MESSIAH THE PRINCE,

Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.

By William Symington.

Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 28.

CHAPTER 9.

THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION OVER THE NATIONS.

(The Duties of Nations—Continued.)

[After presenting Old Testament examples of the approved co-operation of Church and State, Dr. Symington continues by answering an objection.]

To all this it may be said, in reply, that these are Jewish things, that they belong to a system which has 'vanished away,' and furnish no pattern for the imitation of believers under the New Testament dispensation. It is admitted that there were some things peculiar in the Jewish establishment, which succeeding nations are not bound to imitate. But it will not surely be contended for, that the whole was peculiar; there were certainly some things about it both moral and exemplary; and the question is, whether the duty of the civil ruler to interest himself about religion was not one of these things. ► 'It is not pleaded that all the actions of rulers among the Jews are imitable by Christian magistrates, or that the latter have exactly the same power which was allotted to and exercised by the former. . . . But it will not follow from this, that we can draw no argument from the conduct of Jewish rulers, to establish the warrantableness and duty of Christian magistrates employing their power in support of religion. Some are ready to conclude that the argument is entirely set aside when it is allowed that there is not an absolute sameness between the two cases. Nothing can, however, be more unfounded than this conclusion. Such a mode of reasoning is of the most dangerous tendency; and, if applied in all the extent to which it will lead, it would cut off the practical use of the greater part of the Old Testament. According to it, no argument could be drawn from the approved examples which it records, of persons of any rank, or in any station, of parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, because many of their actions were peculiar, or clothed with extraordinary circumstances. . . . The apostle argues for the support of a Gospel ministry from that which was given to the Levitical priesthood; but his argument did not imply that they should be supported exactly in the same way (1 Cor. 9.13-14). ► The priestly and prophetical offices were extraordinary and typical, in a sense in which the regal among the Jews was not; yet we do not scruple to illustrate the office, and enforce the duties of ministers of the Gospel, from those of the priests and prophets, especially in their actions with reference to the public state of religion, and in advancing reformation. The judgments inflicted upon the Israelites in the wilderness were in many respects peculiar, yet the apostle holds them out as monitory ensamples to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10.). The prayer of Elijah was extraordinary, yet the apostle James urges it as exemplary to Christians (James 5.16-18). And shall we suppose that the actions of Jewish magistrates form a single exception, and that they

were so peculiar, that we cannot reason from them in the way of example or analogy? . . . Persons may affect to talk of the difficulty of ascertaining what is moral and exemplary from what was peculiar; and by dwelling on the more intricate cases, may endeavour to lead away the attention from the subject altogether. But why should it be magnified, and represented as insurmountable, any more than others of a similar kind? ► The peculiarity of the divine government of Israel, or, as it is commonly called, the theocracy, consisted in general in two things; in a system of laws which was immediately given to that people from heaven; and in the exercise of a peculiar providence in supporting and sanctioning that system, by conferring national mercies and inflicting national judgments, often in an immediate and extraordinary way. Now why are not the difficulties which are started as to the application of the first of these, urged also as to the application of the last? If we cannot apply what is said in the Old Testament, concerning the duty of the rulers and nation of Israel respecting religion unto Christian nations and rulers, because the former were under a peculiar law; then we cannot apply what is said in the Old Testament, respecting the judgments denounced against the nation and rulers of Israel, unto Christian nations and their rulers, because the Israelites, as a people, were under a peculiar providence, which constituted a part of their theocracy. The same distinctions will remove the difficulty in both cases.'[1]

