

The Clarendon Code

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 10 March 2015 17:33

Laws very close to modern persecution of Christians

Many of our civil laws and activities are shrouded in the mists of time. One of these is the way Anglicanism is treated as the 'official voice' of Christians, and why independent Christians are looked-down upon. The Clarendon Code was foundational to this and modern versions are arising in our own time.

During the reign of Charles II, the 'Cavalier Parliament' passed a number of laws designed to persecute dissenters. Unfortunately, the laws were appended in history to the 1st Earl of Clarendon. It is unfortunate, because he wanted tolerance towards dissenters! The Code included several new laws devised by hateful Anglican bishops to persecute dissenters. We see similar actions taken today, via homosexuals.

The Restoration Settlement allowed the son of the beheaded Charles 1st to come back to Britain from France, to take up the throne. The set of laws concerning this were spread over 4 years and were far from 'settled' - they were

ad hoc

and badly planned. The two main groups involved in this 'Settlement' were the Convention Parliament of 1660 and the Cavalier Parliament of 1661, composed of a large number of Anglican bishops and leaders, who hated Cromwell for his removing of their wealth and privileges under the last king. Hence their dislike for dissenters.

There were Presbyterians in the Convention Parliament, whose task was to deliberate on what powers to give the new king. The Presbyterians wanted to limit the powers of royalty, but the rest wanted the king to have more. Sadly, the Presbyterians also had an eye on rewards from the court, so gave more powers than they originally wanted the king to have.

In the Declaration of Breda, the new king pressed for a general amnesty for all who fought against his father. However, those involved in regicide were punished. Thirteen involved in regicide were put to death. The new king left many big decisions to Parliament. And the Anglicans in the Cavalier Parliament played their politics well, by dividing laws between Anglicans and Dissenters, because they feared another civil uprising: laws included the Corporation Act, which only gave municipal offices to Anglicans; The Act of Uniformity upheld the Prayer Book of Elizabeth 1st. As a result of this Act 1760 dissenter-ministers lost their living

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and 150 professors lost their university tenures. The Conventicle Act made attending, or preaching at, a dissenter meeting illegal. The Five Mile Act tried to force dissenting preachers out of their own towns, forbidding them to teach or take in lodgers.

The four new Acts led to tough and vigorous persecution of dissenters (most of whom were true believers). But, as is often shown in history, persecution makes for a stronger and more resilient Christianity, and the number of non-conformists grew! The Conventicle Act expired in 1670, and dissenters made sure it was not replaced or renewed. Sheer numbers of dissenters prevented re-enactment of persecutory laws, and this should provide a clue as to what to do about persecution of Christians in the 21st century.

The main answer to this, as it was with the Clarendon Code, is to become true believers, not just idle, lax Christians who think everything will come to them. It does not. History proves that when Christians are strong in their faith, they can resist evil, and evildoers must recede.

This includes identifying fake believers and exposing them: In a sense, making a list of those who are not genuine believers, and a list showing who believes truly. This need not be a list of actual names, only a list of their characteristics. Such a list needs to be continually made available and publicised, so that public, Christians and parliament alike know what to expect. It must be shown that things done by fakes are not for social good, but for personal interest of the fakes only. All in parliament who are on the fake list must be identified as fake before the people.

Of course, today, as in the days of Charles II, dissenters (true believers) were called social revolutionaries. In Charles' time this was based on one failed attempt at a London rebellion by Fifth Monarchy men in 1661.

This group was active between 1641 and 1661. They preached a strong millennial message, and wanted to reform parliament, so that the proposed new government was ready for the imminent return of Christ. Of course, this confusion of political and earthly reign with the spiritual reign of Christ was bound to fail. Like Protestant versions of Rome's Crusaders, the Monarchists would convert all of Britain before marching on Europe and beyond to make way for Christ, converting all in their path!

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For Monarchists, the real change began with the beheading of Charles 1st, which they saw as the start of the coming millennium. The civil war was, to them, a metaphor for the new religious activity. Like some today, fearful of anti-God groups, they combined politics and faith (well, religion), instead of relying solely on the Holy Spirit. And also like the modern fearful, they allowed a diversity of types to join them in the hope that their numbers would bring about change.

Only a theocracy can bring about this kind of general change, but even within a theocracy we can expect to find many who are not really interested in the *theos*.

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