

# BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

---

## ARTICLE I.

### THE MINISTER IN POLITICS.

BY KARL F. GEISER, PH.D.,

PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN OBERLIN COLLEGE.

WHATEVER explanation may be given, it is a remarkable fact that political science, which regards Aristotle as its founder, has not yet won its primary conquest of a respectful popular hearing in America. It has not yet compelled the public, as it has, for example, in Germany—at least since the days of the great minister Stein—to regard either the opinion of living authorities on government or the works of great political writers of the past as a preponderating factor in the determination of forms of government or the course of legislation. The election of Woodrow Wilson to the presidency of the United States was the exception which proves the rule; and indeed some foreign observers expressed surprise that America had actually risen to the occasion of electing a trained political scientist to such an important office.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this article the term "political scientist" is often used in a general, non-technical sense. Obviously government cannot be turned over to any single class or profession. There is, however, a growing sentiment that those who govern, and especially those who hold office in the administrative branch of government, should have a special training for their work. Many cities are now employing expert agencies, a number of states have research bureaus and a drafting service, and proposals for similar agencies have recently been made to Congress.

And yet no other branch of knowledge is held in such popular disregard. The historian is seldom challenged on his own ground except by another historian; the lawyer has little difficulty in convincing a client that the bar is gifted with men whose opinions before a court will outweigh those of any other profession; the patient submits to the physician, and no one but the German Emperor would venture to dispute the merits of a Rembrandt, a Raphael, or a sonata of Beethoven; the astronomer is alone among the stars as the physicist is among the electrons, and even in religion the layman at most dissents from the minister. In all these fields there is a willing concession on the part of society to the opinion of the expert or specialist. This willingness to yield obedience to authority, however, does not apply to political science; and perhaps the members of no other profession are given more to ignoring its principles than are those of the clergy, who, with the best intentions, thus tend to retard true reform rather than help it. This is especially true because of the large influence of ministers in forming and directing public sentiment; at the same time, in thus preëmpting the field of politics, ministers, in a measure, prevent scientific opinions from receiving that popular attention and consideration which is necessary to all sound political action. Just as it would be difficult for ministers to succeed if the educational system of the country were opposed to Christianity, so the progress in disseminating correct political views among the masses will be retarded until the field is cleared of obstructions; it is not so at present. In his endeavor to give society a sound political philosophy as a working basis for social advancement, the political scientist finds, at every turn, foreign agencies disputing his claims and propagating doctrines which not only counteract his influence, but which, at

least in his opinion, are unsound and even demoralizing to the cause of good government.

Nor is it strange that this is so. A vast range of human interests and human activities is reflected in government, and government constitutes the chief branch of political science. All fundamental rights — such as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, each including innumerable special rights — are protected by the state, and therefore come within the range of contemplation of every thinking individual. Moreover, it is highly desirable that every individual should express his opinions concerning his civic rights, to the end that the common sense of the majority may become crystallized into the best forms of government and enacted into the best laws of society. This being granted, it cannot, however, be assumed that the opinion of each individual is of equal value or that the province of political science, as such, is less definite or requires less careful thought than any other branch of knowledge.

Whether the position taken by Hume, that politics may be reduced to an exact science, be true or not, the materials from which the political scientist draws his facts, are, of themselves, of sufficient importance to command the best and most careful thought. History, economics, statistics, forms of government, the present state of society, laws, political parties — these are among the facts from which he must draw his conclusions and upon which he builds his philosophy. That philosophy must ever be the guiding principle upon which sound government, constitutions, legislation, and social theories must rest; and any change in government, any proposed reform, or any new legislation not based upon scientific principles can at best be an experiment the wisdom or folly of which time alone can reveal. It is unfortunate that political

thinking has not yet advanced far enough to dispel the illusion that any one knows enough to legislate or to administer the affairs of a state.

