

## 2020 Report of Synod's Special Committee on Christ's Mediatorial Kingship

Dear Fathers and Brethren,

In addition to mandating the publication of our voter's guide, last year's synod provided us with some very helpful feedback. As you may recall, many felt that it would be wisest for us to refocus our energies upon the task of defining and clarifying the Scriptural doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship, as opposed to its various practical applications. Not a few even suggested (on the floor as well as privately) that we labor to present a substantial exegetical and theological treatment of this doctrine to the 2020 Synod. Others raised the familiar question as to when our mysterious "80-page historical-theology paper" would finally be released. All in all, we were extremely thankful for the wealth of practical insight which so many of these comments provided for our committee.

After several months of prayerfully weighing synod's feedback and brainstorming our options, we decided that the best path forward would be to complete our historical-theology paper, *Christ's Mediatorial Kingship: A Developing Doctrine*, and submit it to the 2020 Synod for feedback. It is our hope that this paper will not only help to define and clarify our Scriptural position as Reformed Presbyterians, but that it will also serve to encapsulate our findings (research + analysis) as a committee since our appointment in 2014. It features a selective historical-theological survey of the confessional doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship from the Scots Confession of Faith (1560) to the current RPCNA Testimony (1980), followed by three appendices. Appendix Two provides "*A Historical Outline and Summary of the RPCNA Synod's Gradual Abandonment of Principled Political Dissent*" (1958-1970). Granted, this is not primarily an exegetical paper. However, we believe that it does outline the clear Biblical basis for our position in a manner that should satisfy the court.

Our rationale for submitting this report so early in the year is that we desire to provide you with as much time as possible to consider our paper. To be clear, we are **not** asking the synod to adopt or approve this paper. All we ask is that you read it, think about it, and tell us what you think about it. Your feedback is welcome before, during, and after the 2020 Synod, but we will especially look forward to hearing from you at the meeting itself.

Ultimately, our committee's objective is very simple. We would like to compose a small booklet summarizing the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship (as taught in our standards and laid out in our paper) to be approved by the 2021 Synod for use in local congregational ministry. By presenting this paper so far in advance of the 2020 Synod, we hope that we will put the synod in an optimal position either to affirm our vision (perhaps with constructive criticisms and suggestions) or simply to dissolve our committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Anderson, Bruce Backensto (Ch.), Brad Johnston, Mark Koller, Adam Kuehner, Scott Wilkinson



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# CHRIST'S MEDIATORIAL KINGSHIP

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A DEVELOPING DOCTRINE



BY THE RPCNA SYNOD'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON CHRIST'S MEDIATORIAL KINGSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

As Christians, we have no greater treasure than our personal, saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In His high priestly prayer, our Lord declared that "this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (Jn. 17:3). The Apostle Paul counted "all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8). When preaching the gospel to the Corinthians, he "determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), urging them to discover "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). Conversely, the Apostle John warns that anyone who "does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (2 Jn. 1:9).

Every true Christian possesses true knowledge of Jesus Christ. This ordinarily includes a basic intellectual understanding of His person and work, as well as an experiential knowledge of Him as personal Savior and Lord. True Christians also long to know Christ more. Both intellectually and experientially, they desire to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). The more a believer knows about Christ *doctrinally*, the more he or she is able to draw near to Him *relationally*. For this reason, we, as Christians, ought to relish every possible opportunity to grow in our understanding of Biblical Christology (that is, the doctrine of Christ as taught in the Bible).

### 1. Christ's Exaltation

One aspect of Biblical Christology which has captivated Reformed Presbyterians throughout their long history is the doctrine of Christ's *exaltation*. Following His death and resurrection, our Lord asked the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" (Lk. 24:26). We often refer to the *initial* phase of Christ's redemptive work—beginning with His human conception and characterized by suffering—as His *humiliation*. During this period, our Lord "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant" and "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

As a reward for His redemptive humiliation, the Father powerfully raised Jesus from the dead and ushered Him into an everlasting estate of glory, commonly called His exaltation. "Therefore," writes Paul, "God also has highly *exalted* Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

At Christ's ascension, the Father "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named... and He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body" (Eph. 1:20-23). For this reason, prior to His ascension, Jesus informed His disciples that "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" and commissioned them to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). The Apostle John speaks of our exalted Savior as "the ruler over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5) and the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16).

Christ's exaltation to the throne of glory is frequently foreshadowed and anticipated in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms and Prophets. Speaking of the Messiah in Psalm 110:1, David writes, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Similarly, we read in Daniel 7:13-14 that "One like the Son of Man, coming with the

clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."

In Psalm 2, God the Father reminds the rebellious nations of this world, "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" and speaks of His Messianic King as "My Son" whom "I have begotten", offering Him "the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession." He then warns the rulers of these nations to "be wise" and "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way." If they refuse to submit, the Messiah will "break them with a rod of iron" and "dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." On the other hand, if they turn from their sin in true repentance and faith, they may take comfort in His gracious promise: "Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." Many similar statements could be drawn from both the Old and New Testaments.

The basic thrust of this teaching is perhaps best summarized in Westminster Larger Catechism 54, which states, "Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fulness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and does gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them."

The RPCNA Testimony reiterates this important truth when it asserts that "God has given the exercise of all authority to the Lord Jesus Christ" (23.2), who reigns "as Head over all things for the sake of the Church... in perfect wisdom and justice over all parts of His creation including wicked men and devils", causing all things to "serve God's glory in the plan of redemption" (8.4).

## **2. Christ's Mediatorial Kingship**

As the Eternal Son of God, coequal with the Father, it would have been impossible for our Lord to be exalted any higher than He was from all eternity. As the Second Person of the Trinity, He already possessed all power and authority over all things. This is why the catechism speaks of His being exalted "as God-man". In the words of Larger Catechism 53, His ascension to power was accomplished not merely as God, but "in our nature, and as our head".

Today, we often refer to this aspect of Christ's kingship as being mediatorial. By employing this term, we are not suggesting that Christ savingly mediates for all men and nations universally. Properly speaking, He is the "Mediator of the covenant of grace" (LC 36) and "by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace" (LC 57). We believe that Christ is "the Savior only of his body the church" and does not, therefore, savingly mediate for all men and nations universally. However, it is appropriate for us to speak of His universal kingly authority as *mediatorial* in a different sense: namely, that it flows from His exaltation in history as *the God-man Mediator*, and not merely from His essential authority as *the Son of God*. As our Mediator, He reigns as Head over all things for the church, exercising universal authority over every nation and institution in this world, for the purpose of discipling the nations in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Eph. 1:21; Matt. 28:18-20). In this sense, His mediatorial kingship includes not only the right to govern His church, but also a scepter of dominion (Dan. 7:14) over all nations. As Reformed Presbyterians, we commonly refer to this authority as *Christ's mediatorial kingship over the nations*.

### **3. Avoiding Opposite Extremes**

On the surface, it may come as a shock to us that a doctrine so clearly taught in Scripture could ever become the subject of so much controversy or be regarded as the distinctive teaching of any one Christian denomination. Upon closer examination, however, it is not difficult to identify an underlying tension which has prevented this teaching from gaining more widespread acceptance among God's people. This tension stems from the relationship between the universal and particular aspects of our Lord's reign.

On the one hand, He has been made *Head over all things* and received *all power in heaven and earth*. This is His *universal dominion*, whereby all are morally required to obey Him. On the other hand, our Lord also has a *particular kingdom*, consisting in those whom He saves and who actually obey Him from the heart. Moreover, the chief purpose of His universal dominion is to build and expand His particular kingdom on earth. That is, He has been made head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:21); and He has received all authority in heaven and earth in order to build His church through the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Generally speaking, there are two main ways in which this teaching is often misunderstood and misapplied: (1) Overemphasis on Christ's universal dominion to the neglect of its particular redemptive purpose; and (2) Overemphasis on Christ's particular redemptive purpose of building His church, to the neglect of His universal dominion.

First, there is the tendency to overemphasize the all-encompassing nature of Christ's universal dominion to the neglect of its particular redemptive purpose. This overemphasis stems from a failure to make an adequate distinction between the universal and particular aspects of Christ's reign, thus collapsing them into "one kingdom" and leaving the door wide open for the promotion of a social or political gospel. Adherents of this view rightly recognize that all nations and cultures must conform to God's word and submit to King Jesus in every aspect of earthly life and civilization. However, amidst all the many fascinating details of Christian cultural theory, they tend to lose sight of the predominately *spiritual* character of Christ's reign, reinterpreting the Great Commission along cultural lines. As such, they replace the eternal, heavenly, soteriological, and ecclesiastical emphasis of the Biblical gospel with a "good news" which revolves around the untold societal advantages of a Christian worldview, Christian ethics, Christian politics, and Christian education. Passion for evangelism is gradually displaced by a zeal for Christian cultural influence, vocational excellence, political activism, and/or an emphasis on promoting large, well-ordered Christian families. In other cases, evangelistic outreach is conducted chiefly with an eye to increasing the number of Christian voters, thereby making the eternal salvation of souls subservient to the temporal good of society.

Christians under the influence of this perspective are generally very quick to declare that King Jesus owns every square inch of society, but not always so quick to add that His universal headship exists *for the church* (Eph. 1:21). They are eager to remind us that the Father has given Jesus "authority over all flesh", but often less eager to emphasize the primary purpose for which the Father did so: "that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him" (Jn. 17:2). This tendency to overemphasize Christ's universal ethical authority, to the neglect of His particular redemptive purpose, has been (and continues to be) a great hindrance to the work of the Great Commission wherever it has taken root in the Christian church.

Second, there is the tendency to overemphasize Christ's particular redemptive purpose of building His church, to the neglect of His universal dominion. This second major error frequently stems

from an overreaction to the first. Many Christians are zealous to preserve the spiritual, soteriological, ecclesiastical emphasis of the Christian gospel over against the onslaught of a moralistic social gospel. They understand that, Biblically speaking, Jesus shed His blood on the cross to redeem elect sinners, not art festivals and geopolitical nation-states. Unfortunately, in their eagerness to defend the gospel, they go to the extreme of denying the universality of Christ's reign as Mediator. In other words, they refuse to recognize the moral obligation of every individual, family, and nation to submit themselves in worshipful obedience to the revealed will of the Mediator (Ps. 2:10-12; Acts 17:30). They fear that if Christ's authority as Mediator is acknowledged beyond the borders of the church, then the centrality of the church and its evangelistic mission will be compromised. They worry that by attaching the term *mediatorial* to Christ's universal reign, we leave ourselves open to the danger of implying that His *saving* mediation applies universally, thereby robbing the church of its unique position in the world. Thus, while acknowledging the supremacy of the Triune God over all things, they limit the supremacy of the Mediator to the church. As *God*, they acknowledge Him to be "King of Kings", but not as *God-man*.

At its best, this second view fosters a generic concern for Biblical "values" that is largely detached from the gospel and Lordship of Jesus Christ. At its worst, it limits the authority of Scripture to the sphere of the church, arguing that civil government should be governed solely by an autonomous and undefinable natural law. It is correct in recognizing the danger of making Christianity revolve around the cultural implications of the gospel. However, its proposed solution disregards these implications altogether, thereby robbing the church of its God-ordained prophetic witness in society. This breeds a form of Christianity which has much to say regarding *spirituality* and *eternity*, but very little to say about our practical involvement in the spheres and institutions of daily life on planet earth.

By compartmentalizing Christ's Lordship within the limited sphere of religious life, this view leaves far too much that is not held captive to the obedience of Christ. The value of Christian vocation, Christian family life, and Christian education is neglected. The public witness of the church against national godlessness and injustice is all but silenced. Because civil rulers are no longer viewed as servants of God who will give account to Christ, believers become ambivalent to the notion of Christian politics. This creates a cultural vacuum which is easily filled by the forces of darkness.

Ultimately, the problem with this view is that it attempts to salvage one set of Scriptural truths (i.e. Christ's unique redemptive purpose for the church and the centrality of the gospel) at the expense of another set of Biblical truths (i.e. Christ's universal authority over the nations, the moral and cultural implications of the gospel). The fact is that God has chosen to reveal both sets of truths. Jesus Christ is Head over all things and He employs this authority primarily to build His church. The gospel is absolutely central and its cultural implications are unavoidable. The Bible reveals the eternal salvation of God's elect and it provides a comprehensive ethical blueprint for human society. God's plan for human history centers around the church and we must implement Biblical principles in both the family and the state. In each case, to deny either of the two truths in question is to deny a valuable aspect of God's revealed will for mankind. Over time, such an error cannot help but lead to even more serious errors.

As a general rule, opposite extremes tend to feed off of one another. The more some Christians defend the gospel by distancing themselves from Christ's universal authority, the more other Christians will overreact by idolizing Christian culture and politics. This, in turn, will give the false



impression that to advocate explicitly Christian principles for all of life is to threaten the church's gospel-centeredness and to pave the way for a social gospel. The only safe path forward is one of Scriptural balance. We need to guard the gospel-centeredness of our churches and we need to implement Biblical principles for all of life in submission to Christ's universal Lordship.

The history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church represents a rather fascinating case study in this highly delicate balancing act between the universal and particular aspects of Christ's mediatorial kingship. The remainder of this paper will trace the doctrinal development of this teaching within the Reformed Presbyterian tradition — from the Scots Confession of Faith (1560) to the existing Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (1980) — seeking to demonstrate that the position of the RPCNA with respect to mediatorial kingship is presently more consistent with the Westminster Standards than it has been in well over a century.

## **PART ONE — The Scots Confession of Faith (1560)**

The Scots Confession of Faith (SCF) represents the first major doctrinal statement of the Scottish Reformation and serves as an important precursor to the Westminster Standards.

In Article 6 ("On the Ascension"), the SCF asserts that Christ "has received all power in heaven and earth, where He sits at the right hand of the Father, inaugurating His kingdom, [as the] advocate and only mediator for us... till all His enemies are made His footstool."<sup>1</sup> It speaks of Him as "our Head and only Mediator, Christ Jesus", "the only Head of His kirk, our just Lawgiver, our only High Priest, Advocate, and Mediator" as well as "our sovereign and supreme governor Christ Jesus."<sup>2</sup> While tending to emphasize Christ's kingship in relation to His Church, these excerpts also serve to echo the Scriptural testimony concerning His delegated universal authority as Mediator.

However, in connection with its blueprint for Christian civil government, it highlights the state's accountability to God as the sovereign Creator and Lawgiver, rather than to Christ as the exalted Mediator. Article 24 ("Of the Civil Magistrate") declares that "empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities" are "distinguished and ordered by God" as "God's holy ordinance" in subjection to "God's expressed will".<sup>3</sup>

The SCF goes on to describe civil rulers as "lieutenants of God, in whose sessions God Himself does sit and judge" and to whom "chiefly and most principally the conversation and purgation of religion appertains."<sup>4</sup> That is, "not only are they appointed for civil policy, but also for maintenance of the true religion and for suppressing idolatry and superstition whatsoever, as in David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others highly commended for their zeal in that case may be espied."<sup>5</sup> All who "resist the supreme power (doing that thing which appertains to His charge) do resist God's ordinance".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennison, James T., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552-1566* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010) 193

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 193-194.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 204-205.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 205.

The SCF neither asserts nor rejects the accountability of civil governments to the Mediator's universal authority. Instead, its authors wisely opted to leave room for further Christological developments in the years ahead.

The sound theology of the SCF was greatly used by God to transform the entire nation of Scotland within less than a century. In 1581 (and again in 1638), the Scottish people covenanted with God to be a reformed Christian nation. Citizens freely promised to "defend [the king's] person and authority with our goods, bodies, and lives, in the defence of Christ [and] His evangel, liberties of our country, ministration of justice, and punishment of iniquity, against all enemies within this realm or without." As a prerequisite for coronation, "all Kings and Princes" were required to "promise by their solemn oath in the presence of the Eternal God" to "maintain the true religion of Jesus Christ" in accord with "the confession of faith immediately preceding" and to "abolish and gainstand<sup>7</sup> all false religion contrary to the same".<sup>8</sup>

In 1643, the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland entered into the Solemn League and Covenant, pledging perpetual unity and loyalty in the preservation of their "one reformed religion" for "the glory of God, the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the peace and tranquility of Christian kingdoms and commonwealths."<sup>9</sup> This eventually led the English Parliament to call the Westminster Assembly, which would later produce the Westminster Standards (WS), consisting of a Confession of Faith (WCF) alongside both a Larger and a Shorter Catechism (WLC, WSC).

## **PART TWO — The Westminster Standards (1645)**

The Westminster Standards (WS) are, without a doubt, the most influential and most widely used subordinate doctrinal standards in the history of Presbyterianism. According to the current *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (RPT),

The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the historic creeds of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America believes that the Confession is based on, and subordinate to, Scripture. The truth it presents is of inestimable value for contemporary society.<sup>10</sup>

### **1. A Theology of Kingship**

Like the SCF, the WS emphasize Christ's Kingship in relation to His Church. LC 36 describes our Lord Jesus Christ as "the only Mediator of the covenant of grace", who has been "anointed by the Holy Ghost" to "execute the offices of prophet, priest, and king of his church."<sup>11</sup>

A careful reading of the standards reveals that the terms 'mediation' and 'kingship' (along with their various derivatives) appear exclusively in relation to Christ's Church, for whom He savingly mediates within the covenant of grace. He is said to execute His kingly office by "subduing us to

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<sup>7</sup> Gainstand: to withstand; to oppose; to resist.

<sup>8</sup> Kerr, James, "The National Covenant," in *The Covenants and the Covenanters: Covenants, Sermons, and Documents of the Covenanted Reformation* (Edinburgh: R.W. Hunter, 1895), 47. E-book can be accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/covenantscovenan00kerr/page/47/mode/1up>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Kerr, "The Solemn League and Covenant" in *Covenants*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2003) A-5.

<sup>11</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Press, Reprint 2003) 145.

himself, in ruling and defending us"<sup>12</sup>, or, as LC 45 explains in greater detail, by "calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them" and by "bestowing saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings."<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of Christ's universal authority as the Mediator receives a more thorough treatment in the WS than in the SCF. For instance, Christ is said to execute His office as King of the Church by "restraining and conquering all his and our enemies" as well as by "powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good; and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel."<sup>14</sup> In other words, His kingship over His Church requires Him to exercise sovereign authority over all His enemies.

In order for Christ (as Mediator) to exercise authority over all His enemies (that is, universally), two things are required. First, He must have access to infinite and sovereign power, such as exists exclusively within the divine nature. Hence, LC 38 states that "it was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that he might... conquer all [His people's] enemies."<sup>15</sup>

Second, as the Messianic *Servant of the LORD*, Christ's mediatorial work is exclusively defined and authorized by His Father. Were He (as Mediator) to exercise His omnipotence without divine authorization, it would be the equivalent of turning stones into bread in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-4), calling down twelve legions of angels in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:53), or miraculously climbing down from the cross (Matt. 27:40-42). Therefore, in order for Him to exercise sovereign power over all things — including civil government, which finds its origin in "God the supreme Lord and King of all the world" (WCF 23.1)<sup>16</sup> — it was necessary for God the Father, speaking on behalf of the Trinity, to grant Him authorization.

According to LC 54, this is precisely what took place at our Lord's ascension, when He was (and is) "exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that *as God-man* he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fulness of joy, glory, and *power over all things in heaven and earth*."<sup>17</sup> This delegation authorizes Him to sovereignly "gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies", and to "[furnish] his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and [make] intercession for them."<sup>18</sup>

## **2. A Theology of the Kingdom**

The confessional articulation of our Lord's kingship naturally leads us to consider that of His kingdom. WCF 25.2 asserts that "The visible Church... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."<sup>19</sup> That is, our Lord's kingdom, in its most proper and precise Scriptural sense, is His Church. This teaching is highlighted in LC 191 and SC 102, where the catechisms expound the second petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Thy kingdom come") to set forth a systematic 'kingdom theology'. Here we find

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 293-294.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 145-156.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 155 (Emphasis ours)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

explicit references to at least four kingdoms: (1) the kingdom of sin and Satan, (2) the kingdom of grace, (3) the kingdom of glory, and (4) the kingdom of power.

With respect to the "kingdom of sin and Satan", LC 191 teaches that all men are "by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan"<sup>20</sup> and that, due to the arrival, advance, and consummation of our Lord's kingdom, the kingdom of darkness will ultimately be "destroyed". Despite its extensive global influence, it is subject to the universal power and authority of Christ the Mediator, and, in that sense, has no rightful claim to legitimate, God-given authority.

SC 102 urges believers to pray "that the *kingdom of grace* may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the *kingdom of glory* may be hastened."<sup>21</sup> It is evident here that Christ's *kingdom of grace* is His church on earth throughout history, both visible and invisible. This is the kingdom into which sinners are drawn through the effectual call of the gospel. The phrase *kingdom of glory* represents the Church in its final state of everlasting, sinless, heavenly perfection, when its elect members will be raised from the dead and "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). This is the kingdom unto which believers on earth are presently "looking and hastening" (2 Pet. 3:12).

Simply stated, our Lord's kingdoms of grace and glory represent the two major phases in the life of His church: (1) this present age of grace and salvation, prior to His return, and (2) the glorious age to come, subsequent to His return. Therefore, we can safely and accurately condense these two kingdoms into one by speaking of the church.

In addition to Christ's kingdoms of grace and glory (i.e. His church), the standards speak of "the kingdom of his power in all the world." LC 191 puts it this way:

In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate; that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: *and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.*<sup>22</sup>

Here Christ is said to rule in two distinct ways. First, He rules as King of His Church, expanding His kingdom of grace through the Great Commission, and thereby hastening the arrival of His kingdom of glory at the last day. Second, He rules over all things without exception, exercising "the kingdom of his power in all the world" in order to advance His global agenda. This entails the gathering, building, and perfecting His Church. In other words, Christ the Mediator has been given "all authority in heaven and earth" as the basis for the Great Commission. This fact empowers His Church to boldly, prayerfully, and victoriously "Go and make disciples of all the nations", knowing that Zion's Head and King will gather His elect from all nations and, in due

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 316 (Emphasis ours)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 274-275 (Emphasis ours)

time, "dash to pieces like a potter's vessel" every rebellious foe who refuses to repent and "kiss the Son" (Ps. 2).

The teaching of the WS on the exalted reign of Christ as our Mediator might well be summarized as follows: *Jesus Christ, as the God-man, presently exercises a kingdom of supreme power and authority over all things in heaven and earth, having been made "head over all things for the church", that He might destroy the kingdom of Satan, establish His kingdom of grace among all nations, and hasten the arrival of His kingdom of glory.*

The kingdom theology of the WS is refreshingly balanced. It offers a robust vision for the moral and spiritual transformation of society. Unlike so many attempts to transform society, it is careful to maintain the church-oriented, gospel-centered paradigm of the Great Commission. In the next section, we will explore the vocabulary employed in the WS to express these vital truths.

### **3. A Pattern of Sound Words**

The WS clearly affirm Christ's universal authority as the God-man. In setting forth this doctrine, however, they nowhere employ the phrase *mediatorial kingship over the nations*. In fact, they seem to regard the terms *mediate*, *mediator*, and *mediatorial* as relating exclusively to the church. This raises a variety of important questions regarding theological vocabulary.

In our day, theologians tend to regard anything as *mediatorial* which may be predicated of Christ as the God-man. In defending the doctrine of the Trinity, for instance, a Christian apologist might assert that our Lord's statement in John 17:4 ("My Father is greater than I") refers to Him *not as the Eternal Son of God*, but rather *mediatorially* as the God-man (or *Theanthropos*). In such instances, the term *mediatorial* is synonymous with the adjective *theanthropic*, indicating that something is true of Christ as the God-man.

Similarly, when most Reformed Presbyterians today refer to Christ's authoritative rule over the nations as *mediatorial*, they mean that He possesses this authority *not* eternally and essentially as God, but *as the exalted God-man*. They are not seeking to make an assertion regarding Christ's mediatorial work, as if to claim that He savingly mediates on behalf of the entire world. Rather, they are emphasizing His mediatorial Person, in that this authority has been granted to Him *as the God-man*. When LC 54 ascribes universal power to Christ "as the God-man"<sup>23</sup>, it is, in principle, asserting the very same doctrine that Reformed Presbyterians today call *Christ's mediatorial rule (or kingship) over the nations*. The only difference is that instead of using the term *mediatorial* to convey this idea, it employs the equivalent phrase "as the God-man".

Our tendency to use the term *mediatorial* in broader reference to Christ's theanthropic Person was not nearly as common in the 17th Century. At that time, to classify something as mediatorial was to place it under the umbrella of Christ's saving work of mediation whereby He redeems His Church according to the Covenant of Grace. Rather than bringing to mind the broader scope of Christology, it tended to highlight matters of soteriology and ecclesiology. A striking example of this pattern occurs in the ecclesiastical writings of Samuel Rutherford, arguably among the most precise and prolific polemical theologians of the 17th Century.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 155.

## **PART THREE — Samuel Rutherford (1600-1660)**

During Rutherford's ministry, two of the most vocal threats to Scottish Reformed orthodoxy were Arminianism and Erastianism. Both of these errors tended to downplay (if not openly reject) the Scriptural distinction between the Christian church and society at large. Arminians, in seeking to herald a universal atonement, undermined the soteriological uniqueness of the Church by asserting that Christ died for all men universally and not merely for His elect sheep. By contrast, Erastianism marginalized the ecclesiological uniqueness of the church by intermingling the governments of church and state, thereby enabling the latter to dominate the former.

Both Arminians and Erastians would have welcomed the idea of a categorical link between that which is *mediatorial* and that which is *universal*. They regularly contended for such a connection as a means of advancing their views. Within this context, it would have been counterproductive for Reformed theologians to apply the term *mediatorial* to Christ's *universal* authority as the God-man. Doing so would have weakened their defense of church's soteriological and ecclesiastical distinctness within society.

By employing the phrase "as the God-man" (LC 54) to express the concept of mediatorial authority, the Westminster divines were able to convey their intended meaning without lending support to their opponents. This same confessional vocabulary is reflected throughout Rutherford's polemical writings against both Arminians and Erastians.

### **1. The Meaning of 'Mediatorial'**

In *The Divine Right of Church Government*, Rutherford labors to defend Presbyterianism against Erastian ecclesiastical hierarchy (i.e. bishops, archbishops, etc.). In doing so, he asserts that "The Magistrate as a Magistrate is not the Vicar nor Deputie of Jesus Christ as Mediator... Because this is the heart and soul of Popery, that the Papists teach that Christ as Mediator hath left a temporall, an earthly and visible Monarch as his Vicar on earth."<sup>24</sup> Erastianism, he contended, was grounded upon Rome's notorious error of failing to distinguish between church power and civil power. Whereas Rome had sought to grant civil power to the church, Erastians now desired to grant church power to the civil ruler. Both errors stemmed from the same basic failure to appreciate the Scriptural distinction between church and state.

In opposition to the Erastians, Rutherford cites Protestant theologian Andreas Rivetus to the effect that "Christ hath instituted neither Kings nor Princes in the Church... but onely Ministers and Servants to discharge their Embassage, in the Name of the onely Prince Christ."<sup>25</sup> He then declares that "all the arguments of Protestants that are brought to prove that the Pope, a Bishop, and a Church man... in Christ's spiritual Kingdom that is not of this world cannot be an earthly Prince and Monarch... doe also prove that the King cannot be head of the Church, nor the Magistrate an Officer of the Church."<sup>26</sup>

In his very next proposition, Rutherford states that "The Magistrate as such is not a Vicar of Christ's mediatory Kingdom", since, although "Magistrates are called Gods in Scripture," they are nowhere "called little Mediators, or submediators between God and man", nor are they called

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<sup>24</sup> Rutherford, Samuel. *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London, 1646) 601. E-book can be accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/600/mode/1up>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 601.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 602.

"little Kings of the Church" or "little Priests, little Prophets of the Church."<sup>27</sup> While "God giveth his name [i.e. 'gods'] to Magistrates" as an indication that "he communicateth also to them some of his Majesty and power"<sup>28</sup>, such civil power is distinct from Christ's ministry of reconciliation (that is, saving mediation) in relation to His Church. For Rutherford, Christ's "mediatory kingdom"<sup>29</sup> is the church, for whom He savingly mediates as Prophet, Priest, and King. "Now", he asks his opponents in rhetorical fashion, "what mediatory, what Princely, Priestly, or Prophetically power hath Christ communicated to Magistrates?"<sup>30</sup>

Rutherford is adamant in his insistence that the civil ruler is neither a "Deputie of Jesus Christ as Mediator", nor a "Vicar of Christ's mediatory Kingdom."<sup>31</sup> However, he is not arguing that civil rulers are free from all moral or spiritual obligation to King Jesus as the God-man Mediator. Such a question of abstract moral obligation to the theanthropic Person of Christ is irrelevant to the real issue at hand: namely, *whether civil rulers, in their capacity as civil rulers, are entitled to hold church office*. As McKay rightly observes, by insisting that the magistrate is not Christ's deputy, Rutherford "seems to be trying to guard against views that would make the magistrate a kind of church officer."<sup>32</sup>

Within this context, Rutherford is simply clarifying that "the King cannot be head of the Church, nor the Magistrate an Officer of the Church."<sup>33</sup> A careful reading of Rutherford's argument reveals the following pattern of theological vocabulary:

1. The phrases "Deputie of Jesus Christ as Mediator" and "Vicar of Christ's mediatory Kingdom" are equivalent to the phrase "Officer of the Church".
2. The words "Deputie" and "Vicar" are equivalent to the word "Officer".
3. The phrase "mediatory Kingdom" is equivalent to the word "Church".
4. The phrase "as Mediator" is equivalent to the phrase "of the Church".

