

NATIONAL REFORM AN ABSURDITY

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by A.T. Jones

The fundamental proposition upon which the whole National Reform structure is built, is that "the nation is a moral person." If this proposition will not hold good in the sense in which National Reformers use it, their whole scheme is a fallacy. That it will not hold good is certain.

Their idea of the State as a moral person will not allow that it is the whole people, but that it is a mysterious, imaginary something which stands separate and distinct from the people which compose it. Their concept of a State is that it is formed of all the people, yet that it is not all the people, but a distinct entity, having a personality all its own; and this personality that springs in some way from the whole people, is a person in the eyes of men just as distinct as is General Sherman or Mr. Blaine. As therefore General Sherman, or Mr. Blaine, or any and every other person, is a moral person, is responsible to God, and must acknowledge that responsibility, so this other individual, which springs in part from each individual, being a person as real, as distinct in the eyes of men as is any one of the people, is a moral person, is responsible to God, and must acknowledge that responsibility. As it is the duty of General Sherman, or Mr. Blaine, or any other person, to have a religion, and to exercise himself about religious affairs, so this person called the State or the nation must have a religion, and must exercise himself

about religious affairs, with this very important difference, however, that, whereas General Sherman, Mr. Blaine, John Smith, James Robinson, Thomas Brown, John Doe, and Richard Roe, each having his own religion, must exercise himself in that religion without interfering with the exercise of anybody else's religion, this other individual must not only have a religion of his own, and exercise himself with that religion, but he must exercise himself about everybody else's religion, and must see to it especially that the religion of everybody else is the same as his own.

A State, as pictured by Prof. J.R.W. Sloane, D.D., in the Cincinnati National Reform Convention, 1872, is as follows:--

"What is the State? ... Its true figure is that of a colossal man, his consciousness the resultant of the consciousness of the millions that compose this gigantic entity, this body corporate, his power their power, his will their will, his purpose their purpose, his goal the end to which they are moving; a being created in the sphere of moral law, and therefore both moral and accountable."

But that is not all; they even go so far as to give the State a soul! In this same speech Professor Sloane said:--

"'The State has no soul' is the dictum of an atheistic political theory. On the contrary we say, with the famous French priest, Pere Hyacinth, 'What I admire most in the State is its soul.'"

Well, if the State be, as he also said, "a personality as distinct in the eyes of men as General Grant or Mr. Colfax," then we cannot wonder that it should have a soul. But what is the soul of the State? He tells us:--

"Moral principles are the soul of a nation; these are the informing spirit that mould its various elements into a compact unity, and that bind them together with bands stronger than steel."

Does Professor Sloane mean to say that "moral principles" composed the soul, and were the kind of a soul that "General Grant or Mr. Colfax had"? Are moral principles the soul of each of the millions of people that compose this "gigantic entity"? If, as he says, the consciousness of this colossal man is "the resultant of the consciousness of the millions that compose him, his power their power, his will their will, his purpose their purpose, his goal their goal," then why is not his soul their soul? If moral principles are his soul and he is but the resultant of all the other's then what can their souls be but moral principles? Truly this is a new conception of the soul, which we commend to the consideration of psychologists and theologians. We confine ourselves to the political aspect of the question.

The doctor proceeds:--

"A still more practical view of this subject is taken when we consider the moral obligations of a nation as such; like an individual, it is held bound in the judgment of mankind to the

fulfillment of its obligations. Great Britain, France, and Italy owe enormous debts. The same is true of our own country. Shall the obligations of these debts be met? May the nation repudiate? If not, why not? ... Or does the law, 'Thou shalt not steal,' bind a nation as well as an individual? ... Do we not apply to nations the same adjectives expressing moral qualities, which we apply to men? Has not Great Britain a national character as well defined in the minds of men as her Queen or Prime Minister--a character into which her physical character and resources scarcely enter, but which is determined by moral qualities? Is not the United States a personality as distinct in the eyes of men as General Grant or Mr. Colfax?"

Having thus established, as they suppose, their proposition that the State is a moral person, the fundamental principle of the whole National Reform movement is, as stated by themselves:--

"The nation being a moral person, must have a religion of its own, and exercise itself about religious affairs."--Christian Statesman, February 28, 1884, p. 5.

