

The Authority Of Civil Disobedience

By Ron Smith

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

- 1.) That all men are created equal,
- 2.) That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
- 3.) That among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. —
- 4.) That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -
- 5.) That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...

At this point in American history, at the election of Barack Obama (Jan 2009), many are asking, “Are we now the United Socialist States of America?” It appears to the Tea Party people that we have lost our constitution. Just as God sold Israel to their enemies because of their sins, perhaps He has sold Christian America. Are we now captives to the statist¹ This brings a question to the minds of many. Or is it time to take up arms?²

¹ Every religion except Biblical religion ends up worshipping the state as the highest authority. This theme runs through Scripture from the Tower of Babel to

To answer this question, it is helpful to look at the paradigms of history. Each time God's people were sold by God in the Book of Judges, they cried out to God and repented. God then sent them leaders like Deborah and Gideon who delivered them through armed battle. Later, God gave them up successively to Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Each of these situations called for a different response.

In the case of the Babylonian Captivity, God commanded them through the prophet Jeremiah to submit to the king of Babylon and to pray for the peace of the city (Jeremiah 29). Babylon allowed them to worship Jehovah freely and so did Persia. Greece also did at first. But later Antiochus Epiphenes did not. He would not allow them to circumcise their children and forced them to sacrifice to Apollo. In this case the Jews were justified, yea required by God, to take up arms. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as Christianity today. Over 300 years previously, Daniel had prophesied of these times when the Macabbees would take up arms in Daniel 11. Rome allowed freedom of worship. When the zealots rebelled against Rome in AD 66 it was not justified. They asked for the insurrectionist Barabbas to be released and they got what they asked for (zealots). As a result, they were destroyed in AD 70.

How does this apply to our situation? In each case God sold the Jews to their enemies. To attempt to overthrow the oppressor is useless unless ordained by God. How do we know if God ordains it or not? First, they had to repent. It is the sin of God's people that has brought this current captivity to "statist" socialism. Preachers will not even teach their people the evils of humanism and socialism. "Dogs that cannot bark" are afraid of losing members and/or losing their jobs. Others are dualistic in their thinking and separate the secular from the sacred. They preach a truncated gospel that seeks only to save souls from hell instead of

Nebuchadnezzar's image, to "We have no king but Caesar." It is the City of God versus the City of Man.

² Or is it time to take up arms? I think not. If Christians would vote right proper change would come.

seeking and praying for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. (That would also save many from hell.) We can pray for revival till we are purple in the face, but until the preachers and churches repent for voting for "French revolutionary statist," God will not hear. It would be futile to take up arms before crying out to God in repentance. If Christians would obey the covenant and repent, there would be no need for arms. The right policies would be voted in.

In countries like China, the situation is different. It is more like the situation when Rome was persecuting Christians. Armed rebellion by believers was not justified even though some emperors sought to stamp out Christianity. It was not justified because Rome had never made a covenant that declared certain rights (as in Scotland and America).

One of the last books Francis Schafer wrote, *The Christian Manifesto*, suggested the possibility of armed rebellion. This author cannot see a justification for that yet because the churches have not yet repented. God will not be with us until there are enough of us that repent. If all the Christians in America repented, we could vote for reformation and turn the nation on a dime. There would be no need for arms.

The Scottish Covenanters showed us what true submission to authority is. The Stuart kings of England (1600-1688) made themselves the heads of the church, seized the churches of Scotland, and placed their prelates over them. The Covenanters said, "No. Christ is the Head. We'll preach in the fields." They lost their homes, their incomes, their churches, and sometimes their lives. Thousands flocked to them in the fields and the king outlawed their meetings. When they were accused of rebellion, they answered that they were more than willing to submit to the legitimate authority of the king, but he was demanding that they disobey their covenant and their God. There was a Higher Authority they were bound to obey. When James Guthrie, for example, was offered a bishopric in the Church of England, he chose to have his head cut off instead. Many others of them received the same in the 17th Century.

This persecution ended in 1688 with the Glorious Revolution. Protestant William and Mary came to England and replaced King James II in an almost bloodless (and legal) revolution. It was called “glorious” because it was legal. King James was a tyrant and therefore had no legal right to rule. Puritan Oliver Cromwell had applied this same principle in executing James’ father, Charles I for treason.

This history helps us understand submission to authority. The Maccabees were justified in rebelling against Antiochus for the same reason. The zealots, on the other hand, had no right to take up the sword against Rome because Rome permitted freedom of religion. The current persecuted Christians in China have a policy of not speaking against the government; nevertheless they are willing to suffer and die just as the early Christians did. They understand that this will accomplish more than the power of the sword.

When the American Revolution broke out, many of the exiled Scots were in America.

