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THE BIBLE A LAW FOR NATIONS.

THAT Church and State are both Divine institutions, and that each occupies a sphere, in an important sense, separate from and independent of the other, are truths that are now very generally accepted among all classes of Presbyterians.

That Christ is the Head of the Church, Her King and Lawgiver, in some sense, is universally admitted in theory, however imperfectly exemplified in practice.

That Christ is also King of kings and Lord of lords, that is, King of nations as well as of the Church; and that the Bible is the law of nations as well as the law of the Church, are truths that are now become prominent, and that seem to demand special emphasis.

As different planets revolve around the same central sun, each in its own separate sphere guided and controlled by the same law; so Church and State, having different spheres, are nevertheless both subordinate to Christ, and subject to the law which He has given for the guidance and control of each.

The Scriptures are not only a rule of faith, but a rule of practice as well. They teach us not only what to believe, but also what to do; not only our duty to God, but our duty to man. There is no sphere of human conduct exempt from their control; no relation in which man can be placed in which he may act independently of their claims.

From this it follows that all organisations of men, as such, are bound and controlled by the same law—not only the individuals composing these organisations, but the organisations themselves, as moral entities or legal personalities. A bank, a railroad, a joint-stock company of any kind, has a legal existence of its own, and, as such, is as much bound by the law of God in its corporate capacity as are the individuals composing it.

The current saying that “corporations have no souls,” is not only thoroughly false in the sense in which it is used, but embodies a principle

that is the cause of much of the villainy of which such corporations have been guilty from time to time, and notably in these last days.

This, which is true of every organisation merely human, is more emphatically true of that higher organism, that moral personality which we call the State. This is indeed an "ordinance of man," in so far as it is founded on the nature of the human constitution and not on grace, and may take its form—aristocratic, monarchical, or republican—from the inclinations, interests, or circumstances of those who are its subjects; but in another and more important sense, it is an "ordinance of God," inasmuch as it derives all its rights of government from God, and not one of them *ultimately* from the people. "There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice; by me princes rule and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." All this is true, irrespective of the *form* of the government, and any other claim is an impious and arrogant assumption of a Divine prerogative.

But if this be a true conception of the nature of the State and of its relations to God as a subject of His moral government, it must follow, of consequence, that the State is bound to obey the will of God in whatsoever way that will is made known.

There are but two grounds, so far as we can see, on which it may be claimed that the Bible is not a law for the nation—we mean, of course, for those professing the Christian name. The first is that of the "secular theory" of civil government—viz., that the State is a merely human institution, a "social contract," dissolvable at the will of the contracting parties, and in no sense a moral personality, or a subject of the Divine government. Were this theory true, it might, with at least some show of plausibility, be argued that the State is not under law to God, its only guide being policy or expediency; and that, being without law, it was a law unto itself.

This view of government is so utterly unscriptural and unphilosophical, so absolutely subversive of the very foundations of civil society, and so opposed to all correct views of the solidarity of nations, that it may be set aside as exploded; at all events, it has not been put forward of late by any writer of note, so far as we know.

The other view is that the Bible treats of man not as a member of civil society, but solely with respect to his spiritual condition and interests; not of nations at all, as such, but only of those who compose nations in their individual capacity; that it leaves all that relates to man's temporal condition and welfare to natural religion, whatever that may be, and to the exercise of reason.

To us it seems that the most cursory glance at the Scriptures themselves must be sufficient to dispel such a view of their design and character. Man's temporal and eternal interests are so inseparably associated that they cannot be separated the one from the other, and

the book which treats of the one must take some account of the other.

No one among us will deny that the Scriptures have been given to man, as an heir of immortality, to reveal to him the Divine method of recovery from his fallen condition, and of restoration to the forfeited favour of God. But for this very reason they must be the guide of his earthly life, and lighten all his path, even to the very gates of death. It would, indeed, be strange if they should leave those higher relations of social life which have so important a bearing upon his spiritual life, to the guidance of clouded and erring reason, or to the dim light which, in its highest manifestations, only serves to make the darkness visible. To speak of natural religion and reason being chief guides in lands enjoying the light of revelation were absurd in the highest degree.

When we turn to the inspired volume, we find that its claims as the supreme law of national life are put forward clearly, frequently, and urgently. Nations and rulers are encouraged to obey the law of God by the promise of appropriate rewards, and deterred from disobedience by threats of national judgments. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations. . . . And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. iv. 5, 6, 8).

