

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,

Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.

By William Symington.

Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 27.

CHAPTER 9.

THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION OVER THE NATIONS.

(The Duties of Nations—Continued.)

Sixthly. It is the duty of nations, as such, to have respect to religion.

This is a point which, from its intimate connection with the Mediatorial dominion, its vast importance in itself, and its being a subject on which the public sentiment at the present time is greatly divided, demands particular consideration.

That civil government has anything to do with religion is by many pointedly denied. Every sort of alliance betwixt Church and State, is condemned as unlawful and unscriptural. Not content with exposing the abuses of existing civil establishments and seeking their reformation, their entire overthrow is demanded, and the very principle on which they are founded held up to unmeasured reprobation. We are not blind to the evils that prevail in the national churches of our land, and should be sorry that anything we might say should have the effect of perpetuating or palliating these in the least. They are too palpable to be overlooked, and too great to admit of being justified. We are not prepared to approve of the *nature* even of the connection subsisting between Church and State in our existing establishments; and, of course, we frankly admit that it is not a reformation of abuses merely, but an entire constitutional change that is needed.¹ ► Nevertheless, believing as we do that it is the duty of nations to concern themselves about religion, that consequently a union between Church and State, of an unexceptionable kind, is capable of being formed, and, moreover, that the formation of such a union is not only lawful in itself, but dutiful and obligatory, we are anxious that the principle should be distinguished from the corruptions that have been grafted upon it. In lopping off and giving over to merited destruction the excrescences, it is not necessary that the root should be destroyed. In the preservation of the principle, we see involved the glory of the Messiah, the good of his Church, and the best interests of civil society itself. For this reason, and not by any means to uphold or apologise for existing corruptions, in whose maintenance we have no interest, and for whose continuance we have no wish, we are induced to submit the following statements respecting the duty of Christian nations towards the true religion of Jesus.

¹ See the Lecture of Dr. Stewart Bates titled “The Sin and Danger of Union Between the Church of Christ and an Immoral, or Antichristian Civil Government,” 1841, for another example of opposing the then-existing civil establishment of religion, while also defending a Scriptural plan of National Establishment.—JTK.

It is of consequence, in every controversy, that parties have a distinct idea of the point in dispute. The things in which they agree and those in which they differ, ought to be well understood. In the present instance, it may not be easy to give unexceptionable definitions. We beg attention, however, to the following distinctions:—

It is not, whether it be the duty of a Christian nation to establish a *false* religion;—but whether it be not its duty to establish the *true* religion.

It is not, whether it be the duty of the Church of Christ to seek alliance with a *heathen, anti-christian, and immoral State*;—but whether it may not enter into alliance with a government, possessing the character, and subserving the purposes of *the moral ordinance of God*.

It is not, whether it be the duty of the State merely to afford *legal protection, or positive toleration*, to the true religion;—but whether it be not its duty to extend *positive favour, encouragement, and support*, to the Church of Christ.

It is not, whether the *Church of Christ may not exist*, and even prosper, without the favour, encouragement, and support, of the State;—but whether it may not be the *duty of the State* to extend such countenance to the true religion.

It is not, whether the State has power *in and over* the Church, so as to interfere in any way with her internal jurisdiction and management;—but whether it be not competent to, and the duty of, a Christian State to frame regulations *about* the Church, or respecting the external interests of religion. Whether, in short, a Christian State be not possessed of power *circa sacra*, although having no authority whatever *in sacris*.

These statements will help to limit and explain the point on which the present discussion turns. And, without adopting any of the definitions of a civil establishment of religion that have been given, either by their friends or by their enemies, or venturing on any definition of our own, the proposition we design to explain, confirm, and defend, is this:—THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF A NATION, AS SUCH, ENJOYING THE LIGHT OF REVELATION, IN VIRTUE OF ITS MORAL SUBJECTION TO THE MESSIAH, LEGALLY TO RECOGNISE, FAVOUR, AND SUPPORT, THE TRUE RELIGION.

In this discussion when we make use of the term *State*, we mean a civil government possessing the character of the moral ordinance of God; and when we speak of the *Church*, we mean the Church possessing and maintaining the true religion of Christ.