Out of Washington's twenty-two brigadier generals, nine were of Scottish descent. There is excellent authority for the statement that, at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War one-third of the entire population of Pennsylvania was of Ulster-Scottish origin. A New England historian, quoted by Whitelaw Reid, counts that between 1730 and 1770 at least half a million souls were transferred from Ulster to the Colonies--more than half of the Presbyterian population of Ulster--and that at the time of the Revolution, they made one-sixth of the total population of the nascent Republic. Another authority fixes the inhabitants of Scottish ancestry in the nine Colonies south of New England at about 385,000. He counts that less than half of the entire population of the Colonies was of English origin, and that nearly, or quite one-third of it, had a direct Scottish ancestry.³

The Scottish pastors in America were preaching the same kind of rebellion that they had understood in Scotland. The British

³ From George Fraser Black’s Scotland's Mark on America at <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/1/5/1/6/15162/15162.htm>

called it the Scots Irish Presbyterian Revolt.⁴ This was obedience to true authority.

Edmond Burke supported the American Revolution because he saw it as legal and likened it to the Glorious Revolution. But when the French Revolution broke out, he was appalled by the fact that some of his co-members of the Glorious Revolution Club supported that bloody atrocity. He wrote a book⁵ explaining the difference and seemed to many a prophet because of his foresight in seeing the awful results that would follow. Those who see no difference between the two Revolutions do not understand what submission to the authority of the God of the Bible requires.

But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29 NKJV).

Although Burke had supported the American War for Independence, which he saw as an appropriate response to the situation regarding the American colonists, he foresaw the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in November 1790, and took a stand against them. Former admirers of Burke, such as Thomas Jefferson, Sheridan, and fellow Whig politician Charles James Fox, proceeded to denounce Burke as a reactionary and an enemy of the French and their ground-breaking aspirations. Thomas Paine penned *The Rights of Man* in 1791 as a response to Burke. However, other former supporters of the American Revolution such as John Adams, George Washington, and Alexander Hamilton agreed with Burke's assessment of the French situation.⁶

Organizations like the ACLU and People For The American Way are in reality people for the French way of illegitimate rebellion. They are not only treasonous against God; they are traitors against the U.S. Constitution. Christ demands that all men everywhere repent and submit to the King of kings and His delegated authorities.

⁴ The Presbyterian Rebellion <http://www.wvwnews.net/story.php?id=5984>

⁵ Edmond Burke, *Reflections On The Revolution In France*, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1955, xxvi Editors Intro.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Burke

If we want to change the culture and the world by means of the Gospel of the Kingdom, why not look at the patterns of the past that brought about kingdom change? Why not “preserve” the old things that brought great freedom and blessing, and improve them?

The Covenanters provided a good model for change by forming an important movement in the religion and politics of Scotland in the 17th century. In religion the movement is most associated with the promotion and development of Presbyterianism (republican government), as opposed to Episcopacy, favored by the crown. In politics the movement saw important developments that eventually contributed to the American Revolution.

The Covenanters opposed James VI of Scotland (James I of England) in his attempt to force the Anglican Church on Scotland. He ousted the Covenanters from their pulpits and homes saying that he was the head of the church. The Covenanters said, “No. Christ is the head. We will preach in the fields.” Later (after the rule by Puritan Oliver Cromwell) King Charles II and his brother King James II, for 28 years, indulged certain ministers and allowed them to pastor Scottish churches where Anglican pastors could not be found. But to do this, they had to compromise with the king’s state church. Covenanters like Richard Cameron railed against these compromisers as being dead and without God’s power. These 28 years from 1660 to the Glorious Revolution in 1688 are called “the killing years” when Covenanters and Puritans were harassed unmercifully.

The Lion Of The Covenant And Civil Disobedience

Richard Cameron (1648? - 1680) was a leader of the Presbyterians who resisted the Stuart monarchs. The life & ministry of Richard Cameron was among the first of a series of events that led to the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the end of the reign of the House of Stuart. His followers took his name, the Cameronians, which ultimately formed the nucleus of the Scottish regiment of the same name.

He was initially a parish schoolteacher and then a highly successful field preacher of the strict Presbyterian school, a Covenanter. He spent some years in exile in the Netherlands when

the authorities demanded that all preachers submit to the Crown's religion. He was ordained there and sent back to Scotland with the prophecy by Rev. M'Ward that he would be martyred for the cause of Christ.

He returned to Scotland in 1680 and issued with others such as Donald Cargill the Sanquhar Declaration, calling for war against the king, Charles II and the exclusion of his brother (James II) from the succession. He was killed in a skirmish with government troops, at Airds Moss near Cumnock, later the same year, in a government attempt to suppress the Covenanters. This period was later given the title of "the Killing Time" because hundreds, if not thousands of Presbyterians were persecuted and martyred for holding Cameronian views. However, after the accession of William III (in the Glorious Revolution) his followers were pardoned and incorporated into the British Army as the Cameronian Regiment.

