



The Christian's Response to an Encroaching State

This may seem a rather dry subject, but for the Christian all that pertains to the honour and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is important. In all things He must have the pre-eminence and therefore, if that means delving into what is going on in our ungodly and apostate nation, then so it must be.

Most of us will have heard the question asked, 'What are *they* going to do about it?' In most cases, we instinctively know who 'they' are — the Government, either national or local. This kind of statement is commonplace because there is a vast range of problems that are seen as the responsibility of the State, or civil government, to resolve. But the 'nanny State' comes at a price and that price is freedom. In particular, an ungodly nanny State will encroach upon the liberties of the people of God. Because the people of God have a supreme allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, they have fixed Biblical principles and therefore cannot or should not bend those principles to fit in with the demands of an ungodly government. Moreover, the bigger the role that Government assumes, the greater the likelihood and number of occasions where what is required by the civil power and what Christ requires of His people will come into conflict.

We must also face the fact that there is a widespread sense of dependence on the State that is encouraged by a process of high and very complex taxation and the subsequent handing out of a vast range of benefits. In other words, tax high and then make as many people as possible feel that they are getting something from the Government by handing some of their taxes back to them. This is an oversimplification, but surely not that much of an exaggeration. With all this money swirling around, we must go back to the first principles of the Word of God.

The Biblical View of the State

Firstly: all authority amongst men begins with God and His Christ

All authority exercised by one human being over another is either God-given or it is usurped. It either comes from God and is legitimate or it does not come from God and proceeds from the arrogance and pride of men. A Christian cannot believe in unlimited government, not in the family, not in the church and not in the State. Since all authority has been given to our Lord Jesus Christ, then it is the duty of kings and rulers to acknowledge His authority over them. Psalm 2:10-12 tells rulers to '*kiss the Son*' and to honour Him and acknowledge Him as King over them as Samuel did when he kissed Saul at his anointing (1 Sam. 10:1).

This is not merely speaking about kings and rulers in their personal lives; it is speaking of them in their capacity as civil rulers. The earlier verses of that Psalm are quoted in the book of Acts 4:25-28,

'Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou has anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done'.

These verses of Psalm 2 are applied to Herod and Pontius Pilate, not simply as individuals, but as civil rulers who used their public position in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to the later part of the Psalm, therefore, which tells rulers to kiss the Son and the judges of the earth

to be wise and to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling, it is addressing rulers, not simply in their personal lives but in their exercise of civil power, to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the duty of rulers to trust Christ personally, certainly; to repent and believe on Him. But it is also their duty, in their public capacity, to submit to Jesus Christ and to openly acknowledge Him as the Prince of the kings of the earth. No activity and, especially, no exercise of authority can legitimately be engaged in without submission to Christ as King of kings, the blessed and only Potentate.

Secondly: the principal duty of rulers is the punishment of evil-doers

We read in Romans 12:19-13:4, *'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord ... Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation ... For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil'*. The fundamental principle here is that vengeance belongs to the Lord and this one principle, which outlaws private revenge, also requires the civil ruler, as God's minister to whom a limited power is given, to execute vengeance upon them that do evil. God has not committed the execution of vengeance to private individuals, but he has delegated a limited expression of His own intolerance of sin to civil rulers.

The duty of submission to civil rulers arises from their divinely delegated authority, as it does also for heads of families and the church's eldership within their respective spheres. The delegation of limited authority to men is always the basis of the requirement of submission. Children are to obey their parents, and wives are to obey their husbands, because God has given a limited authority to husbands and to parents (Eph. 5:22 & 6:1-3). Church members are to submit to the elders of the church for the same reason, that Christ the King has given a limited authority to the eldership of the church (Hebrews 13:17). This duty of submission, in all cases, does not extend to complying with requirements to do what is sinful (Acts 4:19 & 5:29). The Lord never gives either unlimited or arbitrary authority to anyone. At no point, even in governing a nation, is any part of the life of man to be lived independently of submission to the Word of God.