First. This proposition is but a natural and necessary inference from the fact, already established, of national subjection to the Messiah. Nations and their rulers are, as we have seen, the subjects of Christ. They are under, not only his providential control, but his moral authority. Now the religion of Christ, that is to say, his Church or spiritual kingdom, must be to him an object of the deepest interest; it is that, indeed, to which everything else is subordinate. To it, of course, the nations of the world must be subordinate; and if so, is it not utterly inconceivable that they should be freed from all obligation to have respect to the interests of religion? ► Indeed, it sounds paradoxical or self-contradictory, to say, that nations, which hold so prominent a place among the moral subjects of the Messiah, should be not only exempted,

but absolutely prohibited, from taking any concern about that which is dearest to the heart of their Sovereign. The dominion of the Head of the Church over civil society, renders it, not only expedient and safe, but dutiful and obligatory, for nations, as such, to interest themselves about the true religion. The doctrine of the Mediatorial headship over the nations, lays a firm and ample foundation for an alliance between Church and State, which has been rashly pronounced to be in every case unlawful, unchristian, and sinful. While this doctrine is admitted, it will be difficult to refuse the legitimacy of the inference in favour of the alliance in question. If men would only look, without prejudice, at the plain testimony of revelation, there might be less disputing on this point. ► Does not the apostle Paul speak of God having put all things under the feet of Christ, and ‘given him to be Head over all things to the church’? Mark the language. It is not only ‘Head over *all* things;’ but ‘Head over all things *to the Church.*’ It is for the sake of the Church that he is invested with universal regal authority: in other words, the *end* of Christ’s universal Mediatorial dominion is *the good of the Church.* Thus far, all is clear and undeniable. But *the nations* are among the ‘all things,’ over which Christ is appointed ‘Head.’ It follows, then, that Christ is appointed *Head over the nations for the good of the Church.* If so, there must be some way in which the nations are capable of subserving the interests of the Church. Is it possible, then, to conceive that it is not the duty of the nations to promote, by every means in their power, the good of the Church? Is it conceivable that nations are not under obligations to advance the very end for which they are placed in subjection to Christ? Believe this who can. To us it appears that, although there were not another passage on the subject in the whole Bible, that which we have now in view should be sufficient to prevent us from giving our assent to the proposition that the nations have nothing to do with religion.

We are not unaware that an inference of an opposite nature has been drawn from the Mediatorial dominion over the nations. The argument is this:—Christ as Mediator is governor of the nations—he does not govern the nations immediately, but has delegated this to the people—the people, however, are almost universally wicked—it is, therefore, absurd to suppose that the Redeemer should commit the care of his Church to the wicked. But, in this mode of reasoning, there are several fallacious and mistaken assumptions. It is, first of all, assumed that the theory of an establishment supposes that Christ commits his Church to the care of his civil government, whereas all that it implies is that it is the duty of the civil government to extend countenance and protection to the Church of Christ. There is, farther, the unreasonable and pernicious assumption, that organised civil society and the world lying in wickedness are one and the same, whereas the one is the kingdom of Satan, who is the god of this world, and the other a moral ordinance of God. Moreover, while it is admitted that Christ has committed the power of government, in some sense, to the people, it is forgotten that he has, in his Word, both commanded the people to qualify themselves for the right use of this power, and furnished them with an infallible rule to guide them in the exercise of it.

Secondly. The manner in which the object of the magistrate’s office is described in the New Testament, confirms and illustrates the preceding observation. He is the minister of God for GOOD, and a terror, not to good works, but to the EVIL. The terms *good* and *evil* are expressed