As noted above, Rutherford regards Christ's *mediatorial kingdom* as the Church for whom He savingly mediates as Prophet, Priest, & King. This, however, does not amount to a denial of Christ's universal authority as the God-man. We have no reason to believe that he took exception to the teaching of LC 54, which, as we have already seen, ascribes "power over all things in heaven and earth" to Christ "as the God-man". His limited use of the term 'mediatory' simply follows the restricted theological vocabulary present in the WS.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that Rutherford's restrictive *vocabulary* implies a restrictive *theology* of Christ's exaltation. In the excerpts presently under consideration, he is not addressing (much less denying) the civil ruler's accountability to the theanthropic Person of Christ. His goal is simply to demonstrate (1) That Christ savingly mediates for His Church alone, not for society at large; and (2) That civil rulers have no authority to govern the internal affairs of the church.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 600, 607.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 604.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 601, 606.

<sup>32</sup> McKay, David. "Samuel Rutherford on Civil Government" in Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction to His Theology. Matthew Vogan, Ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Reformation Society, 2012) 261.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 602.

## 2. How Magistrates Serve the Mediator

Rutherford and his Erastian opponents were agreed that believers should prayerfully labor to see "kings and all who are in authority... come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Both agreed that the church should disciple converted civil rulers, teaching them how to observe Christ's commands for the advancement of His kingdom (Matt. 28:18-20). Their disagreement centered around what it truly means for converted magistrates to serve Christ as Mediator. The Erastians argued that a civil magistrate "shall not serve Christ as Mediator if he doe not command [sic] the dispensing of the Word and Sacraments."<sup>34</sup> They held that Christian magistrates, under Christ the Mediator, had a duty to exercise the keys of the kingdom by authoritatively governing the church's ministry of the word and sacraments.

In opposing this view, Rutherford does not flatly deny the magistrate's duty to serve Christ as Mediator. In fact, he affirms that "The Magistrate may serve Christ as Christ, and promote and advance the Kingdome of Jesus Christ as Mediator." Such service takes place when the magistrate "contributes his power to those things that materially conduce to a supernaturall end, though he doe not contribute anything that formally conduceth to such an end." In other words, the civil magistrate's service to Christ the Mediator does not entail *formal* service as a church officer, but rather *material* service according to his own place and calling as a Christian disciple within civil society. Such service is *indirectly* conducive to the wellbeing and success of the Church, but does not involve the *direct* exercise of church office or authority.<sup>35</sup>

According to the Erastians, such *indirect* and *material* acts of service "do nothing serviceable to Christ as Christ, and in promoting Christs Mediatory Kingdom." Rutherford strongly disagreed. If such a view were correct, he argued, it would be impossible for Christians not holding church office to serve Christ as Mediator or to advance His Kingdom in any way. In other words, the Christian father, who "begetteth children, that being borne in the visible Church are made heires of the Kingdome of Christ" could not be regarded as a servant of Christ. The physician, who "by his Art and skill he preserveth the life of a godly and zealous Preacher" could not be regarded as a servant of Christ. Not even the printer, "when by his Art he publisheth in print the Testament of Christ", would qualify as a servant of Christ the Mediator. Rutherford rightly regarded this view as contrary both to Scripture and to the facts of Christian experience. Every believer is called to serve Christ as Mediator and to advance His kingdom according to his or her own place and calling.<sup>36</sup>

Such *material* service, moreover, is of a different character than *formal* church ministry. "The Physician... is serviceable to Christ as Mediator," writes Rutherford, "yet (I hope) it is no Ecclesiasticall businesse to restore to health a godly Minister: nor to beget a child who is made an heir of Grace, nor to print the Bible." Even if "a Philosopher as a Philosopher doth convince one that worshippeth bread" — that is, a Roman Catholic who holds to transubstantiation — so that "the man leaveth his error", such service is of a different character than that of an ordained church officer. Such personal witness, he writes, "is materially service to Christ, and a promoting of Christ's Mediatory Kingdom", yet it must be distinguished from the service of "Ecclesiasticall persons [who] formally advance the kingdom of Christ as do the preachers of the Gospel." In other words, it is the material servants of Christ, and not the formal servants of Christ, who "advance

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*, 600. See <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/600/mode/1up>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 600 (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 600. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)



Christ's Kingdom, as the Magistrate is supposed to do."<sup>37</sup> Hence, as David McKay observes, Rutherford "believes that civil rulers are to use their power for things which contribute to a spiritual end, thus indirectly promoting the Kingdom of Christ as Mediator."<sup>38</sup>

In his writings, Rutherford takes great pains to preserve the uniqueness of the Church's mission, offices, and jurisdiction. Nevertheless, he repeatedly affirms the duty of all persons (including civil magistrates) to repent and believe in Christ, to become teachable disciples within the church, to diligently study God's moral law, and to subject every sphere of life to Jesus Christ for the advance of His kingdom. In other words, he seeks to cultivate a healthy balance between the universality of Christ's authority and the uniqueness of the church and its mission.

The Erastians were, by contrast, seeking to hijack the doctrine of Christ's universal authority in order to justify state control of the church and conversion by the sword. They reasoned that if Christ the Mediator possessed authority over magistrates, then it would be both reasonable and advantageous for Him to incorporate these magistrates (subsequent to their conversion) into the ministry and government of His church. Thus, all their worldly wealth and military power might be used to increase the spread of the gospel among the nations and to govern the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Rutherford acknowledged the Christian magistrate's duty to outwardly enforce the Ten Commandments, as well as to recognize, support, and defend true religion within its borders. At the same time, he shuddered to think of placing church officers under the oversight of civil rulers, or of replacing Scriptural evangelism with the carnal weapons of the state. "All power mediatory<sup>39</sup> in Heaven and in earth, that is given to Jesus Christ as Mediator," he wrote, "is all spiritual, all Ecclesiasticall power." Hence, "Christ upon this receipt of all power (Matt. 28:18) draweth a conclusion (v. 19), 'Go ye therefore and teach all Nations, &c.'" According to Rutherford the universal authority of Christ the Mediator is intended to fuel a spiritual agenda in this world: the discipling of the nations according to the Great Commission. It is not a "Kingly power of this world by carnall weapons, and by sword to fight", since Christ "denieth expressly (John 18:36) that he hath such a Kingdom as Mediator, or that he was [entrusted] with the sword as Mediator (Luke 12:13)."<sup>40</sup> For Rutherford, the universal authority of Christ and the transformative effect of the gospel in society made no allowances for Erastian tyranny.

### **3. The Kingdom of Power**

We noted above that LC 191 speaks of Christ's universal authority as "the kingdom of his power in all the world."<sup>41</sup> In seeking to refute the Erastians, Rutherford addresses the proper meaning of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 600-601. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph). See <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/600/mode/1up>.

<sup>38</sup> David McKay, "Samuel Rutherford on Civil Government" in *Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction*, 261.

<sup>39</sup> As reiterated below, Rutherford's use of the term "mediatory" is often misunderstood. In keeping with the theological vocabulary of his day, he uses this term in reference to Christ's mediatorial work of redemption, and as virtually synonymous with "redemptive" or "ecclesiastical". In more recent centuries, theologians have come to use this term in a Christological sense, to refer to Christ's theanthropic Person "as the God-man", as distinct from His eternal Sonship. Using modern vocabulary to interpret the quotation above, Rutherford would appear to be asserting that "All of Christ's power as the God-man is spiritual and ecclesiastical." Such a bold statement would flatly contradict LC 54. However, taking into account the vocabulary of the seventeenth century, as well as the context of this treatise against Erastianism, we can easily discern his meaning: "All of Christ's power of redemptive mediation for His elect is spiritual and ecclesiastical." As such, his statement is consistent with LC 54 and with the doctrine of Christ's universal authority as the God-man.

<sup>40</sup> *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*, 611-612. See <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/611/mode/1up>.

<sup>41</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 275.

this key phrase. "Now as God and Creator of the world," he writes, "Christ could not deny but he had a Kingdom worldly, and that he hath a regnum potentie, an universal Kingdom of power."<sup>42</sup> It is likely this very statement that persuades McKay to assert that although "Rutherford does not deny that Christ exercises universal rule," yet "he believes that he does so as God and Creator."<sup>43</sup>

However, Rutherford goes on to state that, as "Lord of all", this kingdom of power enables Christ "to dispose of all the Kingdoms of the world, and to rule amidst the children of men, and to rule over the children of men, and to give them to whomsoever he will."<sup>44</sup> "Nor is this Kingdom," he adds, "given to Christ (nor is he made Prince and a King) as God; but as Mediator to give repentance to the House of Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31)."<sup>45</sup>

Here Rutherford explicitly acknowledges our Lord's universal kingdom of power, not merely as *God from all eternity*, but as *God-man Mediator by delegation*. He is perfectly clear in asserting that Christ possesses His kingdom of universal power "as God and Creator of the World". He is equally clear that this kingdom is "given" to Christ and that Christ is "made" a "Prince and a King... as Mediator".

For Rutherford, the universal power received by Christ at His ascension is intrinsic and divine in *one* sense and delegated to the God-man in *another* sense. It is intrinsic and divine in terms of its *nature* and *origin*, as the infinite power and authority of God, possessed by the Son from all eternity. At the same time, it is delegated to the Mediator in the terms of its *exercise*. At the ascension, God the Father granted the exalted Savior the right to *exercise* His infinite, divine power and authority *to a new and redemptive purpose*, on behalf of His church. Thus, Rutherford could elsewhere speak of "the Lord Jesus Christ's power Kingly, and his power mediatory, which includeth a power as God (for he is Mediator and a mediatory King, according to both natures).

In other words, what took place at Christ's ascension is not so much a granting of universal authority *itself*, as a granting of the right to *exercise* His already-existing divine authority for redemptive (i.e. mediatorial) purposes. As we will see below, this is the historic position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, as set forth by William Symington and as currently articulated in the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (RPT), which teaches that "God has given the exercise of all authority to the Lord Jesus Christ" as "the Divine Lawgiver, Governor and Judge."<sup>46</sup>

#### **4. The Nature of Kingship**

Another sticking point with the Erastians involved the extent of Christ's kingship as Mediator. By misconstruing the universal implications of this doctrine, they sought, once again, to undermine the church's unique relationship to her Royal Bridegroom.

As stated in LC 42, Christ the Mediator, "executes the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church."<sup>47</sup> Christ's Kingship, rightly understood in relation to His church, includes a universal

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<sup>42</sup> *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*, 611-612.

<sup>43</sup> McKay, "Samuel Rutherford on Civil Government" in Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction, 261.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 611-612. Texts cited by Rutherford include: Dan. 4:25; 8:18; Ps. 2:8-9; 24:1; 50:12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 612. The grammar of this statement is confusing at first glance. However, it may be rephrased in the following manner so as to bring out its undoubted meaning: "It is not as God that Christ is given this kingdom and made a king and a prince. Rather, he receives these things as Mediator, for the purpose of accomplishing His saving purpose for the elect."

<sup>46</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2003) A-70

<sup>47</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 148.

authority over the church's enemies, and over all of creation and providence on the church's behalf. We also noted how this universal authority presupposes the uniqueness of the church and its mission, since Christ received this authority "for the church" (Eph. 1:21). Christ's universal authority, therefore, does not negate the distinctive mission and government of His church in society. Likewise, the uniqueness of the church does not negate His supreme authority over all things.

While Rutherford does deny that "Christ is King over the kings and kingdoms of the earth", he does so *only* in the sense that would make "kings the vice-gerents of Christ as mediator" and, therefore, "lawgivers in God's house". Elsewhere he asserts that "Christ, as mediator, hath all power given to him as king of the church, and so power kingly over all his enemies, 'to reign until he make them his footstool.'" (Ps. 110:1-2), 'to break them with a rod of iron' (Ps. 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:24-27; Rev. 1:18, 20; 10-15)... He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, and King of Ogs, of kings, of his enemies."<sup>48</sup> Concerning Christ, he states, "I grant [that] as Mediator and King he breaketh his enemies, Devils, and men (Ps. 2:9) 'with a rod of iron, and dasheth them in pieces like a potters vessel', and 'maketh his enemies his footstool' (Ps. 110:1)." Nevertheless, "that is no carnall power, such as earthly Kings useth; it is a spirituall power, for the reason is given (v. 2), 'The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Sion', by which (v. 5) as great Anti-Royalist, 'He strikes through Kings in the day of his wrath'."<sup>49</sup>

In stating that Christ is the "King of Ogs" and "of his enemies", Rutherford is not seeking to equate Christ's *kingly authority* over His foes with the redemptive, *kingly intimacy* that exists between Himself and His elect Bride. When writing against the Erastians, he rejects any attempt to oversimplify Christ's kingship, as though Christ were the King of His enemies in precisely the same sense that He is the King of Saints. As a gifted systematician, Rutherford is keenly aware that any lack of precision on this point could easily lead to Arminian universalism.

Christ be not [the reprobate's] rightful King as Mediator, nor their King at all as Mediator... [since] he neither gave a price as Mediator to buy them, because the adversaries then must say, that Christ is so King of the whole earth, as he hath died for all and every one of mankind... if the adversaries can say that Christ died for all and every one of Makonde, and so for these Heathen Kings, I can refuse this Article of Arminianisme.<sup>50</sup>

But though Christ subdue all his enemies, Devils, and wicked men, it shall never follow that Christ is for that, King and head of Devils, and wicked men: For Christ is the Mediator King and Head, or mediatory King and Head, of those that are the subjects, and redeemed conquest of this King, and of those who are members of the body of which he is Head. Now this body is his Church only (Col. 1:18), "He is the Head of the Body the Church", (Eph. 1:22-23) "And gave him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is his Body, the fulnesse of him that filleth all"... Now never Divine can say, that Devils and wicked men, who shall bow to Jesus, are the subjects of this Kingdom of Christ, who have right to the fruits of the Kingdom, "righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17), far lesse that they are of the Body... [A]s if Christ were as Mediator, a King to Heathen, and all and every one of mankind, who must have Magistrates, and so maketh the Kingdome

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Lex Rex, or, The Law and the Prince* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, Reprint 1982) 211 (Includes all quotations in this paragraph). E-book can be accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/lexrexlawandpri00ruthgoog/page/n241/mode/1up>.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*, 612. See <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/612/mode/1up>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 610.

of men as men, and the Kingdom of Grace commensurable, and of alike latitude and extension, and maketh nature and grace of equal comprehension. But such is the former opinion, the proposition cannot be denied, except by Arminians, Socinians, Papists, who do maintain an universal redemption, a grace universall, a Catholick Kingdom of Grace comprehensive of all and every man, of Pharaoh, Evil Merodach, Belshazer, all the Kings of Romans, Persians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and of Turk, India, and such as worship the Sunne and Moon, the Devil, and the work of mens hands...<sup>51</sup>

The Lord Jesus Christ's power Kingly, and his power mediatory, which includeth a power as God (for he is Mediator and a mediatory King, according to both natures) doth no way make him King of Devils, of Hell, of sin, of the reprobate, and damned, no more than Davids power over Ammonites and Moabites makes him King and feeder of the Ammonites and Moabites. Never Divine said, that Christ was King of Devils, and King of Hell; though he subdue Devils and Hell, and make them his footstool (Col. 2:15)... And therefore, though as King and an eternall King, he subdues all things, even his enemies; yet it followeth not, he is King and Mediator, and Head of his enemies.<sup>52</sup>

Rutherford's analogy between King David and King Jesus helps to shed light on his view. David's reign over Ammon and Moab, he argues, is a picture of Christ the Mediator's reign over those outside His Church. Although David ruled over and possessed the nations of Ammon and Moab, he is never called *King of Ammon* or *King of Moab*, but rather *King of Israel* (2 Sam. 6:20). Ammon and Moab were David's possessions, but not his people. He ruled them solely according to His capacity as King of Israel. To Ammon and Moab, he was certainly the king, but he was not their king. They could not say to David, as did the tribes of Israel, "Indeed, we are your bone and your flesh" (2 Sam. 5:1). The Lord exalted David to become head over the surrounding nations, but not for them. His headship over the nations was intended for Israel's wellbeing, even as Christ was made head over all things for the sake of His Church.

According to a majority of contemporary scholars, Rutherford held that "the kingship of Christ as Mediator is only over the elect and redeemed of God" and "is exercised only over those saved by his gracious mediation."<sup>53</sup> However, based upon the primary source material surveyed thus far, we would strongly question the accuracy of this assessment. Rutherford repeatedly affirms the confessional teaching concerning Christ's universal authority as the God-man in judging His enemies. He uses the phrase *as Mediator* and the term *kingship* to describe this universal authority. His only real scruple is to insist that Christ's redemptive mediatorial work be regarded as entirely particular rather than universal.

As noted above, the term *mediatorial* means something today that it did not mean in the seventeenth century. Today, it is generally employed as a Christological term, equivalent to the adjective *theanthropic* or the phrase *as the God-man*. That is, it refers to Christ's universal authority as the God-man, a confessional teaching which Rutherford repeatedly affirms. The reason he appears, at times, to reject the language of *mediatorial kingship* is that, in the seventeenth century, the term *mediatorial* carried a primarily soteriological and ecclesiological meaning. That is, it was employed almost exclusively in reference to Christ's *redemptive work of mediation on behalf of His church*, not to His *universal authority as the God-man*. By denying Christ's mediatorial kingship to be universal, Rutherford is simply safeguarding the particularity

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 612-613. See <https://archive.org/details/divinerightofchu00ruth/page/612/mode/1up>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>53</sup> McKay, "Samuel Rutherford on Civil Government" in *Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction*, 261.

of redemption. He is by no means denying the universal authority and dominion of Christ as the God-man.

Unfortunately, this important distinction is not always fully appreciated by contemporary scholars. Seeking to draw a "sharp contrast" between Rutherford's view of mediatorial kingship and that of the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, one well-respected author asserts that, according to Rutherford, "If all were [Christ's] subjects in this sense, all would be [saved]."<sup>54</sup> Such a statement seems to assume that Rutherford is using the term *mediatorial* in the same way that Reformed Presbyterians use it today. As we have seen, this assumption is highly doubtful. In reality, the "sharp contrast" has far more to do with Rutherford's seventeenth century vocabulary than with his theological position.<sup>55</sup>

All in all, the writings of Samuel Rutherford provide us with keen insight into the mindset and vocabulary of the era in which the Westminster Standards were composed. They remind us that differences in vocabulary do not always indicate fundamental differences in theology. For Rutherford, as for the Westminster Assembly, there were very good reasons — stemming from the surrounding context — to avoid employing the term mediatorial in a universal sense, and to avoid speaking of Christ's kingship as universal without qualifying precisely what they meant. Yet, even within these more carefully restricted boundaries, there was ample room to articulate the Scriptural and confessional doctrine of Christ's universal authority as the God-man.

## **PART FOUR — George Gillespie (1613-1648)**

Among Samuel Rutherford's most intimate allies against Erastianism imposition was George Gillespie, a Scottish minister and fellow commissioner at the Westminster Assembly. Both men argued vehemently against Erastianism. Gillespie was perhaps the more gifted debater, however Rutherford is generally regarded as a more careful theologian.

### ***1. Responding to Erastianism***

Gillespie's defense of the Presbyterian cause eventually led him into a written debate with Thomas Coleman, a noted Erastian. Coleman asserted that the "Christian Magistrate, as a Christian Magistrate, is a Governour in the Church." He reasoned that although not all magistrates are Christians, "all should be; and when they are, they are to manage their Office under, and for Christ." Such management, he contended, must include the governing of the church, since Christ "placed Governments in his Church" (1 Cor. 12:28). In his view, Paul uses the term "governments" in reference to civil rulers, whom Christ, as "head over all things", has brought to faith and subsequently "given to the Church" (Eph. 1:21) to govern her on His behalf.<sup>56</sup>

Coleman's line of argumentation is very similar to the Erastian objection addressed above by Rutherford, which states that in order for a magistrate to serve Christ as Mediator, he must govern the Church. Rutherford had responded to this assertion by reaffirming the duty of civil

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 261

<sup>55</sup> A member of our committee respectfully disagreed with this assessment of contemporary scholarship, expressing his agreement with the scholarly consensus as reflected in the quotations provided.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Coleman, *Hopes Deferred and Dashed: Observed in a Sermon to the Honorable House of Commons, in Margarets Westminster Iuly 30. 1645. Being the Monethly Fast*. (London: Printed for Christopher Meredith at the Crane in Pauls Church-yard, 1645) 27-28. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

magistrates to become Christian disciples and, as such, to rule *under* Christ and *for* Christ as Mediator. Additionally, he had distinguished between *formal* service to Christ (as a church officer) and *material* service to Christ (as an obedient Christian in his or her God-given calling). The civil magistrate, in his mind, ought to serve Christ materially, but never formally. In this way, Rutherford was able to maintain the magistrate's moral subjection to Christ the Mediator without making the magistrate himself a church officer.

## 2. A Different Approach

Gillespie's response to Coleman is far more radical in nature than that of Rutherford. Rather than simply distinguishing between formal and material service to Christ, he argues that magistrates must serve Christ as God, but not as Mediator.

According to Gillespie, Christ, at His ascension, received "all power in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18) in the following two senses: (1) "by the eternal generation", and (2) "by the declaration of him to be the Son of God with power, when he was raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4), even as he is said to be begotten, when he was raised again (Acts 13:33)."<sup>57</sup>

Strictly speaking, neither Christ's eternal generation nor the declaration of His eternal Sonship bears the character of an actual gift or delegation of power. Gillespie, therefore, advocates a highly figurative interpretation of Matthew 28:18, such that the only thing actually *given* to Christ is a fresh public acknowledgement of His already-existing eternal Sonship and divine prerogatives.

Adding further complexity to his view, Gillespie appeals to the distinction between our Lord's humiliation and exaltation. Prior to His resurrection, Christ "had relinquished and laid aside his divine dominion and power when he had made himself in the form of a servant, but after his resurrection it is gloriously manifested... and so he that is Mediator, being God, hath power to subdue his and his church's enemies, and to make his foes his footstool."<sup>58</sup> Technically, this statement is consistent with the WS, since our Lord *did* receive universal power in connection with His transition from humiliation to exaltation (LC 54). His exaltation *did* include the glorious manifestation of the divine prerogatives which He willingly laid aside during His humiliation (LC 46). Moreover, His divine power *is* required in order to exercise universal power as the Mediator (LC 38). At the same time, Gillespie appears hesitant to echo the precise phraseology of Larger Catechism 54, which ascribes these things to Christ, not merely as the eternal God, but "as the God-man."<sup>59</sup> This likely stems from his vigorous debate with Coleman.

## 3. Head Over All Things

According to Coleman, the fact that Christ has been made "head over all things for the church, which is His body" (Eph. 1:21) implies that he is the Head *over* civil rulers. As the Head *over* civil rulers, He can (and does) ordain them as governors *over* His Church. This is one of several classic

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<sup>57</sup> George Gillespie, *A sermon preached before the right honourable the House of Lords in the Abbey Church at Westminster, upon the 27th of August, 1645 being the day appointed for solempne and publique humiliation : whereunto is added a brotherly examination of some passages of Mr. Colemans late printed sermon upon Job 11.20, in which he hath endeavoured to strike at the root of all church-government / by George Gillespie, minister at Edinburgh.* (London: Printed for Robert Bostock dwelling in Pauls Church-yard at the sign of the Kingshead, 1645) 39. E-book can be accessed online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/a42767.0001.001/44?page=root;size=125;vid=47415;view=text>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 155.

arguments for Erastianism and Gillespie had every intention of meeting it head-on with a Biblical response.

One might have expected Gillespie to reply that Scripture nowhere links the Mediator's authority over kings with their being appointed church officers. Like Rutherford, he could then have distinguished between formal and material service to Christ as Mediator. Instead, Gillespie takes a different approach, arguing that the phrase "head over all things" (Eph. 1:21) refers exclusively to the church. This verse, he reasons, could not be teaching that "all Government is given to Christ, and to him as Mediator; and Christ, as head of these, given to the Church", nor could it mean that "Christ is given to the Church as the Head of all Principalities and Powers." Such an interpretation should be abandoned, he wrote, since it "makes Christ a Head to those that are not of his Body."<sup>60</sup>

Gillespie is concerned to distinguish between Christ's headship over all things and His headship over His Church. He wants to make it clear that the Church, as Christ's body, is unique. All things are not Christ's body; civil society is not Christ's body; the Church *alone* is the body and bride of Christ her exalted Head. However, in seeking to defend the uniqueness of the Church, Gillespie appears to advance a highly questionable interpretation of Scripture, restricting the phrase "head over all things for the church" to the church alone.

Ephesians 1:21, however, includes a reference to both aspects of Christ's rule: (1) His reigning *over* all things, and (2) His reigning *for* His Church. In response to this concern, Gillespie adds that although Christ "is a Head to none but the Church", yet "he who is Head to the Church is *over all*, God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5)." He goes so far as to concede that "even as man, he is over or above all." At first glance, this may sound like a reference to Christ's superior authority over all things; but it is most certainly not. Instead, it is a reference to Christ's superior *dignity* over all things. In his view, "the very Humane nature of Christ... is exalted to a higher degree of honour and glory" than "either man or Angel ever was, or ever shall be." In other words, Christ is *over* all things "because he doth not onely excell his own members, but excelleth all creatures that ever God made", being "exalted to a dignity, excellency, preeminence, majesty, and glory, far above all Principality, and Power, and Might, and Dominion."<sup>61</sup>

While affirming Christ's dignity over all things, Gillespie flatly denies "that Christ is head of all Principalities and Governments, and as Mediator exerciseth his Kingly Office over these." Rutherford, as noted above, affirmed Christ's *kingly authority* over all things, so long as it was understood that His *kingly intimacy* as the redemptive Mediator applies exclusively to the Church. Here Gillespie goes beyond Rutherford, restricting both kingly intimacy and kingly authority to the church alone, thereby granting to the Mediator nothing more than a kingly *dignity* over all things. "Will any say," he asks rhetorically, "that he who excels other men in dignity, splendor, honour, and glory, must therefore reign and rule over all those whom he thus excels?"<sup>62</sup>

According to Gillespie, Christ, as the God-man Mediator, possesses universal and unequalled dignity. He is *greater, better, and more glorious* than all things in the created universe. He is, however, *not* invested with universal power and authority to command all nations. He "is a Head to none but to his Church" and, therefore, "no Government is given to him as Mediator, but the

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<sup>60</sup> A Sermon Preached Before the Right Honourable the House of Lords, etc., 40. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph) See <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/a42767.0001.001/45?page=root;size=125;vid=47415;view=text>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 40. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 41. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph) See <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/a42767.0001.001/46?page=root;size=125;vid=47415;view=text>.

Government of his Church."<sup>63</sup> In seeking to further clarify his view, he enumerates three ways in which the headship of Christ ought to be understood.

1. As Mediator, he is exalted and dignified above all creatures, and his glory is above all the earth.
2. As Mediator, he exerciseth acts of divine power and omnipotency over all creatures, in the behalf of, and for the good of his Church, and restraineth, or diverteth, or destroyeth all his Church's enemies.
3. As Mediator, he is King, Head, and Governour to none but his Church: Neither was all Government put in his hand, but the Government of the Church onely.<sup>64</sup>

In his first point, Gillespie reiterates Christ's supreme kingly *dignity* in terms of comparative excellence. In his second point, he asserts Christ's kingly *power* to sovereignly govern history and providence, working all things together for the good of His church. Thirdly, he declares that, as Mediator, Christ's kingly *authority* applies "to none but his Church" and includes "the Government of the Church onely".

#### **4. Power vs. Authority**

Gillespie's distinction between kingly power (point #2) and kingly authority (point #3) is crucial in that it represents his gloss on the term *power* as it appears in a number of key places, including (1) the AV translation of Matthew 28:18 ("all power in heaven and earth"), (2) LC 54 ("power in heaven and earth"), and (3) LC 191 ("the kingdom of his power over all the world").<sup>65</sup>

According to Gillespie's view, this *power* of Christ does not include an authoritative right to morally govern all men and nations. Rather, it refers to His sovereign capacity to overrule the events of providence, excluding any notion of moral power (i.e. authority to command obedience), except insofar as He is God from all eternity. Perhaps it was this distinction between *providential* and *moral* powers which enabled Gillespie to reconcile his position with the language of the WS, which clearly traces back to Matthew 28:18.

Gillespie's distinction between providential and moral power is, nevertheless, vulnerable to at least two main objections. First, there are two Greek words which the AV often renders as "power": *dunamis* and *exousia*. The former generally refers to power, strength, might, or capacity, the latter to moral authority or jurisdiction. For this reason, modern Bible versions tend to translate *dunamis* as "power" and *exousia* as "authority". It is significant that *exousia* (and not *dunamis*) stands behind the word "power" in Matthew 28:18 (AV). This makes it very difficult to adopt Gillespie's claim that our Lord's expression refers solely to providential power and not to moral authority.

Second, it is inconceivable that our Mediator would possess universal providential power without universal moral authority. What sense would it make for the Father to grant Him providential power over those outside His Church if he lacked the moral authorization to use it? How is it that Christ (in Gillespie's own words) "as Mediator... destroyeth all his Church's enemies" if He possesses no moral authority "as Mediator" to govern those enemies? The right to execute

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>65</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 155, 275.



judgment is part and parcel of the right to govern. The fact that Christ executes powerful acts of retribution against those outside His church implies a God-given moral jurisdiction over them. Otherwise, what is the moral basis of these judgments?

Moreover, if the Mediator punishes men and nations for the sin of *opposing* the church, this implies a positive duty on their part to *befriend* the church. It implies that, *had* they befriended the church, they would have averted the punishment which resulted from their neglect of this duty. Hence, the Mediator's punishment of His enemies for their opposition implies the need for a *positive, pro-active, preventative* moral exhortation to all who reside outside the church. Such an exhortation would serve to warn Christ's enemies not to "take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed", but instead to "be instructed" to "serve the LORD with fear" and to "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry" and "break them with a rod of iron" and "dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel", such that they "perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little" (Cf. Ps. 2:9-12). Biblical exhortations of this kind would make no sense if our Lord did not possess both providential and moral power as the exalted God-man Mediator. For this reason, we must regard Gillespie's distinction as inadequate and his rejection of Christ's universal authority as the Mediator as inferior to the more confessional categories of Rutherford.

