

ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

by R. J. Rushdoony

The word "accreditation" comes from "credo," I believe, and certification comes from a Latin word meaning "certain" and means to verify. Both words have an inescapably religious connotation. They imply a verification, a declaring that a thing is true, by the religious lord of those who seek accreditation and certification. To seek these things from the state is to declare the state to be our lord.

Is the state God's appointed agency of accreditation and certification? Is there any warrant in Scripture for contesting the state's claim to accredit and certify a church or Christian School? The answer to this question is urgently important. Today the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, and a variety of other federal and state agencies, claim precisely that right. It is held that a church has no valid status as a church, nor a Christian School any standing or legal status as a school, until some statist agency renders its decision and gives its stamp of approval. The same is held to be true of Christian School teachers. Our answer is very important: we will either offend and anger a powerful humanistic state, or we will anger and offend the sovereign and almighty God. It can also be added that, with either decision, we will offend many men.

What say the Scriptures? When we turn to the Bible, it immediately becomes apparent that our present practice reverses God's order. In Scripture, it is the prophetic ministry of God's law-word which accredits or certifies, or denounces and places under a ban, all officers of state, and entire nations as well. The sovereign prerogative of accreditation and certification of both church and state is the Lord's, and it is the calling of all God's faithful ministers to apply the rule or canon of the accrediting, certifying law-word to all men, institutions and nations.

The ministry of all God's faithful servants in every age has had this focus. Elijah denied certification to Ahab, and accreditation to Israel and its people, in terms of God's holy law. Athanasius denounced the Roman Empire and a compromising church in terms of that law-word.

The Biblical origin of the Christian ministry is the Levite. The Levites were a teaching ministry (Deut. 33:10), and the Christian pastor continues the Levitical calling, because the priestly order and sacrifice is ended. The Levites collected the tithe (Num. 18:21-28) of which one-tenth went to the priests. The rest provided for instruction, the care of the sanctuary, music, health, and, with the second tithe, welfare. The Levites taught the Law throughout the nation under Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 17:7ff.), served as judges (II Chron. 19:8ff.), and performed other services for society in general.

But the Christian ministry has another source in addition to the Levites, the prophets. The inspired, predictive role of the prophet ended in Christ; the duty of the prophet to proclaim God's word to church, state, and all of life remains. It was the duty of God's prophets and Levites to declare God's word to all men, to reprove kings and governors, and to "accredit" or refuse to certify in terms of God's law-word, the things of this world, including the state.

Civil government was strictly barred from invading God's house, as witness the case of Uzziah (II Chron. 26:16-23). It was the duty of civil authorities to protect and build up God's House, but never to claim powers in or over it. Rulers

thus called for reform, but the reformation was then entrusted to God's chosen ministry.

Thus, in every area of life, accreditation and certification were by the word of God, not by state, church, or man. The law-word, not man's will, is the standard. It is a usurpation of God's prerogative when the state claims the right to accredit and to certify either a church or a Christian School. It becomes a claim to be god on earth. Those who accept such an accreditation and certification are like the 400 false prophets who served Ahab (I Kings 22:6-7). As Jehoshaphat rightly saw, these men were not prophets of the Lord.

Rome, of course, was ready to accredit all churches who would come before the authorities and confess that "Caesar is Lord." The early church refused accreditation, licensure, permits, and controls, because it confessed Jesus Christ, not Caesar, as Lord.

The Puritans, of course, had election sermons on every Sunday preceding an election in civil government. Accreditation was the purpose of these sermons. Because no area of life or creation exists outside its Creator's law, that word must be declared, in all its binding power, to every area. The election sermon was thus an accreditation sermon: it set forth the word of God as it bore upon the issues of the day. It certified that which is righteous or just in terms of God's word.

There is a law-word thus in terms of which all things are judged, and there is a bar before which all things must stand. It is God's law, and it is God's throne, and the government is on none other shoulders than that of the Lord (Isa. 9:6). For any human agency to attempt to replace God's law and God's accreditation with its own is to sin, and to play god. Its test then becomes that of Ahab concerning God's prophet, Micaiah: "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (I Kings 22:8). The servants of the word of God are always hated by the humanists, in every age.

But, in the final analysis, and on the last day, no man stands apart from that word and the grace it proclaims, and no man has that grace who denies the law-word of the Lord of all grace.

The redeemed of God are those who, standing in grace, believe and obey God's every word (Matt. 4:4). That law-word is in their hands and in their hearts. As Scripture declares:

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. (Ps. 40:8).

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:33).

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 11:19).

A new heart also will I give you: and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 36:26).

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For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. (Heb. 8:10).

John Calvin, in a famous passage, declared that "the law is a silent magistrate, and a magistrate a speaking law" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk IV, ch. XX, sect. XIV). However, as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (Ex. 19:6; Isa. 61:6; Rev. 1:8; I Peter 2:9, etc.) makes clear, every man is called to be God's walking law. The law of God is the way of holiness for the redeemed; it is written on the tables of their hearts, and it governs their being. It is only when this is so that we can love and serve the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, and being, and love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31; Matt. 22:37-40; Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 30:6; Luke 10:27, etc.).