without limitation or restriction; and, without some other information than the passage itself furnishes, we are surely not warranted to conclude either that offences against religion form no part of the *evil* which it is the duty of the ruler to discourage, or that the interests of true religion form no part of the *good* which it becomes him to promote. ► ‘Had it been said,’ writes Dr. Willis, ‘*power* is an ordinance merely to enforce common justice between man and man, or to protect one from another’s violence; and had the ideas of *justice* and *protection* been carefully limited according to the modern theory, which, by the way, circumscribes them almost as arbitrarily as the Scripture terms, *good* and *evil* themselves;—had it thus defined the magistrate’s province, then our controversy with those who are ever alleging that secular things only fall within his care, were at an end. But let it be observed, no such limitation is introduced. It is not said, indeed, on the other hand, what offences the magistrate is to resent under the head of *evil*, nor how far, and by what means, he is to promote *good*. But we ask, Does not the burden of proving that offences against religion are excluded from the one, or that the positive advancement of that cause is not included in the other, lie upon our opponents? The analogy of the Old Testament entitles us to call for this. But our right to call for it rests on the broader ground of the moral relation in which the ruler, as well as the nation, stands to God;—a moral relation for which the moral law must be the rule. ► We claim, on this ground, a positive right to interpret the expressions above quoted in a larger sense. We must remind him who would restrict the province of the civil authorities to the second table of the law, that crimes against the first table are not only, at least, equally offensive to the God of nations, but equally injurious to the safety of the State. Outrages on the Majesty of heaven, open contempt of the mysteries and the rites of religion, are more to be dreaded by society than even fraud or oppression, and will more certainly work a nation’s ruin. And, on the other hand, the good connected with the encouragement of sound morals, and the diffusion of Christian truth, is more valuable than any resulting from the wisest human policy, acting merely on the selfish principle of man. We do not, then, forget that the more immediate end of civil government is the outward order of the community. But, if every ordinance of God is bound, as it surely is, to seek its end in connection with his glory who ordained it, they who rule may not warrantably regard with indifference the best (because the divinely-appointed) means, of moralising and civilising the human race. And besides that in this view Christianity comes into the contemplation of a right and wise policy—surely he who is God’s minister for good must be bound, as far as secular power may go, to second its higher object.’²

Thirdly. The Scriptures of the Old Testament undoubtedly contain divinely-approved examples of such a connection between Church and State as that for which we contend. Under the Patriarchal economy (which, by the way, bore a closer resemblance, in many respects, to the Christian dispensation than did the Jewish), we meet with a striking combination of things civil and ecclesiastical in Melchizedec. This remarkable person was both a king and a priest. [Gen. 14.18; Heb. 7.1.] He was ‘king of Salem’—that is, a prince, a monarch, possessed of regal authority, and exercising civil dominion over a particular district more or less extensive

2 ‘National Establishments,’ &c. [by Michael Willis], page 32. [Second ed. page 22.]

and populous. He was also ‘priest of the most high God,’—that is, invested with the sacred functions of the sacerdotal office, and appointed to treat with God on behalf of men by means of sacrifice. These offices were real, not figurative merely. His bringing forth bread and wine to Abraham, when returning from the slaughter of the kings, was a regal act; his blessing Abraham, and receiving from him tithes, distinctly recognise his sacerdotal character. Now, the fact of these offices being combined in the same person—whatever design there may have been to point forward by it to him who sits ‘a priest upon his throne’—shews that there is no such incompatibility between things civil and sacred as to render all union of them necessarily sinful and improper. ► It is utterly inconceivable that Melchizedec was required, either, on the one hand, to abstain from any exercise of his regal functions which might subserve the ends of his priesthood, or, on the other, in the discharge of his sacerdotal functions to avoid having any regard to the civil interests of the people over whom he ruled. Such a separation of objects and interests may be pronounced to have been, in the circumstances, impracticable, and, to say the least, unnatural. This is sufficient to convince us that it was not required; and we may safely conclude that Melchizedec, in acting in the double capacity of king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, felt no jarring of claims, no jealousy of interests, but the most perfect harmony and co-operation between the functions of his respective offices. Here, then, we have one example, at least, of the combination of things civil and sacred possessing the authority and approbation of God, as it is spoken of in the Scriptures, not only without censure, but with obvious commendation.³