Thirdly: the ruler is to punish evil as defined by God

This follows from the above. He is an avenger of 'evil' (Rom. 13:4). Who but God can define evil? There is no definition of evil that has any validity apart from God. Richard Dawkins may talk about right and wrong, good and bad, but it has no meaning. The atheist has no right to even talk about right and wrong. There is no such thing if there is no Lawgiver in Heaven whose authority is over all. Evil must be defined by God. And it is the public expression of sin (declared in Scripture to be the transgression of God's law), which defines the evil that the civil ruler ought to punish. This extends to both tables of the Law of God. The idea that the civil power only has to do with the second table of the Law and that the first four commandments, even in the public domain, are only a matter for the private individual has no Biblical foundation. Public transgression of any of the Ten Commandments is the proper domain of punishment by the civil power.

The idea of total religious freedom, in which civil rulers only take account of the second table of the Law, is quite impossible to put into practice. The Mormon polygamist is a polygamist because he is a Mormon. The public Sabbath-breaker sins not only directly against God, but also against his neighbour as he vexes the godly and encourages the ungodly in their wickedness until they are ruined. So the idea that you can separate off the second table of the Law, and that the State will only deal with that, is impossible to implement as well as unscriptural.

Fourthly: if the state has other functions, it must be shown biblically to be within the authority given to rulers by God

If we want the state to do more things than punish sin, we must show in some way that the Bible says that they have the authority for that function from the Lord.

Government of a nation should mean, first and foremost, punishing Biblically defined evil and must be limited by God's Word.

The Current Exaggeration of the Role of Civil Government

Firstly: exaggeration or expansion of the role of the civil power is inevitable when men forget God

A godless society is inclined to enlarge the importance of most things in order to paper over the gaping hole that godlessness leaves. Where God is ignored, that is the living God who speaks in Holy Scripture, then everything becomes out of proportion. This is true of everyday things. People's homes are no longer simply places to live in comfortably but become objects of endless pride and vanity beyond anything that relates to comfort or convenience. In the realm of sport, people will go to immense lengths in their devotion. Instead of sport being a diversionary recreation, it becomes a vehicle of idolatry. They idolise their favourite football players or other sports personalities. The forgetfulness of God must lead to a disproportionate place being given to other things.

This applies to civil government. In the absence of the fear of God, civil government becomes wildly extended in its role and expected range of cures for all ills. If you want an illustration of that, you need go no further than the run-up to the election of President Obama in the USA. His election to the presidency was spoken of as bringing in a new era and all our problems, or all America's problems at least, were going to be solved. Even if Obama was a good President (which we frankly do not believe he is), he could never have fulfilled the expectations that many people had of him. And that is why this phrase turns up, 'What are *they* going to do about it?' Exaggeration or disproportionate expectation of civil government is inevitable where godlessness prevails.

Secondly: subtraction and addition to the role of civil government go together as a general rule

It is self-evident that the government of the United Kingdom is not punishing evil in anything like a Biblical manner. Its definition of evil is wrong and punishment is rather feeble, to say the least. Murderers are not put to death and we all know that all manner of crimes receive a very minimal response at the hand of the legislature and judiciary. This subtraction from the God-given role of punishing evil goes hand in hand with addition. If evil-doing is not adequately punished or not punished at all, then it is hardly surprising if an increasing number of measures, functions, 'initiatives' and quangos appear in an effort to compensate for the dreadful effects of this failure to punish evil.

Thirdly: the part played by social conditioning in explaining bad human behaviour is given excessive prominence when God, the Scriptures and God's definition of evil, are ignored

Crime is seen, not as the outworking of sin because man has rebelled against God, but as due to physical, psychological and social factors. It all comes down to factors working on people rather than anything essentially corrupt within them. In order, therefore, to cure this anti-social behaviour, there must be adjustment of order; there must be changes made in those various circumstances that act upon people and which allegedly cause anti-social behaviour. This is not to deny, of course, that some circumstances bring out the sin of man more than others, but the denial of Biblical Christianity means that all has to be explained in terms of external influences or at least this together with internal physical elements in the person's make-up, since the existence of the soul is denied.

Fourthly: monitoring of the population with the aim of preventing crime is substituted for punishment of crime

The idea is to create the conditions which will make people good and law-abiding and therefore there is need to monitor much of society and its activities in order to know how to adjust circumstances to produce the desired effect. By contrast, Scripture actually does maintain the

deterrent aspect of punishment, though this is not the only reason for it. In Deuteronomy 13:10-11, speaking of the idolater, we read,

'And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you'.

