

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW
Session Eleven
Class Leadership Instructions

Introduction Notes

A. The reformers had differing ideas about the role of government.

1. Luther believed that the church was to be subservient to civil government.

2. Calvin believed that civil government was to be subservient to the church.

3. The anabaptists believed that civil government and the church were to be independent of each other.

Civil government is a human institution which serves God by providing stability and peace for the citizens of a land.

B. The doctrinal statements recorded in our history have changed little in actual content.

1. The biblical reason for civil government is acknowledged and accepted.

2. That man is to obey God over any law of civil government is clearly presented.

C. Statements from the early minutes of the Evangelical Mennonites show their concern for civil law.

1. Some controversy must have surfaced during the Civil War creating a need to discuss the responsibilities of citizens

June 3, 1863 (page 33)

8. The present conditions in the land were considered and after some discussion the following was at last decided upon: we should adhere to the law. We shall do our duty in regard to the authorities, praying for them in sincerity, pay our taxes, and live under their protection a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness, respectability, and honesty.

2. At the very next meeting, a brother had failed in some responsibility and the failure was taken seriously.

October 1, 1863 (page 35)

4. It was examined whether the resolution, passed by the Conference, to do our duties toward the authorities and to pay our due taxes, etc., was carried out and

followed. With dismay it was found that one brother had not adhered to this important duty. After a brotherly admonition it was decided to demand an open confession from him.

3. Ten months after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, the Conference decided to support it.

October 1, 1863 (page 36)

8. We believe that slavery (the institution of slave holding) is sin in the eyes of God and a curse on the land when it is tolerated. Therefore, be it Resolved: That we use our influence against it, in Christian spirit, with word and deed, after our confession of faith.

4. In 1889, it was determined that the churches ought to give political support to a temperance law.

February 6, 1889 (page 180)

1. The committee on the temperance amendment reports: Whereas our state lawmakers in Harrisburg have passed an act which has been brought before the people of our state to be voted on in June of this year 1889 as to whether or not alcoholic drinks should be manufactured or sold, therefore, Resolved: That we recommend that the preaching brethren in general at the Pennsylvania Conference should use their influence in sermons, private conversation, tracts and posters against the production of sale of alcoholic drinks.

D. Other issues arose.

1. Pacifism created conscientious objectors during World War 1 but passed by the wayside after World War 2.
2. At various times, politics was viewed as a worldly concern and even voting was discouraged.

Question Notes

5-8 - These questions are pretty contemporary issues that are being faced in a new way. Christians are coming out with different answers to these questions. Do not try to promote a "right / wrong answer" environment in your discussion.

A topic for discussion which you may want to study and talk about is the relationship between our political views and our conviction that Jesus will return prior to the millennium.

Christians who believe in a post-millennial return of Jesus believe that political reformation and activity is a key to His return. Christians who believe in a pre-millennial return of Christ tend to think that political activity distracts from the urgency of the gospel.

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**YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW
SESSION ELEVEN**

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

From Verhandlungen (1859-1895)

June 3, 1863 (p. 33)

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14. Secular
Government

We also believe,
that God has ordained
and instituted power and

Article 22, Civil
Government

God ordained
and instituted the civil
government for the
punishment of evil-doers

Article 23, Civil
Government

God ordained
and instituted civil
government for the
welfare of society, to

government for the punishment of the evil and for the protection of the good; for this reason we do not despise them, but we consider government as a servant of God, are subject and obedient to it, particularly in that which does not militate against the law, will, and commandments of God; we pay tribute and custom faithfully, and pray the Lord for its welfare, that we may live under its protection and lead a still and quiet life of Godliness and honesty. (Doctrines of Faith, Evangelical Mennonites, 1866, What Mean These Stones?, p. 29)

and for the protection and defense of the good. We pay willingly and cheerfully tribute and customs demanded of us. We respect these powers with due loyalty, and we are willing to be submissive, subject, and obedient to their authority, so long as not intruded upon in things which should militate against the supreme law and will of God, and pray for their protection, prosperity and welfare, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, in all godliness and honesty." (The Doctrines and Disciplines, Mennonite Brethren in Christ, 1936)

promote and to protect the good and restrain and punish the evil. It is the duty of Christians to pray for those that are in authority, to render due loyalty, respect and obedience to them, and to pay taxes and customs demanded of them. Where demands of civil law militate against the supreme and higher law of God, Christians should obey God rather than man. (Faith And Order, The Bible Fellowship Church)

QUESTIONS

1. What do you believe is the relationship between the authority of the church and the authority of civil government? Has the position of the Evangelical Mennonites / Mennonite Brethren in Christ / Bible Fellowship Church changed through the years? Explain your answer.

2. What do the following teach about civil government?

-Romans 13:1-5

-Titus 3:1

-1 Peter 2:13-15

3. What are the responsibilities of Christian citizens?

4. Is it ever right to disobey the laws of our land? Under what circumstances?

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5. Should churches promote political points of view and seek to influence elections?
6. Should Christians be involved in political activity? Is political activity a worldly activity which will distract the Christian from serving God and winning the lost?
7. In a pluralistic society where all points of view are to be recognized and valued, is it good to promote a biblical agenda for politics?
8. Why are secular people afraid of a Christian political agenda? How should Christians respond to these fears?