### **5. Agreement with Rutherford**

Gillespie and Rutherford were not in full agreement on the question of *why* civil rulers must submit to Christ. From a practical standpoint, however, their views shared much in common. Both affirmed the duty of all civil magistrates to follow Christ through repentance and faith, to exercise their calling according to Scriptural principles of civil government, to outwardly enforce the Ten Commandments in society, and to use their office for the defense, support, and advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth. Echoing Rutherford's emphasis upon Christian calling, Gillespie writes,

69. For every member of the church (and so also the faithful and godly magistrate) ought to refer and order his particular vocation, faculty, ability, power and honour, to this end, that the kingdom of Christ may be propagated and promoted, and the true religion be cherished and defended: so that the advancement of the gospel, and of all the ordinances of the gospel, is indeed the end of the godly magistrate, not of a magistrate simply: or (if ye will rather) it is not the end of the office itself, but of him who doth execute the same piously.<sup>66</sup>

In keeping with the WS, Gillespie did not view the civil ruler's religious duties as being essential to his office. Such duties certainly represent the wellbeing of civil rule, but not the prerequisite to its existence or validity. They constitute "the end of the godly magistrate", but "not of a magistrate *simply*". They are "not the end of the office itself, but of him who doth execute the same *piously*."<sup>67</sup> In other words, civil government, much like the institution of the family, is common to all mankind. Upon hearing the gospel, a non-Christian father has a duty to become a Christian father and to govern his family as a Christian family. Yet, even in his unconverted state, he remains the God-ordained head of his home. In the same way, upon hearing the gospel, a non-Christian civil

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<sup>66</sup> George Gillespie, *CXI Propositions Concerning the Ministerie and Government of the Church* (Edinburgh: Printed by Evan Tyler, 1647). E-book can be accessed online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A86000.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

ruler has a duty to become a Christian civil ruler and to govern his nation as a Christian nation. Nevertheless, his infidelity does not negate his legitimate civil authority.

It is with this framework in mind that the *Christian* magistrate's duty to "maintain piety" in WCF 23.2 is later qualified in WCF 23.3 by the recognition that "Infidelity, or indifference in religion, doth not make valid the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them."<sup>68</sup> In other words, non-Christian magistrates are still magistrates. They have a duty to become Christian magistrates and then, as faithful disciples, to serve and advance Christ's kingdom as magistrates. Their failure to do so, however, does not divest them of their God-ordained authority to rule.

Gillespie's paradigm for social and political reform, therefore, would appear to stress the importance of the Great Commission no less than Rutherford's. For magistrates to serve Christ in any real sense, they must become Christian magistrates who "kiss the Son" with reverent and affectionate obedience flowing from a heart of faith. If the church fails in its duty of prayerfully evangelizing and discipling non-Christian magistrates (or in seeking to replace them lawfully and peaceably with other magistrates who are faithful disciples of Christ), true and lasting national reform will be impossible.

The prospect of thoroughly reforming a non-Christian nation without converted magistrates is as hopeless as the prospect of thoroughly reforming a non-Christian family without a converted husband or wife. Just as a non-Christian family must become a Christian family in order to experience true reformation, so a nation must become a Christian nation. This can only happen when a sizable portion of its governing officials genuinely devote themselves to the cause of Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. This is not to deny the rightful place of political activism, ethical reform campaigns, and Bible-based voter coalitions. However, according to Rutherford and Gillespie, the primary solution to national wickedness is the faithful witness of gospel-centered churches laboring to fulfill the Great Commission.

## **PART FIVE — The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland**

In 1660, following the brief period of the English Commonwealth, the monarchy was restored under King Charles II: first in Scotland, and eventually in England. This led to a vicious period of persecution known as "the killing times" (1680-1688) in which many who adhered faithfully to the Scottish Covenants were tortured and killed for maintaining the exclusive headship of Jesus Christ over His Church. This ugly period ended with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which William of Orange assumed royal power in London. This, in turn, led to the Revolution Settlement of 1689, which established an Erastian-Episcopal church in England (under the Thirty-Nine Articles) and a Presbyterian church in Scotland (under the Westminster Standards).

Among those who adhered to the covenants in Scotland, there was much dissatisfaction with this settlement. Not only did it ignore the binding nature of the Solemn League and Covenant; it also sought to establish Presbyterianism in Scotland on pragmatic, rather than Scriptural, grounds. The settlement was, for all intents and purposes, imposed unilaterally by the king. Some, therefore, viewed it as a subtle form of Erastianism in disguise, a Trojan horse that would ultimately threaten the survival of Scriptural Presbyterianism in Scotland. Not surprisingly, many of the ministers who had previously advocated Erastianism and helped to persecute the

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<sup>68</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 102.

Covenanters fully supported the Revolution Settlement. The remaining Covenanter ministers responded to this arrangement by raising many grave concerns and objections. At the end of the day, however, every one of them opted to join the Revolution Settlement Church, hoping to bear witness against its imperfections and to see a return to the covenanted reformation.

Only a tiny remnant — consisting of several thousand members, deacons, and ruling elders, but no ministers — remained outside the Revolution Settlement. In 1706, Rev. John McMillan, a young minister in the established church, decided to join their ranks. Over time, other ministers followed, resulting in the formation of the Reformed Presbytery, which was to become the fountainhead of Reformed Presbyterian denominations throughout the world, including those in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Australia, and North America. In this section (Part Five), we will examine the doctrine of Christ's universal authority as articulated by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland during seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

### **1. John McMillan (1669-1753)**

In 1712, John McMillan helped to preside over the Auchensauigh Renovation, in which members and officers within the Reformed Presbytery publicly renewed the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant. In doing so, he sought to clarify the relationship between national covenanting and the covenant of grace.

According to McMillan, "it is through [Christ] we have access to make this covenant with God" and "Such as would make a covenant with God aright... must labor to know if they be in good terms with the God of the covenant, and with the Mediator of the covenant; if they sincerely closed with the terms, and acquiesced to the proposals of the covenant of grace."<sup>69</sup> He then noted that "this personal and particular acceptance of Christ in the new covenant" is "the only fountain of acceptable entering into national covenants."<sup>70</sup>

For McMillan, national covenanting was founded upon the covenant of grace, such that the former flows exclusively from the latter. No ruler or citizen of a nation can truly enter into a *national covenant* with God in Christ without first entering into the *covenant of grace* with God in Christ, through faith in the gospel. A man who refuses to become a willing subject of Christ's kingdom of grace (over the church) cannot truly be a willing subject of Christ's kingdom of power (over the nation). National covenanting was largely a fruit of national revival and of the widespread success of evangelism and discipleship by the church. The idea that a nation could (or would) truly submit to Christ's universal authority by any *other* means was, for McMillan, an utterly foreign concept. His approach to national reformation, therefore, was no less gospel-centered and church-focused than that of Rutherford and Gillespie.

McMillan also echoes the vocabulary of the WS in identifying Christ's kingdom with His church. For instance, during the Auchensauigh Renovation, he equates "all the neighboring reformed churches" with "all the true and loyal subjects of Christ's kingdom."<sup>71</sup> He condemns the enemies of the covenants "for opposing the growth and success of Christ's kingdom, even the reformation

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<sup>69</sup> The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, *The Auchensauigh Renovation of the Solemn League and Covenant: with the acknowledgement of sins and engagements to duties as they were renewed at Auchensauigh, near Douglas, July 24, 1712*. E-version can be accessed online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12381/12381-h/12381-h.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

of these many abuses that have corrupted the holy religion of his institution."<sup>72</sup> He distinguishes Christ's kingdom from the nation itself, exhorting the people to cultivate "zeal for the public good of the nation, and thriving of the work of God and kingdom of Christ."<sup>73</sup>

As to the obligation of the Scottish covenants, McMillan declares, "The matter is moral, antecedently and eternally binding, albeit there had been no formal covenant: the ends of them perpetually good."<sup>74</sup> That is, the Scottish nation was simply promising to do what it was already obligated to do according to the universal and unchanging standard of God's moral law. The law of God itself required "the defence of the true reformed religion, and the maintenance of the King's Majesty's person and estate (as is expressed in the national covenant,) the glory of God, the advancement of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ; the honor and happiness of the King's Majesty and his posterity, and the public liberty, safety, and peace of the kingdoms, as it is expressed in the Solemn League."<sup>75</sup> In these words, McMillan clearly distinguishes between Christ's kingdom (the church) and the three kingdoms (England, Scotland, and Ireland).

## **2. The Reformed Presbytery (1749-1754)**

In the late 1740s, a schismatic sect arose within the Reformed Presbytery and eventually left to form a rival body. This sect affirmed an Arminian view of the extent of Christ's atonement, and made significant concessions to Erastianism. In our survey of Rutherford's polemical writings, we have already observed the eagerness of both Arminians and Erastians to universalize the ecclesiastical and soteriological aspects of Christ's mediation. It was for this reason that the WS and its authors carefully distinguished Christ's kingship in relation to the Church from His universal authority over all things. Not surprisingly, the Reformed Presbytery's dispute with this quasi-Arminian sect ended up centering on the nature of Christ's mediatorial authority.

In 1749, the Reformed Presbytery issued *Three Propositions Respecting the Mediatorial Dominion of Christ*, which was followed up in 1754 with an explanatory postscript, interpreting the propositions.

The Reformed Presbytery's first proposition asserts "That the Lord Jesus Christ has a twofold Kingdom, one essential to him as God equal with the Father in Power and Glory; another donative [received], as the Father's honorary Servant."<sup>76</sup> In other words, Christ has "an essential Kingdom, in which he presides as God equal with the Father and Holy Ghost, over all the Extent of Creation, from which no Being can possibly revolt."<sup>77</sup> Christ, as "the supreme and incomprehensible Maker of all Things", possesses "an universal Sceptre, over all the extensive Regions of Heaven and Earth, with their respective Inhabitants."<sup>78</sup> For this reason, "as Creator, Christ may be justly called God over all, blessed for ever."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> The Reformed Presbyterian Church (Scotland), *A Serious Examination and Impartial Survey of a Print: Designed, the True State &C. by a Pretended Presbytery at Edinburgh: Wherein the New Scheme of Doctrine Anent the Extent of Christ's Death, Advanced in That Print, Is Tried at the Scripture-Bar, and Found Disagreeable Thereto, and to the Authorized Standard of the Church of Scotland in Her Purest Times, and Containing a Discovery of the Falsehoods and Calumnies in Their Narration. Together with a Vindication of the Presbytery's Conduct and Principles Relative to the Subject of Difference between Them and Their Protesting Brethren*. Edinburgh: W. Gray, 1754.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

In addition, the Reformed Presbytery explains the nature of Christ's "donative Kingdom as Mediator, God and Man in one Person."<sup>80</sup> It is this kingdom "unto which he was designed and appointed by God the Father, in the eternal Counsel of Peace."<sup>81</sup> As to the nature and basis of this delegated mediatorial authority, the Reformed Presbytery writes,

The Ground-foundation and Charter of [this] Sovereignty is laid in that Price and Ransom of inestimable Value, paid by him to Law and Justice, in the room and stead of his Body the Church, the given ones; and by virtue of which he obtained a just Right and title, not only of Conquest, but also of Purchase; over whom he sways a Sceptre of Grace, Love, and Peace; ruling by his Spirit in such Laws, Ordinances, and Institutions, as in infinite Wisdom are calculated for promoting the Glory and Honour of God, and for accomplishing their Edification and Salvation. This is his spiritual Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Covenant, that was to be raised out of the Rebel-world of Mankind, whereof Christ is constituted the alone King and Head, Psalm 2:6. Hence, he as Mediator presides in a special Manner in and over all the Ordinances and Administrations instituted by him within the Pale of the visible Church, which is his Spouse and Bride.<sup>82</sup>

The Reformed Presbytery's definition of Christ's mediatorial authority relates entirely to His saving work of mediation in redeeming, ruling, and building His Church. Following the WS, it highlights Christ's mediatorial kingship in relation to His Church, while at the same time introducing His universal authority within the context of His victory over the enemies of His Church.

While at the same Time, by a Right of Conquest over Hell and Death, and him that hath the Power of Death, the god of this World, and all the Powers of Darkness, [Christ has triumphed] openly over them in his Cross; even over these, and all their hellish Confederates, he rules with a Rod of Iron, baffling all their Strategems, secret Plots and Machinations, dashing them to Pieces like a Potter's Vessel, or causing all these, by his wise and over-ruling Providence, [to] work together for his own Glory, and the Good of them that love him. So that the effects and Influences of his mediatorial Power and Government are diffused over all the Inhabitants of Heaven, Earth, and Hell.<sup>83</sup>

The presbytery then cites "the declared Sentiments of Dr. Owen" that

God the Father, in the Pursuit of the sovereign Purpose of his Will, hath granted unto the Son, as incarnate, and Mediator of the new Covenant, according to the eternal Counsel between them both, a sovereign Power and Authority over all Things in Heaven and Earth, with the Possession of an absolute Proprietor, to dispose of them at his Pleasure, for the Furtherance and Advancement of his proper and peculiar Work as Head of the Church.<sup>84</sup>

Having secured this testimony from Owen, they conclude,

Hence, it follows, that, in Subserviency to his spiritual Kingdom, his Church, the Administration of the Kingdom of Providence throughout the World is committed to him; being made head over all things to the church, which is his body, Eph. 1:22-23. Zion's King and Head manages all Things by his Providence, as well without as within the Church,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

though in a very different Way, as to his own People, and to Enemies in the midst of whom he rules, Psalm 110:2. Thus Christ's Lordship and Dominion extends to Reprobates as well as others. They are not exempted from that 'all Flesh' which he hath Power over; though this universal Dominion is not exercised for their Good, but in behalf of his Saints.<sup>85</sup>

The fact that the presbytery cites John Owen in defense of its understanding of Christ's universal authority is noteworthy. Not only was Owen an independent, but he had served as a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. This indicates that the Reformed Presbytery did not regard these views as a denominational distinctive. They simply regarded themselves as affirming a basic confessional Reformed teaching, which appears in the WS as well as in the Savoy Declaration, to which Owen subscribed. They appear fully satisfied with the more restricted confessional vocabulary, preferring the terms "universal authority", "universal dominion", and "Lordship" rather than "Mediatorial Kingship" to describe Christ's relationship to His enemies outside the Church. The Reformed Presbytery also reinforces its commitment to the soteriological and ecclesiastical purpose of Christ's universal authority, as articulated in the WS.

The second proposition set forth by the Reformed Presbytery states "That the Magistrate is not the Viceregent of Christ, substitute under him in the Church."<sup>86</sup> Here they simply reaffirm the teaching of WCF 23.1, that the origin and basis of civil government is founded upon "God the supreme Lord and King of all the world"<sup>87</sup> not upon the delegated universal authority of the Mediator. For this reason, in keeping with WCF 23.4, they regard non-Christian magistrates serving in non-Christian lands as having "just and legal authority".

At the same time, the Reformed Presbytery clarifies that the "Scripture-qualifications are essential to the Being of a lawful Magistrate in a Christian Land; and none but such as are qualified according to Scripture, our Covenants, and the fundamental Laws of the Land agreeable thereunto, can be lawful Magistrates over these reformed Lands."<sup>88</sup> In other words, due to Scotland's unique status as a Protestant Christian nation by covenant, only Protestant Christians who affirmed its covenants were lawfully qualified to serve as civil magistrates. In their view, every nation has a duty to become Christian and, as a matter of course, to adopt and enforce Scriptural qualifications for civil office. Realistically, however, not every nation will do so. The fact that a nation disregards these qualifications and appoints ungodly leaders is undoubtedly sinful, but this "doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them" (WCF 23.4). The only exception, of course, would be in a nation such as Scotland, which had previously entered into a covenant with the Lord which included laws prohibiting such persons from holding office. In such a case, the voiding of the magistrate's just and legal authority would stem from the fact that these qualifications had been solemnly adopted by the state, not merely from the fact that they are Scriptural.

The third and final proposition published by the Reformed Presbytery asserts "That the Magistrate is not the Viceregent of Christ, substitute under him in the Church."<sup>89</sup> Later they declare their "opposition to the Erastian Tenet" that "the Civil Magistrate is a substitute under Christ, as Mediator, to exert his royal Power in and over the Church."<sup>90</sup> This is merely an echo of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Rutherford's polemic against Erastianism. Like Rutherford, they regard the phrase "Viceregent of Christ" as equivalent to exerting "royal Power in and over the Church."<sup>91</sup> At no point are they seeking to deny the moral accountability of nations and magistrates to Christ the Mediator. In fact, they state,

To conclude, it seems to be undeniable, if the Scriptures of Truth are owned to be a perfect Rule, that where ever Christianity comes, the civil Government should be so modified, moulded, and framed, as to correspond with the Circumstances of such a People; and that all Laws, Statutes, Ordinances, and Institutions whatsoever, either respecting the Constitution or Administration of the Government, must needs be formed and built upon the Plan of divine revelation. Hence, not only are the Laws of the Mediator binding upon the Consciences of the Magistrates, in all their public Administrations, as well as in their Election, Constitution, and Appointment; but also must this glorious Person be invested with a Headship of Power over them, for the sake of his Body the Church, disposing their Hearts, and over-ruling all their Transactions, Counsels, and Deliberations, to favour his righteous Cause, according as he hath graciously promised (Isa. 60:10-11, 16; 43:14-15).<sup>92</sup>

According to the Reformed Presbytery, as "Christianity comes" to a nation through evangelism and discipleship, there must be a self-conscious reorienting of civil government along Scriptural lines. This is not merely an external, intellectual, or political phenomenon, but a spiritual response of faith and submission to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is only when "Christianity comes" to a nation in *this* sense — that is, when Christ is "disposing their Hearts... to favour his righteous Cause, according as he hath graciously promised" — that the Scriptural ideal of civil government will be truly realized. Hence, the Reformed Presbytery demonstrates a robust measure of continuity with the gospel-centered, Great Commission-oriented approach articulated in the WS and defended by Samuel Rutherford and others like him.

### **3. The Act, Declaration, and Testimony (1761)**

In 1761, the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland adopted as its official constitution, The Act, Declaration, and Testimony (AD&T): *for the whole of our covenanted reformation, as attained to, and established in, Britain and Ireland; particularly betwixt the years 1638 and 1649, inclusive; as, also, against all the steps of defection from said reformation, whether in former or later times, since the overthrow of that glorious work, down to this present day.*<sup>93</sup> Among other things, the AD&T contained "a brief declaration or summary of the principles maintained by the presbytery, as to doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, in agreeableness to the word of God, our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and whole covenanted testimony of the Church of Scotland — the contrary doctrines condemned."<sup>94</sup>

In Article VII ("Of the Mediator") of this supplemental declaration, the Reformed Presbytery articulates its understanding of Christ's kingship over the church. In their view, "the Lord Jesus Christ is, by the appointment of God the Father, set as King upon his holy hill of Zion; over which, as his special kingdom, he is invested with an absolute power and supremacy, as the sole and only

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> *The Act, Declaration, and Testimony, etc.* E-book can be accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/actdeclarationte00refo/page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



head thereof."<sup>95</sup> Moreover, "as King of Zion, he powerfully and irresistibly, in a day of efficacious grace, subdues the perverse hearts and wills of sinners unto his obedience, persuading and enabling as many as were appointed to obtain salvation through him, to believe in his name, in order thereunto."<sup>96</sup>

According to this view, the Church is Christ's "special kingdom" over whom He is both the authoritative Head and the efficacious Savior. This presupposes that Christ's kingship and kingdom over the Church must be distinguished from His rule over those outside His church. The notion of Christ ruling over "one kingdom", consisting of both church and state is not only absent, but flatly contradicted, in this statement.

After defining Christ's redemptive kingship over the Church, the Reformed Presbytery immediately proceeds to define His universal authority as the God-man.

Further, the presbytery declare and maintain, that, in subserviency to this, his special mediatory kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ has a supreme and sovereign power given unto him, in heaven and in earth, and over the infernal powers of darkness—angels, authorities and powers being put in subjection to him; that he has the management of all the wheels of providence put into his hand, whereby he restrains, disappoints, and at last totally destroys, all the enemies of his interest and glory; and by which he orders and overrules all the events that fall out in time, for the accomplishment of the great and glorious ends of his incarnation, and lasting good of those that love him; according to Psal. 2:6; Isa. 9:6,7; Isa. 33:22; Matth. 21:5; Isa. 55:4,5; Gen. 49:10; Heb. 3:6; Psal. 110:1, 2; Matth. 28:18; John 7:2; 1 Pet. 3:22; Phil. 2:9-11; Confess. chap. 8 sec. 3; larg. Cat. quest. 45; sh. Cat. quest. 26.<sup>97</sup>

While much could be said regarding the preceding statement, three things are particularly striking. First, Christ's universal authority is said to be "in subserviency to" the agenda and wellbeing of the church as well as "for the accomplishment of the great and glorious ends of his incarnation, and lasting good of those that love him."<sup>98</sup> According to the Reformed Presbytery, Christ's universal authority exists not *primarily* for the purpose of reforming human governments through social and political activism, but rather for the distinctively redemptive agenda of the Great Commission by means of the gospel.

Second, the term "King", which is used earlier in connection with Christ's relationship to His Church, is notably absent here. Instead, Christ's universal authority is described as "a supreme and sovereign power given to him, in heaven and in earth, and over the infernal powers of darkness."<sup>99</sup> This careful choice of words reflects the more restrictive vocabulary of the WS and of Samuel Rutherford.

Third, having previously referred to Christ's Church as "his special kingdom", the Reformed Presbytery now speaks of it as "his special mediatory kingdom". Hence, it is the "mediatory" (that is, redemptive) character of Christ's kingship over the church that, in their view, makes it entirely "special" and distinct from humanity at large. Such vocabulary, once again, adheres closely to the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



more restrictive pattern of the WS. It also indicates a desire to maintain Christ's universal authority without compromising the distinctively redemptive character of the church.

#### **4. William Symington (1795-1862)**

Perhaps the most well-known treatise on the subject of Christ's kingship, on either side of the Atlantic, was written in 1839 by William Symington, a Scottish Reformed Presbyterian minister and theologian during the nineteenth century. The work was entitled, *Messiah the Prince, or The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ*.<sup>100</sup>

Despite writing more than a hundred years after the AD&T, Symington's message, emphasis, and vocabulary all remain in substantial harmony with his confessional heritage. One example of this continuity is the wording of the book's subtitle. By preferring to speak of Christ's universal authority as "dominion" rather than "kingship", Symington reinforces the confessional pattern of the Reformed Presbytery, which spoke of Christ's "kingship" in relation to His Church, and of His universal authority or "dominion" as a subservient element underneath this umbrella.

At the outset, Symington states that "the subject of our present inquiry is, the Mediatorial Dominion of the Son; not that which belongs to him as God, but that with which, by the authoritative act of the Father, he has been officially invested as the Messiah." He elsewhere notes that it is not "necessary that the territory over which [his] sovereignty is exercised by inherent right, and that over which it is exercised by delegated authority, should be actually different in matter or extent."<sup>101</sup> Rather, they "may in reality be the same in substance, and of course equal in extent; the difference consisting in this, that the kingdom over which he, as the Son of God, rules by inherent and original right, he, as Mediator, is authorized to manage and direct for a new end, namely the salvation of men, and the best interests of the church."<sup>102</sup>

Christ's "investiture with mediatorial authority," writes Symington, "thus means his having had conferred on him a right to employ the power which he always possessed as God, for the specific objects of his mediatorial work."<sup>103</sup> Hence, "the essential and mediatorial kingdoms of Christ may, therefore, be co-extensive."<sup>104</sup> According to his view, God the Father has bestowed upon Christ the authoritative right to exercise His existing divine authority for a new purpose: namely, the accomplishment of His mediatorial work of redemption.

Symington devotes his first chapter to "The Necessity of Christ's Mediatorial Dominion". In it, he outlines five reasons for this necessity:<sup>105</sup>

1. The kingly office of Christ is necessary to the fulfillment of God's gracious purposes respecting the elect.
2. To complete the mediatory character itself, such an office was requisite.
3. The kingly dignity of the Mediator is necessary, as a reward of his obedience unto death.

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<sup>100</sup> William Symington. *Messiah the Prince or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ*. (London: T. Nelson, 1881). E-book can be accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n3/mode/2up>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 1-16.

4. Nor is this dominion less requisite to counteract the opposition made to the work of man's salvation by its enemies.
5. The kingly office is not less necessary to meet the need circumstances of Christ's own people.

All five of these reasons are explicitly tied to Christ's redemptive work to save His Church. According to Symington, man's fall into sin made it "necessary that the government of these [i.e. His Church], and of others on their account, should be committed to him who was chosen to be their Saviour", that he might "bestow the benefits of grace on the destined objects of salvation". Therefore, "the end contemplated was nothing less than this: that men might be saved from everlasting destruction" and "that he may not only restrain and conquer all their enemies, but rule and defend themselves."<sup>106</sup> Summing up his case for the necessity of Christ's dominion, he concludes,

Without Christ's kingly work, the gracious purposes of God could not be executed; the mediatorial character itself would not be complete; the work of salvation must continue unrewarded; the enemies of truth and holiness should finally triumph, and the necessities of the children of God remain for ever unsupplied. Such things cannot — shall not be. "The Lord is our king, and he will save us" (Isa. 33:22). The exalted Redeemer is at once a "Prince and a Saviour" (Acts 5:31).<sup>107</sup>

In his fifth chapter, Symington addresses *The Spirituality of Christ's Mediatorial Dominion*, identifying the Church as Christ's spiritual kingdom in opposition to the earthly kingdoms of this world. The author uses terms such as *dominion*, *kingdom*, and *church* interchangeably throughout the chapter.

The spiritual origin of Christ's dominion is seen in the fact that it "originates solely in the immediate divine appointment, in the spiritual grant of his Father from all everlasting in the covenant of grace... To such an origin, no kingdom of this world can lay claim."<sup>108</sup>

The spiritual ends (or purposes) of Christ's kingdom are presented in stark contrast to those of this world. "The immediate ends for which kingdoms are set up among men are, of course, worldly ends." For instance, "the administration of public justice, the preservation of peace, the advancement of mortals, and the establishment of social order are immediately contemplated by civil authority." And, although "proper in themselves," such worldly ends "are different from, and inferior to, the ends of Christ's mediatorial dominion." By contrast, the spiritual ends of Christ's dominion "bear a closer relation to the value of the soul, the greatness of the human mind, the vastness of human desires, the immortal destiny of man."<sup>109</sup> Christ's dominion exists

To give light to them that are in darkness, to rescue from the tyranny of sinful passions, to purge the conscience from dead works, to renovate the heart, to sanctify the life, to swallow up death in victory, and to shut the mouth of the infernal abyss — in one word, to save the soul — is the grand end of the mediatorial dominion.<sup>110</sup>

The contrast between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world could not be starker.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 15-16. See <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n129/mode/2up>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 53. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 53.

A worldly kingdom has to do with the lives and property of men, that of Christ with their hearts and consciences. The one has a respect to their interests in the world that now is, the other to those in the world that is to come. The one aims at making men good subjects, the other at making them true saints. The ends contemplated by the kingdoms of this world terminate in time, but those contemplated by the dominion of the Mediator point forward to, and can be consummated only in, an eternal state of being.<sup>111</sup>

Symington is quick to qualify that "earthly dominion may be so conducted as to subserve the interests of the soul and of eternity, just as the dominion of the Mediator cannot but produce the temporal interests and social advantages of mankind." However, he notes, "we speak now, not of the collateral or indirect tendencies of each, but of their direct and immediate ends, which are in the one case worldly, and in the other spiritual. 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost'"<sup>112</sup> In other words, he is not denying that Christ's work of redemption in the hearts of His people will have a powerful tendency to transform their earthly vocations, families, communities, and nations. He is merely insisting that these indirect effects of human salvation upon earthly life are neither the direct nor the primary focus of Christ's kingdom. They are important, but secondary.

The spiritual administration of Christ's kingdom, according to Symington, is similar to the kingdoms of this world, in that it requires "office-bearers, government, and law". However, "here the officers are not persons invested with magisterial authority, and armed with civil weapons, but pastors and teachers, elders and deacons, endowed with ministerial authority, whose weapons are not carnal, but spiritual." Such officers "bear not the sword, but, entrusted with the keys of the kingdom, view it as their prerogative to 'open or shut' the doors of ecclesiastical privilege according to character... but physical violence they may never use." Rather than employing "standing armies, well-stored magazines, swords, and muskets" as "part of their equipments," they use "the Word of God which is quick and powerful", "the cross, the preaching of which is the most effectual means of turning men from darkness to light", and "the example of [Christ] who is the great pattern of perfection." These, contends Symington, "under the hallowed influence of the Holy Spirit of all grace, are the means of enlightening, renewing, sanctifying, and consoling men, and of thus bringing them to be, and qualifying them to act, as subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom."<sup>113</sup>

Concerning the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, Symington asserts that "almost every thing connected with this kingdom is spiritual."

The King himself is no worldly prince, but the Lord from heaven, who is a quickening spirit. The subjects are a spiritual community, consisting of persons who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit as an essential and indispensable qualification to their admission; for "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" [John 3:3]... Thus, in whatever light we contemplate it, the spirituality of Christ's kingdom stands forth as a prominent and well-established feature... Well mightest thou say, O Jesus! 'My kingdom is not of this world.'<sup>114</sup>

At the same time, while "the kingdom of Christ is truly spiritual", yet "connected with this kingdom, it seems there may be many things which are properly secular." That is, "the kingdom

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 53. See <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n167/mode/2up/>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 53-54. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 54-56. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 57.

of Christ is not of this world; yet many worldly things are connected with Christ's kingdom." This is because "the subjects of this spiritual kingdom, after being separated by grace from the world lying in wickedness, continue for a length of time in this lower region of human existence before they are prepared for being transferred to that brighter, and higher, and more spiritual sphere in which they are to exist forever." Therefore, "although not of this world as to their character, they are in this world as respects their place of abode." They may, as saints, "number among the ranks of Christ's spiritual subjects," yet "as men and as citizens they occupy their places and act their parts in the offices and institutions of civil society."<sup>115</sup>

The fact that believers "have bodies" means that "this kingdom can never be so strictly spiritual as to exclude all sort of connection with matter." Moreover, "while God has a visible church in the world, there will be required outward [buildings] for the ordinances of worship, and temporal [funds] for the support of ministers and institutions." For this reason, "the dominion of Christ... includes all creatures without exception; not merely the church (visible and invisible), but all things, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, moral and immoral, individual and social, ecclesiastical and political."<sup>116</sup> In this sense, "the dominion of the Messiah may extend over many things besides the church, and may comprehend many creatures besides the saints, and yet embrace nothing but what is somehow or another fitted to be a service to these", since "whatever power the Mediator possesses is for the good of the church."<sup>117</sup>

According to Symington, Christ's universal "dominion" is not only subservient to the spiritual interests of Christ's kingdom (i.e. the church); but, in a sense, dependent on it.