To these extracts from a source of high authority, we beg to add the following judicious remarks by an acute and able writer on the same subject. 'We cannot discern any evidence of the Old Testament example of a church establishment being a ceremonial thing. Nor can we believe that any reader of the Old Testament, unbiassed by system, in reading of the pious care of a David and a Solomon, a Hezekiah, a Josiah, and others, for the building, repairing, and purifying, the house of God, could have reckoned this an exercise of kingly authority, only fitted for the period of the church's nonage. There is something in it which recommends it to the best feelings of the heart, as worthy of all times and countries. We are confirmed in this when we recollect that it was not only to be a figure of the church to come, that the Almighty set apart that peculiar people; it was also to be a witness to the nations around, for the one living and true God, in opposition to their universal idolatry. ► We see that while the ceremonial worship was evidently ordained for one country, and was therefore impracticable for other nations, being in fact as a sort of wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles; yet in the great features of their national policy, it was intended by God that other nations should observe and learn from Israel.[2] If, then, the care of the Jewish princes about the affairs of religion had not been a duty to be imitated by others, it is certain that the polity of that nation, set up as God's witness to mankind, was, throughout its whole duration, fitted to confirm them in a great and prevalent error. The laws of all nations took cognisance of religion. Now, we see that the manners and worship of the Jews in almost all circumstances, were so framed as just to be contrast to the manners and worship of the heathen. Strange, if *this* was so great an error, I mean the principle of a national recognition of a Deity, that the most prominent part of the Israelitish constitution should have been fitted rather to perpetuate than to correct it! What nation, looking on, but must have deemed this one of the very points in which Israel was "an understanding people." ► How could they look at its religious character at all, without being impressed with the lesson, that the acknowledgment of the true God is the first duty of states and highest honour of princes? Why they did not learn of them more to profit, it does

1 M'Crie's Statement, pp. 121-128.

2 Deut. 4.7-8; Deut. 28.10; Deut 29.24; Deut. 32.27.

not fall to us here to explain. But we are sure it was in the plan of Providence,—even while the typical institutions could not be adopted by them as nations, and the mystery was to be "hid for ages,"—that the great principles of natural religion should be visible in the church and state of the peculiar people, and so far make the heathen inexcusable. Just, then, as the reasons specified in the judicial law itself shew that certain statutes above referred to were of moral and perpetual obligation, so do *these* reasons appear to us conclusive, as proving that the precedent of a national establishment of the church is available as a moral example.'[3]

So much in reply to the objection by which it is attempted to neutralise the argument from Old Testament examples, namely, that these examples are Jewish. But it may not be irrelevant to remind our readers that the Old Testament contains others besides Jewish examples. We have already specified an instance, before the Mosaic economy, in the case of Melchizedek; and we now beg leave simply to remark that several instances are on record of *Gentile* princes who, with marked approbation and distinguished success, employed their influence to promote the welfare of the church. Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a decree respecting the rebuilding of the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, and we are expressly informed that it was the Lord who stirred him up to do so. [Ezra 1.1-4.] Darius afterwards published an edict to the same effect. [Ezra 6.8-12.] Another regal enactment of the same nature was passed by Artaxerxes. [Ezra 7.12-20.] These are examples the force of which cannot be set aside on the score of being Jewish: and yet they were highly approved. 'Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers,' said the pious and patriotic Ezra, in grateful acknowledgment of the divine goodness, 'who hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.'

3 Willis on National Establishments, &c., pp. 85-88.

Fourthly. From the examples just adverted to, it may be inferred to be agreeable to the light of nature or sound reason, that nations should interest themselves in religion. The cases we have specified may be said to be extraordinary, but the fact that almost all nations, ancient as well as modern, barbarous as well as civilised, have incorporated with their constitutions laws respecting religion, shews that these extraordinary impulses were in accordance with the dictates of nature. We wait not, however, to argue from this fact, but avail ourselves of it only as introductory to some observations on the intimate connection subsisting between religion and civil society. The church and the state, so far from being diametrically opposed, are intimately connected, capable of friendly co-operation, and fitted to exert the most happy mutual influence on each other. On the one hand, there is much that religion can do for a nation; and on the other hand, there is much that a nation can do for religion.[4]

4 [The last sentence above, and following footnote are found in 1881 & 1884 editions.]

The author has here made a reference to certain pages of [T.R] Birks's Christian State which contain the following sentences:—

'The general laws of Christian duty, when applied to the case of rulers, lead us to infer that his aim ought not to be, as many conceive, barely to secure property and life by motives of compulsion and fear. The wise distribution of wealth and its right improvement should be the objects of his policy, far more than its mere accumulation. Even in his efforts to secure the temporal prosperity of the nation he needs religious truth, and its open confession, to qualify him for the task.... What is the true character of a national policy framed on these maxims [those of an entire divorce of religion from the state], and where are they carried out consistently to their natural issue?... The whole system, like some chemical mixtures, detonates and explodes when the least gleam of sunlight from eternity breaks in upon its quiet darkness.... Wherever the light of Christianity has shone, the nations which have drunk its truths most deeply have risen the most, even in outward greatness; and