The Christian is the manifest grace of God, and is called to be the walking law of and witness to his Lord. This places a great responsibility upon covenant man.

God's law assigns various duties to institutions. Civil government is thus called to be a ministry of justice, of God's righteousness or justice (Rom. 13:1ff.), and the church is called to be the ministry of the word, and of God's grace and righteousness. It is a serious error to limit the doctrine of ordination and calling to institutions. St. Paul declares, "For we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). We are redeemed so "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4).

The law in terms of which the redeemed of the Lord move is thus God's law. Only this law can accredit and certify the believer. The state may legalize abortion, homosexuality, fornication, and more, but the redeemed cannot be party to such practices nor recognize any validity in such laws. "For conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:5) the believer, in obedience to God, avoids rebellion, but for conscience' sake he also obeys God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Least of all can the redeemed allow men to control that which belongs to the Lord. The church and the Christian School are not the property of the state, nor are they the property of the congregation: they are the Lord's, and can be surrendered to no man. The pagan principle that the state is God walking on earth has a major revival in our time. In old Russia, the Tatar invaders held that all were obliged to serve the state. Later, the tsars held to the same doctrine. A confidant of Alexander I (1801-1825) said of him, "In a word, he would willingly have agreed that every man should be free, on the condition that he should do only what the Emperor wished." Communist Russia has carried the pagan doctrine of the supremacy of the state to this logical conclusion.

In the West, however, the same doctrine has been very prevalent also, earlier in the divine right of kings, now in the doctrine of the general will and its incarnation in the state. In England, Henry VIII was part of a process going back at least to the Synod of Whitby in 664 A.D. His confiscation of church properties, and his use thereof, was an act of arrogation and blasphemy. The step preceding this act was a royal commission which indicted the church and denied it "accreditation" as the preliminary step towards confiscation. This was no new step; every tyrant who seized as much as one church first of all claimed the authority to deny that church its credentials.

The modern, 20th century attack on the church and the Christian School uses the same ploy. The Russian Revolution promoted the idea of corruption in the Russian Church, but it loved and used the corrupt and compromising, and persecuted the faithful, as it still does.

The situation is no different in the United States. The attack is on the faithful and the uncompromising, on those who declare unequivocally, "Jesus Christ is Lord," and who will not sacrifice what is the Lord's to Caesar. The Rev. Levi Whisner, and Dr. Lester Roloff, and others, have been ready to surrender their freedom, and have gone to jail at no small cost to themselves, but they have refused to surrender what belongs to Jesus Christ to American caesars.

The compromising clergy are, of course, full of "good" reasons why their way is "the path of reason." But reason is not our Lord: Jesus Christ is. These compromising clergymen cannot say with Paul, "But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after men" (Gal. 1:11). The word Paul uses is *gnorizo*, meaning to certify, declare, know, understand. Paul declared that he had been faithful, not to men, but to the Lord, and he had paid a price for that faithfulness. He understood that God's word cannot be compromised; no man can claim rights over God, or the power to judge and accredit God's realm.

To be a walking law means above all to be governed and to live, as our Lord declares, "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3; Luke 4:4). It means to be, like Elijah, "very jealous for the LORD God of hosts" (I Kings 19:10), to guard God's realm from the covetous hands of ungodly men. It means, as prophets and disciples saw, being "brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them" (Matt. 10:18). It means knowing the whole of God's counsel, His law word, in all our being; living and obeying it, and bringing men and nations into conformity to it in Christ. We accredit ourselves by the Lord's sovereign word, and we require all things to be accredited by it. It means denouncing the Ahab's of our day, in church, state, and school, and declaring the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things. It means, in brief, proclaiming the crown rights of Christ the King.

THE REASON FOR THE ATTACKS

One of the problems facing Christian School men, and churches, under fire from the state is the attacks from other churchmen. No matter how flagrant the attack, excuses are made for the state. When I told someone of the demands made the I.R.S. on a newly formed Bible Church, which included giving power of attorney to the I.R.S., the response was, "There must be a reason."

I have given copies of the Christian Law Association defender, and Chalcedon materials, to many, and met with a similar response, or been told that these and other lawyers are trying to make money.

There is a reason for these attitudes: it is compromise, and it is sin. No man has the right to surrender anything which belongs to Jesus Christ to Caesar. There cannot be two masters over Christ's domain.

Even more, instead of surrendering Christ's realm, we must enlarge it. In the trial of a Michigan state trooper for refusing to obey an order contrary to his Christian convictions, one witness reminded the trial board that, in terms of Scripture, they are ministers of God, and will be judged as such by Him. He witnessed to the necessity for recognizing the total claims of Christ the Lord. Anything short of that is sin.

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