But for the church, would the sun continue to shine, the rain to fall, the earth to vegetate? Would the wheels of providence continue to revolve, or the pillars of the universe to be upheld? No. The church is the great conservative element of the world and all that is in it; nor is there any thing which is not capable of being rendered, by infinite wisdom and power, subservient to the interests of God's covenant society.<sup>118</sup>

In conclusion, Symington writes, "We call [Christ's kingdom] a spiritual kingdom, inasmuch as the great design of its existence is spiritual, notwithstanding that, among the things connected with it, there may be many that are material." He closes his treatment of the spirituality of Christ's kingdom by warning that "the view now given of the kingly office of Christ is one of great importance", given that "the tendency to take a carnal view of his kingdom is deeply seated in the human heart, and has appeared in various forms."<sup>119</sup>

Having observed Symington's robust emphasis upon the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, one might conclude that he had very little interest in calling civil rulers to submit to the Mediator. Nothing could be further from the truth. In no uncertain terms, he repeatedly asserts that "God has placed the affairs of the moral universe in the hands of his Son as Mediator."<sup>120</sup> The societal implications of this reality, according to Symington, are nothing less than revolutionary.

The moral law and all the precepts of Scripture are administered by Christ. Communities, as well as individuals are under the divine law. Such commands, therefore, as are found in the Word of God, applicable to nations and their rulers, are to be regarded as issuing from

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 59. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph) See <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n174/mode/2up/>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 60. (Includes all preceding quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 64. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 215. See <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n329/mode/2up/>.

the divine Mediator, who is invested with all possible sovereignty and power; with not merely physical control, but moral dominion.<sup>121</sup>

For Symington, Christ's universal dominion also forms the basis of our Lord's Great Commission to disciple, baptize, and teach all nations. In fact, "it is only in virtue of his sovereignty over the nations that he could issue such a mandate."<sup>122</sup>

When the ambassadors of Jesus visit foreign lands to [spread] the knowledge of the Gospel, however exclusive the laws and strict the prohibitions of these lands against foreign intrusion, they are not to be regarded as lawless aggressors. Jealous [dictators] may refuse to acknowledge the King in whose name they come... but they have a right to enter, and as faithful and authorized ambassadors, have a right to negotiate with the inhabitants of all lands in behalf of their Sovereign Lord. It may be their duty to use caution and exercise prudence in introducing themselves into heathen kingdoms; but they are to regard themselves as fully entitled to be heard.<sup>123</sup>

As important as it is, the right of missionaries to enter foreign nations is by no means "the only thing that is secured by the Messiah's headship over the nations." In addition to this, our sovereign King provides "a way for the success of their cause, and the protection of their persons." Indeed, "in this capacity, the Mediator will ultimate bring about an entire change in the character and constitutions of the nations of the world."<sup>124</sup>

At present, the nations are all, more or less, in a state of hostility to the Redeemer; either sunk in criminal apathy, or extensively pervaded with pagan and anti-Christian leaven. A numerous and influential class have given their power and strength to the Beast. The authority and law of the Redeemer are not regarded; his glory is not contemplated; the true interests of his Church are opposed or forgotten. It will be otherwise, however, in the end. When "kings shall be nursing fathers and their queens nursing mothers" to the Church; when "the Zion of the Holy One of Israel shall suck the breasts of kings;" when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ;" the nations of this earth will assume an aspect very different from the present. The basis of their organization will then be the Word of God, and the aim of their administration, the glory of Christ: their officers shall be peace and their exactors righteousness; and the spirit which shall pervade all their actions, shall be the pure spirit of the Gospel. But by whom is this change to be effected? How is this revolution to be brought about? By the overruling providence and gracious energy of Him who is Governor among the nations.<sup>125</sup>

Symington's unflinching emphasis on the church's spiritual mission, in combination with his zeal to assert Christ's authority over the nations, is not only a *striking* combination; it is a thoroughly *Biblical* and *confessional* combination. It bears all the marks of substantial continuity with the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian tradition as considered above. Apart from his occasional use of the phrase "King of Nations" to describe Christ's relationship to the state, he maintains, for the most part, the more careful and restrictive vocabulary of the WS. Moreover, aside from his slightly increased emphasis on postmillennial eschatology, the doctrinal content of *Messiah the Prince* is virtually identical to that of previous centuries. All in all, Symington seems content to proclaim

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 217-18.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 228. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph) See <https://archive.org/details/messiahtheprince00symiuoft/page/n343/mode/2up/>.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 228-29.



Christ as "head over all things for the church" in the precisely same careful and gospel-centered way as his Reformed Presbyterian forefathers.

### **5. Andrew Symington (1785-1853)**

Andrew Symington was not as widely known as his younger brother William. Nevertheless, by God's grace, he exerted a significant influence upon the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the nineteenth century. Having studied for the ministry under the grandson of Rev. John McMillan, the elder Symington was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1809, later granted the chair of theological instruction in 1818, and known for writing and speaking on theological topics of various kinds.

In a lecture entitled, "Introductory Principles of the Second Reformation" (1841), Andrew Symington asks the question, "What, then, are the principles which the men of the Second Reformation have transmitted as a precious inheritance to their children?"<sup>126</sup> He then proceeds to answers, in the first place, that "the Universal Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ must take the lead here" in that "He is given to be the head over all things to the church."<sup>127</sup> The Covenanters, he argues, "viewed [Christ's] universal supremacy as essentially connected with his headship over the church" such that "the exclusive headship of Jesus over his church, was the grand and leading principle of the Second Reformation, into which all its other principles may be resolved."<sup>128</sup> "But, besides this," he adds, "they acted upon the principle of the subjection of civil rulers to Jesus Christ; not that they viewed civil government as originating in the dispensation of grace, but as placed, with other moral ordinances, under the feet of Christ."<sup>129</sup> While church and state each retained "its own independent jurisdiction,"<sup>130</sup> yet "it was a fixed principle of that period, that civil society should acknowledge Divine Revelation, bow at the footstool of Jesus 'throne, and erect its constitution, enact its laws, and conduct its administration, in subserviency to the interests of the kingdom of Christ"<sup>131</sup>, who is Himself both "King in Zion, and Prince of the Kings of the earth."<sup>132</sup> "The headship of Christ," he declares, "is the grand sun of the Second Reformation, irradiating all its parts, and binding them in sacred harmony."<sup>133</sup>

According to the elder Symington, "the great objects before us" are "to make Jesus King—to bring the King back to his OWN HOUSE—to assert the honours of the Redeemer's crown, proclaiming him King in Zion, and Lord of all... and to direct our hopes and endeavours forward to the days of millennial glory."<sup>134</sup> Indeed, "the Saviour shall yet be crowned King of Zion, and King of Nations."<sup>135</sup> and His people must pray that God would "hasten the day, auspicious for our land and for other lands, when the King shall be brought back to his house, and all people, and nations, and languages, shall "be of one heart to make Jesus King."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Andrew Symington, *Introductory Principles of the Second Reformation*. (Glasgow, 1841).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

It is noteworthy that Andrew Symington did not regard the Mediator's universal headship as a distinctive doctrinal position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Indeed, "there are others in the established church, and these not few, who will acknowledge the greater part of these principles, if not the whole of them, and who are fain to think that the principles of the period referred to, are still unquestionably the principles upon which she stands." With such persons, he adds, "we have no debate whatever on abstract scriptural principles."<sup>137</sup>

In a subsequent lecture entitled, "The Headship of Christ Over the Nations" (1841), Symington provides further insight into this important subject.<sup>138</sup> Christ's headship, he asserts, must be defined as "a headship of authority and moral supremacy, not a headship of providential rule and physical control."<sup>139</sup> As our Mediator, Christ not only orchestrates every detail of human history, such that "the Church of God is the supreme and ultimate interest to which all others are made subservient."<sup>140</sup> He also rules "in the sense of moral sovereignty, implying a right to legislate, to command obedience, and to reward and punish accordingly."<sup>141</sup>

Therefore, he writes, "the kingdom of Christ is set up in opposition, to recall not only individual but social man to obedience to God from whom he has revolted,"<sup>142</sup> which "we know shall be the grand result in the period of millennial prosperity."<sup>143</sup> Our Lord's "commission to teach all nations... as it extends to the whole world, will yet exert an influence upon the state of the nations,"<sup>144</sup> such that "in the glory of the millennium, Christ shall be declared King of nations, as well as King of Saints and King of Zion."<sup>145</sup>

By what means will Christ bring the nations under His dominion? According to the elder Symington, it is through the spread of the gospel.

Ministers are authorised to go throughout the world, and thus instruct all nations upon the face of the earth; and the object of their ministry cannot be said to be completely accomplished, until nations as such, shall have submitted to the rule of righteousness. Individuals, indeed, may be converted, and edified, and glorified; churches may be organised, and enlarged and comforted; and even bodies politic may experience some advantage from the Christian religion: in all these instances the honour of the deity is promoted on earth, but the object of the ministry of the word of God is not fully answered unless the earth be filled with the glory of the Lord, and all nations be made to feel the influence of Christianity."<sup>146</sup>

For Andrew Symington, the titles "King of Zion" and "Head of the Church" were "indeed the grand distinctive and prominent designation of the Redeemer's authority." First and foremost, He is the King of His Church. Yet it is "worthy of notice that [Christ's] power, even in this special view of it, is often spoken of in terms of the universality," such as when His "commission to preach and baptise is connected with 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [me].'"<sup>147</sup> "The

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>138</sup> Andrew Symington, *The Headship of Christ Over the Nations*. (Glasgow, 1841).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

universality of his power," therefore, "was placed by himself in connection with a commission embracing all the world and all the nations."<sup>148</sup> In other words, Christ has "acquired a right... to the persons of the elect", thereby authorizing Him to "go through the world, find, renew, sanctify them, and bring them to glory."<sup>149</sup> This authority enables Him "to institute means for the salvation of the redeemed, to employ these means, and to make them effectual in a world lying in wickedness, where social institutions are ungodly and immoral, requires an authority over them."<sup>150</sup>

In response to Christ's universal authority, "nations, enjoying divine revelation, must bow to Christ as king of nations, and acknowledge explicitly that religion of which he is the author."<sup>151</sup> They are not only "under obligation to recognise and cherish the interests of the church of Christ"<sup>152</sup>, but also "to diffuse abroad the religion of Jesus, by providing for an education of youth founded upon its principles, and co-operating with the church of God in extending the kingdom of Christ."<sup>153</sup> In a word, he explains, "now that the Messiah has appeared, we might plead for a Christocracy."<sup>154</sup>

For the elder Symington, the fact that "Christ's kingdom is not of this world," does not change the equally Scriptural fact that "the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."<sup>155</sup> In the meantime, he declares, believers ought to employ "the Holy Scriptures and the Redeemer's headship... as a test by which to prove the claims the kingdoms of the earth have upon the approbation, the affections, and the conscientious subjection of those who profess" to follow Christ.<sup>156</sup>

In conclusion, he notes that the leaders of the Second Reformation were not content merely to honor "the King of Zion in pleading for the liberty and independence of his kingdom, and asserting his sole headship over the church." They also sought to honor "the King of nations" by requiring "the kingdom to constitute, appoint rulers, enact laws, and administer righteousness, not in hostility to his kingdom, not in utter neglect of it, but in subserviency to it, without any compromise of independent jurisdiction either on the one hand or on the other."<sup>157</sup> Indeed, "while they regarded the only King in Zion as the legitimate Husband of the Church, they saw in his headship over the nations, a right on his part to employ them in casting protection around her externally, when in circumstances that required it."<sup>158</sup>

As such, "the doctrine of the headship of Christ over the nations supplies an important truth for the testimony of the church" and "should have a distinct place in the church's confession."<sup>159</sup> It "provides for bringing all the relations of life, and all the institutions and improvements of society under the hallowing influence of Christianity" such that "the arts and sciences, and the very wealth of society will become Holiness to the Lord, and be consecrated to the God of the whole earth."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 143-44.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 151-52.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 158.



Looking by faith to the future, Andrew Symington rejoiced at the thought of a day when the gospel will "carry its blessed peaceful triumphs over the nations, bringing them in subjection to the law of God, and the Redeemer be honoured as King of saints and King of nations."<sup>161</sup> "It is delightful to think that when the millions of the human family shall be converted to Christ, they shall be united as a royal priesthood and a holy nation."<sup>162</sup> Indeed, he asserts,

We know that the Redeemer has received the uttermost ends of the earth for his possession, and that he shall inherit all nations. The Jews shall be restored to the church, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought in. All ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. The pagan nations shall be turned to the Lord, and shall found their social institutions upon the principles of true religion.<sup>163</sup>

It is impossible to read this older brother of William Symington without observing a striking level continuity between His own gospel-centered, church-centered conception of Christ's kingship and that of his covenanter forefathers. At the same time, his writings reveal at least four key *developments in emphasis*, all of which are, to some extent, present in the writings of his younger brother William.

1. An increased emphasis upon the historical realization of Christ's kingship by way of a highly optimistic or postmillennial eschatology.
2. An increased emphasis upon the development and promotion of a constructive Scriptural blueprint for Christian society and politics.
3. An increased willingness, albeit with qualification, to employ the phrases "King of Nations" and "King of Zion" as distinct, yet parallel phrases in reference to Christ the Mediator.
4. An increased emphasis upon use of Christ's universal authority as a test whereby Christians should evaluate not only the morality of the existing civil government, but also its legitimacy as a God-ordained institution.

While none of these developments represents a fundamental departure from the past,<sup>164</sup> they do reveal a shift in emphasis among Scottish Reformed Presbyterians in the nineteenth century. As we will see, a similar shift took place among Reformed Presbyterians across the Atlantic during this period. This shift would eventually play a significant role in impacting the church's understanding and application of Christ's mediatorial kingship in future centuries.

## **PART SIX — The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)**

The first Reformed Presbyterian congregation to be officially organized in North America was established in Middle Octorara in Lancaster County Pennsylvania in 1738. The Reformed Presbytery was later constituted in 1774 by ministers sent for that very purpose: Rev. John Cuthbertson, who came from Scotland in 1752, along with Rev. Matthew Linn and Rev. Alexander

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>164</sup> One could argue that this fourth development, respecting the illegitimacy of civil governments who refuse to recognize Christ, is a fundamental departure from the earlier confessional view. However, given the unique political context existing in Scotland (as a legally covenanted land in violation of its covenants), we will choose to pass over this matter until it reappears in North America, where the case is more clear-cut.

Dobbin, who came from Ireland in 1774. After its dissolution in 1782,<sup>165</sup> the Reformed Presbytery of the United States of North America was constituted in 1798, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Reformed Presbyterian Synod was first constituted in 1809 and is today known as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA).

### 1. Alexander M'Leod (1774-1833)

Perhaps the most influential RPCNA theologian during its earliest stages of development was Rev. Alexander M'Leod. Ordained to the ministry in 1800, M'Leod served as a Reformed Presbyterian minister in Coldenham, New York for over thirty years. During this time, he wrote various theological treatises, and, for a time, served as the denomination's Professor of Theology.

In 1803, M'Leod authored a small book entitled, *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth*. In it, he asserted on the basis of Revelation 1:5 that Jesus Christ presently sits enthroned in heaven as "the Prince of the Kings of the earth." Writing almost four decades before the Symingtons in Scotland, he asserts that "Christ, as Mediator, rules over all the nations of the earth"<sup>166</sup> and regularly employs the phrases "King of Saints" and "King of Nations" to describe His relationship to the church and state respectively.

Concerning the necessity and purpose of Christ's headship, M'Leod states that "it is necessary that he be appointed head over all things to the church" in order to "give efficacy to his gospel, to reward him for his abatement, and to afford safety to his church."<sup>167</sup> Concerning the necessity of our Mediator's two natures, he explains,

As the Mediator was God, he could not, by becoming man, have divested himself of divine attributes. Although he voluntarily entered into a relation inferior to that in which the Father stood, this did not imply a diminution of essential perfection. In the mediatorial character, his person continued omniscient and omnipotent. He necessarily possessed *ability* to govern the nations; but in this official capacity he stood in need of *authority*. He had *dunamis* (physical power), of himself, but he received *exousia* (moral power) from God (Matt. 28:18).<sup>168</sup>

Unlike his seventeenth and eighteenth centuries predecessors in Scotland, M'Leod seems to employ the phrases "as Mediator" and "mediatorial character" in a broadly *Christological* sense rather than in a strictly *ecclesiastical* or *soteriological* sense. He tends to regard a thing as "mediatorial" if it is true of Christ as the God-man, even if it is not directly connected with the church or with the eternal salvation of the elect. Hence, he can apply the term "mediatorial" to Christ's universal authority without falling into the trap of either soteriological or ecclesiastical

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<sup>165</sup> In 1782, a vast majority of the Reformed Presbyterians and Associate Presbyterians (aka. Seceders) merged to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. These two groups had long disputed over the issue of political dissent from the colonial British government, which the RP's held to be in violation of its covenants. In the years immediately following the American revolution, this became less of a sticking point and the two groups quickly merged. During this period, the American states were governed by the Articles of Confederation and most retained an explicitly Christian constitution. The adoption of the US Constitution, which established the federal government along secular lines, was not to be adopted until 1789-90. It is unlikely that the merger of 1782 would have taken place under the US Constitution, due to its secular nature and protection of slavery. It is also unlikely that the few scattered "holdouts" from that merger would have gained the momentum necessary to grow into what we now know as the RPCNA, had these inherent flaws in the US Constitution not provided them with the necessary motivation for principled political dissent.

<sup>166</sup> Alexander M'Leod, *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth*. 1803 (Glasgow: Printed by Stephen Young, Prince's Street, 1804) E-book can be accessed online at <https://books.google.com/books?id=TaJhAAAAcAAJ&>.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. See <https://books.google.com/books?id=TaJhAAAAcAAJ&>.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

universality. His use of this language does not imply that Christ mediates universally. It simply means that Christ possesses universal authority in His capacity as the theanthropic (God-man) Mediator.

In keeping with the gospel-centered approach of his predecessors, M'Leod emphasizes the importance of the Great Commission as an expression of Christ's universal authority. "The Mediator," he writes, "declaring that all power on earth is his (Matt. 28:18), commissions his messengers to enter every nation... clad in spiritual armour, to display his banner among."<sup>169</sup> He also "prepares the way for their entrance by opening a great and effectual door, and constantly encourages them, by announcing, in the clearest manner, his right and his power to rule the nations in the exercise of his mediatorial office."<sup>170</sup> "The gospel, the rod of his strength, he sends out of Zion; his spirit he sends along with it; and thus he gathers together those whom the Father hath given him from among the nations."<sup>171</sup>

As sinners are brought to Christ, says M'Leod, "he makes them sensible that there is no concern or business incident to humanity, either in an individual or collective capacity, which the principles and motives of Christianity ought not to pervade and govern."<sup>172</sup> Although "the Church of Christ is a kingdom not of this world," yet "the kingdoms of the world are bound to recognise its existence." Indeed, "it is impossible to legislate in a country where Christianity is generally embraced, precisely in the same manner as if no such thing existed."<sup>173</sup> Therefore, our exalted Mediator "demands of all his subjects to bow the knee before him" and "requires of the powers which are named in this world, that in their official stations they would remove impediments to the progress of religion, and afford protection to his church."<sup>174</sup> While M'Leod grants that "the practical application of this principle must, indeed, be regulated in some degree by existing circumstances," he insists that "to reject it entirely from theory and practice would be a declaration of hostilities against God."<sup>175</sup>

Unlike his predecessors within the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, M'Leod advocates a "one kingdom" paradigm, in which Christ's other-worldly kingdom (John 18:36) comprises both "the visible church" and "the nations".<sup>176</sup> Both are under Christ and, therefore, both are constituent elements of our Lord's "united kingdom" of church and state. In an attempt to illustrate and defend this view, he notes that "the several states under the [U.S.] federal government are not mingled with one another; but, with respect to the rest, each exercises a distinct sovereignty, although they all be retired under one common head." Therefore, he argues, "there is no inconsistency in teaching the doctrine of Messiah's headship over the nations" and, at the same time, "teaching that the church is to be kept perfectly distinct from the national society." After all, "one respectable character may be a member of the Missionary Society of New-York, and of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia; he may preside over each of these institutions, and they continue perfectly distinct."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 22. See <https://books.google.com/books?id=TaJhAAAAcAAJ&>.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 33.

According to M'Leod's illustration, the relationship between the church and the state under Christ is analogous to the relationship between Pennsylvania and Ohio under the United States Constitution. Both are equal in relation to one another and both are equal in relation to the federal government. In addition, he compares Christ's relationship to the church and the state with an individual who is a member of a missionary society and a philosophical society. Interestingly, such views are similar to those of another RPCNA minister, Rev. Samuel B. Wylie. In that same year (1803), Wylie released *The Two Sons of Oil*, a treatise on Christian principles of civil government, in which he argued that church and state are two distinct branches of the same lampstand.<sup>178</sup> M'Leod, therefore, was not alone in formulating his "one kingdom" approach.

Both M'Leod's viewpoint and his illustrations represent a significant departure from the historic, confessional understanding of Christ's kingship. Previous theologians regarded Christ's universal authority as *subservient to* (and, in some cases, *under the umbrella of*) His redemptive kingship over the Church, in keeping with Ephesians 1:21. They did not regard church and state as two parallel, constituent parts of one universal mediatorial kingdom. Instead, they embraced the confessional distinction between Christ's *particular* kingdom of grace/glory (i.e. the church) and His *universal* kingdom of power over all nations. For them, it would have been unthinkable to place the exalted Body of Christ on equal footing with the political bodies of men, or to place Christ's relationship to His glorious Bride in parallel columns with His relationship to ungodly monarchs. While the same person may be a member of two distinct clubs or societies, King Jesus has only one bride, and His intimate, eternal, saving relationship to *her* is absolutely incomparable.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to lumping church and state together under the umbrella of Christ's one kingdom, M'Leod also seeks to unify God's two covenants with man under the headship of Christ. "There are," he writes, "two grand establishments, agreeably to which God deals with the human family: the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace." He then asserts that "Christ is the administrator of both covenants" and goes on to explain,

The whole bond of the covenant of works was put in his hand. He subscribed this bond, in behalf of his elect, as their surety. He has paid their debt, and administers to them purchased blessings. He exacts payment of the reprobate in his Father's name. He arrests them, and judges them, and condemns them. He executes the sentence, and inflicts upon them death eternal.<sup>180</sup>

With respect to non-Christian civil governments, M'Leod asserts that God "does not approve" and "cannot sanction with his authority that government which is constituted upon immoral

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<sup>178</sup> Samuel B. Wylie, *The Two Sons of Oil; or, The Faithful Witness for Magistracy and Ministry upon a Scriptural Basis*. 1803 (Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Publications, Reprint 2002). *Note*: Due to the specific focus of this paper, we have chosen not to interact with Wylie at this time. His focus is mainly upon the issue of principled political dissent, whereas our focus is upon the our Lord's universal dominion as Mediator. As a denomination, we do not believe that principled political dissent (as proposed by Wylie and practiced historically by the RPCNA) is a necessary implication or application of Christ's universal dominion as Mediator. In other words, it is possible to agree with Wylie's Christology (i.e. mediatorial dominion) and yet strongly disagree with his theology of the civil magistrate (i.e. principled political dissent from a non-covenanted civil government). From a confessional standpoint, the case could be made that the Westminster Standards themselves support such a stance (i.e. mediatorial dominion minus political dissent) in today's North American context. Historically, RP's in Scotland have practiced political dissent due to their understanding of the perpetual obligation of the Scottish covenants, and not *merely* due to their affirmation of Christ's mediatorial kingship. Had our committee been asked to focus specifically upon national covenanting and the practice of political dissent (as opposed to Christ's mediatorial kingship and its direct implications in North America today), we would likely have spent more time interacting with Wylie.

<sup>179</sup> Roughly four decades later in Scotland, the Symingtons would occasionally employ a similar kind of parallel phraseology ("King of Nations" and "King of Saints"). However, they were likewise careful to affirm the superiority uniqueness of the church as Christ's particular kingdom.

<sup>180</sup> *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth*. See <https://books.google.com/books?id=TaJhAAAACAAJ&>.

principles."<sup>181</sup> Therefore, "To an immoral constitution he never shall require the obedience, the allegiance, the subscription, or the support of his subjects." He continues,

Such powers as oppose God or Christ are not ordained of God in any other sense than the prince of the power of the air, whom they serve, is; nor does God require that every soul should obey them. The authority which he sanctions, and to which he demands conscientious allegiance, is one which is a terror to them who do evil, and a praise to them who do well. Submission to such is submission to God; allegiance to governments of a contrary character is rebellion against Heaven. God is, however, a God of order, and your weapons, Christians are not carnal. Conformity to the general order of society is a duty, provided this can be done without violating the divine law. If this be all that is meant by submission to government, there is no inconsistency in it, with allegiance to the King of nations. And, perhaps, the conscientious obedience of the most of men to the powers that be includes no more than this, except what arises from mere selfish principles.<sup>182</sup>

In describing the work of the gospel ministry, M'Leod exhorts ministers to preach more frequently about Biblical principles of civil government and to promote the subjection of the state to Christ. "While you profess to love the dear Redeemer, and lead sinners to his cross for pardon and peace, will you not exalt him, and demand obedience to him from the kings of the earth." Moreover, since the Bible speaks of "remarkable periods of history" and "the influence of political movements upon the church", so these themes are to be "held up for imitation" by preachers of the gospel in every age.<sup>183</sup>

Despite adopting a "one kingdom" view, M'Leod remains, for the most part, in substantial harmony with a confessional understanding of Christ's kingship. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid classifying his writings as idiosyncratic. Moreover, when we consider (1) the ease with which he places the church on parallel footing with the state, (2) his confusing attempt to define political dissent, and (3) his emphasis upon political preaching, we cannot but regard him as a harbinger of things to come in the RPCNA throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond.

## **2. Reformation Principles Exhibited (1806)**

In 1806, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of the United States of North America approved a volume entitled, *Reformation Principles Exhibited* (RPE), which was to serve as their official ecclesiastical constitution.<sup>184</sup> In addition to the Westminster Standards, the volume included a doctrinal testimony, clarifying the theological positions of the church and condemning various errors. The chief author of this volume was Rev. Alexander M'Leod, who likely received assistance

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 46. (All quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>184</sup> *Reformation Principles Exhibited by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. 1806.* (Philadelphia: Isaac Ashmead, 1849). E-book can be accessed online at <https://books.google.com/books?id=-qxDAQAAMAAJ&>; or at <https://archive.org/details/reformationprinc00refo/page/n6/mode/2up>

from Rev. William Gibson<sup>185</sup> and Rev. John Black.<sup>186</sup> Given McLeod's influential role in drafting RPE, one might expect that its Testimony would simply reiterate the peculiar ideas contained in *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth*. However, this is not the case. By and large, it reflects substantial continuity with the AD&T of the Reformed Presbytery in Scotland, even in those places where M'Leod himself appears to deviate.

When addressing Christ's mediatorial office — as Prophet, Priest, and King — the Testimony emphasizes the exclusivity of His redemptive mediation *for* the Church and the uniqueness of His redemptive headship over the Church. For instance, in Chapter 7 ("Of Christ the Mediator"), it asserts that God "in his eternal purpose" chose to ordain "the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only Mediator between God and man, and to constitute him the public Head and Representative of all the elect."<sup>187</sup> As such, He "will never cease to be the Mediator; but as the Prophet, the Priest, and the King, shall remain through eternity in full possession of the glory of God, the head of his body, the Church."<sup>188</sup>

In Chapter 10 ("Of Christ's Satisfaction"), the Testimony admits that "the reprobate world, by means of their connection with God's elect... are partakers of some benefits which flow from Christ's death."<sup>189</sup> However, it subsequently condemns the error "That Christ purchased any benefit for the reprobate."<sup>190</sup>

In terms of covenant theology, Chapter 19 ("Of the State of Men After Death") simply states that the "God-man, the Mediator, shall sit in judgment upon all mankind."<sup>191</sup> It nowhere affirms M'Leod's view that Christ is thereby made "administrator of both covenants." Rather, it stresses Christ as the Mediator and Administrator of the Covenant of Grace on behalf of His elect. In Chapter 9 ("Of the Covenant of Grace"), it declares that "God, from all eternity, having foreseen the fall of man, by the breach of the covenant of works" constituted "the Lord Jesus Christ as the public head of elect sinners" to "fulfill the law, and satisfy Divine Justice, as their substitute." Therefore, "having fulfilled the condition of the Covenant of Grace" Christ, "the Mediator between God and man, makes of the Covenant of Grace a testamentary dispensation to all his people" as "his own proper testament, which he ever lives to execute and administer," such that "every blessing which God promises to bestow upon believers, and everything which they receive in time, and through eternity, comes through the channel of the Covenant of Grace."<sup>192</sup>

Chapter 20 ("Of Christ's Headship) addresses the universal authority of Christ and is noteworthy for at least three reasons. First, the AD&T had only included one brief statement on this topic

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<sup>185</sup> "New York, May 12, 1806 — The Reformed Presbytery, impressed with the duty of exhibiting a *Historical View* of the Christian Church, as a Testimony of their thankfulness to God for his goodness to his covenant people, and of their approbation of the faithful contending of the saints; and also to serve as a means of instruction to those who are desirous to understand the Presbytery's FIXED TESTIMONY, do hereby ratify and approve of the Preface and the *Brief Historical View of the Church*, with the Proposed Amendments and Additions; and they hereby also appoint Messrs. William Gibson and Alexander McLeod a committee to insert those amendments and additions in their proper places, and to publish the word with all convenient speed." *Reformation Principles Exhibited by The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: J.W. Pratt Company: 1899) 3.

