

# World-wide Prohibition

(By William Jennings Bryan, before the Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches, Pittsburgh, Pa., September 21, 1921.)

Mr. Moderator, Members of the Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I esteem it a rare privilege to be permitted to present a great cause to this religious body, representing so many branches of the Christian Church from all parts of the world. World prohibition is a question in which the Church must naturally take the leadership; every question that affects human welfare must ultimately come under the consideration of the Church. The Church is the hope of the world. In the closing verses of the last chapter of Matthew Christ four times used the word "all"—the all-inclusive word of our language. And this was after his crucifixion; it was after His resurrection; it was His final word. He told His followers that all power had been given into His hands—not SOME power, but ALL power in heaven and in earth. He sent them out to make disciples of all nations; not of some nations, but of ALL nations. He instructed them to teach ALL the things that He had commanded. And he concluded with that wonderful promise, "Lo, I am with you ALWAYS, even unto the end of the world."

No other organization has ever had such a commission back of it. Here is a gospel intended for every human being; here is a code of morals that is to endure for all time; here is a philosophy of life that fits into ever human need; and back of these is ALL POWER IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. God has given into the keeping of His Church not only A solution, but THE ONLY solution of every problem that can vex a human heart or perplex a world. Every problem that is an important one, that affects human welfare, human society, and human progress, must receive the attention of the Christian Church. Intoxicating liquor presents one of the great problems.

The Church's position on this subject rests upon facts that cannot be disputed. Let me lay before you a few of the facts that no one can attack. First, God never made a human being who, in a normal state, needed alcohol. Alcohol is not a necessity for the human race. God provided the necessary things; alcohol is not a natural product, it is man's product.

Second, God never made a man strong enough to begin the use of alcohol, as a beverage, with certainty that he would not become its victim. Every drunkard who has gone down to a disgraced grave has passed through a period of confidence when he boasted that he could drink when he wanted to and leave it alone when he wanted to, but he overestimated his strength and fell.

Third, God never fixed in a human life a point or age, AFTER which one could drink alcohol without danger. All through the world and all through history we find illustrations of the alcoholic appetite taking hold of people all the way from youth to the most advanced age. The Bible tells us that, when Noah came out of the ark, he planted a vineyard, and drank of the wine and was drunken. His sons took a garment and, walking backward that they might not see their father's nakedness, spread the garment over him as he lay drunk in his tent. I remind you, friends, that it was not what they call strong drink that made Noah drunk, it was WINE, and wine from his own vineyard as well. There are people today who tell us that there is no harm in wine, and some add beer to wine. Let them not deceive you; wine became a mocker, not when prohibition began to be agitated, but back when Solomon gave utterance to his wisdom, and beer is as bad as wine. There is nothing intoxicating that is not dangerous to the human being.

Here, my friends, are three propositions. I have stated them without limitation, without mental reservation. They apply to every human being now living; they have applied to every human being who ever lived, and they will apply to all who may be born hereafter. We sometimes find statements that have to be confined to groups or to sections, but here are three statements upon which the advocates of prohibition build their cause, that have neither latitude nor longitude, and they have no historical limitation. I repeat them before I proceed to the next: First, that God never made a human being who, when normal, needed alcohol. Second, that He never made a human being strong enough to commence its use and be certain that he would not be one of its victims. And third, that there is

no age in a human life after which it is safe to begin. And to these three that apply to ALL time and to ALL people everywhere, I add three that apply to all Christians now and always.

First, a Christian is a Christian because he has given his life in pledge of service to God and to Christ. What right has such a one to take into his body that which he knows will impair his capacity for service and may destroy even his desire to serve?

In the second place, what money has any Christian that he can afford to spend for intoxicating liquor? We go down on our knees at morning and pray to the Heavenly Father, "Thy kingdom come;" what right have we to rise from our knees and spend for intoxicating liquor money that we can spare to hasten the coming of God's kingdom on earth? What money has a Christian to spare for intoxicating liquor, when there are so many noble causes that demand every dollar that a Christian has to spare?

And, third, what right has a Christian to throw the influence of his example on the side of a habit that has brought millions to destruction? Christians, we will have enough to answer for when we stand before the judgment bar of God without having a lost soul arise and testify that it was a Christian's example that led him into a habit that caused his ruin. If we have no other reason for not drinking, this is enough, that no young man shall ever be led astray by our use of intoxicants. Paul says, "If meat maketh my brother to offend, I shall eat no meat while the world standeth." What Christian can be more interested in the satisfying of an appetite for drink than in helping his brother? If a Christian only drinks a little, it will be a very little sacrifice to quit drinking entirely, that his example may be on the right side. If any Christian drinks so much that it will be a real sacrifice to stop, then he ought to stop for his own sake and for the welfare of his family.

Now, my friends, I have stated these things as the basis for our plea for total abstinence. They are the foundation of our propaganda, for unless we believe that alcohol is unnecessary and harmful, we can make no progress with our cause. I have shown you that it is unnecessary and I have shown you that it is harmful; because it is unnecessary and harmful, we must teach and preach total abstinence.