The chief magistrate of Israel was to have a copy of the law continually before him to be the guide of his administration. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites, and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them, that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand or to the left, to the end that he may prolong his days in the kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel." These, and similar injunctions, given to Joshua, to Solomon, and after rulers, have their force weakened in many minds by vague and incorrect views of the so-called "Israelitish Theocracy." The true idea of a theocracy is that of a state or commonwealth in which the law is God's will, and the government is administered by magistrates who are His servants. But this is the description of every government claiming legitimacy in a Christian land. Law that is not in accordance with the Divine will has no binding force or authority. "Of law we can say no less, than that it hath its seat in the bosom of God, and its voice in the harmony of the world." The magistrate who is not the minister of God is a usurper; "for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

For all the purposes of this argument, every legitimate government is as truly a "theocracy" as was the government of Israel, and on this fact rest all its claims to conscientious obedience. If the laws are not the expression of the Divine will, if the magistrate is not the minister of God, there may be submission for wrath's sake, but not for conscience' sake. Can any reader of the Bible doubt that the consuming judgments of heaven descended upon Egypt, Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, Moab, for transgressions of Divine law? or does any one doubt that nations are at this very moment wasting away from off this earth, and from under these heavens, by the visitation of Divine wrath vindicating God's regard to the majesty of His own law?

If, however, we are required to furnish proof from the New Testament, the task is not difficult. The thirteenth chapter of Romans is a law for rulers—that is, a law for nations. It defines the character of civil government as an ordinance of God, and the qualifications and duties of rulers. It is indeed passing strange that any one with that chapter before him could doubt that the Bible prescribes rules for nations, or the propriety of emphasising this most important but, we fear, much neglected truth. If it be claimed that the passages to which we have referred, and many similar passages, have reference to nations and rulers merely as "individuals," and have no bearing on nations as such, then we can only say that this seems to us to contradict reason, subvert the plainest principles of interpretation, and obscure some of the highest and most impressive illustrations of the Divine government.

This doctrine is one of the principal elements of the old Presbyterian doctrine of "Christ's universal headship." His headship is realised when His law is recognised by the nation as of binding authority.

That nations form a part of Christ's moral government, or, as Luther termed it, His government of power, is clear from Divine revelation. "Be wise now, therefore, ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth; kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is governor among the nations." "And gave Him to be head over all things to the Church." "And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." From these and similar passages, it is manifest that the authority of Christ over the nations is one of the plainest of scriptural truths. But this right of rule imposes the obligation upon the nations to accept His law as the standard of national life and conduct.

The truth of this position is farther manifest from the consideration that unless the Bible be the law of nations, they have no supreme rule, no unerring guide. Guided by natural faculties, the nations of the past have gone down into that grave of nations from which no one has ever emerged. "No nation," says Rawlinson, "has ever continued under one form for a thousand years." This is not because nations necessarily have their rise, their period of prosperity, and then of old age,

decrepitude, and decay. This is an exploded philosophy of history. There is no reason why a nation composed of individuals coming and passing away in endless succession should not endure for ever. The destruction of nations is accomplished always by the judgments of Heaven descending upon them because of their violations of the Divine law ; many a Sarmatia has fallen unwept,—but never without a crime. There is no future for the nations of the earth so long as they continue to say, “Come, let us break His bands, and cast His cords from us.” The misguided nations of the present must pass away one after another into the night of oblivion, deep as that which envelopes the empires of the past, so long as they attempt to build on the shifting sands of expediency, and not on the eternal principles of justice and righteousness as these are revealed in the Word of God.

The recognition, both in theory and in practice, of the law of God as supreme is the only security for the rights of the people. The nation is sovereign in its own domain. There is, in its own territory, no power superior to itself, or to which it is amenable. The only security of the people is the affirmation of the supreme authority of the Divine law. That is supreme over the nation. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than unto God, judge ye.” Luther at the Diet of Worms, John Knox in the presence of Mary, Andrew Melville reminding James that he was “God’s silly vassal,” are each the embodiment and assertor of the principle of the absolute supremacy of the law of God over all human laws and legislations. This, indeed, is the very source and spring of all liberty, civil and ecclesiastical ; for the power which the State wields demands that there be a “higher law” to which it is accountable. There is no interest of man from the cradle to the grave which it does not affect. The State or Government under which a man is born and lives has a powerful moulding influence upon his character and destiny. The German, the Frenchman, the Englishman, the American,—these are types, whose peculiar characteristics are due much more to the institutions under which they have been born and reared, than to the peculiarities of the soil and climate of their respective countries. The State assumes, in most free countries, the function of the education of the young ; in some countries, as in the United States, the children are almost entirely taught in the public schools. The time is scarcely yet sufficient to realise the radical influence which these institutions must exert upon the national character. That this influence will be radical and determining no one can for a moment doubt. Hence the vast importance of insisting that religious instruction, not in the sectarian, but in the broad and catholic sense of the word, be given in these institutions. The demands of secularism—the word *secularism* being the modern word for what was formerly termed infidelity,—that the instruction in the public schools shall be colourless (that is, destitute of any moral or religious element), is in our judgment both impious and preposterous.