<sup>186</sup> "Alexander McLeod, with help from John Black, drafted the third and most influential manifesto of the new Reformed Presbytery, *Reformation Principles Exhibited* by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States, which was adopted in 1806." William J. Edgar, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (1871-1920): Living By Its Covenant of 1871* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2019) 14.

<sup>187</sup> *Reformation Principles Exhibited*, (Philadelphia, 1849), 169 (7.1). See <https://archive.org/details/reformationprinc00refo/page/169/mode/1up>.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 171 (7.6).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 181 (10.4).

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 183 (Error 7).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 215 (19.3).

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-79 (9.1, 2, 4, 6, 8) Includes all quotations in this paragraph.

under the heading "Of Christ the Mediator". By contrast, the Testimony devotes an entire chapter to it. This reveals a growing appreciation for this doctrine and a more thorough development of its implications. Second, the decision to address "Christ the Mediator" in Chapter 7 and "The Headship of Christ" in Chapter 20, indicates an important distinction between Christ's *redemptive mediation* for His Church, on the one hand, and His *authoritative headship* over all things, on the other. Third, the title of Chapter 20 ("Of Christ's Headship") reveals a preference for careful, scriptural, and confessional language. Rather than referring to Christ as "mediatorial king of the nations" — a phrase which might unintentionally imply a sort of universal mediation for the non-elect — the Testimony speaks of Christ as the authoritative "Head over all things for the church", according to the language of Ephesians 1:21.

In Chapter 20, the Testimony states that Christ has been "appointed to the highest power and glory" such that "in his exalted state he rules in and over all his children, as their living Head and Lawgiver, and governs all creatures and all their actions for his own glory and our salvation, as Head over all things to the Church, which is his body." It also recognizes Him as "the King and Head of his Church."<sup>193</sup> As a theologian, M'Leod's personal tendency was to place the church and the nations in parallel columns under Christ, as *King of Saints* and *King of Nations*. In writing the Testimony, however, he emphasizes the uniqueness and superiority of the church, as historically confessed by Reformed Presbyterians. He also follows the more historic vocabulary by reserving the term *King* for Christ's relationship to the church and choosing other terms to speak of His universal *authority* or *dominion*.

Chapter 20 continues by stating that "Submission is due to the mediatory authority, from all the intelligent creatures of God." It then declares,

Men, not only as saints and church members, but also in every possible relation and condition, are under obligation to subserve his gracious purposes according to his law. The holy angels minister, under his directions, to the heirs of salvation.

4. The administration of the kingdom of Providence is subordinate to the dispensation of grace; Christ Jesus, as the head of the Church, rules by his infinite power, and in perfect wisdom and justice, over all parts of the inanimate and irrational creation, and over all wicked men and devils; making them, and all their changes, counsels, and efforts subservient to the manifestation of God's glory, in the system of redemption.<sup>194</sup>

Having articulated its gospel-centered view of Christ's kingship, the Testimony proceeds to condemn the error "That the authority of the God-man, as Mediator, is confined to his saints, and does not extend to all the creatures of God" as well as the error "That there is any creature or institution which is not subjected to Christ for the good of his Church."<sup>195</sup>

It is notable that while the Testimony openly affirms Christ's universal authority — even speaking of it as His "*mediatory* authority" — it nowhere refers to this authority as *kingship* or to Christ as *King of Nations*. Rather, it employs the more careful, confessional vocabulary of the WS and the AD&T.

The Testimony touches on the issue of political dissent in Chapter 29 ("Of Civil Government"), stating that "It is lawful for Christians residing in nations in which the light of the gospel has not

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 218 (20.1-2) Includes all quotations in this paragraph.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 219 (20.3-4).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 220 (Errors 1, 3).

been generally diffused, to continue in submission to such authority as may exist over them, agreeably to the law of nature." In such instances, "the infidelity of the ruler cannot make void the just authority conferred upon him by the constitution."<sup>196</sup> This would appear to limit the application of WCF 23.4 regarding the legitimacy of unbelieving magistrates to lands which remain untouched by the gospel.

The issue of political dissent is further developed in Chapter 30 ("Of the Right of Dissent from a Constitution of Civil Government"), which asserts that "It is the duty of Christians, for the sake of peace and order, and in humble resignation to God's good providence, to conform to the common regulations of society in things lawful; but to profess allegiance to no constitution of government which is in hostility to the kingdom of Christ, the Head of the Church, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."<sup>197</sup> This statement, which reiterates M'Leod's position on American political dissent, represents the only instance in which the Testimony employs shades of M'Leod's parallel phraseology ("Head of the Church" and "Prince of the kings of the earth") to describe Christ.

The Terms of Communion listed in the Appendix of RPE make no mention of Christ's universal or "mediatory" authority over the nations, and merely allude to the notion of principled political dissent. According to Term 5, all communicant members must profess

5. An approbation of the faithful contending of the martyrs of Jesus, and of the present Reformed Covenanted Churches in Britain and Ireland, against Paganism, Popery, Prelacy, and against immoral constitutions of civil government, together with all Erastian toleration and persecution's which flow therefrom, as containing a noble example for us and our posterity to follow in contending for all divine truth, and in testifying against all contrary evils which may exist in the corrupt constitutions of either Church or state.<sup>198</sup>

Perhaps the most striking feature of RPE and its doctrinal Testimony is how little it appears to have been affected by the distinctive (and, at times, idiosyncratic) views and expressions of its primary author, Rev. Alexander M'Leod.

### **3. David Scott (1794-1871)**

David Scott was licensed by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland (Glasgow Presbytery) in 1824. He later emigrated to North America, where he was ordained as a home missionary by the Southern Presbytery in 1832. Siding with the Old Lights in 1833,<sup>199</sup> Scott would later pastor RPCNA congregations in both Albany and Rochester, New York. In 1841, he published a volume entitled, *Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*,<sup>200</sup> the second chapter of which is devoted to the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial dominion.

Like William Symington, Scott prefers the phrase *mediatorial dominion* to *mediatorial kingship*. Also in keeping with Symington, he argues that "the mediatorial dominion is of the same extent with the absolute dominion that belongs to God as Creator."<sup>201</sup> In fact, "it is not ability, or natural

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 255 (29.5).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 259 (30.2).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., see <https://archive.org/details/reformationprinc00refo/page/271/mode/1up>.

<sup>199</sup> The RPCNA split in 1833 over the issue of political dissent, with a majority of the church ("new lights") leaving the denomination and a remnant of political dissenters ("old lights") remaining.

<sup>200</sup> David Scott, *The Dominion of Christ*. 1841 (Grand Rapids: Torwood Press, Reprint 2012). This is an excerpt from the larger work, *Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 15.



power to exercise dominion, that is conferred upon Christ" at His ascension, since "the divinity of the Mediator secures to Him the attribute of omnipotence."<sup>202</sup> As such, "the power which He possesses in Himself, as the Son of God, enables Him to perform the functions of His office; but He requires a mediatorial right to exercise this power as Mediator."<sup>203</sup> In this sense, "the gift of moral power gives the Mediator a right to govern;" whereas "the divinity of the Mediator qualifies Him for the exercise of the right" such that "the former is... delegated" and "the latter is not, and cannot be conferred."<sup>204</sup>

Scott proceeds to warn his readers not to "confound the mediatorial kingdom with the kingdom of grace," since "they are, however, distinct."<sup>205</sup> The distinction lies in the fact that "the kingdom of grace includes only believers," whereas "the mediatorial dominion includes the whole kingdom of providence."<sup>206</sup> As such, "The administration of the latter is given to the Mediator for the sake of the former."<sup>207</sup> It is significant that Scott here distinguishes Christ's headship over the church from His headship over the nations by appealing to the kingdom theology of the WS. The church, he argues, is Christ's "kingdom of grace" in distinction from the nations, which He rules by His "kingdom of providence", a phrase which is likely synonymous with "kingdom of power" as it appears the WS. His formulation is in lock step with the historic confessional view, as well as that of William Symington.

Scott also follows Symington in regard to the purpose and necessity of Christ's dominion. "The possession of dominion," he writes, "was necessary to the performance of the mediatorial functions" such that "without kingly power, the Mediator would not be a complete Saviour."<sup>208</sup> He also states that "the power given to Christ is employed for the benefit of the church, which is His body"<sup>209</sup> and that "as Mediator He receives authority to employ this power for the salvation of sinners."<sup>210</sup> He goes on to assert,

...It is this authority which gave him a right to pluck them as brands out of the burning; to take them from the state of nature, and bring them into the state of grace. Otherwise, any exercise of authority over them would have been an intrusion into a jurisdiction not embraced in the mediatorial charter. The dominion of Christ must necessarily extend beyond the church, or a church never could have been formed in the world.<sup>211</sup>

Throughout the chapter, Scott articulates the gospel-centered, church-oriented purpose of Christ's dominion using the following expressions: **(1)** "for the benefit of the church — the whole elect of God"<sup>212</sup> **(2)** "that He may give practical efficacy to His atonement"<sup>213</sup> **(3)** "that He may institute ordinances in the church"<sup>214</sup> **(4)** "that He may preserve and protect the church"<sup>215</sup> **(5)** "that He may bestow spiritual blessings on the church"<sup>216</sup> **(6)** "that He may provide His people

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 40.

with temporal support"<sup>217</sup> (7) "that He may employ the ministry of angels for the good of the church"<sup>218</sup> (8) "that He may restrain the enemies of the church."<sup>219</sup> (9) "that He may raise the dead, and adjudicate the final condition of men and devils."<sup>220</sup>

A Scotsman by birth, it is perhaps not surprising to find so many similarities of emphasis and vocabulary between Scott and the Symingtons in their respective treatments of Christ's kingship. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the RPCNA had already begun to move away from these historic formulations, shifting its focus to the world of American politics.

#### **4. The Covenant of 1871**

The current version of the RPCNA Constitution includes a helpful section entitled, *History of the Standards*, which informs us that

In 1802 Presbytery appointed a ministry to prepare a Form of Covenant, "containing the spirit of the National and Solemn League." Various forms were prepared in later years, but none was adopted until the one solemnly subscribed by Synod in 1871, and by the several congregations.<sup>221</sup>

The RPCNA's Covenant of 1871 provides us with an accurate reflection of the denomination's overall mindset heading into the latter half of the nineteenth century. It also helps us to understand the church's perspective on Christ's kingship at that time.

Not surprisingly, the Covenant begins with a prefatory confession of sin, including that of having "failed in obedience to His command to preach the Gospel to every creature, to make known His will and law among the nations, and to administer with fidelity the law and discipline of His own house." Confession is then made for the sin of "not testifying fully and clearly in word and act for the claims of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."<sup>222</sup> Then, after stating that "the nation refuses to own its responsibility to God and to the Mediator, to recognize the supremacy of the Bible in National Affairs, and to countenance and encourage the true Christian religion"<sup>223</sup>, a lengthy list of national sins is enumerated, followed by a declaration of humiliation and repentance.

In the body of the Covenant itself, a more detailed theology of civil government is set forth in the following terms.

Persuaded that God is the source of all legitimate power; that he has instituted civil government for His own glory and the good of man; that he has appointed His Son, the Mediator, to headship over the nations; and that the Bible is the supreme law and rule in national as in all other things, we will maintain the responsibility of nations to God, the rightful dominion of Jesus Christ over the commonwealth, and the obligation of nations to legislate in conformity with the written Word. We take ourselves sacredly bound to regulate all our civil relations, attachments, professions and deportment, by our allegiance and loyalty to the Lord, our King, Lawgiver and Judge... We will pray and labor for the

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>221</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2013) I-3.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., I-6.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., I-6.

peace and welfare of our country, and for its reformation by a constitutional recognition of God as the source of all power, of Jesus Christ as the Ruler of Nations, of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme rule, and of the true Christian religion; and we will continue to refuse to incorporate by any act, with the political body, until this blessed reformation has been secured.<sup>224</sup>

With respect to the Great Commission, the Covenant goes on to declare,

Rejoicing that the enthroned Mediator is not only King in Zion, but King over all the earth, and recognizing the obligation of His command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and resting with faith in the promise of His perpetual presence as the pledge of success, we hereby dedicate ourselves to the great work of making known God's light and salvation among the nations, and to this end will labor that the Church may be provided with an earnest, self-denying and able ministry...<sup>225</sup>

It is later added that "we will bear true testimony in word and in deed for every known part of divine truth, and for all the ordinances appointed by Christ in His kingdom; and we will tenderly and charitably, but plainly and decidedly, oppose and discountenance all and every known error, immorality, neglect or perversion of divine institutions." It is difficult to say for certain if the phrase "all the ordinances appointed by Christ in His kingdom" is a reference to the ordinances of the Church or if it should be equated with the subsequent phrase "divine institutions." In either case, the Covenant of 1871 ends with these words,

And our prayer to God is and shall be to strengthen us by His Holy Spirit to keep this our promise, vow, and oath, and to bless our humble attempt to glory His name and honor His truth and cause with such success as will bring salvation to our own souls, the wider spread and triumph of truth and holiness, and the enlargement and establishment of the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Spirit, one God, be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. AMEN.<sup>226</sup>

It is possible that the phrase "the enlargement and establishment of the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" refers exclusively to the building up of His Church through the Great Commission. It is also possible, in contrast to the older view, that this clause refers to everything over which Christ reigns as Head over all things. In either case, the Covenant of 1871 would appear to be the first ecclesiastical document in the Reformed Presbyterian tradition to depart from the older confessional vocabulary in favor of a broader, more ambiguous conception of Christ's kingdom.

It should also be noted that the Covenant of 1871 — being "Sworn and Subscribed by the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America... and by the several congregations — was essentially an ecclesiastical covenant rather than a national covenant. Nevertheless, it is striking that so much of its contents should be devoted to matters of social, political, cultural, and ideological import.

When compared with the content and emphasis of the AD&T or RPE, one can clearly discern a growing fascination with cultural warfare and political involvement, particularly in connection

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., I-8, I-9.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., I-9.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., I-10.

with Christ's universal dominion. This is not to say that the older documents are devoid of political content; they are most certainly not. However, the nineteenth century brought an increased emphasis upon the church's role as an agent for cultural change, and with this change in emphasis came a repackaging of the doctrine of Christ's kingship. Rather than associating this doctrine primarily with the saving power of the gospel and the missionary expansion of the church, the nineteenth century RPCNA came to link it more closely with the political implications of the gospel, and the cultural influence of the church. Both the older view and the newer view entertained robust notions of Christian political theory. However, the newer view tended to place a far greater proportion of its emphasis upon such matters, especially in connection with Christ's universal dominion.

### **5. The Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (November 1886)**

From 1863 to 1895, the *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* magazine functioned as a highly influential, mainstream theological medium within the RPCNA. In 1887, its November issue featured an article entitled, *The Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* by Elder John A. Dodds of New Galilee, Pennsylvania.<sup>227</sup> In the article, Dodds maintained that the RPCNA should reallocate the bulk of its financial resources from the work of evangelism and discipleship to the cause of political reform. Rather than planting churches at home and abroad, the denomination would be better off seeking to establish branches of the National Reform Association throughout every nation under heaven.

Satan, writes Dodd, "is not bitterly opposed to the salvation of individual souls, nor to religion in the church or in the family."<sup>228</sup> He continues,

But when an effort is made to reform that moral person, the State, does he manifest the same indifference that he seems to do in the other cases? Not at all. He is up in arms at once, and marshals not only his own minions, but draws largely on the Church of Christ for help, and gets it too, either in open warfare or indifference and sneers. Notwithstanding, the State must be saved; the stronghold must be reduced, and the lawful captive delivered.<sup>229</sup>

According to Dodds, the mission of the RPCNA should be "to sustain the appointment by the Father of his Son, Jesus Christ, to be ruler over the nations, and to antagonize Satan's authority and influence, especially in civil government."<sup>230</sup>

Rather than focusing on making individual disciples through evangelism, the RPCNA has a more fundamental duty to "set forth prominently, the claims of Jesus Christ on nations, as his moral subjects who must submit to his scepter, or be dashed to pieces by his iron rod, and to bear a consistent testimony against all immorality, whether it be infidelity, secretive, intemperance, the liquor traffic, Sabbath desecration, and everything that supports Satan's kingdom, and every organization or association that ignores Christ and [therefore] is of the devil and must be

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<sup>227</sup> John A. Dodds, "The Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church" in *The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*. Vol. 26 (November 1887). An e-version is available at [http://rparchives.org/data/RP\\_Covenanter/rpc1887.pdf-Red.pdf](http://rparchives.org/data/RP_Covenanter/rpc1887.pdf-Red.pdf).

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 380.

antagonized." "That this, then, is our great work, the work we are especially fitted for and to which we should give all our energies," he writes, "is very clear."<sup>231</sup>

According to Dodds, the duty of seeking and saving lost sinners is one that belongs primarily to other denominations. He writes,

The great work of other churches is the salvation of individual sinners, and we heartily wish them unlimited success in this work. If they are not successful in this work, we cannot be successful in our work, as we must have Christians to work on, and that we cannot succeed in making them ourselves, a comparison numerically with other churches will make plain. Perhaps we might be credited with one in seven hundred, probably less. If the evangelization of individuals be our work, we have been a failure, and have no right to keep up a separate organization. If this is not our work, the money and labor spent in vain as far as doing our church's work is concerned, and would have accomplished much more for the kingdom of Christ if applied to national reform work. It is not wisdom for us to spend money and labor in a field that others can work seven-fold better than we can do; if we do, we will have this for a complaint some day, "mine own vineyard have I not kept." It is impossible for us to do our own work and other peoples' too."<sup>232</sup>

Dodds then exhorts the RPCNA to "Evangelize the nations" by seeking "the salvation of the nations". "Until this is accomplished," he adds, "or until all other Christian churches come up practically to our position, our church is an absolute necessity and must be sacredly maintained." "In this way only", he continues, "can we fulfill our mission, which is to have the nations 'bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.'"<sup>233</sup>

Regarding his conception of national salvation, he clarifies that "To save a nation is to have all men born temperance men", "to have men born moral men and Christians", "to save individual souls by the wholesale", and "to banish Satan, the great adversary of souls, from the earth, and to give us Christ, the saviour of souls, as ruler of the nations in his place."<sup>234</sup> This explanation, however, leaves more questions than answers. For instance, precisely how will the political witness of the RPCNA ever cause "all men" to be "born temperance men" or to be "born moral men and Christians"?

Perhaps the most helpful aspect of Dodds' article is the following exhortation: "Covenanters! Read your own history; your future success under God depends on it."<sup>235</sup> Ironically, however, Dodds' own *politically-driven* view of the church's mission has virtually no pedigree within the Reformed Presbyterian tradition. Even a cursory reading of church history is sufficient to demonstrate this point. His desire to replace evangelism with political action would have been no less distasteful to Reformed Presbyterians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than certainly they must be to Reformed Presbyterians in the twenty-first.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 381. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 381. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph)

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 382.

<sup>236</sup> Note, by contrast, the gospel-centered mission statement featured in the current RPCNA Testimony (25.2), "It is the mission of the Church to preserve, maintain and proclaim to the whole world the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the whole counsel of God; to gather into her fellowship those of every race and people who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and promise obedience to Him; to build them up in their most holy faith, and train them to be faithful witnesses for Christ in all his offices; to maintain the ordinances of divine worship in their purity; witness against all evil; and in every way to seek the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth."

There is no reason to believe that Dodds was alone in his emphasis. If he had been alone, it is highly unlikely that his article would ever have seen the light of day, much less appeared in such a mainstream periodical as the *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*.<sup>237</sup> Hence, as we prepare to enter the twentieth century, we can readily perceive that rapid changes are occurring within the life, ministry, and emphasis of the RPCNA.

## **6. The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism (1912)**

In 1908, the RPCNA Synod appointed a committee, chaired by Dr. George Alexander Edgar (1865-1927), to compose a distinctively Reformed Presbyterian catechism centering on the kingship of Christ that could be utilized for the instruction of young people.<sup>238</sup> Eventually approved and published by the 1912 Synod, the catechism was entitled, *The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism: A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church upon the Mediatorial Kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.<sup>239</sup> It featured 146 questions organized into the following nine sections:

1. Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom
2. The Bible — The Law of Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom
3. Covenanting — The Subject's Acceptance of the Divine Law
4. The Family
5. The Church
6. The Nation
7. The Relation of Church and State
8. Voluntary Associations
9. Christian Living

The most distinguishing characteristic of this catechism is its explicit and radical departure from the historic RP formulation of Christ's mediatorial kingship in at least one very important respect: its *purpose*.

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<sup>237</sup> Oddly enough, the very next article in the magazine (p. 384) is an urgent appeal for young men to devote themselves to evangelistic work on the foreign mission field ("Who Will Go?"). The author, James Kennedy, laments the fact that so many of the existing RP missionaries are laboring alone, with no co-laborers to assist them in their work. It is, perhaps, not surprising to find a lack of RP men willing to give their lives to overseas evangelism at a time when the church was sending so many mixed signals regarding its chief purpose in the world.

<sup>238</sup> The prefatory note to the catechism states: "This little work composed by the Chairman with the assistance of the other members of the committee to whom the Synod of 1908 assigned the task of preparing 'a catechism and manual of history and doctrine for the instruction of the youth,' is now laid before the church. The aim has been to present in the form of question and answer the teachings of the Word of God with regard to the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, while covering the ground, to keep the work within usable limits. The general form in which the subject is presented is our own, but in many instances where no better statement of the truth could be desired than that already found in the literature of the church, it has been freely appropriated. Though suggested by friendly critics of the work, proof passages of Scripture have not been adduced. For some statements they would be of no practical value without elucidation and it was deemed best not to attach proofs to any unless they were attached to all. It will be a helpful exercise for teacher and scholar in the use of the work to compare and discuss proofs of their own selection."

<sup>239</sup> *The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism: A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church upon the Mediatorial Kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, Authorized by the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, Morning Sun, Iowa, 1912. E-book can be accessed online at <https://caleb-cangelosi-437x.squarespace.com/s/Edgar-George-Alexander-The-Reformed-Presbyterian-Catechism.pdf>. (Includes all subsequent quotations from this work)

Historically speaking, the RP confessional tradition had consistently held that the overarching purpose of Christ's universal authority was to accomplish God's redemptive purposes for His covenant people, the church. Whatever societal influence or benefits resulted from His mediatorial dominion, it was always understood to be subservient to God's grand purpose of redemption. Christ was not simply the universal Lord over every human sphere *indiscriminately*, as though every human sphere stood on parallel footing or was of equal importance. As has already been documented above, from the Westminster Assembly in the seventeenth century all the way down to William Symington in the nineteenth, Christ's headship over all things was always understood to be "for the church". It was never regarded as a distinct agenda of moral or social reform for its own sake, but always placed under the umbrella of Christ building His church and gathering from every nation the elect sinners for whom He died.

The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism, on the other hand, takes an entirely different approach. In Question 1, it defines "the condition of the world of humanity" as "by nature in a state of sin and rebellion against Divine authority and law, and therefore lost." Note that it depicts the problem of sin exclusively in terms of the lawless rebellion of "the world of humanity", with no reference to individual sinners being in danger of God's eternal wrath in hell.

In Question 2, it asserts that "the purpose of God with reference to the world" is twofold: "to save all who believe in Jesus and bring society into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ." In Question 3, it states that "the plan whereby God purposes to accomplish this salvation is mediatorial." Notice that it regards "this salvation" as including not only the eternal redemption of elect sinners through Christ, but also God's purpose to "bring society into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ". In other words, God's plan includes two distinct agendas: eternal redemption and temporal social reform. Both agendas are regarded as "mediatorial".

Previous generations of RP's had maintained a high view of Christian social reform as an implication of Christ's mediatorial dominion. However, they had not placed it on parallel footing with the plan of salvation. They had viewed it as an organic fruit of salvation and as a powerful catalyst for salvation. But they had never identified it with salvation. Breaking with centuries of Reformed tradition, therefore, the 1912 RP Catechism opted to place the enterprise of Christian social reform right alongside the eternal redemption of elect sinners as a *parallel objective* in the plan of God.

After acknowledging "the nature of Christ's mediatorial kingdom" to be "essentially spiritual" (Q. 11), the catechism proceeds to speak of Him governing all mankind "both individually and in all their social relations" (Q. 12). These social relations included "the divine institutions of the family, church and state, and in every other corporate body which they may devise" (Q. 13). No mention is made of the superiority, uniqueness, or overarching priority of the church.

Far more disconcerting, however, is the catechism's shocking omission of the gospel itself. Granted, it does, in passing, employ the terms "mediator", "priest", and "reconciliation", albeit without much discussion of their redemptive significance. It states that "as a Priest" Christ "procures the salvation of man" and that "as a King He applies it" (Q. 7), but it does not say how or on what basis. It also scatters a few generic references to the words, "gospel" and "salvation", and at one point speaks of Christ's "resurrection", but only in relation to His universal moral authority as King (Q. 10). In Questions 17-19, it describes the "duty of entering into covenant with God" through "the mediation of Jesus Christ" as "a religious act in which the subject solemnly avouches the Lord Jesus Christ to be his Saviour and King, and engages to serve Him in obedience to His law, looking for His blessing in fulfillment of His promises."

Beyond these casual references, the catechism provides little, if any, explanation as to what personal salvation actually is, how it was accomplished, and how it is obtained. Some of its most frequently used words include *duty*, *authority*, *morality*, *law*, and *sin*. The word *love* occurs only once, and that in reference to the believer's love for God's kingdom as expressed in his willingness to give tithes and offerings (Q. 61). The catechism says nothing about the redeeming love of God or the finished work of Christ; nothing about our Lord's sufferings, His substitutionary atonement, His blood, His cross, or His death; and nothing about personal pardon or assurance of eternal life in heaven. While Question 100 offers hope that a lawless *society* may be "pardoned and restored to the Divine favor only upon confession of its sin and return to its allegiance", nothing is said concerning personal justification. One might expect the catechism to highlight the redemptive work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in connection with the sacraments (Q's. 56-60). Sadly, this is not the case. When explaining the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, it makes no reference to spiritual rebirth, the cleansing power of Christ's blood, justification, sanctification, or even to the death of Christ. Instead, it emphasizes the external mode of baptism and the grave importance of fencing the Lord's table from "members who live in violation of their vows".

The 1912 RP Catechism essentially strips away the gracious, redemptive overtones of the term "mediatorial" (as understood historically and confessionally within the RP tradition) and redefines it primarily in terms of authority, law, morality, and social influence. As a result, it spends most of its energies seeking to establish the supreme moral authority of Christ and the Scriptures. Once this is accomplished, it outlines a long list of highly detailed commands, duties, and principles, each of which must be obeyed within the family, the church, the state, voluntary societies, the workplace, and personal recreation. It seeks to regulate virtually every aspect of life with precise Biblical standards of conduct, including total abstention from alcohol and tobacco, the avoidance of ungodly amusements, principled dissent from the US Constitution, cheerful giving to the church, and, of course, strict and unwavering adherence to "the Scriptural posture for the worshipper in public prayer" (i.e. "either kneeling or standing"). In Question 146, it concludes by exhorting its youthful audience to "strive to live above reproach, to manifest the spirit of Christ in word and deed, and to adorn in all things the doctrine of God our Saviour." Unfortunately, over the course of 146 Questions, the catechism fails to specify what "the doctrine of God our Saviour" actually is.

It is difficult to imagine a catechism more steeped in implicit moralism than the one approved by the 1912 RPCNA Synod. Perhaps most striking of all is that, in seeking to flesh out the doctrine of Christ's *mediatorial* kingdom, it does not make a single reference to the death of Christ. Ironically, for all its bold criticisms of the founding fathers, the Reformed Presbyterian Catechism mentions the cross of Christ *precisely the same number of times* that the US Constitution mentions it: *zero!*

To be fair, the 1912 minutes of synod reveal that memorization of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (with Scripture proofs) was quite common among RP young people. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the RPCNA had systematically abandoned the precious doctrines of the gospel. Nevertheless, it is apparent that, as zeal for the constructive cultural implications of Christ's kingship began to wax hot in the early 20th century, these central doctrines of redemption tended to take a backseat in the life of the church.

To argue that this lack of gospel emphasis is merely due to the limited scope of the catechism ("Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom") is, first of all, to ignore the fact that this was a fairly sizable "Reformed Presbyterian" catechism with nine major sections covering a myriad of topics.



Secondly, such an explanation only serves to reinforce the catechism's departure from the predominately redemptive conception of Christ's mediatorial kingship as articulated in the past. To suggest that the proper scope of a catechism devoted to "Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom" need not include a single reference to the death of Christ is to utterly reject the historic, confessional RP outlook on this doctrine.

Perhaps the most effective way to put these observations in proper perspective is to compare the 1912 RP Catechism with the far more comprehensive and historic RP Catechism authored by W.L. Roberts in 1848: *A Catechism of the Peculiar and More Prominent Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (13 Sections, 535 Questions).<sup>240</sup>

Following the pattern of William Symington, Roberts lays out the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial dominion with a consistent emphasis on the supremacy of eternal redemption and the centrality of the church. In Question 6, he notes that Christ's mediatorial kingdom differs from His essential (divine) kingdom solely in the fact that "he is, as mediator, authorized to manage and direct" the very same universal kingdom "for a new end, namely, the salvation of men, and the best interests of the church." In Questions 7-11, he asserts that God the Father, "as the representative of Deity in the economy of redemption", appointed Christ as the Mediator "from all eternity" in "the covenant of grace", which "comprises the whole scheme agreed upon by the divine persons for the salvation of fallen man."