When hands were laid on Richard Cameron at his ordination in Holland, the one hand of Mr. M'Ward remained and M'Ward cried out, "Behold, all ye beholders, here is the head of a faithful minister and servant of Jesus Christ, who shall lose the same for his Master's interest, and it shall be set up before sun and moon, in the view of the world." And so it was that his hands and head were put on display at the gate of Edinburgh for all to see. One of his enemies said, "There's the head and hands of a man who lived praying and preaching, and died praying and fighting."⁷

Before this was done, his hands and head were delivered to his father in prison to add grief to his former sorrow. Taking his son's head and hands, which were very fair, he kissed them, and said, "I know – I know them; they are my son's – my own dear son's. It is the Lord – good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days."⁸

⁷ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995, 423.

⁸ *Ibid.* 428.

What does all this have to do with us? This struggle in Scotland and England led first to the Glorious Revolution in England (1688) and later to what the English called the “Presbyterian Scots-Irish Revolt” in America (The American Revolution).

Eighteen days before Cameron was killed, he prophesied from an open-air pulpit that there would not be a crowned King of the name of Stuart in Scotland. This was fulfilled eight years later in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. He also prophesied “A man shall ride a day’s journey in the shires of Galloway, Ayr and Clydesdale, and not see a reeking house nor hear a cock crow, ere ye get a right Reformation; and several other shires shall be little better.” He also prophesied in the same sermon, “The rod that the Lord will make instrumental in this, will be the French and other foreigners, together with a party in this land joining them; but ye, that stand to the testimony in that day, be not discouraged at the fewness of your number; for when Christ comes to raise up His own work in Scotland, He will not want men enough to work for him.”⁹

This prophecy of slaughter was fulfilled 66 years later in 1746 at Culloden. In 1746 the Stuart Prince Charles, with the help of the French, Spain, and others, invaded Scotland where many Highlanders joined him and marched toward London. At Culloden the English and other Scots slaughtered them. The slaughter did not end there. Genocide by the English in the highlands followed.

Description Of The Ethnic Cleansing

The Highland people were wiped out. Over the coming years they were cleared out of their homes to make way for their lands to be used for profitable sheep farming. For 4 generations the Highlanders were scattered to the corners of the world - Europe, India, and the New World 'America'. Sold as slaves they worked on the lands in the southern parts of America, and one account even tells us that in Barbados a ship load of Highlanders were traded for 10 tones of Sugar.

Their culture was demolished, their native language - Gaelic - was banned and marked as a hanging offence if spoken, the wearing of tartan was also made a hanging offence and even the Bible was not

⁹ Ibid. 427.

allowed to be learnt in their own language, never mind written.

These times are known to us who are still here as the 'Highland Clearances'. English schools were put in place and the process of conversion began. Finally the English dream of a conquered Scotland was theirs.¹⁰

Many of those Scots who were exiled came to America where “the encouragement” of Richard Cameron’s prophecy was fulfilled when they fought alongside George Washington and received encouragement in final victory. A large percent of Washington’s officers were Scots. Cameron had prophesied, “...but ye, that stand to the testimony in that day, be not discouraged at the fewness of your number; for when Christ comes to raise up His own work in Scotland, He will not [lack] men enough to work for him.” (There are now five times as many Scots in America as in Scotland).¹¹

And you, the Christian conservative patriots of America, be not discouraged at the fewness of your numbers; for when Christ comes to raise up his own work in America, He will not lack men enough to work for him.

Cowardly preachers of today are those who would have compromised in the days of Richard Cameron. They say we should not get involved in politics. They argue that there are two kingdoms (the secular and the sacred) and “it is used today particularly by confessional Lutherans and some Calvinists, most of whom, though theologically orthodox, would not want to be called fundamentalists.”¹²

Contrast this attitude with the spirit of the prophets. Jonah and all the prophets spoke to both people and king without exception because the nation had made a covenant with God.

¹⁰ <http://www.highlanderweb.co.uk/culloden/jacobite.htm>

¹¹ The number of Americans of Scottish decent is estimated to be 20 to 25 million (up to 8.3% of the total US population), and Scots-Irish, 27 to 30 million. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_American#Number_of_Scottish_Americans. The population of Scotland is around five million.

¹² John Frame in Jeffery J. Ventrella, *The Cathedral Builder*, Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007, 82.

Elisha, for example, sat with elders in a house (2 Kings 6:22). Name one prophet who did not speak to politics and kings.

Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus (Acts 17:7 NKJV).

Biblical government is (representative) republican. Even David's monarchy was of a republican spirit. When David wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he did not arbitrarily decide to do it. He gathered the representatives (elders) and said, "If it is the Lord's will and seems good to you, let us..." Top down aristocracy is not biblical. Republican democracy hardly existed in Christendom for 1000 years until the Reformers brought it. Calvinist Thomas Hooker wrote the first constitution in history as a result of a sermon in 1639 for Connecticut.¹³

Abraham Kuyper, in his speech at Princeton in 1898, showed that of the five worldviews of paganism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, Humanism, and Calvinism, only Calvinism resulted in republicanism. Submission to legitimate authority means that rulers must also be accountable to the people and to the law.

How should Christians view statism when it comes to submission to authority? In America, we have the constitutional authority and God given duty to speak out against it.

¹³ Paul Johnson, A History of the American People, New York: HarperCollins, 1997, 105