We have another example, under the Mosaic economy, in the case of the Jewish kings. Into the *nature* or details of the civil establishment of religion under the law, it is not necessary that we should here enter. We have at present to do with the *fact* that legal countenance and support were given, under that dispensation, to the Church. That Moses, and Joshua, and David, and Solomon, and Hezekiah, and Josiah, concerned themselves, in their capacity of civil rulers, about the interests of religion, about the erection of places of worship, the support of the ministers, the removal of obstructions, and the correction of abuses, will not be denied. This is all that we require for our present purpose. It proves, beyond all controversy, that union of Church and State is not *necessarily, abstractly, or in itself* sinful, else it never could have received the sanction of divine approbation at any time. There may be room for discussion as to the kind of union that happens to exist, or that may be proposed to be formed; or as to the expediency of forming a union at all in certain given circumstances, but the undeniable fact of its *having once existed and that for a lengthened period with the express approval of heaven*, demonstrates that there is nothing sinful in the thing itself. This, one should think, ought to teach a lesson of moderation to our opponents, in the denunciations in which they are accustomed to indulge.⁴ ► However unsparing in their censure of abuses, or decided in their opinion of inexpediency, they ought to beware of even seeming to cast a reflection on the wisdom and rectitude of the Almighty, by unceremoniously pronouncing all civil

3 Inglis’ ‘Vindication of Ecclesiastical Establishments,’ p. 25.

4 When this book was written the voluntary controversy was at its height, and language was used on both sides of a kind which has, happily, long ceased to be heard.—ED.

establishments of religion as, in their very nature and tendency, unscriptural, anti-christian, oppressive, un-just, and essentially sinful. *Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* ► And, as if to teach us, in the most impressive manner, the perfect compatibility of a friendly alliance between civil and ecclesiastical matters,—as if to make it palpable to all and for ever, that there is nothing incongruous in the union of the king and the priest, the throne and the altar, the sceptre and the censer, the crown and the mitre,—at every stage of the Jewish history we meet with two distinguished characters, the one civil and the other sacred, acting together a conspicuous part, and exhibiting the most perfectly harmonious co-operation. Such were Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Eleazar, David and Abiathar, Solomon and Zadok, Hezekiah and Azariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua. *These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth!* [Zech. 4.14.]

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Discussion Questions:

1. What is the topic or “theory” associated with the sixth duty which the nations owe to Messiah?
 - A. The sixth duty concerns their having respect to religion, which raises the topic of “National Establishment.”
2. From the side of those who oppose the national recognition of the Christian religion, what is often pointedly denied as if it was the end of all discussion on the matter?
 - A. “That civil government has anything to do with religion is by many pointedly denied.”
3. In stating the question on this topic, what fallacious representations of the question must be avoided?
 - A. The question is not about whether it is the duty of a Christian nation to establish a false religion. The question is also not about whether the Church of Christ should seek an alliance with a heathen, anti-christian or immoral state. (etc.)
4. What proposition does Dr. Symington propose to defend?
 - A. “That it is the duty of a nation, as such, enjoying the light of revelation, in virtue of its moral subjection to the Messiah, legally to recognize, favor, and support, the true religion.”
5. For the purpose of the discussion, how would Dr. S. understand the words “State” and “Church”?
 - A. “When we make use of the term State, we mean a civil government possessing the character of the moral ordinance of God; and when we speak of the Church, we mean the Church possessing and maintaining the true religion of Christ.”
6. What is the first argument in favor of the proposition stated by Dr. Symington?
 - A. The duty of the nations to legally recognize, favor, and support the true religion is only “a natural and necessary inference from the fact, already established, of national subjection to the Messiah.” That is, the fact that the nation and its rulers are subjects of Messiah, makes this necessary.
7. What is the second argument in favor of the proposition stated by Dr. Symington?
 - A. The manner in which the object of the magistrate’s office is described in the New Testament, confirms and illustrates” the proposition. He cannot otherwise be the minister of God for good, and a terror to evil works.
8. What is the third argument in favor of the proposition stated by Dr. Symington?
 - A. “The Scriptures of the Old Testament undoubtedly contain divinely-approved examples of such a connection between the Church and the State as that for which we contend.” There is no unrighteousness of God in this.