In Question 47, Roberts denies that Christ's mediatorial dominion is "limited to the church", instead maintaining that

The church is the special kingdom of Christ — the great central province of his empire, around which other provinces are made to revolve. Therefore, the dominion of Christ necessarily extends beyond its hallowed precincts Eph. i. 22, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church."

In Question 48, Roberts explains why it is "necessary that Christ's mediatorial dominion should extend beyond the limits of the church, or be universal", enumerating the following reasons.

1. That he might give a general commission to his ministers to go forth among the hostile nations and preach his gospel. Matt xxviii. 18, 19, "power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go therefore, and teach all nations."
2. That he might gather from among them his elect. Jon. xvii. 2, "Glorify thy Son as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."
3. As a reward of his mediatorial sufferings. Rev. iii. 21, "To that, overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne." See also Phil, ii. 8, 9.
4. To subdue all his own and his people's enemies. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet," 1 Cor. xv. 26.

In Question 58, after listing no less than seven distinct provinces of Christ's dominion, Roberts asks "For what end is Christ invested with this universal dominion?" He responds with the

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<sup>240</sup> Roberts, W.L., *A Catechism of the Peculiar and More Prominent Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1853). Ebooks online at <https://books.google.com/books?id=bMhNAQAAMAAJ&> and <https://archive.org/details/ReformedPresbyterianCatechism/page/n3/mode/2up/> Includes all subsequent quotations from this work. See Appendix Three for additional excerpts.

standard confessional answer: "That he should render the whole administration of providence subservient to the erection, progress, and final perfection of his *special* kingdom, the church."<sup>241</sup> While acknowledging that the spirituality of Christ's kingdom does not prevent it from having a certain "connection with the world, or things that are secular", Roberts is emphatic that it has no ulterior motive or parallel cultural agenda which is not "rendered subservient to spiritual objects" (Q. 63-64). At no point does he depart from the historic, confessional RP paradigm of viewing Christ's universal dominion (and its transforming impact upon the nations) as being entirely subservient to the one grand object of God's redemptive plan to save elect sinners in Christ.

By comparison, the 1912 RP Catechism leaves much to be desired. By redefining salvation so as to place Christian social reform side by side with the redemption of God's elect, its authors (perhaps unwittingly) left the door wide open for the moralistic influence of the social gospel. Moreover, they missed a perfect opportunity to instruct their youth in the God-honoring confessional principles of Reformed Presbyterianism *along gospel-centered lines*.

## 7. The RPCNA Constitution (1945)

Between 1938 and 1945, the RPCNA adopted a variety of changes to its constitution, including several which reflect changing attitudes toward Christ's kingship.<sup>242</sup> Included among these changes is a revision of the *Terms of Communion* (TOC). Term 6 of the revised TOC requires

An acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations, and that in loyalty and obedience to Him, it is our duty to follow the noble example of the faithful confessors and martyrs of Jesus in their witness for divine truth, and in their sacrifices and labors to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>243</sup>

Furthermore, in Query 4 of the *Queries for Ordination, Installation, and Licensure* (QFO), it is asked, "Do you believe it to be the teaching of Scripture — that church and state are distinct and separate institutions; that both are under the Mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ...?"<sup>244</sup> The notion of placing both church and state under Christ's "Mediatorial rule" represents a departure from the more restrictive use of the term mediatorial among Reformed Presbyterians in the past. However, by this time, the primary meaning of the term, as used in the seventeenth century, had changed. It was no longer employed exclusively (or even primarily) to speak of Christ's mediatorial work. Rather, it was used to speak of His mediatorial Person as the God-man. In principle, therefore, this twentieth century assertion that church and state "both are under the Mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ" remains in substantial doctrinal continuity with the WS. While it may use slightly different language, it is simply reiterating the thrust of LC 54, which states that the exalted Christ, "as the God-man", has received "power over all things in heaven and earth".<sup>245</sup> Properly understood, both the QFO and the LC place all men and nations under the "rule" of Jesus Christ, the God-man Mediator. Therefore, while the RPCNA's inclusion of this language into its QFO may evidence a change in vocabulary and emphasis, it does not represent a substantial change in the doctrinal beliefs of the denomination.

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<sup>241</sup> Roberts' emphasis.

<sup>242</sup> The adoption of these changes also followed a series of debates which took place throughout the 1920s.

<sup>243</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 333.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>245</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Press, Reprint 2003) 155.

The reference to Christ's "mediatorial rule" in Query 4 was not the only notable addition to the QFO. In Query 6, the candidate for ordination is asked, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations...?"<sup>246</sup> The addition of the phrase "Saviour of nations" represents a significant development in confessional vocabulary. Since the days of the Second Reformation, Reformed Presbyterians on both sides of the Atlantic had preferred to describe Christ's relationship to the nations using terms such as "headship", "dominion", "authority", and "rule". Such terms had the advantage of conveying the idea of universal moral accountability without undermining the uniqueness of the church and without implying universal mediation or universal salvation. Thus, they preserved a social ethic without entertaining a social gospel.

The decision to describe Christ as "Saviour and Lord of men and nations" represents clear break with this confessional pattern. Never before in the history of the Reformed Presbyterian tradition had a confessional document explicitly referred to Christ as the "Saviour" of "nations". Indeed, Larger Catechism (LC) 60 asserts that He is "the Saviour only of his body the Church."<sup>247</sup> Yet, by the mid-twentieth century, without a shred of creedal precedent, the RPCNA had come to require public affirmation of this doctrinal language as a prerequisite for church office. Perhaps even more surprisingly, this language was incorporated into the RPCNA's TOC, thereby making its acceptance a prerequisite for communicant membership. According to Term 6, a communicant must profess "An acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations."<sup>248</sup>

The language of Term 6 raises serious questions as to exactly what communicants were being asked to affirm with respect to *national salvation*. That is, in what sense should Christ be regarded as the Savior of entire nations. We have already seen what Elder John A. Dodds understood by this concept. In his view, it spoke of a glorious day in the future when "all men would be born temperance men" and "born moral men and Christians." He also connected it with the notion of Christ becoming the Savior of the nations during a future millennial era. However, Term 6 states that Christ "is" the Savior of the nations, not that He "will be" such during a future millennium.

The notion that Christ is *presently* the Savior of nations raises a host of questions, including (but not limited to) the following.

1. Does the term "Savior" refer to eternal salvation from sin or to some other gracious benefit, such as national deliverance, blessing, or prosperity?
2. Is Christ presently applying eternal salvation to entire nations, or simply gathering His elect *from among* all nations and adding them to His church?
3. Is Christ the Savior of *all* the nations (in the same sense that He is Lord of all) or is He the Savior only of those who respond in repentance and faith?
4. How many citizens in a nation must repent and believe in order for the entire nation to be regarded as saved?
5. Is Christ the Savior of the nations in the sense that He is *freely offered* to the nations as the only God-appointed Savior, or that He *actually* saves them?

The brevity of Term 6 makes such questions difficult to answer with certainty. Perhaps the most consistently Biblical and orthodox gloss would be to say that Christ is freely offered to all nations

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<sup>246</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 335.

<sup>247</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Press, Reprint 2003) 157.

<sup>248</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 333.

as the only God-appointed Savior. Moreover, as the citizens of a nation are increasingly converted to Christ, this will bear fruit in the corporate life and experience of the nation, even to the point of a national covenant to obey God in Christ, and to enjoy His healing power and blessing upon the land. Whether or not this is the intended meaning is difficult to say. Certainly, it is a possible meaning and, from a Reformed and confessional standpoint, the best option available. At the same time, there are other possible meanings that are far less Biblical and, confessionally speaking, not the least bit alarming. All in all, the phrase "Saviour of nations" is entirely proper if properly understood; yet its susceptibility to confusion and misunderstanding causes one to question whether or not it was the most prudent choice of words for a solemn vow.

In the 1806 version of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony (RPT), only a brief statement concerning Christ's headship over the nations appeared, with no mention of it in either the TOC or QFO. By 1945, those seeking ordination were required to affirm that "both [church and state] are under the Mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ" and that Christ is the "Saviour of men and nations". Moreover, while the newly adopted *Covenant of Communicant Membership* (CCM) made no explicit references to this doctrine, the TOC mandated adherence to it as a prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper. Needless to say, this represents a major development within the history of the Reformed Presbyterian tradition.

Given such noteworthy changes to the RPCNA's TOC and QFO, one might expect to find a whole host of new material in the revised version of RPT Chapter 20 ("Of Christ's Headship") explaining in what sense Christ must now be regarded as the Savior of nations. Quite astonishingly, however, the chapter remains entirely unchanged from its original form in 1806.

The bulk of the changes to the 1945 RPT appear in Chapter 29 ("Of Civil Government") and Chapter 30 ("Of the Right of Dissent from a Constitution of Civil Government"). Whereas the 1806 version of Chapter 29 contains virtually no mention of Christ's authority over the nations,<sup>249</sup> the 1945 version puts this doctrine on full display. According to Section 2,

Sovereignty belongs to Almighty God alone, who has committed all authority to his Son, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the duty, therefore, of every nation, in setting up its government, to acknowledge the authority of Christ, and to enter into covenant with Him as its King and Saviour.<sup>250</sup>

The meaning here seems to be that while believers *presently* regard Christ as "our Saviour"; "every nation" *should* acknowledge Him as "its King and Saviour". Once again, this manner of expression is virtually unprecedented within the Reformed Presbyterian confessional tradition. Moreover, it raises the same questions noted above in connection with the "Saviour of nations" language in the TOC and QFO. Unfortunately, the chapter leaves these questions entirely unanswered.

It is noteworthy, however, that the 1945 RPT calls nations to "enter into covenant with [Christ]" rather than with God. This too represents a break with the past. A careful inspection of both the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant reveals that neither is ever said to be made directly with Christ, but rather with God for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of Christ. It is not clear why the RPT chooses to depart from the historic vocabulary and logical

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<sup>249</sup> While Section 7 states that magistrates "have authority from God to rule in subserviency to the kingdom of Christ", Error 5 reveals that the phrase "kingdom of Christ" should here be interpreted as "the Christian religion". In other words, magistrates are called to rule under God for the good of Christ's Church. This is a reiteration of the teaching of the WS concerning the religious duties of the magistrate, not an explicit reference to Christ's dominion or headship over the nations.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 209.

framework of the Reformed Presbyterian tradition without any scriptural argument or explanation.<sup>251</sup>

Another distinct feature of the 1945 RPT is its emphasis upon a proper relationship between church and state under the authority of Christ. In Section 7 of Chapter 29 ("Of Civil Government"), we read that

Church and state are two distinct and separate institutions. The Christian religion should be the religion of both. Any departure from the spirit, the ethics, the teachings and the ideals of Jesus Christ on the part of either is freighted with disaster for humankind. Each has its own sphere, and its own functions to perform. Neither has a right to invade the territory of the other. The source of guidance for both is the Word of God... They are both under Christ, and should seek, separately and conjointly, to do his will "in earth as it is in heaven."<sup>252</sup>

The doctrinal content of this paragraph is in full agreement with the confessional tradition of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. However, there is a notable change in its structure and emphasis. One can easily discern that the revised RPT, following the paradigm of M'Leod and Wylie, is placing both church and state on distinct, yet parallel footing under Christ. This is in contrast to the paradigm of the *Westminster Standards* (WS), the *Act, Declaration, and Testimony* (AD&T), and (for the most part) the Symingtons, who regarding the state as subservient to the redemptive interest of Christ's church. In other words, with respect to the relationship of the state to the church under the Lordship of Christ, the RPT is moving away from the more historic *Distinct/Subservient* model in favor of a *Distinct/Parallel* approach.

Moreover, the revised RPT appears to have shifted its focus with respect to the *purpose* of Christ's universal dominion. Rather than emphasizing the confessional aim of gathering God's elect to eternal salvation through the Great Commission, it echoes the nineteenth century American cultural agenda of promoting a Christian ideology (i.e. the spirit, ethics, teachings, and ideals of Jesus Christ). In this respect, it is very similar to the 1912 RP Catechism and very different from the historic RP approach. The older view had certainly recognized the need for social and cultural transformation as a fruit of the gospel. However, in keeping with Matthew 28:18-20, it had refused to allow the enterprise of political or cultural influence to displace the centrality of the church's all-important task of evangelizing and discipling the nations.

The older *redemptive* paradigm, however, was not entirely removed from the revised RPT. For instance, it was still adequately reflected in Chapter 7 ("Of Christ the Mediator") and Chapter 20 ("Of Christ's Headship"), which remained virtually untouched by the revision. According to RPT 7.1, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only Mediator between God and man, and to constitute him the public Head and Representative of all the elect." RPT 20.1 then notes that "in his exalted state he rules in an over all his children, as their living Head and Lawgiver, and governs all creatures and all their actions for his own glory and our salvation, as Head over all things to the Church, which is his body." This is followed by a recognition that "Submission is due to the mediatory authority, from all the intelligent creatures

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<sup>251</sup> This is not to say that the language of the Testimony is substantially at odds with the basic doctrinal convictions underlying either the Scottish covenants or the Westminster Standards. It is simply to say that the vocabulary and framework has notably and inexplicably changed. The same may be said with respect to the phrase "Saviour of nations" in the TOC and QFO. There is no doubt that this phrase can be affirmed in a Biblical and confessional sense. The point is that it represents a significant departure from the more careful and restricted language employed by Reformed Presbyterians in previous centuries.

<sup>252</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Press, Reprint 2003) 345-360.

of God" (20.3) and that "The administration of the kingdom of Providence is subordinate to the dispensation of grace" such that Christ sovereignly makes all things to be "subservient to the manifestation of God's glory, in the system of redemption" (20.4). Hence, Chapter 20, Error 3 condemns the view "That there is any creature or institution which is not subjected to Christ for the good of his Church."<sup>253</sup> It is evident from these excerpts that, even as late as the 1940s, the newer *Distinct/Parallel* model had not entirely displaced the older *Distinct/Subservient* approach to human culture and society in relation to the church.

The 1945 RPT also includes a full-scale revision of Chapter 30 ("Of the Right of Dissent from a Constitution of Civil Government"), featuring an entirely new framework for political dissent. Rather than following the traditional pattern of lamenting the nation's failure to acknowledge God, enforce His law, and establish the true religion, it describes a cosmic conflict for social, political, ethical, and ideological dominance within the nation.

In every nation there is a constant conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. If the spirit of Christ is in control of the national life, it will register its ideals in the law, and will appear in the administration of the government. If the powers of this world have the ascendancy, then the opposite outcome will make itself manifest. In this conflict neutrality is impossible. Whoever or whatever is not with Christ is against Him. Consequently, every citizen must of necessity give his supreme allegiance either to Christ and His kingdom or to Satan and his. If he is a Christian and the government is under the dominance of the kingdom of this world, and hence is not Christ, unqualified allegiance to Christ will require the withholding of his unqualified allegiance to the government. He will have to separate from the government at the point where the government separates from Christ. The only position consistent for the Christian is the position of dissent from any constitution or form of civil government which refuses or neglects to own allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Prince of the kings of the earth.<sup>254</sup>

The substance of this statement is not inconsistent with the historic teachings of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. However, its emphasis and vocabulary are notably different. Rather than viewing Christ's kingdom primarily in terms of *soteriology* (e.g. John 3:3; WSC 102) and *ecclesiology* (e.g. Matt. 16:19; WCF 25.2), it defines "the kingdom" along broader cultural, ethical, and ideological lines. The danger here, of course, is that Christianity will eventually be reduced to an abstract, intellectual worldview, and that salvation will come to be identified primarily with the outward acceptance of certain moral and political principles. This, in turn, would threaten to undermine the Scriptural emphasis upon the sinner's need for a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ according to the gospel, leading to a new grace-filled life in spiritual fellowship with other believers in the body of Christ. As such, one could conceivably have "consistent loyalty to Jesus Christ in dissenting from that which dishonors Him"<sup>255</sup> and yet spend eternity in Hell for never having personally known the Savior.

It is not the intention of this paper to exaggerate or overstate the imbalance of the RPCNA during the middle of the twentieth century. The denomination still remained substantially faithful to the scriptures and active in many important ministries. Nevertheless, there is surely a lesson to be learned in all of this: namely, that denominations ought always to craft the vocabulary and

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<sup>253</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 159-161, 185-187. (Emphasis ours. All quotations in this paragraph.)

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

emphasis of their subordinate standards with great care, striving not only to avoid imprecision and ambiguity, but also to convey God's truth in a manner best suited to promote the spiritual health and vitality of God's people.

### **8. Johannes Geerhardus Vos (1903-1983)**

Perhaps the most influential RPCNA minister of the twentieth century was J.G. Vos. In addition to his many years of fruitful ministry as a pastor, missionary, and Bible professor at Geneva College, he is often credited with helping to revive confessional Reformed theology within the RPCNA. Known as "the people's theologian", Vos edited the *Blue Banner Faith and Life* magazine while serving as a local pastor in Clay Center, Kansas.

From 1946-1949, the magazine included a monthly exposition of the Westminster Larger Catechism, which were eventually collected and edited for publication by G.I. Williamson in 2002 under the title, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*.<sup>256</sup> This commentary is widely regarded as one of the most insightful resources on the WLC presently available in print, mainly due to its simple method of question and answer. In particular, its analysis of the confessional doctrine of Christ's kingship may help us to account for the RPCNA's notable shift back to a more historic and confessional paradigm during the latter half of the twentieth century.

As we have already seen, LC 42 identifies Christ the Mediator as the "king of his church", after which LC 45 asks, "How doth Christ execute the office of a king?" According to Vos, the catechism has chosen to "divide the exercise of Christ's kingly office" into "three spheres": (1) "the sphere of the visible church;" (2) "the sphere of the invisible church;" and (3) "the sphere of the world."<sup>257</sup>

Following William Symington, Vos understands Christ's universal authority as a necessary and subservient feature under the umbrella of His mediatorial kingship over the church. He is quick to point out that the "most important of these spheres in which Christ's kingly office is exercised" is the "sphere of the visible church, or the body of the elect." This is because "it is for the benefit of the invisible church that Christ exercises his kingly office" in the "visible church" and "in the world or universe."<sup>258</sup>

Vos reminds his readers that "elements" which, according to the LC, "are included in Christ's kingly rule in the visible church" include (1) "calling out of the world a people who shall be members of the visible church;" (2) "giving them officers, as appointed in the Scriptures, and as realized in actual life;" and (3) "giving them laws and censures, by which he visibly governs them, that is, by means of the structure of church government and discipline".<sup>259</sup>

Furthermore, he writes, the elements included under "Christ's kingly rule in the invisible church" are **(1)** "Bestowing saving grace upon his elect, by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts in their hearts and lives, resulting in their being united to Christ in their effectual calling"; **(2)** "Rewarding the obedience of his people, both now by his providence, and at the Judgment Day by his supernatural power; and correcting his people for their sins, in his providential discipline during the present life"; and **(3)** "Preserving and supporting his elect under all their temptations

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<sup>256</sup> Vos, J.G. *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*. G.I. Williamson, Ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002)

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

and sufferings, so that they are never overwhelmed with troubles, but are always kept from despair."<sup>260</sup>

Finally, the "elements" which "are included in Christ's kingly rule in the world or the universe" are (1) "Restraining and overcoming all the enemies of his elect"; (2) "Powerfully ordering all things to his own glory, and his people's good, so that even the evil deeds of the wicked men are made to work out for the true benefit of the elect"; (3) Taking vengeance on the wicked, who know not God, nor obey the gospel." According to Vos, "This vengeance is partly during the present life, by Christ's providential dispensations; and chiefly at the Judgment Day at the end of the age."<sup>261</sup>

Vos then asks, "In which sphere is Christ's kingly reign over the nations included?" His answer is that "Christ's kingly reign over the nations is included in the third sphere, namely, the exercise of his kingly office in the world or universe." Regarding the timetable of this reign, he declares that "Certainly Christ is a king today", noting the scriptural teaching that Christ "was a king when on earth, is a king today, and will be a king for ever and ever." "While it is true," he writes, "that the nations of the world are living in neglect of, or in rebellion against, Christ's kingly reign, still he is reigning over them and accomplishing his purposes in spite of their neglect and rebellion." It is notable that Vos expounds the confessional doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship without so much as a single reference to civil government or politics. While he does not deny that Christ reigns over these spheres, he chooses to emphasize the *redemptive purpose* of Christ's authority, by which he empowers, defends, and vindicates His Church against its enemies.

In his exposition of LC 54 ("How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God?"), Vos affirms the historic confessional position that "The power committed to Christ is absolutely universal and includes the entire created universe" and that "Christ will never give up his kingly office *as head of the redeemed human race*."<sup>262</sup> Even when describing Christ's *universal* headship, Vos redirects the focus back to the overarching theme of His *particular* headship over the church. In his view, "The purpose or aim of Christ's dominion over the entire universe is *the benefit of his church*, as shown by Ephesians 1:22: 'And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.'" Sadly, he observes, "This text is often misunderstood, as if it said, 'head over all things in the church,' that is, as if it meant simply that Christ is *head of the church*." In opposition to this error, he reminds his readers that "the text actually says 'head over all things to (or for) the church,' that is, *head over the entire universe for the benefit of the church*!"<sup>263</sup>

According to Vos, "Christ's universal dominion" serves to "benefit his church" in the followings ways: **(1)** "By gathering his elect into his church"; **(2)** "By defending his church against her enemies"; **(3)** "By perfecting his church, bestowing gifts and graces on ministers and people"; **(4)** "By making intercession for his people."<sup>264</sup> It is clear that he views Christ's dominion as integrally connected with His redemptive purposes on behalf of His elect, rather than with a public campaign for social, cultural, or political reform.

In exposition of LC 191 ("What do we pray for in the second petition — which is, Thy will be done?"), Vos again draws important distinctions. There are, he writes, "three forms or phases of Christ's kingdom" which are "dealt with in the last part of this answer of the catechism". These

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 120. (Underlining ours)

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 120.



include **(1)** "Christ's present spiritual kingdom in the hearts of his people, called 'the kingdom of grace' in the Shorter Catechism [Q. 102]"; **(2)** "Christ's eternal reign in glory, which will begin at his second coming, called, 'the kingdom of glory' in the Shorter Catechism [Q. 102]"; and **(3)** "Christ's kingdom of power in the world, by which at the present time he has all power in heaven and earth over his enemies."<sup>265</sup>

According to Vos, Christ's kingly reign over all things (from LC 45 and 54) is identical to His "kingdom of power in all the world" (from LC 191). In doing so, he asserts that the historic Reformed Presbyterian understanding of Christ's universal dominion is clearly and accurately articulated in the WS.

In addition, Vos issues an important warning which serves to demonstrate his awareness of theological imbalance within Reformed churches, including the RPCNA.

To disregard any of these forms or phases of Christ's kingdom is sure to result in an erroneous, unbalanced, one-sided view of Christ's kingly office. Such error is extremely common at the present day. One Christian will emphasize Christ's present spiritual kingdom, another his eternal kingdom of glory, and still another his present reign of power over the universe. Only by believing in and emphasizing all three together, in their mutual relations, can we really grasp the scope of Christ's kingship and hold a truly scriptural view.<sup>266</sup>

For Vos, a balanced view of Christ's kingdom will, in turn, add further balance to the prayers of God's people.

In the second petition of the Lord's Prayer we rightly pray for all three phases of his kingdom: the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of glory, and the kingdom of power. We pray for the extension and continuance of the kingdom of grace, the hastening of the kingdom of glory, and the success of the kingdom of power for its appointed ends. Note that the kingdom of power is not an end in itself, but a means to the furtherance of the kingdom of grace and the hastening of the kingdom of glory.<sup>267</sup>

In conclusion, J.G. Vos represents a much-needed return to the "old paths" of a balanced, confessional paradigm for understanding Christ's kingship. He emphasizes Christ as head over all things *for the church*. He is unwilling to limit Christ's authority (as Mediator) to the church, yet is equally unwilling to allow a political or cultural agenda to diminish the primacy of the church and its Great Commission. Vos summarizes his interpretation of LC 191 by stating that "In this statement of the matter, the catechism is eminently scriptural." In the years ahead, a vast number of Reformed Presbyterians would come to regard Vos' own statement of the matter to be just that — *eminently scriptural*.

## **9. The RPCNA Constitution — Another Revision (1970)**

During the period between 1958 and 1970, the RPCNA Synod devoted a great deal of time and energy to revising portions of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony (RPT), especially Chapter 29 ("On Civil Government") and Chapter 30 ("Of the Right of Dissent From a Constitution of Civil

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 557.

Government"). This process of revision was both accompanied and followed by many vigorous debates and discussions on the relationship between Christ's mediatorial kingship and the church's practice of political dissent. In 1967, the synod finally concluded that neither the Scriptures nor the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship provides a firm basis for the historic RPCNA practice of political dissent. In other words, the church no longer regarded it as sinful for a Christian to swear an oath of allegiance to the secular US Constitution, or to vote for a candidate who intended to swear the oath. A detailed account of this enormously pivotal series of events is included in Appendix Two.

In 1970, the RPCNA published a newly revised edition of its constitution, with the updated versions of RPT Chapters 29 and 30.<sup>268</sup> Despite a variety of changes relating to the application of Christian political theory (See Appendix Two), both the TOC and the QFO are left entirely unchanged, as is Chapter 20 ("On Christ's Headship").<sup>269</sup> Rather strikingly, the redemptive emphasis of Chapter 8 ("Of Christ the Mediator") is even more pronounced than in the 1945 RPT. It openly asserts Christ's universal power in connection with His saving work and supplies much that perhaps ought to have been included in the Reformed Presbyterian Catechism of 1912.

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Saviour of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, and glorified. (8.1)

The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety. Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father, who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same. (8.3)

RPT 8.4 and 8.5 describe, in detail, our Lord's perfect obedience unto death on the cross in fulfillment of both the precept and penalty of the law, His victorious resurrection from the dead on the third day, His glorious ascension to God's right hand in heaven, and the everlasting inheritance laid up for all whom God has sovereignly chosen and enabled to place their trust in His finished work. The chapter concludes with these words (8.8).

To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

In RPT 30.2, the historic doctrine of Christ's universal authority is articulated with stunning precision:

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<sup>268</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1970).

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-187.

God alone is sovereign. God has given the exercise of all authority to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the Divine Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge. His will concerning the purpose of civil government and the principles regarding its functions and operation are revealed in the written Word of God. The Holy Spirit alone enables nations to recognize and accept their obligation to live according to Christ's authority and law.<sup>270</sup>

All of this serves to demonstrate that the debate over political dissent was never rooted in a fundamental disagreement about Christ's universal dominion. This doctrine was held in common by both sides and survived the decision of 1967 fully intact. Indeed, the language used in the revised RPT is even more precise and historic, shedding ambiguous statements such as the claim that "every nation" is called to recognize Christ as its "King and Saviour", and emphasizing the necessity of the Spirit's regenerating work."<sup>271</sup>

Such changes reflect a growing awareness among late twentieth-century Reformed Presbyterians that the practical implications of Christ's universal dominion are not primarily political. Social change must begin with spiritual change in the hearts and lives of individuals, families, and local congregations. Without vital, gospel-centered churches evangelizing and discipling according to the Great Commission, no set of Christian political principles—be they ever so logical and persuasive—will succeed in turning the heart of a nation to "Kiss the Son" in submission to King Jesus.

For the most part, the 1970 Testimony represents a refreshing return to the more gospel-centered, church-oriented approach of the Westminster Divines, the Scottish Covenanters, and the majority of pre-nineteenth century Reformed Presbyterians on both sides of the Atlantic. By articulating Christ's universal dominion apart from certain fringe elements and applications which had attached themselves to this doctrine in the 19th century, it effectively rescues the historic, confessional truth of Christ's universal dominion from much that had previously served to undermine and overshadow it.

The RPCNA's renewed interest in confessional Reformed truth eventually came to fruition in 1969, when the synod approved a motion to rewrite and reformat its Testimony without making any alterations to its existing system of theology. According to this proposal, the reorganized Testimony would then, for the first time in its long history, be placed into parallel columns with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).

### ***10. The RPCNA Constitution (1980—Present)***

The synod adopted the final version of its revised and reorganized Testimony in 1980, placing it in parallel columns with the WCF.<sup>272</sup> By this time, the RPCNA had opted to abandon the TOC in favor of the CCM (previously adopted in 1938). Since the CCM makes no reference to Christ as "Saviour and Lord of men and nations", we may safely conclude that this affirmation was no longer regarded as necessary for communicant membership. However, the QFO remains

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 205 (Section 2)

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 205 (Section 3)

<sup>272</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Pub., 2013) I-3.

untouched, such that all ordained officers, according to Query 6, must profess to "believe that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of men and nations".<sup>273</sup>

Chapter 23 of the Testimony ("Of the Civil Magistrate") includes no major bombshells. The most recent revisions of Chapter 29 ("Of Civil Government") and Chapter 30 ("Of Christian Citizenship") have largely been harmonized into parallel columns with the WCF. This includes a variety of caveats and counsels regarding oaths of allegiance, voting in elections, and political involvement of various kinds.

Most importantly of all (at least for our purposes), the 1980 Testimony reaffirms that "God has given the exercise of all authority to the Lord Jesus Christ" as "the Divine Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge"<sup>274</sup> and that "Jesus Christ, as Head over all things for the sake of the Church, rules in perfect wisdom and justice over all parts of His creation including wicked men and devils", such that "He makes them, and all their counsels and efforts, serve God's glory in the plan of redemption."<sup>275</sup> It recognizes that "The Holy Spirit enables even unregenerate rulers to fulfill their proper functions." It also asserts that "A true recognition of the authority and law of Christ in national life can only be the fruit of the Spirit's regenerating power in the lives of individuals."<sup>276</sup> As such, it leaves no doubt whatsoever regarding the *redemptive* purpose of Christ's universal rule, emphasizing that the Spirit's *saving* work (and not merely His *common* work of restraining evil) is absolutely necessary for true and lasting societal transformation.