I might add that we in this country should be quite charitable toward those in other countries who have not yet reached the same advanced position on the drink question that we have. We recollect that it took our churches some time to get in line on this subject. The first temperance society, for instance, organized in this country was not built upon a total abstinence pledge. The members only agreed not to get drunk more than once a week, a very moderate limitation. And you may be interested to know that our churches when they began were not violently radical. I learned from a Congregationalist, for instance, that something over a hundred years ago there was a Congregational meeting—a meeting of ministers, in Connecticut. They met in the morning, and, when they adjourned for lunch, so many of them drank to excess that they could not reassemble in the afternoon. Lyman Beecher, the father of Henry Ward Beecher, was so impressed and distressed that he prepared and delivered six great addresses on the subject. When I read them three years ago, I found in them practically every argument that has been made since in favor of total abstinence and prohibition. Those addresses were the beginning of an awakening in New England. They resulted in the organization of a national temperance society. Since that time the Congregational Church, with increasing emphasis, has been making a fight against alcohol. That is one of our great churches, and its activity began only a little over one hundred years ago. But I would not single out one church; I have other illustrations. I certainly would not leave the impression that just one church had been slow to start. The fact is, they have all been slow.

Take the Methodist Church. I suppose the Methodist Church, north and south, has furnished more active workers for prohibition than any other church organization, and yet they only started a little over one hundred years ago, and their first resolution was not startling. It was that no Methodist preacher should be peculiarly interested in the liquor traffic. And they could not pass that at that conference either. I suppose some of those Methodist preachers

thought it interfered with their "Personal liberty." I think it was at the second conference that it passed.

Now, that was the Methodist Church. See how much it has improved since then! But I think I ought to tell you that the Presbyterians did not start any too soon, and they did not start with a rush. I am informed that the first resolution on this subject ever introduced in the Presbyterian General Assembly was the very mild statement that Presbyterian preachers should not get drunk in public. Now see how far we have travelled since then. The Presbyterian Church has been one of the bulwarks of prohibition in the fight that has recently culminated in this country.

Well, as I went along I gathered new illustrations; when I reached Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and told of the Congregationalists, the Methodists and the Presbyterians, a Baptist came up and expressed some disappointment that I had not mentioned the Baptist Church. I said, "Give me an illustration of your church's change, and I will mention it." "Well," he said, "we have an old country church, not far from Hattiesburg; they were celebrating an anniversary not long ago, and read the minutes of some of the earlier meetings. They found a meeting held before the war, the minutes of which show a resolution like this passed: 'Resolved, that the members of the church should not sell intoxicating liquor on the ground during service.'"

Here are four great churches, which have been very active in cooperating against the saloon in these later years, whose activity began only about one hundred years ago.

I come next to legislative action. Legislative action depends upon the arguments in favor of total abstinence; prohibition laws can not live, except as they have back of them a sentiment in favor of total abstinence. If it cannot be shown that the use of alcoholic beverages is both unnecessary and harmful, and, therefore, unwise, we cannot defend legislative provisions intended to restrain or restrict the sale of such beverages. If it could be shown that alcoholic beverages are necessary, we would no more legislate against them than against meat and vegetables; and even if it could be shown that they are unnecessary but are not harmful, we would not want to prevent their sale. We first lay the foundation in the arguments that support total abstinence, and then proceed to matters of legislation.

Why is it that legislation has come to support total abstinence? Let me explain. It is because representative government has extended its reign throughout the world. If we did not have representative government the people would not feel responsible for what is done. But today, throughout the civilized world, we have licenses; no liquor can be sold in any important nation except under license, and licenses are granted by law. Therefore, those who make the law are responsible for the licenses. The reason why the license system has been abolished in this country is that the conscience of men would not allow them to share responsibility for the existence of the saloon, and for that which the saloon was known to do. Men have become conscious of the fact that when they vote for license they are just as much partners in the saloon as if they furnished the liquor sold, or stood behind the bar. The man who votes for a license, and by his vote enables the saloon to exist, is just as much a partner in the business as the man who puts his name above the door and furnishes the capital that runs the saloon; just as much a partner in the business as the distillery or brewery that makes the stuff and makes money selling the stuff, and he has less excuse. He can not even plead the poor excuse that he did it for money. Because Christians refused to be partners with the saloon the cause of prohibition grew in this country.

The same cause that operated here will operate everywhere. You may rest assured that no sound principle that is established anywhere can be confined to the place where it is established. God has put back of every truth the same irresistible force that He puts behind the growing crops. We know that if we put a grain of wheat into the ground and surround it with a favorable environment, the germ of life will assert itself; that the little roots will reach down into the ground, and that the slender blade will force its way up into the air. We can tell to a day when the ripened wheat can be taken from the stalk. Why? Because we understand the laws that are back of these things in the material world. We know that the God who planted men on His footstool provided for all the wants of man, with laws irresistible and constantly at work. We could not worship that God as we do if He had only provided for our bodies and had failed to provide for the triumph