



# F.A.C.S. REPORT

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## The State's Role in Reformation

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**C**AN REFORMATION TAKE PLACE without the involvement of the Civil Government?

If the word reformation is just shorthand for compliance with the revealed will of God, then I don't suppose that there are too many people reading this magazine who would deny the need for reformation of Church and society in New Zealand. We hardly need to catalogue the doctrinal aberrations of the wider church or the moral debauchery of wider society do we?

But a question arises for us, as it did for former Christians zealous for God's glory. Can we hope for reformation in church and society without the involvement of the civil Government in some way?

Of course, to the modern mind, such a thought seems abhorrent. In particular, the idea that the State should have a role in the reformation of religion is repugnant to many. Surely there should be a complete separation of Church and State shouldn't there? Well John Calvin and John Knox never thought so in the 16th century, and neither did the Westminster Divines in the 17th Century. They saw in their Bibles that the civil magistrate (the name they gave the Government) indeed had a responsibility to exercise when it came to reformation. The Westminster Divines, in their Larger Catechism, describing the requirement of the second petition in the Lord's Prayer includes the following, (we are praying for the church to be) "*furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate.*"

### Reformation countenanced and maintained by the Government

**W**HEN THEY SAID *countenanced and maintained*, they had in mind more than just a benign tolerance. They saw a positive role for the State creating an environment where true religion would flourish.

It is my contention that not only were they correct in their view of the role of civil Government, but that it is a part of our task in 20th Century New Zealand to work for the same involvement of our civil Government in the task of reformation of Church and society.

Radical as this may seem, it only appears so because we are unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches on this subject. There has over ensuing centuries been a conscious suppression of the Bible's teaching on this great subject. This mentality has largely won the day; so that many Christians believe that it is wrong for Governments to legislate for private morality; let alone legislate with Biblical presuppositions.

Historically this new view that rejects one of the fundamental insights of all reformations of religion, has been somewhat inaccurately called voluntarism. William Cunningham explores this view in his *Historical Theology* Vol. 1 (P.390ff). He says, voluntarism "amounts in substance to this — that the only relation that ought to subsist between the State and the Church - between civil Government and religion — is that of entire separation; or in other words, its advocates maintain that nations, as such, and civil rulers in their offi-

cial capacity, not only are not bound, but are not at liberty, to interfere in any religious matters, or to seek to promote the welfare of the church of Christ as such."

Cunningham, quite rightly, rejects that view and upholds the view of the classical Reformers. And when you think about it, you have to acknowledge the impossibility of reformation of religion under such a voluntary system, where civil law is not brought to bear in some way upon the interests of the Creator and Redeemer, whose servants or ministers, Paul says in Romans 13, the Government in fact are.

Before we look briefly at some of the arguments for this view we need to refute the false charges that have been brought against the idea of the official sanction of the true religion with the assistance of the Civil Government. This does not need to imply that the State burns books, idols and heretics. 19th Century Scottish theologian Thomas M'Crie, speaks for the Reformed position when he says in his treatise, *Statement of the difference between the profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as adopted by the Seceders and the profession contained in the New Testament and other Acts, lately adopted by the General Associate Synod*;

The care of religion, is in the general view of it (in which respect the consideration of it is previous to that of the form which it assumes in consequences of supernatural revelation and the erection of a church state), belongs to the magistrate's (civil Government) office; and it is his duty to watch over its external interests, and to exert himself in his station to preserve upon the minds of his subjects an impression of its obligations and sanctions and to suppress irreligion, impiety, profanity and blasphemy. It is also the duty of civil rulers, and must be their interest, to exert themselves to introduce the gospel into their dominions when it may be but partially enjoyed; and by salutary laws and encouragements to provide them with the means of instruction, and settled dispensation of ordinances; especially in poor and desolate or in ignorant and irreligious parts of the country; all

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which they may do without propagating Christianity by the sword, or forcing a profession of religion on their subjects by penal laws. (page 82)

What were some of the arguments that the proponents of this idea used?