The 1980 Testimony also reiterates the duty of every nation to recognize "the sovereignty of God exercised by Jesus Christ" and "enter into covenant with [Him]" in order to "advance His kingdom on earth."<sup>277</sup> It speaks of Christ as "Preserver and Ruler of nations"<sup>278</sup>, the "Ruler of every nation"<sup>279</sup>, and the possessor of "supreme authority"<sup>280</sup> who deserves "supreme allegiance"<sup>281</sup> from both "the governments of church and state" as they labor within their distinct spheres "for the advancement of the Kingdom of God"<sup>282</sup>. However, the phrases "mediatorial kingship" and "Saviour of nations" are notably absent.

Overall, the reorganized Testimony echoes the more historic, confessional vocabulary of the 1970 version, emphasizing universal *authority* without leaving the door wide open for universal *mediation* or universal *salvation*. Its intimate harmonization with the WCF, as opposed to the previous format, is by no means accidental. There is good reason to believe that, moving into the latter half of the twentieth century, the RPCNA enjoyed increased interest in her confessional Reformed heritage.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., G-2. While the phrase "Saviour of men and nations" appears in Query 6 of the QFO, it does not appear anywhere in the revised RPT. In other words, at their ordination, RPCNA officebearers are required to confess their adherence to doctrinal language which appears nowhere in the denomination's subordinate standards! As noted above, the phrase "Saviour of men and nations" was first introduced in 1945, when it was added to the RPT, the TOC, and the QFO. Within just 25 years, it was removed entirely from the RPT (1970). Within another ten years (1980) it was removed along with the TOC and not added to the CCM. Hence, its exalted position in the current RPCNA QFO is, at best, a puzzling phenomenon. Thankfully, as also noted above, this phrase can be understood and affirmed in a way that is fully consistent with the Bible, the existing RPT, and the Reformed Presbyterian confessional tradition.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., A-70 (RPT 23.2).

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., A-30-31 (RPT 8.2).

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., A-70 (RPT 23.2).

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., A-70 (RPT 23.4).

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., A-71 (RPT 23.6).

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., A-73 (RPT 23.17).

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., A-73 (RPT 23.17).

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., A-74 (RPT 23.19).

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., A-74 (RPT 23.19).

At the same time, the 1980 Testimony does not affirm every jot and tittle of the WCF. In two minor instances, it states a rejection of the teaching of the confession. These include **(1)** The statements in WCF 23.3 and 31.2 regarding the civil magistrate's duty to purge the church of heresy and, under certain circumstances, to call synods and councils; and **(2)** The statement in WCF 24.4 regarding mutual consanguinity, which would effectively prohibit a person from marrying his or her deceased spouse's sibling on the grounds of incest. The adoption of these minor disagreements marked the first time in RPCNA history that the Testimony had officially rejected any portion of the original WS. Needless to say, neither of them is particularly consequential within a post-1980 North American context. In fact, it is evident that the synod itself did not regard these amendments as constituting an essential change to its overall system of doctrine.<sup>283</sup> It is equally clear that, on the whole, the reorganized Testimony represents a return to the old paths of confessional Reformed doctrine, and that its careful articulation of the doctrine of Christ's kingship is no exception to this refreshing trend.

## CONCLUSION – Where Do We Go from Here?

According to what we have surveyed thus far in this paper, the historic, confessional RP doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship, may be summarized as follows: *Jesus Christ, as the God-man, presently exercises a kingdom of supreme power and authority over all things in heaven and earth, having been made "head over all things for the church", that He might destroy the kingdom of Satan, establish His kingdom of grace among all nations, and hasten the arrival of His kingdom of glory.*

Furthermore, we have observed the many ebbs and flows by which this vital doctrine has developed within the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, from the earliest stages of the Scottish Reformation to the most recent edition of the RP Testimony. We have seen how this balanced Biblical teaching has been, at virtually every point, accosted by the rising tides of theological imbalance, threatening to pull it to one extreme or another. In the seventeenth century, the fear of Erastianism and Arminianism drove careful Reformed theologians such as George Gillespie to marginalize the universality of Christ's mediatorial dominion, confining it exclusively to His particular people, the church. Conversely, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an increased emphasis upon the cultural and political implications of Christ's universal authority within the RPCNA seemed to overshadow the particular primacy of the church and its heart-transforming gospel.

Nevertheless, by the grace of God, the balanced Biblical doctrine of Jesus Christ as "head over all things for the church" has remained intact within the Reformed Presbyterian Church and its subordinate standards. During the course of this paper, we have traced a line of substantial continuity and fruitful development, from the precise kingdom theology of the Westminster Standards, to the expansive polemical analysis of William Symington, to the simple, "blue collar" orthodoxy of J.G. Vos, and, finally, to the gospel-centered, confessionally-harmonized formula of our existing doctrinal standards. Truly we can say, from a theological standpoint, that "the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places" and we have "a good inheritance" (Ps. 16:6).

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., I-3. [From History of the Standards] "The Synod of 1969 gave approval to the 'rewriting of the Testimony of the Church without change in the system of theology.' A committee chaired by James D. Carson completed the task by 1979 when the full document went down in overtire. The 1980 Synod declared the revised Testimony to be the law and order of the Church. It is presented in a form which enhances the teaching of the Confession yet speaks to issues of the day without unnecessary duplication."

In recent years, it has been our committee's great delight to discover the Holy Spirit's illuminating influence among Reformed Presbyterians down through the centuries, leading us into all truth and testifying of Christ our King (Jn. 15:26; 16:13). As it stands, our journey as a denomination has been a glorious one, but it is not over yet. The Lord has left us with many opportunities to further develop our understanding and articulation of confessional doctrine. As a committee, we have identified three main ways in which the RPCNA could seek to clarify and deepen its faithful witness to the mediatorial kingship of Christ.

First, there are a wide variety of opinions within the RPCNA regarding the nature and implications of Christ's mediatorial kingship. At times, one gets the sense that for every ten presbyters, there are at least a dozen different ways of explaining it. Some tend to equate "Christ's mediatorial kingship" with a whole host of Biblical duties or moral principles which we actually hold in *common* with Reformed churches which *deny* our understanding of Christ's kingship. Others associate the phrase "Christ's mediatorial kingship" with imbalanced forms of political activism which can only serve to dilute the society-transforming effects of balanced, gospel-centered ministry. Still others, perhaps unintentionally, have tended to obscure this doctrine's distinctive meaning and relevance to our society. It is all the more crucial, therefore, that we take the time to reassert a balanced, Biblical understanding of Jesus Christ as head over all things for the sake of His church.

Thankfully, amidst these varying perspectives, the *best* path forward is also the *simplest*. By going back to the basics of the orthodox Christology and kingdom theology taught in the Westminster Standards, we can come alongside the members and officers of our denomination to help them to gain a clearer understanding of what this doctrine actually teaches and how it applies to their lives.<sup>284</sup>

Second, today's RPCNA, more than ever before, enjoys a wide variety of ever-deepening relationships with other confessionally Reformed sister denominations in North America. If, as we have already demonstrated, the RP doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship does possess a confessional pedigree, this ought to be increasingly emphasized. The more we learn to articulate and defend this important denominational distinctive in the *confessional mother-tongue* of our sister denominations, the more effective we will be at promoting the peace and purity of the broader Reformed community. Moreover, this will sharpen our own understanding of our doctrine, as we continually sift it through the sound, balanced, careful Christological categories of the Westminster Standards. As a result, our denomination will be empowered to bear witness to the reality and implications of Christ's mediatorial kingship in a way that is *increasingly* accurate and winsome, and *decreasingly* obscure and idiosyncratic.<sup>285</sup>

Third, it is apparent to this committee that more work could be done to streamline our Testimony's teaching on the mediatorial kingship of Christ. It is difficult to read Chapter 23 of our Testimony without finding many statements which a contemporary audience may find obscure, redundant, or merely hypothetical. In addition, the phrase "Saviour and Lord of men and nations" in Ordination Query 6 might not be the best choice of words. We recognize that the principles contained in these statements are entirely sound and Biblical. However, in some cases, their lengthy articulation could almost certainly be cut in half without changing the slightest doctrinal

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<sup>284</sup> It is our intention, as a committee, to develop a user-friendly booklet (15-20 pages) explaining the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship within a simple confessional framework, and to present it to the 2021 Synod for constructive feedback.

<sup>285</sup> It is our desire, as a committee, to eventually draft a paper summarizing the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship, which could then be approved by synod and forwarded to NAPARC for feedback and discussion.

detail. By simplifying, condensing, and streamlining our principles of civil government, the RP Testimony might become less cumbersome and more user-friendly as a resource for church membership classes and Sabbath school lessons. Nevertheless, this is merely an observation, not a proposal.

All things considered, we are extremely grateful to the Lord for our existing standards and remain committed to expounding and applying them precisely as they have been passed down to us. Now more than ever, we have reason to lift up our voices in praise and adoration of our exalted Lord and Savior, as He continues to build, sustain, and sanctify our tiny denomination in the historic Biblical truths of the Christian faith. Moreover, as we look to the future, it is our earnest prayer that His Holy Spirit would enable us, more and more, to echo the victorious battle cry of the church militant in all ages, boldly declaring to a lost and dying world that "There is another king, Jesus!"

# APPENDIX ONE

## ***A Catechetical Glossary of the Confessional Doctrine of Christ's Mediatorial Kingship***

**Preface:** The following catechetical glossary was developed by our committee, as a means of expressing our distinctive understanding of Christ's mediatorial kingship using the confessional framework and vocabulary of the Westminster Standards (WLC 31, 36, 42, 45, 191; WSC 102). We are looking for feedback — either privately via email or on the floor of the 2020 Synod — regarding any aspect(s) of this doctrine which may require additional exegetical proof or explanation. We hope to consider and discuss your feedback as a committee in the year ahead, with the tentative goal of submitting a brief, user-friendly booklet (15-20 pages) outlining the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship for your examination at the 2021 Synod.

**Q. 1 What is God's essential kingship?**

A. God's essential kingship is His supreme Lordship, as the Triune God, over all His creation.

**Q. 2 How many kingdoms does Christ possess as the God-man Mediator of the covenant of grace?**

A. Christ, as the God-man Mediator of the covenant of grace, possesses three kingdoms: the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of glory, and the kingdom of power.

**Q. 3 What is Christ's kingdom of grace?**

A. Christ's kingdom of grace is His church on earth throughout history, both visible and invisible, of which He declares, "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

**Q. 4 What is Christ's kingdom of glory?**

A. Christ's kingdom of glory is His church in its final state of sinless, resurrected, everlasting, heavenly perfection, wherein all its members shall "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father".

**Q. 5 What is Christ's kingdom of power?**

A. Christ's kingdom of power is His supreme authority over all things in heaven and earth, granted as a reward by His Father, who "put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things for the church", that He might destroy the kingdom of Satan, establish His kingdom of grace among all nations, and hasten the arrival of His kingdom of glory.

**Q. 6 How can Christ the Mediator be head over all things, if He mediates for His church only?**

A. Christ the Mediator reigns as the supreme and authoritative Head over all things; yet He is neither Head of all things (as if all were His body), nor for all things (as if to procure eternal life for all).

**Q. 7 How does the scope of Christ's kingdom of grace differ from that of His kingdom of power?**

A. Christ, by His kingdom of power, rules universally as Head over all creation — including fallen angels, reprobate sinners, and godless nations — whereas, by His kingdom of grace, He rules particularly as the Head and Husband of His body and bride, the church.



# APPENDIX TWO

## ***A Historical Outline and Summary of the RPCNA Synod's Gradual Abandonment of Principled Political Dissent (1958 – 1970)***

Since its inception in 1774, the RPCNA experienced a steady stream of internal conflicts in connection with its position on political dissent.<sup>286</sup> This included a majority exodus into the RP/AP merger of 1782 (thus creating the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church), the Old Light/New Light Division of 1833, and the Disruption of 1891. By the middle of the twentieth century, many in the RPCNA had grown weary of contending for political dissent and entertained serious doubts as to its Biblical warrant.

### ***1. The Explanatory Declaration***

In 1936, the *Oath Committee* was appointed to help determine the official meaning of the oath of allegiance to the US Constitution, and to assist the church in its application of political dissent. In 1939, the synod endorsed and approved the Explanatory Declaration, which permitted RP members to take the oath of allegiance, albeit with this stated qualification:

In taking this oath I make no mental reservation. I am a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and I declare that I owe a supreme allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, but in making that declaration I take the same God as my witness, invoking His assistance to help me to render due obedience to my country in all temporal matters. And I do further declare that I do not know any matter in which I intend actual disobedience to any command of my country now known to me."<sup>287</sup>

In 1959, however, the *Special Committee to Study the Possibility of a New Explanatory Declaration* asserted its "objection to taking an oath to a constitution that does not acknowledge the Crown Rights of Jesus Christ" and proposed an alternative statement, which laid greater emphasis on the secular nature of the US Constitution.

I cannot conscientiously take the oath to the Constitution of the United States without an explanation because I believe the Bible teaches that all men owe their first allegiance to Jesus Christ and that all nations should acknowledge His authority and law.

I am willing to take the oath with this explanation:

My taking this oath is not to be interpreted as meaning that I approve the failure of this Constitution to acknowledge the authority and law of Jesus Christ, through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God.

It is to be interpret as meaning that my purpose is to be a true and loyal citizen of this country, and in every way consistent with my maintaining of my first allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> By political dissent, we refer to the conviction that due to the US Constitution's failure to acknowledge the supreme authority of Christ, Christians are morally required (1) to abstain from taking an oath to support and defend the US Constitution, and (2) to abstain from voting for political candidates planning to take the oath. By implication, this view would also prohibit Christians from serving in public office.

<sup>287</sup> 1939 Minutes of Synod, 105. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1967%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>288</sup> 1959 Minutes of Synod, 148. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1959%20Minutes.pdf>.

Rather than adopting the proposed revision, the synod ordered that the matter be "recommitted for another year's study", thus reaffirming the 1939 Explanatory Declaration.<sup>289</sup> The following year (1960), the *Committee on Political Dissent* referred back to the proposed Explanatory Declaration of 1959, contending that the 1939 version did not adequately express "the oath-taker's disapproval of a secular constitution."<sup>290</sup> No further action was taken, however, and the 1939 Explanatory Declaration remained an option for RPCNA members to take the oath of allegiance without violating the church's official stance on civil government.

## **2. *Revising the RP Testimony: Chapter 29***

The church's official stance on civil government was, at the same time, undergoing changes of its own. For some time, efforts had been underway to reevaluate the position of the Testimony as articulated in Chapter 29 ("Of Civil Government") and Chapter 30 ("Of the Right of Dissent from a Constitution Of Civil Government").

In 1957, the Committee to Review Chapters 29 and 30 of the Testimony<sup>291</sup> provided the synod with a rough draft of its proposed revision of Chapter 29.<sup>292</sup> Two proposed changes are especially worth highlighting.

First, the existing version of 29.2 asserted the duty of "every nation" to "acknowledge the authority of Christ, and to enter into covenant with Him as its King and Saviour."<sup>293</sup> The proposed revision, by contrast, asserts the duty of "every nation to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, the authority of Christ as King of nations, and the Bible as the supreme standard of national righteousness."<sup>294</sup> While Christ's kingship over the nations is acknowledged, increased emphasis is laid upon the sovereignty of God and the moral authority of the Bible, with no mention of national covenanting or of Christ as national "Saviour".

Apparently these omissions did not go unnoticed, as the committee noted in its report the following year (1958) that "We have agreed to the insertion of the words 'and Saviour' after the word 'King' in section two of Section 29."<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, when the final revision of Chapter 29 was adopted in 1962 by a vote of 113-5, it did not include the phrase "King and Saviour of nations". It did, however, reincorporate the language of every nation's duty to "enter into covenant with Christ and serve to advance His Kingdom on earth" (29.4).<sup>296</sup>

A second notable feature of the proposed revision to Chapter 29 was its tendency to soften the language asserting the absolute illegitimacy of secular governments. In its existing form, RPT 29.2 declared that "no government which deprives men of civil or religious liberty, or interferes unjustly with private ownership, or plays fast and loose with human life, or proposes to force men to do violence to the spirit and precepts of the Christian religion, can rightfully claim the sanction of God, or consider itself to be his minister."<sup>297</sup> In the proposed revision, this statement was relocated into 29.3 with a very subtle (yet highly significant) change in its language. Instead of

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>290</sup> 1960 Minutes of Synod, 34. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1960%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>291</sup> By 1961, the Committee had become known, perhaps more accurately, as The Committee to *Revise* Chapters 29 and 30 of the Testimony.

<sup>292</sup> 1957 Minutes of Synod, 17-19. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1957%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>293</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 205.

<sup>294</sup> 1957 Minutes of Synod, 17.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>296</sup> 1962 Minutes of Synod, 22. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1962%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>297</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 205.

flatly denying that such governments "can rightfully claim the sanction of God", it denied them to be "fully sanctioned by God."<sup>298</sup>

Similarly, the existing version of Error 6 had condemned the notion "That Christians are bound to cherish, as the ordinance of God, all those who may be exalted in providence to power in a nation, although they may be tyrants or usurpers..."<sup>299</sup> By contrast, the proposed revision of this section (listed as Error 7) condemns the idea "That Christians are bound to cherish" such providential governments "as fully sanctioned by God".<sup>300</sup>

By the time the final revision was adopted in 1962, even these softer statements had been removed. Rather than denying the sanction (or full sanction) of a secular government, the adopted revision affirms that its rebellion against Christ "is sinful, makes the nation liable to the wrath of God, and threatens the continued existence of the government and nation." Rather than labeling a wicked and oppressive government as illegitimate, 29.7 notes that it cannot "rightfully claim the submission of its citizens or the blessings of God promised for obedience to Him." That is, while the adopted revision affirms that ungodly governments will experience God's providential judgment for their rebellion, it no longer regards such governments as illegitimate. In fact, in the revised version of Error 9, it explicitly condemns the view "That sinful actions or neglect of God's Word makes void the just authority of the civil government."<sup>301</sup>

The adopted revision of Chapter 29 no longer emphasizes the need to identify and reject unlawful governments. Instead, it highlights the need to identify unlawful actions and commands issued by lawful governments. "Due subjection of all persons, cheerfully rendered, to civil officers and to civil government in general, is pleasing to God." However, "No person... is required by God to obey civil authority when such authority demands that the citizen or subject do that which is clearly contrary to the law of God as revealed in the Scriptures." In such instances, "The Christian has a special obligation to render due submission to civil authority in order to express his loyalty to Jesus Christ".<sup>302</sup>

### **3. Revising the RP Testimony: Chapter 30**

In 1958, the Committee to Review Chapters 29 and 30 of the Testimony provided the synod with its "tentative restatement" of Chapter 30, changing its name from "Of the Right of Dissent From a Constitution of Civil Government" to "Of Dissent from a Secular Constitution of Civil Government". The existing version of 30.1 had plainly asserted that "The only position consistent for the Christian is the position of dissent from any constitution or form of civil government which refuses or neglects to own allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Prince of the kings of the earth."<sup>303</sup> The revised version stated that "in case such recognition [of Christ as ruler of the state] is not given" Christians "should dissent from the sin of omission" [sic] and "withhold their assent from the Constitution, in order to make their testimony consistent."<sup>304</sup> In the same way that the revised version of Chapter 29 softened (and eventually abandoned) the notion of secular governments being illegitimate, this proposed revision of Chapter 30 clearly downplays the role of dissent from

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<sup>298</sup> 1957 Minutes of Synod, 18. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1957%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>299</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 207.

<sup>300</sup> 1957 Minutes of Synod, 19.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>303</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 208.

<sup>304</sup> 1957 Minutes of Synod, 18. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1957%20Minutes.pdf>.

a non-Christian government. Indeed, it sounds more like pious advice for those desiring to go above and beyond in maximizing the consistency of their Christian witness. It does not carry the force of an absolute moral principle that is worth dying to maintain.<sup>305</sup>

This trend is reinforced in the proposed revision to Error 1. The existing version of Error 1 had condemned the view "That it is lawful to profess or swear allegiance to an immoral constitution of civil government."<sup>306</sup> The proposed version condemned the view "That it is lawful to profess or swear an unqualified allegiance to any human authority, in particular to a secular government." According to the proposed revision, certain forms of qualified allegiance to the constitution (e.g. the Explanatory Declaration) were not unlawful. Civil governments with a godless, Christ-less constitution (e.g. the United States of America) were no longer characterized as "immoral", but only as "secular". This reflects the growing sentiment among RP's that although the US government and its secular Constitution were inherently flawed and unbiblical at certain points, they were perhaps not so diabolically "immoral" as previous generations had made them out to be.

Eventually, the final revision of Chapter 30 was adopted in 1963 by a razor-thin two-thirds majority of 72-34, with 16 delegates registering their dissent.<sup>307</sup> By this time, its title was no longer "Of Dissent From a Secular Constitution of Civil Government" but simply "Of Christian Citizenship". Whereas the 1945 version had included three sections and condemned four errors, the 1963 version featured nine sections and condemned no less than twelve errors.<sup>308</sup>

As it turns out, the change in content was no less radical than the change in name and structure. The revised Chapter 30 features a robust appreciation for conscientious civil obedience (and principled disobedience when explicitly commanded to sin) as well as proactive Christian social and political influence. It presents political dissent merely as an abstract theoretical principle, constantly qualifying and hedging itself on matters of concrete application. It paints the recognition of Christ's universal supremacy as optimal and beneficial, yet not absolutely essential to legitimate civil government. It urges the Christian citizen not to "compromise his loyalty to Christ", but refuses to specify what such a compromise might entail. It declares that "The Christian must relinquish every right or privilege of citizenship which involves him in responsibility for silence about, disregard for, or denial of the regal rights of Jesus Christ", but provides no examples. It warns the Christian against the "sinful" act of taking "an oath of allegiance which compromises his supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ" and the "sinful" practice of participating "in the selection of officials or civil servants who are required to take an oath which a Christian himself could not take in good conscience", but does not explain how any of this applies specifically to modern-day North American believers.<sup>309</sup>

In a word, the newly adopted Chapter 30 fails to give any decisive answer to the most important question of all: Do any of these prohibitions apply to the US government and its federal Constitution? Rather, it calls upon the individual Christian himself or herself "to ascertain whether any prescribed oath of allegiance to the civil authority involves acceptance of unchristian principles stated or implied in its constitution of government." Reference is also made to the

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<sup>305</sup> This assessment, of course, could equally be applied to the existing 1945 Testimony as well, when compared with the language of the previous version of the Testimony. The point is that the RPCNA's commitment to political dissent had been slowly fading away for a long time.

<sup>306</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 210.

<sup>307</sup> *1963 Minutes of Synod*, 54. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1963%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-59.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

church assisting the believer in this judgment: "It is for the Christian and the Church to decide whether this sense [of the oath, as intended by the civil authority] involves sinful requirements." However, with "the Church" either unwilling or unable to provide a clear answer, "the Christian" is left with little more than a purely hypothetical if/then scenario: "If the oath of allegiance to civil authority explicitly or by necessary implication requires support of anti-Christian, atheistic, or secular principles, then the Christian must refuse on these grounds to take the oath of allegiance."<sup>310</sup>

#### **4. Christ-Centered Voting?**

There can be little doubt that the adopted revision of Chapter 30 paved the way for limited participation in political elections by RP members. According to 30.3, "As a part of his witness to Divine truth, the Christian, when such action involves no disloyalty to Christ, ought to select civil rulers who fear God, who love truth and justice, who hate evil, and who are publicly committed to Scriptural principles of civil government."<sup>311</sup> This theme is picked up in 30.8, which states that "When participating in political elections, the Christian should support and vote only for such men as are publicly committed to Scriptural principles of civil government. Should the Christian seek civil office by political election, he must openly inform those whose support he seeks of his adherence to Christian principles of civil government."<sup>312</sup>

That such vote-worthy candidates were required to have a credible profession of faith in Christ is evident from the fact that 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ("Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers") is cited as a proof-text. Moreover, the revised form of Error 3 explicitly condemns the view "That a candidate's relation to Jesus Christ is not significant in determining his qualification for office."<sup>313</sup> In other words, Christian voters must select God-fearing Christian candidates, not impenitent unbelievers, of whom the Apostle declares, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18; Ps. 36:1).<sup>314</sup> To meet this confessional criteria, a candidate would need to credibly profess a personal saving relationship to Jesus Christ and publicly promise to obey His revealed will as the ultimate standard of truth and righteousness.

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>314</sup> In RPT 30.3, the phrase "rulers who fear God, who love truth and justice, who hate evil" is a Scriptural allusion (if not excerpt) drawn directly from at least two classic texts. Exodus 18:21 states, "Moreover, you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." According to David's last words, as recorded in 2 Samuel 23:3, "The God of Israel said, 'The Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.'" Scripturally speaking, the phrase "fear God" (or "God-fearer") refers to those who, at the very least, profess the true religion and worship the true God as recognized members of His covenant community. A simple concordance study using the English Bible will reveal this much. Within the Jewish synagogue, the term *God-fearer* was commonly applied to Gentile converts in order to distinguish professing *Jewish* worshippers from professing *Gentile* worshippers. On two occasions, the inspired Psalmist lists this class of Gentile God-fearers right alongside the "house of Israel," the "house of Aaron," and the "House of Levi" as constituent elements of the professing Old Covenant church (Ps. 115:9-13; 135:19-21). Similarly, in Acts 13:16, Paul addresses his synagogue audience in Pisidian Antioch as "Men of Israel, and you who fear God." Luke then records that, after the service, "when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:43). In other words, the *God-fearers* mentioned in verse 16 are identical to the "devout proselytes" of verse 43 (Cf. 13:50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7). Perhaps the most well-known Gentile God-fearer in Scripture is "Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1-2; Cf. vv. 30-32, 34-35). When addressing assurance of salvation, WCF 18.4 equates the phrase "such as fear [God]" with the phrase "True believers". All things considered, there appears to be no substantial warrant — either in Scripture or in our confessional standards — for classifying individuals as "God-fearing" or "God-fearers" unless they are professing members and worshippers within the God-ordained covenant community of the true church.

The synod's adoption of these revisions meant that nothing in the church's doctrinal standards would technically prohibit RPCNA members from voting for (or running as) consistently Christian politicians, so long as the Explanatory Declaration was properly utilized. By thus qualifying their intent, members could take the oath of allegiance in good conscience and begin participating in the political process as both voters and candidates. These new liberties, however, were implicit, not explicit. The standing judicial precedent remained in favor of principled political dissent. Therefore, the issue would eventually need to be addressed directly by the church courts.

Not everyone in the synod shared this grand vision of permitting RP members to vote for consistently Christian candidates. The process of revising Chapters 29 and 30 of the Testimony involved considerable debate between the proponents of absolute political dissent on the one hand, and those who sought to relax the church's position, on the other. For instance, in 1961, "Synod decided that at this point the historic position of the Church on Political Dissent stands unchanged, that the whole question of Political Dissent remains in the hands of the present committee for revision of chapter 30 and that they be a committee to receive and publish in the *Covenanter Witness* during the coming year a discussion of the proposed revision of chapter 30, pro and con, space to be divided equally between the two sides."<sup>315</sup>

The final outcome of this controversial revision process indicates that those seeking to relax the church's position on political dissent were largely successful in their effort. The 1963 revision of Chapter 30 had passed with only one vote to spare, but it had passed nonetheless; and the dominoes were not about to stop falling.

Not surprisingly, the Synod of 1964 received multiple communications related to national covenanting and political dissent. Each of these was addressed in the report of the Judicial Committee.<sup>316</sup> For instance, a paper from the Phoenix session (Paper No. 3) requested clarification regarding the newly adopted statements on voting in RPT 30.3 and 30.8, asking "Is or is not the acceptance of Political Dissent a condition of church membership?" In response, the Judicial Committee states, "The revised Chapter 30 of the Testimony shows that, there might be conditions under which it is not a condition of church membership." The report then lists "those conditions under which acceptance of Political Dissent is a condition of church membership."<sup>317</sup>

Among the five circumstances in which the committee regards political dissent as a condition of church membership, is a scenario in which "if one should participate in political elections, he could find no candidate who is publicly committed to Scriptural principles of civil government." The report continues,

In implementing Sec. 8, Chap. 30, Synod declares that when the oath to the constitution of the United States is taken with the Explanatory Declaration the Christian may regard it as involving only due submission in the Lord, and as not involving his acceptance of any unchristian principle of civil government. However in so far as the conditions for participation in political elections are not met, political dissent remains a condition of church membership. Members may seek political office if the Explanatory Declaration is used in taking oath of office and members may vote for candidates who use the Explanatory Declaration."<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> 1961 Minutes of Synod, 75. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1961%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>316</sup> 1964 Minutes of Synod, 99-102. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1964%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

According to the 1964 Judicial Committee's interpretation of RPT 30.3 and 30.8 (equivalent to RPT 23.15 and 23.29 in the 1980 Testimony), RPCNA members could technically vote in an election, but only for candidates who employ the Explanatory Declaration as a profession of their ultimate, heartfelt allegiance to King Jesus. Evidently, the synod agreed with the committee's findings, voting to adopt its response to the inquiry from Phoenix.

Some in the synod, however, strongly disliked the Judicial Committee's ruling. Sam Boyle (joined by four others) issued a rather passionate Dissent From the Judicial Committee Report, citing his "continued disapproval of the new Chapter 30" and acknowledging that "the Judicial Committee's answers to Paper No. 3... are naturally based on the revised Chapter 30."<sup>319</sup> Boyle continues, "To vote for any men, even ones who say they accept the Christian principles of civil government or use the Explanatory Declaration with the Oath of office, is, in my judgment, a sin and contrary to the Word of God" and "constitutes a further violation of the spirit of the Covenant of 1871".