The State in the enactment and administration of law should have regard to the revealed will of God. All eminent writers recognise the Scriptures as a fountain of law, and the guide of civil jurisprudence.

It is a fundamental principle that no human enactment which contravenes the law of God is valid. The laws of Moses stand as the imperishable guide and model of all wise legislation ; the death penalty, the war power, the civil oath, all depend for their validity upon a Divine warrant, but these are powers and sanctions essential to the very existence of the State.

It is important also to remember that the Scriptures form a part of that higher code termed "the law of nations," which regulates the intercourse of these "moral personalities" with one another, so that as a matter of fact, each nation is compelled to submit itself to this supreme authority.

The principles thus briefly enunciated are generally accepted by Christian thinkers in theory, and, as no one can deny, embodied to a considerable extent in practical forms in many of the Christian nations of the earth. At the same time, they do not occupy the same position in the teachings of the Church.

The enjoyment of a large measure of that liberty for which the Church was once compelled to contend even unto death ; an extreme view of the relation of the Church to the State produced by the acknowledged evils arising out of an unscriptural alliance of the two ; and absorption in what appears to many minds to be her more immediate work,—the conversion of souls at home and abroad, may be enumerated as among the causes which have tended to draw away the attention of the Church from this matter.

It is time to pause and consider whether this apparent indifference is not one among other causes, and perhaps a chief cause, why in professedly Christian lands we have so much godless legislation, and that too, in matters vitally affecting the interests of religion.

There are reasons, doubtless strong reasons, for caution in this direction, but it is neither manly, nor Christian, nor Presbyterian, to keep silence when the "throne of iniquity frames mischief by a law."

As an illustration—we see the safeguards of the Sabbath, one by one, broken down, and, as a consequence, the day profaned in many ways formerly unknown, to the wounding of religion and the detriment of public morals. We seem to need a revival of the spirit which breathes in the language of the Psalmist, "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed;" that burned in the words of the prophets when they declared in the face of kings those judgments which their sins were daily incurring ; that flamed forth in such splendour at the Reformation, when, in so many forms and with such powerful effect and such beneficial results, the supremacy of the Divine law was affirmed. We are well aware that it is often said, that all good results may be best secured by the inculcation of gospel truth and the conversion of the individual through the regular administration of the ordi-

nances of Divine grace. We do not for a single moment depreciate that aspect of the Gospel in which it is presented in the parable of the leaven. The quiet, unobtrusive labours of devoted men and women gathering in the travail of the Redeemer's soul, and completing the number of God's elect, are valuable—yes, are powerful, beyond all computation. Through these, the Church advances to that final triumph when “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” But as she advances, she meets with opposition from the world-powers, obstructions are thrown in her path, her progress retarded, and her work impeded and often neutralised. In such emergencies, she is faithless to her commission, if she does not, in every wise and lawful way, employ the power with which she is invested, to overcome such opposition and remove such obstructions from her path. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” Again and again, strong and earnest protests, made in the face of some proposed evil, by the followers of Christ, have been the means of arresting that evil and accomplishing much good. We believe that the Church has reached such a point in her progress that hardly anything is impossible to her, would she but wisely and courageously exert her power.

The evils that afflict society are not so strong in themselves as in their relation to the timidity of those who ought to grapple with them, but do not. We plead for a revival of the old, heroic, aggressive spirit of the Church, the spirit that has actuated her during all periods of revival and rapid progress, from the days of Paul until the present hour.

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## THE EVANGELICAL OUTLOOK IN HOLLAND.

IT would probably be easier to write an essay on some single topic connected with the general subject of this article, than to compress within the allotted space the abundant material which lies to our hand in taking a survey of what has been passing in our Church and country of the Netherlands. The bare record of a few facts will not serve our purpose. We must show their value and import, indicate their relations to each other, and, in fact, illustrate them, especially from the history of the past. At the same time, mindful that it is necessary to be concise, we shall attempt no more than to trace some general outlines whence a fair idea may be gathered of the state of things in Holland. Perhaps we may have another opportunity of treating more at length some subject connected with the theology and religion of this country.

Let us go back in our Church's history to its reorganisation in 1816. The Revolution had passed, leaving both the Church and the State in a