It is too often the case with a person who is eager to prove a particular proposition that he first resolves upon his conclusion, and then makes "a major of most comprehensive dimensions," and, having satisfied himself that it contains his conclusion, never troubles himself about what else it may contain; and as soon as it is examined it is found to contain an infinite number of conclusions, every one being a palpable absurdity. This is exactly the logical position occupied by the advocates of this so-called National

Reform. Take the statements which we have here quoted, and who cannot see that they apply with equal force to any conceivable association of human beings for a common purpose? Let us here apply their argument in a single case, and anybody can extend it to any number of similar cases:--

What is a railroad company? Its true figure is that of a colossal man, his consciousness the resultant of the consciousness of the stockholders of this gigantic entity, this body corporate; his power their power, his will their will, his purpose their purpose, his goal the end to which they are moving; a being created in the sphere of moral law, and therefore both moral and accountable. It is composed of moral beings subject to moral law, and is therefore morally accountable, A still more practical view of this subject is taken when we consider the moral obligations of a railroad company as such; like an individual, it is held bound in the judgment of mankind to the fulfillment of its obligations. May the railroad company repudiate? If not, why not? Or does the law, "Thou shalt not steal," bind a railroad company as well as an individual? Do we not apply to railroad companies the same adjectives expressing moral qualities which we apply to men? Has not the Erie Railroad Company a character as well defined in the minds of men as its president or its cashier--a character into which its physical character and resources scarcely enter, but which is determined by moral qualities? Is not the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company a personality as distinct in the eyes of men as is General Sherman or Mr. Edmunds? "The railroad company has no soul" is the dictum of an atheistic political theory. On the contrary, we say, with the famous financial king, Jay

Gould, what I admire most in the railroad company is its soul. Moral principles are the soul of a railroad company. The denial of the moral character and accountability of the railroad company is of the nature of atheism; it is practically a denial of God's providential government--leads to the subversion of morals, and the destruction of the railroad itself. That a railroad company is possessed of moral character, that it is therefore a subject of moral law, and consequently accountable to God, is not theory but fact; not hypothesis, but science. That all men do not admit that a railroad company is a moral being, and accountable to God, does not prove that it is not an established principle of moral and political National Reform science. Therefore the railroad company, being a moral person, must have a religion of its own, and must exercise itself about religious affairs.

This is a genuine National Reform argument. And we submit to any candid mind that it is just as good in proof of the personality and moral obligation of the railroad company as it is for that of the State. And not only for the railroad company and the State, but likewise, and equally, good for the personality and moral obligation of banks, insurance companies, steamship, gas, water, and publishing companies, lodges, benefit societies, clubs, corporations, and associations of all kinds; and the logic of the whole situation is that each one of these must in its corporate capacity "have a religion of its own, and must exercise itself about religious affairs." If the premises of the National Reform Association be true, this conclusion and a number of others equally absurd inevitably follow,

or else there is no truth in syllogisms. But if the logic of the thing be so absurd, it only demonstrates the absurdity of the principle.

Now the National Reformers, being wedded to the principle, and wishing to be divorced from the inevitable conclusions, resort to the fallacy that railroad, bridge, steamboat, and other companies are "but creatures of the State," and so are not moral persons. Dr. McAllister, in the Cleveland Convention, in trying to meet this point said:--

"The nation is a moral person, created by God, and creation implies the authority of the Creator; but a company of the kind described, receives its charter from the State, is subject to the laws of the State."

With that, place the following from Rev. T.C. Sproul, in the same convention, speaking to the same resolution as was Dr. McAllister:--

"If the nation is not a moral being, it cannot be subject to the law of God."

Accordingly, between the State and the company, we have the following

Contrast:

The nation is created by God; Therefore the nation is a moral person, and hence is Subject to the law of God.

The company is created by the State; Therefore the company is not a moral person, and hence is not subject to the law of God.

Now if, as they say, the railroad and other companies are not moral persons; and if, as they also say, these not moral persons (or companies) "cannot be subject to the law of God," then why is there so much ado made about these "Sabbath-breaking railroads," these "Sabbath-breaking steamboats," and so on through the list? Then why are the railroad companies told, as they are in the address of the International Sabbath Association, printed in the Statesman of February 7, 1884, pp. 2, 3:--

"Your action in thus multiplying trains to desecrate the day of rest is in direct violation of divine law"? "In view of your responsibilities to God. ... you cannot afford to do this."

We would respectfully submit to the consideration of the National Reform party the following: From your own premises there is not, and there cannot be, any such thing as a Sabbath-breaking railroad company, nor any other kind of Sabbath-breaking company. For you say, first (truly), the Sabbath is a part of the law of God; secondly, you say that a not moral person "cannot be subject to the law of God;" thirdly, you say that the company, as distinguished from the Government, is "not a moral person;" and then you

inconsistently accuse the railroad companies of "direct violation of divine law!