### The light of nature

THE LIGHT OF NATURE itself teaches that the maintenance of the true religion is a responsibility of the civil Government. If we accept that we live in a moral universe where all are accountable to the creator, then it is inconceivable that a human Government should not so order society in a way that honoured the Moral Governor of the universe. After all, none is without excuse. All men everywhere are accountable to God and owe Him worship and will be judged by their response to the knowledge of the true God that they all have (Rom. 1:18).

### Scripture demands it

THE WORD OF GOD demands that the civil Government promote the reformation of religion and Christian social ethics. In Ephesians 1:22, speaking of our Lord's mediatorial reign, He is said to be "head over all things to the church." Nations are included in these "all things."

In view of this it seems totally improper that a Government should govern without reference to the honour of Christ and His church. William Symington, an important Scottish Reformed

theologian, says of this verse, "To us it appears that, although there were not another passage on the subject in the whole Bible, that which we have now in view should be sufficient to prevent us from giving our assent to the proposition that the nations have nothing to do with religion (Messiah the Prince, p.266)."

In Romans 13:17, we have the teaching on the civil Ruler that requires him to be a minister (servant) of God for good and to be a terror not to good works, but to evil. The scope of this surely requires a positive endorsement and encouragement of true morality and religion. In view of the claim of Christ upon all men and over nations, this is a most reasonable conclusion.

### Old Testament predictions

MANY PASSAGES in the Old Testament can be appealed to in this regard. Psalm 2 is well known, "Now therefore be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry and you perish in the way..(verses 10-12)." "They are to submit to Christ, The Son, in their public capacity as kings and not merely as private persons. Psalm 72, prophesies that what is required of rulers in the New Testament will come to pass; "Yes all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him (v.11)."

We have a graphic and irrefutable exposition of this idea in Isaiah 49:23. Speaking of the New Testament Church, Isaiah prophesies, "Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth; And lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait on me." Calvin's commentary on this verse would seem radical to many in our day. "This took place when the Lord revealed Himself to the whole world by the gospel; for mighty Kings and princes not only submitted to the yoke of Christ, but likewise contributed their riches to raise up and maintain the Church of Christ so as to be her guardians and defenders."

He goes on to show what is said here, is "...about removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry, about advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine, about purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the lustre of the Divine majesty." This raises eyebrows in our own day, does it

## Whose Fault Unemployment?

Ian Hodge, Ph.D.

SPeAKING WITH A FRIEND recently, he commented on a recent discussion in his home Bible study group on the formation of the One Australia party, led by former independent Pauline Hanson. (Ironically, Ms Hanson holds the seat held for so long by Labor stalwart and former Governor General, Bill Hayden, Oxley, south-west corner of Brisbane.)

The conversation at this group revolved around the issues that have made Ms Hanson so popular. What surprised my friend was the number of older people, especially those in the 60+ age group, who supported many of the ideas espoused by Ms Hanson. At the top of the list is the immigration issue, and the call for a halt to immigration until unemployment levels are reduced. These people fully supported the idea that if the federal government took appropriate action to reduce the number of foreigners competing for jobs, then somehow the Australian workers would be able to obtain these positions.

What I found interesting in this comment is that the older generation still believes in the myth that the government can solve our economic problems. But this myth, in the case of unemployment, is misplaced because the conclusions are based on false premises. Consider these questions:

1. Are foreigners really taking jobs from Australians?
2. Why do business people employ foreigners rather than Australians?
3. Which jobs do foreigners take from Australians?
4. Do Australians want these jobs, anyway?
5. Do these foreigners who allegedly take the jobs of Australians also create more jobs?
6. Would we be limiting the market size by prohibiting foreigners from entering the country.
7. If these foreigners create jobs as well as take them, why do we still have such high unemployment?