Without attempting to justify a science in which there have been, since its foundation as a science, perhaps fewer changes in fundamentals than in any other branch of knowledge, or without attempting to define the province of the minister in society, the political scientist may render a service to the church by pointing out to the minister why the field of politics requires the same careful training that is required by any other science. Such a discussion may help the minister to understand why the church itself is not always taken seriously, and why, at least that portion of its own membership which recognizes the existence of a political philosophy, does not respond with that enthusiasm to ministerial leadership and exhortation which the ministers who have kept aloof from the sphere of politics and confined themselves to reformation and development of character once inspired.

Obviously the interference on the part of the minister in political affairs rests on the popular notion that there is no science of politics, — that at least it has not yet justified itself as a science, — that political theories are but the expression of current public sentiment, that law changes from age to age and is but the crystallized common sense of the masses, and that molders of public opinion, whoever they may be, are as liable to be correct as is the historian who is guided by the past, or the political scientist who applies principles to the present. Moreover, many ministers seem to assume that since their mission is to better society in all its relations, political as well as social, they should on every occasion enter the field of politics, to the end that just laws shall prevail.

There are, accordingly, two sets of arguments urged by

the church itself for its new work. On the one hand, it is urged to return to the old way, which means more theology; on the other, there are those who argue for a larger social service, that is, more attention to the bodies of mankind.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the church and the new social sentiment, Dr. Eliot in a recent number of the *Harvard Theological Review*<sup>2</sup> has in his usual thoughtful manner, in our opinion, gone far to account for much of the disregard that is shown the church by the thoughtful laymen. "Before churches can enlist for the new kinds of social service, the ministers who lead the churches ought to have devoted a considerable part of their professional study to subjects to prepare them for social service, such as economics, government and the inductive method of finding truths." In a cogent article entitled "Ministers and Mobs,"<sup>3</sup> essentially the same sentiment was voiced by the editor of this journal over twenty years ago: "In the improvement of public sentiment the ministry, it is clear, can be successful only as they have some real light to shed. The greatest danger is that, on sociological questions, they will become sciolists and charlatans, accepting crude theories of social reform as the greatest *desideratum*, without due comprehension of the complicated nature of the questions involved."

These two opinions, coming from different sources and uttered at different times, express, after all, the essential and vital points in all true and lasting political and social reforms. They at once recognize that social legislation to be effective must be scientific and that to arrive at scientific conclusions in reforms and legislation requires special fitness, that in this field, as in every other, "a little learning is a dan-

<sup>1</sup>The Nation, vol. xciv. p. 561.

<sup>2</sup>October, 1913.

<sup>3</sup>G. F. Wright, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1892.

gerous thing." This view does not seek to place political science above any other science in its respective field. It merely recognizes, what society must come to acknowledge before much progress in social betterment can be made, namely, that legislation requires a specially fitted body of legislators, and that administration requires experts. It maintains the very reasonable position that a training in theology does not make a universal specialist and that those who devote their whole attention to politics may be in a far better position to judge than the superficial observer.

That crude theories, therefore, should be advanced by ministers when they attempt the work of specialists is not strange. It is a human impossibility to be an authority in all lines; but that a training in any profession should not, first of all, give one a more or less definite notion of its limitations, is not so clear. Moreover, it is quite evident that the church has lost the confidence of that thoughtful opinion which it once held, and which is necessary to the perpetuation of its dignity and influence, whenever it has interfered in politics. The development of the secular political spirit, says Lecky in his *Rationalism in Europe*, is the result of the declining influence of theology; and history shows that all governments have declined that have held to the union of politics and church. It should be remembered that it was religion apart from politics that gave to Christianity that peculiarly fitting position of power and influence that enabled it to accomplish that steady progress which resulted finally in bringing the Roman Emperor himself to bend his knees to worship at the shrine of a provincial of his empire.