The question of the extent of the obligation to reproduce the penalties of the Old Testament is a big one and we shall not enter into that here. Suffice to say, our own view is that many of the penalties (especially the death penalties) in the Old Testament were a mode of church excommunication rather than purely civil punishment and therefore not directly applicable as a template for purely civil penalties today. The point here is, however, that the deterrent aspect is not dismissed in the Word of God, not even in New Testament church discipline, although such church discipline aims to be remedial for the offender in the first instance (and does not involve the death penalty), *'Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear'* (1 Tim. 5:20). Both civil punishment and church discipline are ultimately to be done because the Lord requires it, but the deterrent aspect is not irrelevant. When prevention of unacceptable behaviour by social conditioning and monitoring of the whole of society is dominant, then punishment of crime recedes into the background. This stimulates a cycle. The minimising of punishment increases crime and increases the perceived need to engage in further social adjustments and the increase of governmental monitoring and surveillance of human activity in general. It is virtually inevitable, therefore, that government will become more intrusive when the fear of God is absent. The awareness of God-given authority within His appointed limits is not in place and so the expansion of power by Government results. Because the thought process of the population must be moulded and lifted up, it is thought, to a better level, the behaviour of the populace is monitored to steer the people in what is regarded as the right direction as to their thought-patterns and behaviour. An unbelieving populace can be all too ready to accept this and approve the expansion of the role of the state and even if some begin to see the danger, it is too few or too late: power ceded to the state is not easily recovered.

This partly explains why governments tend not to like home schooling, for example, because the schools act as a means of monitoring the children in order to trace potential parental wrongdoing. But generally speaking, an army of social workers tries to forestall crime rather than the police arresting and the judiciary significantly punishing evildoers. (This is not to disparage all that is done by social workers.)

Fifthly: we need to be aware of the Trojan-horse method of encroachment

This involves the use of noble-sounding language to justify harmful, ungodly and encroaching legislation.

'Equality' or 'diversity' agenda

One example of this is the 'equality' or 'diversity' agenda. We would not choose to dwell on these things, but it would be madness to ignore the fact that sexual morality, or the lack of it, is one of the major areas of difficulty for the people of God in this country at present. Under the old pretence, *'Ye shall be as gods'* (Genesis 3:5), man is still trying to be independent of God and refusing to take God at His word and so he 'does his own thing'. So much within our nation can be explained when we grasp this; the idea abounds that independent man is competent to judge what is lawful to man because he is competent to judge what is harmful to man.

Gone is the idea that anything is wrong because God says so. Gone is even the idea that anything is wrong because it is repulsive to nature. The only rule that now seems to govern sexual conduct is that of adult human consent. So paedophilia is criminalised, rightly so of course, but only because a child is deemed unable to give informed consent. Do we understand how low we have come? The fact that the paedophile's behaviour is as instinctive to him as the homosexual's behaviour is to himself doesn't seem to be allowed to come into the picture. The homosexual's instincts have a 'right' of expression whereas the paedophile's do not. The difference is because one involves only consenting adults whereas the other does not. In other words, the rights of God,

who condemns both, are not mentioned. Even the self-evident and God-given distinction between male and female is no longer decisive. Man sees himself as competent to decide what is harmful and, on that basis alone, differentiation is made between what instinctive behaviour must be criminalized and what need not. *'God is not in all his thoughts'* (Psalm 10:4).

No longer does homosexuality bring disapproval; even the older generation amongst the ungodly are falling over themselves to show that they are not behind the times and are tolerant of things that they would have found disgusting in their youth. Above all, it seems, one must avoid the stigma of being accused of 'homophobia'. We could call this the 'Phariseism of breadth'. The old Pharisees liked to show how narrow they were. Today's Pharisee wants to show how broad he is and display his 'equality awareness' credentials.

Homosexuality is now recognised as a valid form of human partnership with increasing legal safeguards for homosexuals and increasing legal penalties against those who dissent from this 'equality agenda'. This is morality without God. We make it up for ourselves. We are not as clever as we think we are, but are very loath to face up to this. The investment of human pride in the whole 'diversity' dogma is exceedingly great. That is why the hostility to Biblical Christianity is increasing — because we do not and cannot fit in! We get some idea of the extent of the pride involved when we consider the response to the problem of AIDS. People have been dying, but the response has not been, 'Maybe we've got it wrong and permissiveness is a problem' but rather 'we'll work out a safe-sex policy; we can handle it'. Inconvenient facts, such as that of homosexuals being significantly more promiscuous than even heterosexuals, are ignored. Nothing must be allowed space that may suggest that the agenda is disastrously wrong.