The media, who spend so much time reporting the political debate, do not ask these questions, and many

not? But he further adds, "undoubtedly, while kings bestow careful attention on these things, they at the same time supply the pastors and ministers of the Word with all that is necessary for food and maintenance, provide for the poor and guard the Church against the disgrace of pauperism; erect schools; and appoint salaries for the teachers and board for the students; build poor-houses and hospitals and make every other arrangement that belongs to the protection and defence of the Church." (Chapter 23:3 of the Westminster Confession, revised by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA and adopted by our churches, alludes to this passage also).

Much more could be said from the Old Testament, but M'Crie (p.140) summarises much of the data for us:

We might have urged here that the whole tenor of the declarations, promises and predictions of the Old Testament, lead to the conclusion that Christianity should be owned, countenanced, and supported, in a national way. God addresses the nations in a collective capacity, reproves them for their idolatry, and calls them to his worship, Isa. 34:1, 40:1,21-29. He proposes Christ, as His anointed servant, to them, Ch.42:1; declares that He has given Him the nations for His inheritance, and that He shall direct them all. Ps.2:8; 82:8, Is. 52:15; 55:5. Christ addresses Himself not only to individuals, but to whole Islands, Isa. 49:1; nations join themselves to Him, own and worship Him, Isa. 2:2, Mic. 4:1,2, Zech.2:11, 8:20-22, bless themselves and glory in Him, Jer 4:2; all nations and dominions serve Him, Dan.7:14,27. They consecrate all things in them and employ them in His service, Isa. 60:6-12, Zech. 14:20,21. He owns these nations as His and blesses them, while He breaks in pieces and wastes others, Psa. 33:12; 145:15, Isa.19:25, Psa. 2:9,12; Isa. 60:12....(page 140).

### Objections

**I** AM WELL AWARE of the many and varied objections to this standard Reformed understanding of the role of Civil Government in religion, but each objection raised has long ago been adequately answered. And as we have already seen from M'Crie, this does not mean the establishment of true religion by the sword or coercion of the conscience. Calvin, Knox and the Westminster Divines strenuously opposed the intrusion of the State or its interference in Church matters. Our own confessional statements, revised as they are from the original, correctly set the boundaries or

limitations of the State in matters of religion. Article 35 of the Belgic confession, for example, gives the Government the task of protecting, "*..the sacred ministry, that the kingdom of Christ may be thus promoted.*" When the Westminster Divines addressed this issue, they had in mind that these things were only possible if the Government was indeed Christian - in other words that the Ruler was "born again." And a part of their task was "*to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.*" (Chapter 23:2) Piety, justice and peace are terms that the Divines could not divorce from their source, the revealed will of God. The maintenance of public piety was enhanced by the imposition of appropriate laws — for example laws against blasphemy or the upholding of the sanctity of the Sabbath Day. They had no doubt that the Government, in its responsibility, was to be concerned with both tables of the law and not just the final six. I doubt whether it could be maintained that they understood the "*wholesome laws of each commonwealth*" in terms of modern Theonomic ideas, particularly when it came to the punishment of crime, but it would be equally difficult to maintain that they understood these wholesome laws to be based on a standard other than the Word of God.

### Implications

**W**hat then are the implications for New Zealand, in this view? Firstly we will not see true and thorough reformation of church and society without the involvement of the civil Government taking up its responsibilities. Where we stand at the present time, it seems inconceivable that we would ever have a Government in the foreseeable future who would even accept some of what the Scripture implies about their role in reformation. But this is to limit God. In His wonderful grace He has wrought reformation with the civil Government playing its proper role in past history. He may do so again at any time and ultimately will do so, according to the prophecies of Scripture.

But is He likely to do so when His church is agnostic on this issue and has willingly handed over the civil Government to the authority of the Devil himself? We doubt it. Surely then we have a great responsibility to do two things at the very least. Firstly we must pray, as Nehemiah prayed, that the civil powers that be will see this great truth also and comply as

more like them. Yet they undergird the issue.

Are foreigners really the cause of the current unemployment levels in Australia?