In this respect Christianity stood in striking contrast to the earlier religion of Islam, which was the chief, if not indeed the, authority in the state. The Mussulmans' religion was a

final and peremptory law, a command to be obeyed by every subject. Nor does the nature of Christianity as at present understood, at least in so far as it is embodied in the New Testament, enjoin its followers to a union with politics. "Its precepts are directed not so much to the enjoining of specific right acts fit to be done as to the creation of a spirit and temper out of which right acts will naturally flow."<sup>1</sup> Neither did the Fathers of the church, whose writings carried with them a large measure of authority, affect to lay down positive rules of law; nor were their treatises regarded as constituting a body of laws out of which a civil code could be framed. Beginning its work apart from all secular organs of government, Christianity, unlike the sacred law of Islam, never became united with the civil order of society. When at the time of her dominance the church had built up a complex system of rules in the canon law, parallel to and rivaling the civil law, and the decrees of councils and popes were formed into a systematic digest of rules, the civil authority still held its own. Moreover, the success of the canon law was due to its secular, not to its religious spirit. It was the law of the church as an organized and property-holding society, a law regulating certain civil relations having a religious side. "There was no general absorption of the civil by the ecclesiastical, no lowering of the spiritual to the level of the positive, the external and the ceremonial."<sup>2</sup>

But if the history of the secularization of politics shows that, with the development of Christianity and the separation of politics from religion, both have advanced, the history of missions furnishes a still better proof of the fact that His "kingdom is not of this world," and that there are things

<sup>1</sup> Bryce, *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, vol. II. p. 666.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 668.

that belong distinctly to Cæsar. The early Spanish adventurers who went to the most distant parts of the globe to establish colonies had all promised to aid in propagating the Christian faith. The patent of Louis XIV. to the French Company of the West, in 1664, stated that "the glory of God is the chief object in view"; and in the early English colonization we also find a union of the religious and the secular activities. In all parts of the world the missionary has preceded the tradesman and often unintentionally prepared the way for colonial enterprises. The mother country often gained the first foothold upon the pretext of protecting missionaries, and some European countries are to-day "using the missionaries as pickets or advance guards for the solid phalanx of national power by which they hope in due time to render impregnable the position thus cautiously approached."<sup>1</sup> China is a notable example in which missionary work has been employed for political purposes. Germany obtained her first foothold in Kiao-Chau as a consequence of the murder of two German missionaries; France did the same in southern China; and missions are assisted in the Levant by both the French and Italian governments by annual subventions, which in the eyes of European statesmen is nothing more than an attempt on the part of these two countries to gain political control. This is not to say that missionaries as a rule have not been prompted by a sincere and unselfish devotion to the cause of religion. Their methods may or may not have always been wise. Certainly those who went forth as pioneers into new fields armed with nothing but their faith, commissioned by the spiritual, the unseen, deserve the praise that has been bestowed upon them, and surely no one could question the sincerity of their motives. But the fact remains that states have

<sup>1</sup> See P. S. Reinsch, *Colonial Government*, chap. 3.

often turned the unselfish labors of missionaries into material gain, and thereby injured the cause of religion. We now know that those missions which have kept aloof from politics have yielded the best results, and that missionaries in all parts of the world are opposing the union of religion and politics.

And yet the modern church does not always seem to appreciate the limits of its own province nor the secret of its own strength. It has not always profited by a careful observation of its own present experiences nor learned well the lessons of the past. It has indeed been compelled to accept the dictates of the natural and physical sciences, since their truths were capable of demonstration beyond a doubt, but the political scientist has not yet convinced the theologian of the truth of his philosophy. Nor is the legal separation between the two quite complete throughout the civilized world to-day, for the majority of European states still have an established church. America alone has accomplished this desirable end; and even here the legal separation is often set at naught by a domination and influence which often suggests a union no less real, and often more difficult to combat, than that of the time of the Papacy and Empire. Political leaders still show a servile attitude toward religious leaders, and the "church vote" is still a positive asset in all political campaigns.