Now, how is it possible for a person, being, or thing which "cannot be subject to the law of God," to violate that law? It is plainly impossible for a not-moral being to violate moral law. It is equally impossible for such a being to have any "responsibilities to God." Because where there can be no subjection to law, there can be no violation of the law; and where there can be no violation of law, there can be no obedience to law; and where there can be no obedience to the law of God, there is no responsibility to God. Therefore it just as absolutely follows from your premises that a railroad or other company cannot break the Sabbath, as that two and two make four. And it is just as absolutely true that your resort to a fallacy to escape an absurdity, has involved you in a glaring inconsistency; for it is plainly inconsistent for you to hold a being subject to that to which you say it "cannot be subject."

But if you persist in holding the companies responsible to the law of God, you must admit that they are moral beings, and hence equally with the Government must profess a religion, and have a test, and with that logically admit an infinite number of other absurd conclusions; in short, admit that every combination of human beings for a common purpose must, as such combination, profess a religion and have a test.

Here, then, is the dilemma of the National Reform party,--either an inconsistency or an absurdity. But we have no ground for

hope that they will abandon either the fallacy or the absurdity. For as the fallacy was adopted for the express purpose of escaping the absurdity, for them to abandon either would be to abandon their cause. Therefore we have only to expect that they will act in harmony with the ways of error always, and hold to both the absurdity and the inconsistency, and when questioned about either, do as is suggested by Rev. R.C. Wylie, in the Statesman of February 14, 1884; that is, "adopt a plan that will prevent a repetition" of any such questions.

The absurdity of the view that the State is a person distinct from the individuals that compose it, is made more apparent when we consider the obligations of a nation, or State, as such. Dr. Sloane, in the speech above quoted, instanced the fact that "Great Britain, France, Italy, and our own country owe enormous debts." But we would inquire of the National Reform party, Does this personality, which you call the State of Great Britain, France, Italy, or the United States, owe this debt distinct from the people? and will it pay it distinct from the people? When Germany laid upon France the war indemnity of five milliards of francs (\$1,000,000,000), was it laid upon a "personality" distinct from the individuals that compose the nation? and when it was paid was it paid by such a distinct personality? To the minds of all reasonable men, to ask these questions is to answer them. These National Reform religio-political economists know as well as anybody does, that of the war indemnity exacted from France by Germany, every franc came from the people who compose the State, and not from some hypothetical "individual personality" distinct from the people. They know full well that every

dollar of the national debt of our own country that has ever been paid has been paid by the people of the United States, and not a cent of it by any such theoretical absurdity as the National Reform party defines to be the State.

Does the National Reform party mean to say that, when it gets its iniquitous scheme framed into a law, and has thus perfected its idea of the personality of a State, it will have the State a personality so entirely distinct and separate from that of the people, that the State will pay the national debt without any help on the part of the people? No. That party itself, we do them the justice to suppose, would pronounce the idea preposterous. And so do we. But if it be so, where is the sense of all their arguments about the personality of the State as distinct from the personality of the people who compose the State? If the State has a personality, an individuality of its own, and a soul of its own as distinct from that of any or all of the people who compose it, as is that of General Sherman or Mr. Blaine, then why can't it pay its debts distinct from the people, as General Sherman or Mr. Blaine pays his? The very idea is absurd.

Again, Prof. O.N. Stoddard, in the Cincinnati Convention, said:--

"If the character and liabilities of the State are not distinct from those of its individual members, then the State is punished hereafter in the persons of its subjects."

We would like Professor Stoddard, or any other of the National Reformers, to show where a State has ever been or ever can be punished, either here or hereafter, except in the persons of its subjects. When France was punished for its ill-advised declaration of war upon Germany, did the punishment fall upon the State distinct from the persons of its subjects? When Rome was punished, for the fearfulness of her iniquities--when from the Rhine and the Danube to the deserts of Africa, and from the Black Sea and the Hellespont to the Wall of Antoninus and the Atlantic Ocean, the whole empire was swept by the successive and devastating waves of savage barbarism--did these terrors afflict some such figment of a State as is conjured up by the National Reform brain? Did they not rather fall upon every age, sex, and condition of the individuals that composed the State? Again we say that but to ask the question is to answer it. But it demonstrates to all reasonable men the wild absurdity of the National Reform theory of the personality of a State. There is not, and there cannot be, any such personality of a State. And we are certain that no such thing would ever be seriously advocated in this country, were it not essential to the success of a scheme of religious bigotry and priestly despotism, whose most perfect likeness is that of the Papacy.

Webster defines a State to be:--

"A political body, or body politic; the whole body of people united under one Government, whatever may be the form of the Government."