The assumption of those who follow this line of reasoning is that the labour market is oversupplied, the oversupply caused by foreigners entering the country. But these issues cannot be discussed fairly without raising the issue of price. What is more accurate to say is that *at the current price levels, there is an oversupply of labour.*

Would Australian businesses employ more people if the labour rates were lower? Perhaps. But this would destroy the living standards of many, if not all Australians, shout the unions. Again, that is only true if the prices of goods and services do not reduce. And reduce they should if labour rates are lower.

What is clearly evident in the Australian marketplace right at this time is that prices in a whole range of products and services are being lowered. There are companies who will offer to get reduced prices for business and take a split of the savings as their fee. And the prices are being lowered because Australia is in the midst of a continuing recession that has been with us since 1990.

This recession, however, is causing many businesses to take their purchasing off shore. A drum manufacturing company used to have its plugs zinc-coated in Australia; now they're imported from Brazil. Clothing companies are manufacturing in India or China just so Australians can buy clothes and garments in the \$10-\$15 price range.

So it's not just the foreigners who come to this country who are taking jobs from Australians. Any foreign imports do this.

On the other hand, Australian exports take jobs from workers in other countries. Yet there is no call from the politicians to play the game fairly and help keep foreigners at work in their own countries.

The double standard here escapes many. Is it because they have not taken the time to work out what really causes unemployment.

Unemployment, an oversupply of labour on the market, is a price related phenomenon. It is also related to the levels of demand for labour, and when so many Australians are cutting expen-

they did in Calvin's Geneva and Knox's Scotland.

Secondly we have an obligation — we who possess the oracles of God, to declare to our Government their responsibility in this. Yes we would be fools in men's eyes, but we would be fools for Christ. And who knows what God may do with a people in our own time who take Him at His Word and who lay the re-

sponsibility for reformation with all those to whom it belongs; the Church, the civil Government and the individual believers. Modern writers in this area have pointed out that, properly speaking, the kings of Psalm 2 include the general voting public in a democratic nation. Ultimate power rests with them, in our scheme of Government. We have, then, an educative responsibility for the whole

of our society. It is also our understanding that these glorious days of gospel victory will only come about in the context of widespread revival, where the majority come to receive Christ. Evangelism is then a pre-requisite to any hope of reformation. What keeps us from this glorious kingdom task? God hasten the day that kings will be nursing fathers to the Church.

### Unemployment (Continued) . . .

diture, this in turn places less demand on the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy.

So, should the government ban saving, another cause of unemployment? But then, if it did that, the finance sector would complain that it is getting less money from savers, thus causing unemployment in that sector of the economy?

Those who believe the government can solve the problem by banning foreigners from the local labour market have taken on an argument that is difficult to sustain. It can only be sustained by ignoring certain fundamental realities.

People would rather live under an illusion — they think they have the right diagnosis — than accept what is really

happening. "All they that hate me love death" declared the Lord. After all is said and done, this is the real problem. To accept the reality of the market place is to accept the world as God has made it. And man, in his rebellion against God, would rather not admit to these things.

That we have Christians following the foolish reasoning of the unbelievers is evidence of just how far we need to travel in order for there to be a turn around in the nation. Our churches are not a part of the solution to the unemployment problem: they are a contributor to its continuity.

The great love chapter, I Corinthians 13, rings hollow in our churches, until verse six of that chapter becomes a living reality. Love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (NASB). Unrighteousness and truth are both concepts that must

be defined in terms of the Word of God and the world He has made. Any attempts to deny the realities of the world as God has made it are an attempt to promote unrighteousness or untruth. That our clergy are unable, unwilling or incapable of correctly analysing the world around them causes them to leave the people without real answers to very real problems. Until there is a change here, the people in the pews will continue to follow the ways of the world, the misinterpretations of cause and effect that are offered by politicians of all persuasions.

In the meantime, we will continue to have unemployment, and the foreigners will continue to be blamed for this. If this is "loving our neighbour", then some of us have a screwed up understanding of love.