Let us, first of all, see what religion can do for a nation. True religion, apart from the influence it is fitted to have on the inhabitants and rulers of a country individually, cannot but affect beneficially its civil institutions and interests. Whether the government be monarchical, aristocratical, democratical, or mixed, it is not difficult to see that religion must have a mighty effect in directing it toward the ends it is designed to subserve, and guarding it against the evils to which it is incident. Religion alone can effectually guard the monarch against an arbitrary abuse of his prerogative, tyrannical oppression, and rapacious aggrandisement; or can teach him to feel and to act as the father of his people, and thus at once enable him to promote their good and merit their affection and confidence. ► Religion alone can restrain the nobles of a land, from seeking the supposed welfare of their own order, at the expense of that of the humbler classes of society. Nor can any thing but true religion ever prevent the claims of popular liberty and rights from degenerating into licentiousness, and issuing in tumultuary anarchy. Religion is requisite to teach legislators to have respect, in their enactments, to the honour and decrees of the supreme Lawgiver, rather than to the unstable dictates of worldly expediency. In courts of law and justice, religion is well calculated to disengage civil enactments from that embarrassing ambiguity which goes far to defeat their end; to put a stop to the pernicious practice of pleading any cause however bad; to place an effectual barrier to the taking of bribes, which blind the eyes even of the wise; and to inspire with a sacred regard, at all times, to moral rectitude and honesty.

Religion is favourable to liberty. By checking selfishness, inspiring benevolence, and teaching a strict moral equality, it proves itself decidedly friendly to the rights of the people; while, by its opposition to injustice and oppression, it directly tends to suppress whatever is unfavourable to freedom. Without religion, nations may aim at freedom, but they can never attain it; and even although they could, they would be unfit for enjoying it, for, to the end of time will it hold true of communities as of individuals, that 'whom the Son makes free, *they* and they only are free indeed.' [cp. John 8.36.]

It might even be shewn that religion is fitted to operate favourably in regard to national wealth, by securing industry; by restraining indulgences injurious to health; by hindering all profuse and foolish expenditure of public money; and by preventing to a great extent, and at all events ameliorating, the evils of pauperism which spreads like a leprosy over an immoral population. However despised and overlooked by worldly economists, the statement will be found to rest on a basis of immovable truth, that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*.[5]

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when it has been quenched in the mere spirit of religious strife or superstitious darkness, their strength has commonly begun to decay. Though a fitful gleam of worldly greatness may be secured where the truths of religion are despised and cast away, the world has never seen a state openly irreligious and profane that has been more than a meteor flashing with a momentary brilliance, and then setting swiftly in darkness,'—Pp. 140-144.

5 [This later note found in 1881 & 1884 editions.]

Very striking remarks of Canon Birks on the necessity of true religion to sound political economy, are here referred to by the author—pp. 153-160. He called the attention of his students to them, and rejoiced in receiving confirmation of his views from such a quarter. 'To create riches, and in creating to diffuse them so as to ensure the solid well-being of the State, to preserve the people from the double curse of cankered gold and luxurious profligacy—these are tasks which require the knowledge of higher truths, and a heavenly wisdom in those who would indeed fulfil them. . . . Wealth is not measured by gold and silver; for these change their value continually. It does not consist in bales of merchandise; for these ruin the producers when

It requires little penetration to see how religion is subservient to the peace of a nation. It is directly opposed to those false views of national honour, which would associate the glory of a people with the pomp and circumstance of war. Martial music, glittering arms, mustering troops, and far-spreading conquest, have about them a glare by which men are apt to be deceived. It should never be forgotten, however, that war is at the best a necessary evil, and inseparably connected with bloody carnage, fell bereavement, territorial devastation, and a long train of horrible, nay, indescribable miseries. Religion directly tends to promote the blessings of peace. Securing peace with God, it inculcates peace between man and man; it puts a check to those ambitious designs and wicked passions which will be found, on the one side or on the other, or perhaps on both, to originate those wars which prove a scourge and a curse to mankind; while it teaches all to aim at bringing about that happy predicted state of things, when men *shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*. [Isa 2.4.]

Religion can alone secure the true morality of a nation. Its sanctions are powerfully calculated to restrain those outbreakings of injustice and violence which the laws of civil society are designed to repress, and against which mere human enactments and punishments will be found but an ineffectual safeguard. Nor can any thing but true religion present effectual barriers to that torrent of impiety and profligacy, against which no penal laws can be directed, but which powerfully tends to sap the very foundations of national prosperity, and to call down the curse of God upon a people.