Chief Justice Chase defined a State as follows:--

"It describes sometimes a people or community of individuals united more or less closely in political relations, inhabiting temporarily or permanently the same country; often it denotes only the country or territorial region inhabited by such a community; not unfrequently it is applied to the Government under which the people live; at other times it represents the combined idea of people, territory, and Government. It is not difficult to see that in all these senses the primary conception is that of a people or community. The people in whatever territory dwelling, constitute the State."--Great Decisions by Great Judges.

Bouvier says that a State is:--

"A sufficient body of persons united together in one community for the defense of their rights and to do right and justice to foreigners. In this sense the State means the whole people united into one body-politic." "As to the persons who compose the body politic, or associate themselves, they take collectively the name of 'people or nation.'"--Law Dictionary.

A body-politic is:--

"The collective body of a nation or State, as politically organized, or as exercising political functions; also a corporation."--Webster.

All this is in perfect harmony with the Scriptures. When God speaks of a nation he speaks of "the whole body of people" who form the nation. When he speaks to a State he speaks to "the people who constitute the State." When he inflicts judgments upon a State, those judgments fall upon the people who compose the State. To prove this we need no better illustration than the text which, in this connection, is doubtless more used than any other by the National Reform party. It is this: "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 18:7-10)

Thus it is the people who do the evil, and it is "unto them" that God pronounces to do evil, and when they "turn from their evil," then he turns from the evil he pronounced "to do unto them." In this same connection the Lord makes his own application of the principle which he has just laid down. Immediately following the text quoted, he says: "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you; return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." Verse 11. Here God "framed evil" against the house of Israel, against the nation of the Jews, against the State of Judah, and the way to avert it was for the "men of Judah," and

"the inhabitants of Jerusalem," "every one," to turn from his evil way. It would be impossible to more plainly show that, in the mind of God, and in the contemplation of the word of God, a State or nation is the people who compose it; that it is they individually who sin; and that it is to them individually, "every one," to whom the Lord speaks.

When the Lord pronounced judgment against Babylon it was thus: "A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith the Lord, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes, and upon her wise men. A sword is upon the liars, and they shall dote; a sword is upon her mighty men, and they shall be dismayed. A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her." "The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say." (Jeremiah 50:35-37; 51:35)

To present other instances from Scripture would only be superfluous; the whole Bible is consistent herewith, and but confirms the correctness of the definitions given, and the truth of the position which we maintain, that the idea of a State having a personality, a will, a soul, and a moral responsibility of its own distinct from the individuals that compose it, is absurd. If a nation be wicked it is because the individuals who compose it are wicked; if it be righteous it is because the people, in their own individual moral relation to God, are righteous. When God exclaimed, "Ah, sinful

nation!" it was because the people were "laden with iniquity."
(Isaiah 1:4)

Thus it is clearly shown that the National Reform theory of a State is not only opposed to reason and common sense, but to established and authoritative definitions, and the word of God, as well.

There is, however, in connection with a State, a body-politic, or a corporation, the merest shadow of that which the National Reform party pushes to such absurd conclusions. It is this: All bodies-politic, whether they be States, banks, railroads, or corporations of whatever kind, are, by a legal fiction and "for the advancement of justice," given a personality, but this personality "has no existence except in a figure." The definition is this:--

"A corporation is an artificial being, invisible, intangible, and existing only in contemplation of law. In certain respects and for certain purposes, corporations are deemed 'persons.' ... But a corporation cannot be deemed a moral agent, and, like a natural person, be subjected to personal suffering. Malice and willfulness cannot be predicated of a corporation, though they may be of its members."--Boone's Law of Corporations.

Such, and such only, is the true doctrine of the personality of a State. And yet this "invisible," "intangible," "artificial" thing, this legal fiction, is the fundamental proposition upon which rests the whole National Reform movement! It is this sheer abstraction which

that party proposes to push to such enormous conclusions-- conclusions that are fatal to liberty, both civil and religious. Could anything possibly be more absurd?

Professor Pomeroy says:--

"The State, as separated from the individuals who compose it, has no existence except in a figure; and to predicate religious responsibility of this abstraction is an absurdity."

To predicate religious responsibility of this abstraction is exactly what the National Reform party does; therefore the demonstration is complete, by every principle of logic and of law, that the National Reform movement is an absurdity.

And that all may understand precisely what this demonstration amounts to, we append Webster's unabridged definition of an absurdity:

"Absurdity--The quality of being absurd or inconsistent with obvious truth, reason, or sound judgment." "Absurd--Opposed to manifest truth; inconsistent with season or the plain dictates of common sense; logically contradictory."

That is what we mean in this connection, and that is exactly what the National Reform movement is.

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