Nationally, we are in love with darkness. Pride prevents all reconsideration. We can be on the verge of collapse as a society, but neither permissiveness nor the 'equality agenda' must be called in question. *'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God'* (Psalm 10:4). Sodomite couples can run B&B establishments in our cities without hindrance, but Christians who will not accommodate such couples await the knock at the door. They are seen as bigots who oppose equality and so are viewed as enemies of society who need to be re-educated and delivered from their time warp.

We must notice, at this point, the official and much trumpeted tolerance of Islam, even though Islam is officially intolerant of homosexuality. How do we explain that? There is an element of fear, no doubt. By comparison, Christians will not issue a *fatwa* and are a soft target. Even so, there is a strange contradiction in such a welcome being given to a religion that is so intolerant of homosexuality by a society that has gone to such lengths to show itself tolerant of it. We must not, however, expect rationality where human pride reigns. Another feature is that Islam keeps quite a low profile on opposing homosexuality. They are rarely involved in protesting against it. No doubt this is because consistent Muslims have little interest in cleaning up British 'infidel' society. Their real interest is domination followed by the imposition of Sharia law.

To summarise, then, Christians are viewed as opponents of equality and the state has assumed the right to intervene in the realm of private business to impose its pro-sodomite agenda. This, surely, is iniquitous state encroachment.

Child protection

A second example of the 'Trojan horse' method of encroachment is the issue of 'child protection'. Like 'equality', 'child protection' sounds noble. Don't we all want to look after children? Only the worst people in the world would object to protecting children. What about the requirements of child protection, however? In Northern Ireland, from 2003 criminal record checks were required for employment in state-run educational institutions and any other 'child-care' organisations. Many churches assumed, probably correctly, that the legislation applied to them and felt they should follow the prescribed procedure. This was seen as 'best practice' for insurance purposes and legal safety in the event of anything going wrong. Similar legislation is in place in the rest of the U.K. The Labour Government was in process of bringing in the 'Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act'. This, if it had been passed, would have required vetting through the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), which would have two lists: an adults' barred list for those working with vulnerable adults and

a children's barred list for those working with children. And this would apply, at least, to voluntary organisations meeting with children on a weekly basis. The coalition Government has put this 'on hold' because they think it is too cumbersome and too expensive. One of the few benefits of the recession may be that it restricts Government interference due to financial constraints. There are variations between different parts of the UK, but the general pattern is clear.

But this raises questions, for example, about the State's definition of who is suitable to work with children. If there was a smacking ban and a Christian is prosecuted for giving Biblical correction to his children and he goes on the 'banned' list, what are we going to do then? We don't think that is a Biblical reason for barring someone from working with children. Are we going to have elders who can't teach children and members who can, or are we going to bar such people from being elders? Is this not the State telling the church who can hold office in the church of Christ? And what of the idea that someone in the church is appointed to relay matters in the church to the civil power without necessarily going through the officers of the church? Does it not belong to the church-officers to deal with church matters and to decide whether there is a criminal matter that must be reported to the police? *'The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate'* (Westminster Confession 30:1) and is not that appointed church government adequate to deal with child protection matters and report crime as necessary and without an appointed State agent in the membership of the church?

Are we alert to the very encroachment of the civil powers into the government of the church against which our forefathers so heroically contended, but now coming under the guise of looking after children rather than the 'Divine right of kings' as in former times? We do have to wake up to State encroachment into the province of the church by stealth and noble-sounding policies.

The Church's Response

Firstly, we should oppose unlimited government in principle

Big Government is bad news for Christian freedom. Emotional attachment to socialism, on the grounds that more remote areas of the country may seem less neglected under such, will not do now. The day could come when we would very much like the government to forget all about us!