It is of course admitted that in all the new activities of the church, even in its political intermeddling, the ministers, as a class, have been moved by an honest enthusiasm for social betterment. They have felt that in the readjustment of society they must lend their assistance and that the opportunity of stamping its impress upon the new product was at hand. These motives are most commendable. Indeed, it is not the end sought by the church that can be questioned: it is the

means employed that is open to criticism. It must be admitted that there are many instances in which the church has planned a vigorous and effective campaign against vice and immorality, but instead of relying upon public sentiment and moral force it has insisted upon definite legal means to enforce its standards of morality without due consideration of the consequences of ineffective legal enforcement. The dangers of overlegislation have too often been left out of consideration. If the recent investigations concerning the social evil show one thing more clearly than another, it is that certain forms of vice cannot be legislated out of society. For many years the large cities of both Europe and America have attempted to regulate vice by law. But the enforcement of law must be left to human agencies, to the police, who have not always hesitated to sell favors and privileges, thus fortifying the very evils which government sought to abolish. In a recent scientific investigation of the social evil in Europe, Mr. Abraham Flexner has come to the conclusion that "only a transformation wrought by education, religion, science, sanitation, enlightened and far-reaching statesmanship can effect a cure."

Again, on the question of temperance, the church has generally insisted on a definite form of legal action, regardless of the opinions of the highest authorities. For example, a few years ago, largely through the influence of the church, a bill was introduced into the Legislature of Ohio which provided for giving the Governor of the State the right to remove the mayor of a city on petition of a comparatively small number of the inhabitants of the municipal corporation. The law was really intended as a temperance measure directed against certain cities in which the mayor had shown a laxity in the matter of the enforcement of the liquor law. While the measure

was pending in the Legislature, it was learned that the Governor was opposed to it and would probably not sign it. At the instigation of the Anti-Saloon League the churches were asked to bring pressure upon the Governor by sending in petitions urging favorable action. When these petitions were presented to the churches the matter was not generally made the occasion of a formal discussion by the members. It was merely announced that a great moral issue was at stake; and the members, not wishing to appear reactionary in the matter of morals, generally signed the petition without any thought as to its significance. Governor Harmon promptly vetoed the measure, and rightly so, on the ground that it violated, among other things, the principle of home rule. The question involved was not one of policy; it was purely an administrative measure, and, as such, was contrary to the growing sentiment of home rule which was wisely incorporated into the fundamental law of the State in 1912. Instances could be multiplied where the church and religious associations, with no more thought than in this case, have resolved and petitioned for political changes in a statute or organic law which could have but one effect, namely, to lower public confidence in their judgment on matters political.

Another pointed illustration of unwise political meddling was exhibited at the National Council of Congregational Churches in Kansas City, Missouri, October 24, 1913, when that body voted down a proposition of Governor Baldwin, of Connecticut, who opposed a prohibitory amendment to the Constitution of the United States, by the overwhelming vote of 517 to 14. It is safe to say that the majority of political scientists, and indeed the majority of thoughtful men generally, agree with the *Springfield Republican*, which, in commenting editorially upon the action of the council, remarks,

“Nevertheless, the fourteen were right and the 517 wrong.” Nor can the point of this article be better illustrated than in the words of Governor Baldwin when he said: “This is a proposition to have the Council change its specialty from religion to political science. It is beyond the province of this Council to promote any amendment to the Constitution of the United States. We may pledge ourselves and our churches, but this amendment is contrary to the genus of American government. Home rule is the foundation of the government. Let the States regulate, and not the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

If we may assume that the members of this Council fairly represented the sentiment of the churches, we have here a striking contrast between the thought of the ministers, who are leaders of the churches, and specialists in political science; and here again the question is not one of principle in regard to temperance — there is a general agreement upon that issue — but rather upon the best means of promoting it. Obviously the framers of this proposal did not know the meaning of the terms implied in such a proposition. The immense centralization of power involved, the creation of an army of public officials, and the hopelessness of enforcing a law in accordance with the amendment in communities where sentiment is divided — these are questions not to be dealt with lightly nor solved by casuistic reasoning. Temperance sentiment may properly be — in fact should be — created by ministers and churches, but until careful thinking is more general, and until sound political theories have penetrated more deeply the public conscience, the means of carrying the public will into effect must be left to those best fitted for the task. Nor

