy of public support? What happens when the rights of minority groups are consistently disregarded? What happens when economic practices and monetary policies are followed that do violence to the nature of man? What happens, for example, when the government actively promotes genocide, as has happened within this century? What happens then? Do Christians still remain meek and obedient? When do they stand up and present alternate theories of government?

A very intriguing passage in the Bible itself has been responsible for the prevailing idea that Christians are simply to obey the government and be good citizens and that is Romans 13. Romans 13 counsels them this way: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. This is good advice, and it needs stressing in many contexts. The Bible continues and reminds us that authorities are instituted by God and they exist to encourage good conduct and discourage evil. But right in this same paragraph, the Bible introduces ideas that are extremely exciting and which reveal ways of looking at government that are much, much different from the ways we generally do today.

Speaking of the Christian view of government at the National Convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Dr. Bernard Zylstra commented on Romans 13 this way:

"This has often been interpreted to mean Paul's passive acquiescence to the power of the Roman empire. It means no such thing. Instead, this passage—along with the entire letter to the Roman Christians—in effect destroyed the spiritual foundations of the Roman empire. For the essence of that empire was that the citizen exists for the good of the state. Paul turns this around, and does so totally: the state and its authorities exist for the good of the citizen. This is in a nutshell, the evangelical, the Gospel's message for politics: all political authority exists for the benefit, the good, the welfare, of the citizen."

Dr. Zylstra's point seems to be well taken here, for Romans 13 does indeed indicate that the president, or the prime minister if you will, is "God's servant for your good." Thus, you see, at the same time the Bible calls for obedience to the government, it describes a view of government which is very precise. A government official is a servant of God for the good of the people.

In this year of great political interest, it is worthwhile thinking about Romans 13. A ruler is a servant of God for the good of the people. When one reflects on this rather simple appearing statement, it becomes clear that this is a viewpoint that contradicts the political ideas that are found in the world's great democracies these days.

The idea that government officials must carry out their work for the good of the people is not particularly revolutionary, of course, for most governments attempt to give the impression that they are trying to do just that. Further thought on the matter suggests, though, that when we talk about the good of the people,

nowadays we generally read, the good of the majority.

Tyranny is exercised by a dictator by a majority of people. Even now and then, even in free countries, certain fundamental human rights submitted to the people for their vote. This happens, occasionally, in connection with constitutional matters. But fundamental human rights may never be voted on.

The Bible which reminds us that rulers exist for the good of the people, is the same book which carefully describes man and his nature. No ruler can serve the good of the people unless he has drunk deeply of the Biblical view of man, his needs, and his destiny. It is not enough simply to ascertain the will of the majority.

But Romans 13 also introduces a very interesting concept when it suggests that rulers are: the 'servants of God'. This is something the free nations have not fully understood. The good of the people has often meant in effect that political figures have become servants of the people. According to the Bible, though, a ruler is not required simply to listen obediently to the will of the majority and then do what they want. No, he is called to operate by the objective, definite rules of God. He should know God's Word, the Bible, and should conduct himself as one who knows that he must serve the Lord Christ in the conduct of his office.

Let's not fool ourselves. The faith of a nation's leaders makes all the difference in the world. And I don't mean whether or not they are involved in certain formal religious activities of one kind or another. It means the faith

that is found in their heart of hearts. What they know to be true about God, and about Jesus: Christ His Son, and what they know to be true about the Bible, and what they know to be true about their responsibilities to these dying impulses at the center of human souls, these are extremely important, all political protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

Right now as I look toward the Atlantic; the massive national campaigns, I should like to see that the faith is clear. And I say this not so that this brief investigation of Romans 11 might look like some jargon of the candidates and for election in terms of what I know about their faith or anything else. It is the present condition in which we must reassess our total political system to see whether or not we have outsmarted ourselves by erecting a wall between religion and the state. That is high and so important, we are expected candidates for public office forthrightly to announce their religious allegiance and to express their convictions as they conduct their office.

While we have not removed the embellishment of religious practice from our nation, we have in fact deprived our highest actions of the benefits of specifically Christian influence. We have forced our public officials to exhibit in public utterance and public policy a neutralism that has too often resulted in moral bankruptcy and more than once in action that has been an abomination in the sight of heaven.

I fully realize that what I am saying will be judged by most to be a hopeless impracticality and by some the Ycray beginning of treason.

there have been those who have recently re-minded us, for example, that the American people, at least, want to hear and talk about. There are some who will quickly and prominently remind us once again of the evils of clericalism. Admittedly such evils are not imaginary.

But what about the evils of government, explicitly, deliberately, carefully cut from the reforming power of the Word of the living God. What disaster is this bringing us to what kind of a country is it where a political candidate for high office must apparently cultivate the art of religious double-talk when he speaks of faith matters? What kind of a country is it where a man would be signing his political death warrant if he were to declare without hedging: "My first allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. His Word is my ultimate authority. As a servant of God first, and serving Him, I seek the good of the people"?

Right now, while the campaigns begin and then accelerate, is a good time to declare the message of the Bible. It we find a faith that is as big as the world and as big as our country. The Bible is a book that has the ages, and provides perspective that is indispensable if one is to rule wisely and well. At its center there is the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Christ is not content with a little bit of our lives. He is Lord of it all. Every action, every decision, every dream, every plan, every thing belongs to Him.

The name of Jesus Christ must be lifted up now as never before. We must repent of our great national sin, the sin of trying to keep Christ in His place, the little place we have assigned Him. We must confess that man's

faith is the most important thing about him.

The faith of the president--don't think that that is the issue--this year's faith is all that's at issue.

Faith, after all, is the most important issue in the world.

PRAYER

Lord, we ask a blessing upon those who have been selected for high public office to fulfill their duties. May the rich insights of the Bible be made manifest in their lives and in the lives of those who must make their choice. Grant that we may not be misled by a tradition of separatism of religion and politics that we will fail to see the dangers that confront our nation at this critical time.

Help us assess the qualifications of the candidates who are presented to us, and give us insight that will allow us to evaluate their political promises that now function in our nation. We confess that we have allowed the rule of the regenerate to be cut off from the regeneration of the Scripture. We have isolated our national life from the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Grant us true repentance and the kind that implies, men to correct their ways; we find ways to make our nation's life responsive to the rule of Christ. Amen.

Prepared for broadcast by Dr. Joel Nederhood,
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