Secondly, we need to be on our guard for Erastianism

Erastianism can be explained by looking at the four main views of the relationship between the church and the State. There is the Roman Catholic view that the church should govern the state. The Pope, as the supposed Vicar of Christ on earth and head of the church, is also viewed as the father of princes and ruler of the world and therefore a Christian State is one that submits to the Papacy. Then there is the Erastian view, named after Thomas Erastus (1524-1583) that puts it the other way round; that the State governs the church. Also, there is the view known as Voluntarism; that church and State have no obligations to each other and the State should not be involved in recognising and caring for the interests of the church. Finally, there is the Reformed view, which we regard as the Biblical view, that both church and State are to be subject to Christ, that Christ is King and Head of the church and King of nations. The two are separate in their government, but with duties to each other. The church is to bear witness to the State, as part of its testimony to the whole counsel of God, as to what the State's duty is and the State, in implementing the Law of God in the public domain, facilitates the church in its legitimate functions. Holding this Reformed view, we are obliged to resist Erastianism. We must resist the State interfering in the government of the church. We need to be 'on the ball' lest Erastian encroachment seeps in before we realise what has happened to us.

The situation regarding Gift Aid, for example, needs to be watched. Whilst we don't want to give more money to the Government than necessary, especially since they misuse so much of the taxes given to them, nevertheless the church must never re-invent itself or revise its mandate from Christ the King in order to fit in with State requirements. If Christ's definition of the functions of the church is not good enough for the Government to think that we provide public good, then so be it.

Perhaps you think that if it came to abandoning Gift Aid, the church could scarcely survive. The way forward is: we and all the Lord's people must love the Lord Christ and give as we are really able and commit the future of the church into His hands. He can look after His Church. We must be faithful to Him first of all. Meanwhile, we must be committed to never essentially altering His instructions to His church to suit any Government or pretend that our main work is something other than preaching a definite, Biblical, doctrinal Gospel rather than social work.

Thirdly, we must oppose State interference in family government

We must not allow the State to intervene in parents' obligation to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We must teach our children the truth and we must discipline them according to the Word of God whether the Government approves or not.

At this point, though probably hitting something of a raw nerve, we must face the fact that ungodly State schooling is already interfering with Biblical nurture. For the purpose of this address, let us suppose Knox and his colleagues were right in including in the First Book of Discipline a blueprint for a school system covering the whole of the country, not only initiated by the State, but under its long-term control. Do we really imagine that the present system bears any resemblance to what Knox had in mind? He did not regard education as neutral. He wanted schools for the instruction of children in 'godliness and virtue'. Will an ungodly Government organise godly education? Will a stream rise higher than its source to any great degree? No, and schools will not rise much above the ungodly government which runs them.

This is not to dismiss the commendable efforts of individual Christian teachers. We have Christians in many roles in life, but the presence of some Christians within an organisation does not make it a Christian body. There are Christian policemen, but we do not have a Christian police force. There are Christian teachers, but we do not have a Christian education system and we have to face that. If parents struggle with the idea of taking on the whole of their children's education themselves (though this is a completely Biblical option as Scripture makes no mention of Schools; they are not a Divine ordinance but a helpful arrangement and no more), then let us get on with establishing Christian schools where teachers truly do act on behalf of Christian parents by teaching the whole curriculum in a way which is compatible with a Christian viewpoint. '*Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge*' (Proverbs 19:27). How can we read these words to our children and then send them where they will hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge? We need Christian schools urgently.

Even the most ardent defender of the concept of a State school system should feel no obligation to remain bound to it when it is largely in rebellion against Christ any more than he should feel bound to stay in the Church of Scotland because he believes in an established church. Yes, we submit to the civil powers when they impose foolish and unnecessary regulations. We fill in their irritating forms as required if it is not sinful to do so. Nevertheless, when we are required to sin, then we must obey God rather than men. And when the State crosses the line into the divinely appointed government of the church or interferes with a Christian parent's duty to his children, we resist.

Fourthly, we also need to watch for State interference in the workplace

The equality agenda turns up in all sorts of places. Not only those providing goods and services may be required to recognise and accommodate 'same-sex partnerships', which Christians must never do, but also contracts of employment are another hazard. Can a Christian responsible for taking on staff who will be working with young people agree to ignore the fact that a particular candidate is a known, practising homosexual, for example? Christians must always check a contract of employment before signing, lest they commit themselves to a sinful course.

Fifthly, keep in mind the historical Biblical benchmark of United Kingdom history

The nearest that Scotland has ever come to the Biblical ideal was the National Covenant of 1638. That is the high tide of Scriptural national acknowledgement of Christ as King. The Reformation was wonderful, but the National Covenant took things to an even slightly higher level

than the Reformation under Knox. From then it has been a course of 'up and down downwards'. But is this relevant to today?