<sup>1</sup>As this article goes to press, many churches, with little discussion of the question, are petitioning Congress for a prohibitory amendment to the Constitution.

is this a question concerning which political scientists are at variance. The division of power between the state and the nation is based upon a time-honored theory, and the doctrine of local self-government has become a mental habit of all politically minded citizens to such an extent that the proposal to violate this principle could hardly be expected to call forth anything but ridicule for those who propose it; for whether it be generally admitted or not, there is a science of politics, and those who would counsel in this particular field, however proficient they may be in another, must meet the tests and standards established through the long history of the science and recognized by present political authorities. The criticism of Plato in the early part of his "Apology" has a universal application and may still be regarded as a wise caution:—

"But, O Athenians! even the best workmen appear to me to have fallen into the same error as the poets; for each, because he excelled in the practice of his art, thought that he was very wise in other most important matters, and this mistake of theirs obscured the wisdom that they really possessed."

There are certain fundamental principles underlying all sound legislation, certain criteria by which the excellence of any proposed system may be measured. All political questions are not moral questions to be resolved into right or wrong, nor does the correct solution of any social problem necessarily bear any fixed relation to the number expressing an opinion upon it; terms must be defined; governmental policy must be distinguished from administration; a necessary harmony must be maintained between the expression and the execution of the popular will; laws must not be made in advance of public sentiment; reforms should begin at a certain point and proceed in a certain order, if real progress is to be made. Nor should it always be assumed that every political and every social evil requires an institutional or legal change.

Indeed, the general question may be raised whether society to-day suffers so much from conservatism and existing institutions as from reforms born of a thoughtless and vagarious imagination, or whether present evils are not due to a wrong application of sound principles rather than to the existence of unsound institutions. Certain it is that a conservative attitude toward many of the existing institutions is wiser than revolutionary proposals that would destroy them root and branch. Antiquity itself should lend some weight to the argument for perpetuating an institution which has stood the test of time, for that is simply to admit that all wisdom is not of the present. The greatest statesmen of all time have recognized this fact, the truth of which is most strikingly illustrated in our federal Constitution: in nearly all of its details the framers of that document borrowed from the past. Only one feature — the method of electing a president — was a new creation, and that feature, although contributed by Alexander Hamilton, one of the most brilliant men of the convention, curiously enough, was the only point in which the Constitution broke down. "The American Constitution," says Bryce, "is no exception to the rule that everything which has power to win the obedience and respect of mankind must have its roots deep in the past, and that the more slowly every institution has grown, so much the more enduring is it likely to prove." There is a fundamental principle here expressed which the modern reformer may well consider before proposing radical changes in present political institutions. It is indeed conservative; but conservatism, it should be remembered, is not opposed to reform. It would merely know conditions before proposing a remedy by legislative or organic change.

But fortunately our national Constitution has suffered least

from the popular clamor for change. Only two amendments, and those recently, have been added to that fundamental law since the Reconstruction period. But state constitutions and state statutes have been as straws in the wind before the storm of reform. The sensational newspaper and the muck-raking magazine have incited the masses to unjust opinions about present evils, and driven legislators to grind out social legislation that has confused the statutes and clogged the courts.

It is not argued that evils do not exist or that changes should not be made. It is merely contended that a careful study should precede all proposed changes and that scientific methods must be employed if real and lasting progress is to be made. Neither is it intended to speak disparagingly of the great work that ministers have done in their proper field of activity. This article is merely intended to raise seriously the question of the advisability of ministers entering the field of politics and of their laying down political programs and using the influence of the pulpit or the association in urging the churches to a definite political action. If it is true that ministers are the chief persons who possess sufficient resolution to undertake bold experiments in the interest of morals, it is also true that, as a rule, not being trained in political science, they are as preëminently unfit to adjudicate upon the policy of a state as political scientists and political economists are to judge upon matters of theology or higher criticism.