In short, without religion no nation can feel itself secure. Ungodliness provokes the anger of the Lord, and, like Israel of old, the nation that neglects religion and gives itself up to iniquity, will not be able to stand before its enemies. It may truly be said of such, *Their defence is departed from them*, for, by so doing, they incur the displeasure of Him who is the only sure *defence and refuge in the day of trouble*. [Num. 14.9; Psalm 59.16.] Warriors and statesmen may affect to despise all this, while they put their trust in human wisdom and prowess, but God can soon teach them that it is religion alone that can render a country invincible; that the prayers of the godly are more to be trusted than swords of steel,—the sighs of true penitence a surer safeguard than all the thunders of artillery. Religion is, in truth, 'the cheap defence of nations.'

These remarks, on the connexion between true religion and the welfare of a civil community, are supported alike by Scripture, reason, and history. RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION, BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE, Prov. 14.34. This sacred maxim is illustrated by all history. The nation of Israel was most prosperous, when it was most religious, under the pious reigns of David and Solomon. And when did it become an abomination, and a hissing, and a destruction, but when it departed from the Lord, and filled up the cup of its iniquity by rejecting the Messiah? The same thing might be said of other nations of antiquity. The period of their

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no market can be found for them. It is not measured by the labour bestowed on production; for labour itself may be wasted on useless follies, or on things worse than useless, the fuel and incentive of wickedness and crime . . . Every theory of its nature must be worthless which does not distinguish real from illusive wants, and measure the former by a true standard, derived from the real, solid, and lasting interests of mankind.'

It might have been added, as a matter of history, that each of the great world-empires of antiquity went down under the sheer weight of its precious metals, that is, perished through the effeminacy and moral corruption engendered by fulness. The experiment now being made, under the government of the Mediator, on modern nations, is how far faithful use of the leaven of divine truth will avert from them the same fate. See p. 283 *infra*.—ED.

greatest prosperity will be found to be that of the greatest prevalence of public virtue. It has been remarked, that, in proportion to the prevalence of truth, justice, benevolence, and industry, were their glory and splendour; while their decline and final overthrow were marked by luxury, voluptuousness, envy, injustice, and vain-glorious ambition. ► 'The nations which have been hurled down from the supremacy which they formerly possessed, perished not from the want of resources, but of the courage and the skill to use them. God had taken their hearts from them, and they fell into an evil snare. They bowed down under the load of unrepented sin, and submitted their necks to the conqueror. Babylon, Persepolis, Greece, Rome, and Constantinople, were fuller of wealth and arms on the day that they opened their gates to the conqueror than when poor and few in numbers, but resolute in spirit, they first started in the career of victory. Had God restored to them the mind of their forefathers, they would soon have rolled back the battle from their gates, difficulties and dangers which were bringing on their speedy doom would have disappeared as a dream, and with united hearts and hands they would have re-edified to more than their former height their temples and their bulwarks. But sin, with the power of an avenging God, is the ruin of every people. He turns their wisdom into folly, and their strength into weakness. *All these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed, because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his statutes and his commandments which he commanded thee. Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things; and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck until he hath destroyed thee.*'[6] [Deut. 28.45,47,48.]

6 Douglas's Prospects of Britain, pp. 16, 17.

Such being the close connexion between religion and the best interests of civil society, passing strange were it, indeed, if nations were not at liberty, nay, were not under obligations, to interest themselves about religion. It will be difficult to shew that there is any one thing which can contribute more directly or extensively to the true prosperity of a kingdom than religion; and yet we are asked to believe that this one thing a kingdom must do nothing to introduce, to support, or to diffuse! Every nation is surely bound to use all lawful means of advancing its prosperity; and are we to be told that the means which, above all others, tends most powerfully to this end, is one of which it is unlawful for a nation to avail itself? True, the direct and immediate end of civil government is not the maintenance of religion, but the promotion of order, peace, and justice. Yet religion being a means, an eminent means, to the attainment of this end, no government, having the opportunity, can neglect to improve it, without incurring the guilt of neglecting its own true welfare.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What answer may be given to those who object that Jewish things have "vanished away"?

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2. What does M. Willis discern is the cause if men, in reading of the care of David, etc. about God's worship, conclude it ceremony or nonage?

A.

3. What is the fourth argument in favor of the proposition stated by Dr. Symington (for Establ.)?

A.

4. What maxim of Scripture especially declares what religion can do for a nation?

A.