The Covenanters at the time certainly believed that what they were doing would be relevant for future generations. We tend to look rather selectively at Scottish church history. We look at the Reformation and see the marvellous work of God and rightly so, but then when we come to the Covenanters, we tend to narrow our vision down to individual, exemplary, sacrificial, godly lives: the two Margarets, Cameron, Cargill, Renwick etc. Certainly it is wonderful to see the power of God's grace in their lives. Their godliness, their devotion to Christ was marvellous. But we can overlook the specifics for which they contended and move on to the eighteenth and nineteenth century revivals and on to the Disruption and admire the works of the Lord on a broader canvas again. Can we not pause for a moment and look more closely at what the Covenanter worthies were actually saying? Certainly, they were resisting State interference in the church, but that was not all. They were saying that the National Covenant of Scotland of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1643 were perpetually binding. This is a point that was maintained by those who subsequently made up the Reformed Presbyterian Church, but not only by them. It is true that the 'Cameronians' (later becoming the Reformed Presbyterians), after the Revolution Settlement, held this point with a peculiar rigour, but they were not the only ones who believed it. Alexander Shields (who entered the post-Revolution Church of Scotland) believed it. Those who later became the Secession Church (such as the Erskine brothers) believed it. And much more recently, the late Rev Kenneth MacRae of Stornoway Free Church, in an address on the propagation of the Reformed Faith, said that Scotland was the second guiltiest nation on the face of the earth after Israel because Scotland had been covenanted with God. The idea of the descending obligation of the historic covenants is not confined to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The earlier Covenanters saw themselves as binding the nation perpetually to the acknowledgement of Christ's Kingship over church and State. Some will be familiar with a volume entitled *Sermons In Times of Persecution in Scotland* containing some wonderful sermons setting forth the glorious Gospel of Christ. In amongst them is a sermon preached in 1663 by John Guthrie of Tarbolton in Ayrshire, the youngest brother of William Guthrie of Fenwick and cousin of the martyr, James Guthrie. His text was Ezekiel 17:19,

'Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head'.

Guthrie contends in regard to the Covenants entered into by Scotland (the National Covenant) and then by the three Kingdoms (the Solemn League and Covenant) that no one on earth can release Scotland from their obligations and England and Ireland also in the case of the Solemn League. He points out that in the text, Zedekiah was held guilty for breaking his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar that he had sworn in the name of the Lord, even though he was constrained to it. He also refers to Joshua 9 where the princes of Israel swore in the name of the Lord not to harm the Gibeonites. Though the Gibeonites were deceitful and the princes of Israel were rash, the oath stood, not only for the princes, but also for the whole people. Then centuries later in 2 Samuel 21:1 & 2 the house of Saul was being judged because Saul had slain the Gibeonites in breach of the covenant made all those generations before.

The doctrine that the Covenanters held was that the whole nation was bound to all future generations of that nation by the covenants sworn by their own generation. This explains why James Guthrie, when he was on the scaffold with a rope around his neck, lifted the napkin and cried, 'The Covenants! The Covenants! They shall yet be Scotland's reviving'. Was he right or wrong? Was he carried away with the excitement of the occasion or was he speaking words of truth and soberness? Our Westminster Confession says, *'An oath cannot oblige to sin, but in anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance'* (West. Conf. 22:4).

This means that, on top of all our national sins and guilt, this is added, that we are a Covenant-breaking nation. This is no denominational hobbyhorse, but an important historical fact to take into account in any assessment of our present situation. It highlights the depth of our degradation and

apostasy as a nation. It should stir us up to prayer and to pray high. This is the benchmark that has been set for us and we should pray for the blessing of God to take us back to and even beyond that high ground of Second Reformation attainments.

It should also, however, encourage in the present, not despondency but a healthy scepticism about contemporary Government by any party. There is no room for naivety. The Government is not our friend. We can talk about the Establishment Principle and we believe it. But this does not mean pretending that a wicked Government is anything other than that. This must be acknowledged honestly and openly and the repercussions of this fact frankly faced. We must be vigilant that we do not allow dependence upon the State or the intrusion of the State to cause us to compromise the Crown Rights of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be stirred to jealousy for His honour as our King and our Redeemer; our Beloved is the rightful King over all, and every thought ought to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and therefore we must, by His grace, insist on His Crown rights over the individual heart and life, over the family, over the church and over the Nation. His glorious prerogatives are worth contending for because He is fairer than the children of men. Amen.

David Silversides

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