That same year (1964), a communication (Paper No. 14) was received from the Santa Ana session through the Pacific Coast Presbytery "concerning implementation of the revised chapter 30 of the Testimony".<sup>320</sup> In other words, the folks in Santa Ana wanted to know if they were now allowed to vote. The paper was eventually referred to the Oath Committee. In response to Paper No. 14, the Oath Committee notes that the newly adopted wording of RPT 30.3 and 30.8 essentially leaves it up to the church courts to determine whether the swearing of a specific oath is sinful. It then proceeds to summarize what the courts have said in the past.

Since Synod in the past has given many deliverances declaring that the oath to the Constitution without an explanatory declaration does compromise the Christian's loyalty to Christ and involves the Christian in the support of sinful principles of civil government, the members of the church are not free to participate in elections.<sup>321</sup>

The committee does not stop there, however. It proceeds to note that,

It is also true that if Synod should rule that the Christian is free to use the franchise in elections, the use of this franchise could (under the new Chapter 30) only be used to a limited degree. Section 3 states that "the christian, when such action involves no disloyalty to Christ, ought to select rulers who fear God, who love truth and justice, who hate evil, and who are publicly committed to scriptural principles of civil government." In Section 8 we read, "When participating in political election [sic], he must openly inform those whose support he seeks of his adherence to Christian principles of civil government."<sup>322</sup>

At this point, the Oath Committee appeals to "the decision of the 1964 Synod in connection with the report of the judicial committee" concerning Paper No. 14 from the Phoenix session "regarding the implementation of section 8 of chapter 30." In other words the Oath Committee's response to Santa Ana is essentially threefold: (1) The RPCNA doctrinal standards no longer explicitly require absolute political dissent; (2) The synod, if it so chooses, may permit voting by a judicial ruling; and (3) Such voting would necessarily be limited by the synod's interpretation of RPT 30.8, which requires consistently Christian candidates who express their ultimate allegiance to King Jesus by using the Explanatory Declaration when swearing the oath of allegiance.

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 102-103. (Includes all subsequent quotations from this statement.)

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 103.

Moreover, out of a desire "that the members of the church may be informed as to the provision of the new chapter 30, as interpreted by the 1964 synod", the Oath Committee urged the synod to "appoint a committee to advise presbyteries and sessions as to how far its members may go in participating in political elections."<sup>323</sup> The synod responded by adopting the Oath Committee's report and agreeing to appoint the proposed committee.

## **5. The Synod of 1965**

Following the Synod of 1964, some felt that the stance of the church regarding political dissent was unclear at best. If the standards did not explicitly forbid members from voting or running for office (using the Explanatory Declaration), why were these restrictions required for membership? A great deal of members, congregations, and sessions seemed greatly confused by the mixed signals they felt they were receiving from the church. As a result, the 1965 Synod once again received a host of communications relating to the issue of political dissent.

One such communication (Paper No. 6) stemmed from an action taken by the Illinois Presbytery "concerning one who ran for civil office" (presumably an RP) and apparently received encouragement from the Bloomington session, which circulated a pastoral letter urging members to vote for him. The matter eventually made its way to the Illinois Presbytery which issued a public commendation of the letter. Synod's Judicial Committee, however, was not impressed. It ruled that the action was "out of order" and urged the Presbytery "reconsider its action to bring [it] into conformity with the law and order of the church."<sup>324</sup> While it is perhaps impossible to be certain, it is likely both the Illinois Presbytery and the Bloomington session acted in good faith, supposing that they were simply applying the church's revised Testimony. If the candidate in question was an RP member who was willing to take the Explanatory Declaration, then there would be good reason for them to surmise that other RP members could (or even should) vote for him. Either way, Paper No. 6 is evidence of the growing confusion over political dissent within the RPCNA.

In a separate communication regarding political dissent (Paper No. 1), the New Castle session asked "What is the 'fundamental law of the church' with regard to political dissent? If we have a 'Fundamental Law' on this subject, does it or does it not have to be spelled out specifically in our 'Testimony'?" In its response to this paper, the Judicial Committee notes, on the one hand, that the RP Testimony "contained the general principles on the subject" and that "the church has not felt it necessary to spell out specifically in our 'Testimony' the application of 'political dissent'." On the one hand, it reasserts that "our church's position in regard to political dissent remains a condition of church membership." Ultimately, "Chapter 30 leaves it to the church in the orderly processes of its courts to determine" how the principle applies "in specific circumstances." "For example," the committee observes, "the Testimony condemns oath bound secret orders but leaves it to the courts of the church to apply this to specific organizations", lest "the application of principles to every specific [sic] case" should "involve it in endless confusion."<sup>325</sup>

From a polemical standpoint, this attempted comparison between political dissent and secret societies is an utter failure. If it succeeds at all, it succeeds only in illustrating the great lengths to which some were willing to go in defense of the status quo during this nebulous period of ecclesiastical limbo. It is true that the task of compiling an exhaustive list of secret societies would

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>324</sup> 1965 *Minutes of Synod*, 6, 75-77. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1965%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>325</sup> 1965 *Minutes of Synod*, 75. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1957%20Minutes.pdf>.



have indeed proved challenging. However, any child in the fifth grade could easily have compiled a list of the civil governments under which RPCNA members lived in the 1960s. The idea that a North American denomination would experience "endless confusion" by answering a few simple questions about the United States and Canada is simply not persuasive. The real source of this seemingly "endless confusion" was the synod's adoption of a Testimony that provided more questions than answers, combined with its ongoing hesitancy to provide straightforward answers to key questions. Thankfully, due in large part to another communication submitted in 1965, this confusion was not to be endless.

The pastor of the San Diego congregation also submitted a communication (Paper No. 4) to the synod that year. It dealt mainly with "the question of discipline in the case of those who voted in the last election."<sup>326</sup> The Judicial Committee opted to divide the two main issues raised in the paper.

First, there was the issue of the "eight members of the congregation who voted in the presidential election of 1964", presumably for Arizona Governor Barry Goldwater. While Goldwater did run for office as a political conservative, he was neither a consistently Christian candidate nor a subscriber to the Explanatory Declaration. Therefore, he did not meet the qualifications for voteworthiness outlined in RPT 30.3 and 30.8 as interpreted by the 1964 Synod.

In response, the Judicial Committee expresses its appreciation for the honesty of the eight members in openly acknowledging their actions, it notes that the members had voted "with full knowledge of the Church's position in this matter" and were "therefore in violation of the present established order of the church" and should receive the "proper exercise of Church discipline." Citing the scriptural limitations of Christian liberty (WCF 20.2) as well as the phrase "due subordination in the Lord" in the TOC, the committee argues that these members were insubordinate to "the law and order of the Church" and should not, therefore, "expect to be free from censure by the Church courts."

What is most striking here is that, in 1965, neither the RPT nor the TOC included any specific prohibition against voting. The Testimony did, of course, condemn the sin of swearing an unqualified oath to a secular constitution. However, it neither specified whether the US Constitution was sufficiently secular to warrant this application, nor provided a precise distinction between qualified and unqualified allegiance. Recent synod decisions had all but recognized the use of the Explanatory Declaration by Christian voters and politicians as an open door for political involvement without violating the standards or the Covenant of 1871.

In light of all this, it is difficult to determine precisely what ecclesiastical law these eight members actually violated. As already observed, in voting for either Lyndon B. Johnson or Barry Goldwater (both unbelievers), they had violated the 1964 Synod's interpretation of RPT 30.3 and 30.8. However, the accusation against them was not that they had voted for the wrong candidate, but rather that they had voted at all.

The most plausible explanation is that the newly revised RPT 30.7 stated that "When the Church by orderly processes in her own courts determines that the oath of allegiance to a civil government compromises the Christian's loyalty to Christ or involves the Christian in the support of sinful

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 76. (Includes all subsequent quotations from this report on Paper No. 4.)

principles of civil government, the Church must require her members to refuse such sinful oaths."<sup>327</sup>

This statement leaves it to the church courts to apply political dissent to the oath of allegiance to the US Constitution. As such, it essentially places RPCNA members under obligation to submit to disciplinary actions which are substantially grounded in judicial precedent (i.e. past majority rulings of church courts) rather than in the clearly defined articles adopted in the Confession and Testimony. While the introduction to the 1945 RPCNA Form of Church Government does not include past actions of synod in its list of subordinate standards, Testimony 30.7 grants it this de facto status.<sup>328</sup> This is especially significant, given the fact that synod's judicial decisions require only a 51% majority, whereas adding an article the Testimony would require a two-thirds super-majority, followed by an overture. This deliberative procedure is, of course, predicated upon the assumption that judicial decisions are judicial in nature (interpreting and applying law to individual cases), and not legislative in nature (enacting laws not specified in the standards). By deferring the substance of RPT 30.7 to the majority decisions of the courts, this distinction was blurred, creating a great deal of controversy and confusion over what the church actually believed and what it could legitimately enforce.

The Covenant of 1871 was another key factor. Unlike synod's judicial precedent, the Form of Church Government explicitly acknowledged the church's Covenant as a subordinate standard. Therefore, many continued to emphasize its explicit promise to "continue to refuse to incorporate by any act, with the political body, until this blessed reformation [recognizing 'Jesus Christ as the Ruler of Nations'] has been secured".<sup>329</sup> Proponents of total political dissent argued that the phrase "the political body" pointed directly to the US federal government and that voting clearly amounts to an act of "incorporation". Moreover, they reasoned, since previous disciplinary rulings had confirmed this interpretation, voting must be regarded as contrary to the Covenant and, therefore, contrary to the subordinate standards of the church.

In response to the situation in San Diego, the Judicial Committee's report (subsequently adopted by the Synod) stated that a member who "feels compelled to violate the Church's rules under which he has placed himself" must "face the logical consequences of his insubordination."<sup>330</sup> Hence, despite the uncertain language of the revised Testimony, the synod still felt that voting was, in some sense, a violation of "the church's rules".

In its second major aspect, the San Diego paper argued "that the Church's requirement of political dissent is neither expressly set down in Scripture, nor by good and necessary consequence can be derived therefrom." In response, the committee states that it "does not have time to go into this study in depth and therefore recommends that a special committee be appointed to report in 1967." This recommendation was adopted along with the rest of the report. In the meantime, "in view of the present study of Political Dissent", it was determined that "disciplinary action in this case should be stayed until an answer is given to the San Diego pastor."<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> 1963 Minutes of Synod, 57-58. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1963%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>328</sup> *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Synod, 1949) 228. The current RPCNA Directory for Church Government makes this classification explicit.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 222. (my emphasis)

<sup>330</sup> 1965 Minutes of Synod, 76. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1965%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>331</sup> 1965 Minutes of Synod, 76. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1965%20Minutes.pdf>.

## 6. The Synod of 1966

In 1966, the report of synod's Judicial Committee reveals additional communications regarding the issue of voting. "Paper No. 3" from the Pittsburgh Presbytery asked, "Is it permissible [sic] to summarize our present application of Chapters 29 and 30, in our Declaration and Testimony in the following words: 'You may vote for any candidate who has stated publicly that he will take the oath of office with the Explanatory Declaration, but you are not allowed to vote for any other candidates.'" The Judicial Committee's response (later adopted by the Synod) is as follows:

Your committee recommends that Synod adopt the following statement: "It is the judgment of Synod that under the conditions that now prevail in the United States, members of the church may vote for any political candidate who has stated publicly that he will take the oath of office with the Explanatory Declaration. It is not proper for members of the church to vote for any other political candidate."<sup>332</sup>

This statement by the Judicial Committee was designed to answer various other communications as well. For instance, "Paper No. 4" from the Ohio-Illinois Presbytery asked the synod to reconsider its 1965 ruling on "Presbytery's action in commending the Bloomington Session for its pastoral letter about voting in the 1964 November election." Similarly, "Paper No. 5 from the Phoenix Session... suggests a 'lack of clear decision on the part of Synod as to the political dissent required' of a candidate for membership and admits, consequently, that Session is unable to explain what is expected of a member in regard to political dissent." In both cases, the Judicial Committee referred the authors back to "Synod's decision in answer to Paper No. 3."<sup>333</sup>

A proposed overture to amend RPT 30.7 was also considered and adopted. "Paper No. 6" involved a questionnaire circulated by the Oakdale Session among "all Sessions of the Church, asking support for an overture on two propositions." While the second of these two overtures failed to receive the necessary approval from at least one-third of the sessions, the first succeeded. It stated "that this sentence be added to Chapter 30, Section 7 of the Declaration and Testimony: 'However such requirement for membership shall not be binding until submitted in overture.'"<sup>334</sup> In other words, it stipulates that the "orderly processes" by which the church "determines that the oath of allegiance to a civil government compromises the Christian's loyalty to Christ" cannot be grounded exclusively in the judicial precedent of a previous action of synod. In order to make it a requirement for membership or a matter for disciplinary censure, it must first go down in overture to the sessions and elders of the church, along the same lines as a legislative amendment to the church's constitution.

Following the synod's decision to send the proposition down in overture, several chief proponents of political dissent entered their "protest to the shutting off of debate on this action of Synod because we feel that the statement as passed is ambiguous and capable of different interpretations." Their chief concern was that this amendment would be taken "to mean that the position of political dissent has not been fully adopted by due process of our church." While advocates of the proposed amendment had stated on the floor that their proposition did not entail this conclusion, the protesters complained that "it was not so stated in this action."<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> 1966 Minutes of Synod, 81-82. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1966%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>333</sup> 1966 Minutes of Synod, 81-82. (Includes all quotations in this paragraph.)

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 80.

Either way, if the proposition were to pass in overture, it would, practically speaking, put an end to the requirement of political dissent for church membership in the RPCNA. This is because any concrete application of RPT 30.7 to the American political situation would remain in suspense until it could be successfully passed in overture, which seemed more and more unlikely, given the prevailing zeitgeist within the denomination and its leadership.

## 7. *The Synod of 1967*

In 1967, the results from the overture amending RPT 30.7 were officially released: 201 elders in favor and only 79 elders opposed. Despite receiving over 70% approval from individual elders, the amendment garnered the support of only 42 local sessions, which was fewer than the required two-thirds majority.<sup>336</sup>

Notwithstanding this failed overture, the Synod of 1967 was to become a major turning point in RPCNA history with respect to the issue of political dissent. This was the year that the Committee on Political Dissent would present its landmark report. As it turns out, it presented two reports: a minority report seeking "to maintain the present position of the Church"<sup>337</sup> and a majority report desiring "that the Church no longer require Political Dissent as a condition of Church membership."<sup>338</sup>

The minority report recommended "the reaffirmation of political dissent as a requirement of membership in the Covenant Church", contending that both the Covenant of 1871<sup>339</sup> and the Covenant of 1954<sup>340</sup> had bound the church to this position. It then notes that "the general principle of the Kingship of Christ over nations is not at present under discussion" and proceeds to list four main "Assumptions Our Church Has Made" as the basis of political dissent.

1. The Kingship of Christ over all things in heaven and on earth includes His Mediatorial sovereignty over the governments of all nations of the earth. This is a principle abundantly taught in the Bible and should be upheld at all costs.
2. The United States Constitution does not recognize the Mediatorial sovereignty of Christ, nor does the Government of the United States accept the Word of God as the Divine basis of its national laws and life. U.S. Supreme Court decisions repeatedly confirm this national unbelief.
3. The sin of our nation in refusing to acknowledge Christ and to legislate in conformity with the Word of God must be condemned both by positive Christian teaching and by proper protest, in the form of dissent from involvement in our nation's sin against God.
4. Political dissent as a Christian duty rests on Scriptural passages which point out the general duty of separation from sin, and on human judgments concerning the historical

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<sup>336</sup> 1967 Minutes of Synod, 52-53. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1967%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 121-128. (Includes all subsequent quotations from this report below.)

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 72-74.

<sup>339</sup> "We will pray and labor for the peace and welfare of our country, and for its reformation by a constitutional recognition of God as the source of all power, or Jesus Christ as the Ruler of nations, of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme rule, and of the true Christian religion; and we will continue to refuse to incorporate by any act, with the political body, until this blessed reformation has been secured."

<sup>340</sup> "We do solemnly purpose to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in all the relationships of life. We therefore oppose all the systems, religious and secular that undermine faith in the Scriptures, in the deity of Jesus Christ, and His redemptive work. We will continue to advocate the separation of church and state, and strive to bring each to the proper acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty. We therefore will not avail ourselves of those rights and privileges of citizenship that may tend to neutralize our testimony to the rights and claims of Christ over the nations."

and political situations which are sinful in the light of God's Word. Political dissent, therefore, depends partly on Bible texts and partly on good and necessary consequence from Biblical principles.

This is followed by several pages of Biblical citations organized under various headings, all confirming the universal authority of Jesus Christ, as the God-man Mediator, and the moral duty of nations to submit to His rule. The minority report concludes with a historical analysis of political dissent within the RPCNA.

Ever since 1806, when the Reformed Presbytery in North America adopted its first Testimony, the Covenanter Church has maintained a unique testimony to the Kingship of Christ over the nations. In order to uphold this testimony, the Covenanter Church has always required some kind of dissent from the political life and government service of the United States as consistent, negative proof of our sincerity in urging the Nation to confess Jesus Christ as its King.

At the same time, the report acknowledges that "the Covenanters in America have always found difficulty in defining and maintaining such political dissent as a requirement of church membership" and have faced an ever-increasing "temptation to desert our tradition of political dissent". This has created "tension" which "is difficult to bear and difficult to explain and defend to other Christians who cannot see why we shirk participation in the normal political activities of a democratic nation." As a result of this tension, "the Covenanter position has been changed so often, and altered so drastically, that we can no longer identify clearly what the Church believes or requires of members under the old term 'political dissent.'" This declension, the report argues, is due to "a steady liberalizing tendency through the years since 1806" which has changed how the church views issues such as "jury duty, school board elections, registering to vote on amendments, military service, teachers' oaths, etc." It continues,

The views of Covenanters two hundred years ago concerning religious toleration of non-Christians under a Christian state cannot quite be reconciled with the Christian Amendment now being used and propagated by this Synod. We have changed, and consistent Covenanter practice cannot be found in the historical study of our Church's decisions on practical matters of war duty, jury duty, naturalization oaths, etc., since our church began its denominational life in America 160 years ago.

In response to the objection that this change should inevitably lead to an abandonment of political dissent, the minority report asks, "If a girl from a Christian home be suddenly tempted and seduced from purity, is the only remedy left to go into prostitution?" Continuing this line of thought, it argues,

If there has been a drift in the Covenanter Church away from her earlier covenant profession, then the remedy is not to destroy the last remaining requirement of loyalty to Christ and allow our members to run freely through the wilderness of political secularism. Rather, let us have patience and humility to examine those changes by past Synods and to test all by the Scripture, and confess where our fathers erred. If we have lost the way, let us get back on God's Road.

The minority report, however, does recognize that not all change has been for the worse. "I believe some things in the 17th century covenants, and some things held by the 19th century Covenanters were in error" such that "God has heard the prayers of His Church in the past 150 years of

Covenanter history and that the Holy Spirit has enlightened our Synods to make adjustments to changing situations." Nevertheless, the report asserts, in the strongest of terms, that

If dissent be completely eliminated, then the principle of the Kingship of Christ also becomes a matter of free individual choice, and our Church will no longer hold a corporate testimony to this truth. We are on the verge of discarding the "offence" of the Cross as it applies to bearing faithful witness to Christ's supreme Kingship over our nation. I pray that we may not turn away from our Lord as a corporate church.

And again,

I have faith, too, to believe that God is speaking to us now, and that the distress and trouble of the past few years over political dissent can be a blessing if we seek God's face together and obey Christ The King and Head of the Church with the same heroic faithfulness that our ancestors showed in their historical age.

While the minority report featured a rather remarkable (and surely laudable) passion for the kingship of Christ, it lacked precision on what would become the fundamental question of this debate: How can we be absolutely certain that the oath of allegiance to the US Constitution necessarily involves or implies disloyalty to Christ and/or a denial of His kingship? For all its sound and fury, the minority failed to adequately answer this question. In Assumption #4 (listed above), it had sought to ground political dissent partly in "Scriptural passages which point out the general duty of separation from sin", partly on "human judgments concerning the historical and political situations", and partly on "good and necessary consequence from Biblical principles." There is an old saying that no matter how many leaky buckets one has, he still cannot succeed in making them hold water. The problem with the minority report is that it appears (rightly or wrongly) to employ a series of "Leaky Bucket" arguments, one after the other, without any clear and decisive evidence for its position. Indeed, the report itself is unclear as to whether political dissent truly is a moral requirement of God's law or whether it is simply the case that "the Covenanter Church has always required some kind of dissent from the political life and government service of the United States as consistent, negative proof of our sincerity in urging the Nation to confess Jesus Christ as its King." This lack of clarity and precision would ultimately spell the minority report's demise on the floor of synod.

The majority report, on the other hand, was characterized by brevity and precision, seeking to distinguish between doctrinal principle and practical application. It affirmed the RPCNA's distinct emphasis upon "the Kingship of Christ over the rulers of the earth" as a doctrinal principle. However, it questioned whether or not, scripturally speaking, the practice of requiring political dissent of all church members was a necessary application of this principle. In seeking to outline the historic rationale for political dissent, it listed the following logical propositions:

1. Jesus Christ possesses all authority in heaven and in earth.
2. Civil government ought to acknowledge the authority of Christ.
3. The government of the United States does not acknowledge the authority of Christ in its Constitution.
4. An oath to support and defend the Constitution implies the oathmaker's acceptance of the unscriptural principles of the Constitution. Therefore, it is sinful to take an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

5. Officeholders are required to take an oath to support and defend the Constitution. Therefore, it is sinful to hold office under the Constitution.
6. A voter is morally responsible for any act required of a candidate as a condition of holding office. Therefore, it is sinful to vote for candidates for public office.
7. The Church must forbid its members to take an oath to support and defend the Constitution, or to hold office under the Constitution, or to vote for candidates for public office.<sup>341</sup>

The majority report then noted that "if any of the numbered statements is found to be untrue, all the conclusions which follow are reversed." It also noted that, according to the position of the church, when the Explanatory Declaration is used "the conclusions following Statement five are reversed, because it is not true that officeholders are required to take an oath to support and defend the Constitution without the Explanatory Declaration." Therefore, "so long as the Church approves of taking the Constitutional oath with the Explanatory Declaration, it is not justified on the basis of this argument in prohibiting its members from voting for candidates for public office."

The majority report continues,

Of the seen numbered statements in the argument for dissent, No. 1, 2, 6, 7 are assumed to be drawn from Scripture. The majority of the committee is agreed that they are true statements of Scriptural teaching... With regard to the remaining statements, No. 3, 4, and 5, we observe that they are extra-biblical statements, concerning facts and legal interpretations in our present situation. No. 3 and 5 are simple matters of fact which can be proven by reference to the Constitution and the laws of the land. We believe that they are true. No. 4 is considered last because it is the most controversial. In order for any of the conclusions of the argument to be true, this statement must be true. To prove that it is true is a legal task which few, if any, in the Church are equipped to undertake. The Oath Committee was established by Synod in 1936 to seek an official interpretation of the Constitutional oath, but so far no such interpretation has been obtained by the Supreme Court, the only body which can finally decide such a question. Meanwhile, there have been numerous cases where persons were permitted to take the oath while declaring their supreme allegiance to Christ, and their disapproval of the Constitution's failure to recognize the authority of Christ. We believe that, on the basis of available evidence, Statement four cannot be proven to be true.<sup>342</sup>

At this point, the majority report lists the following recommendations, all of which were eventually adopted by the synod, along with the report as a whole.

1. That Synod reaffirm the principle of political dissent as set forth in Chapter 30 of our Testimony (Minutes of Synod, 1963, pp. 55-59).
2. That Synod declare that the evidence now available is not sufficient clearly to establish the fact that the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States is a sinful oath.

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<sup>341</sup> 1967 Minutes of Synod, 72. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1967%20Minutes.pdf>.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 73. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1967%20Minutes.pdf>.

3. That members and sessions be exhorted to study the Scriptures and the Testimony to pray for guidance, that they may bear witness to the Kingship of Christ in the sphere of their citizenship.
4. That for the sake of bearing witness to the Kingship of Christ and to make very clear the sense in which the oath is taken, Synod earnestly recommend that whenever any member takes the oath to the Constitution, he publicly use the most recent form of the Explanatory Declaration.<sup>343</sup>

In analyzing this majority report and its recommendations, two brief observations are in order.

First, the report does an excellent job of summarizing the precise logical basis of the church's historic position, zeroing in on the lack of definitive evidence substantiating Statement 4. This is ultimately what delivered the knockout punch to the older view; and rightly so. At the same time, the report is not quite so precise in explaining its own logical rationale for reclassifying the Explanatory Declaration from a necessary qualification to a recommended qualification. It seems to suggest that the US government's willingness to permit the Explanatory Declaration is itself evidence that it does not view the oath of allegiance as inherently unqualified. As such, it would be assumed that the person swearing the oath is doing so in subordination to his or her ultimate standard of moral and religious truth (i.e. higher law). While this assumption is not spelled out in the above report, it is addressed in the 1967 report of the Oath Committee, which notes that

The principle that the office holder is bound to a higher law than civil government is recognized by international law. All of the Nuremberg trials were based on the proposition that Hitler's henchmen were responsible to this higher law... The Explanatory Declaration is a clear statement that we intend to adhere in our civil relations to these principles.<sup>344</sup>

Granted, the Oath Committee is not here arguing against the need for an explicit and public Explanatory Declaration. To the contrary, it actually "printed a tract" explaining "why the Explanatory Declaration is needed" and "a questionnaire which may be submitted to candidates for public office, as to their willingness to use the Explanatory Declaration."

It seems clear, however, that the majority report on political dissent is following this line of thought to its logical conclusion. The US government's willingness to permit a stated Christian-based qualification to the oath of allegiance implies its belief that such a qualification, in principle (whether stated or implied), is consistent with the oath itself. Therefore, the oath itself cannot be said to require an absolute allegiance, but rather a subordinate allegiance, which would not interfere with one's absolute or ultimate submission to Christ, regardless if they stated their qualification or not. Furthermore, at that point, the decision to use (or not use) the Explanatory Declaration would no longer impact the integrity of the oath, but only the public witness of the oath taker. Its only real advantage, therefore, would be to maximize the effectiveness, consistency, and visibility of one's personal witness toward those administering the oath. The majority report, of course, regards this as an important matter, but not nearly as substantial as the integrity of the oath itself.

Therefore, while Recommendation 4 "earnestly recommends" use of the Explanatory Declaration as being optimal for personal Christian witness, it does not regard its use as an absolute moral prerequisite for church membership. So long as believers are committed to submitting to King

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 75-76. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1967%20Minutes.pdf>.



Jesus and His Word as their ultimate authority in every aspect of their public and private life and conduct, they may promise subordinate allegiance to the civil government and its secular constitution. This appears to be the position which ultimately prevailed in the RPCNA.

It is important to guard against a common misunderstanding at this point. By reclassifying the Explanatory Declaration as recommended rather than necessary, neither the majority report nor the Synod is denying the absolute necessity of submitting to Christ and His Word as the absolute authority. Submission to Christ is not merely recommended; it is absolutely necessary and morally required. To take the oath of allegiance to the US Constitution without a conscious recognition of the supreme authority of King Jesus and His Word (whether stated or unstated) is undoubtedly sinful. The majority report is not questioning this. It is simply addressing the issue of how this religious qualification is to be expressed and whether or not it must be stated verbally alongside the oath. This distinction will become extremely relevant in connection with our second major observation concerning the majority report.

Second, while the synod did abandon its historic condemnation of the US oath of allegiance as being sinful, it did not abandon political dissent in every sense. Recommendation 1 makes this abundantly clear, in that it serves to "reaffirm the principle of political dissent as set forth in Chapter 30." Although the prohibition contained in RPT 30.7 no longer applies to the US oath of allegiance, the Biblical principle of refusing to take sinful oaths remains intact, as does the Biblical principle of remaining loyal to King Jesus in every aspect of public life, along with a number of other general principles outlined in Chapter 30.

Among these continuing principles of political dissent are, of course, the Biblical principles which govern (1) what sorts of candidates Christian voters may support in good conscience and (2) under what conditions a believer may run for office. These principles, as described in RPT 30.3 and 30.8 remain not only untouched but positively reaffirmed by the synod's 1967 decision. With respect to voting, this is especially significant, since RPT 30.3 and 30.8 were each carried over into the 1980 Testimony (30.15 and 30.29) and remain binding in the RPCNA today.

This, of course, raises more questions regarding the Explanatory Declaration. As noted above, both the Synod of 1964 and the Synod of 1966 officially interpreted RPT 30.3 and 30.8 as mandating that Christians may only vote for candidates willing to take the Explanatory Declaration. While Recommendation 1 of the majority report implies a reaffirmation of RPT 30.3 and 30.8, Recommendation 4 simultaneously undercuts the necessity of the Explanatory Declaration. How then are we to interpret RPT 30.3 and 30.8, in light of the ruling that the Explanatory Declaration is highly recommended, but not morally necessary? Does this mean that, according to the Testimony, Christians are morally free to vote for political candidates who choose not to take the Explanatory Declaration? The answer to this question is yes.

Recommendations 2 and 4 make it clear that the oath of allegiance is no longer to be regarded as inherently sinful, assuming one's ultimate allegiance and submission is reserved for Christ and His Word. If one takes the oath in heartfelt submission to Christ, it is essentially the same as if he or she took the Explanatory Declaration and is, therefore, not sinful.

However, the same cannot be said for those who take the oath of allegiance apart from a heartfelt submission to Christ and His Word as their ultimate authority. As noted above, the majority report does not deny the fact that those who take the oath in this unqualified sense are most definitely sinning by taking the oath. It is seeking to protect Christians who take the oath with an unstated qualification rather than a stated qualification. It is not seeking to protect non-Christians

who vow unqualified allegiance to a secular state in keeping with their personal opposition to Christ.

Applied to the realm of voting, this distinction has major implications. The Synods of 1964 and 1966 had ruled that, according to RPT 30.3 and 30.8, a political candidate was not voteworthy unless he planned to take the Explanatory Declaration. Then the Synod of 1967 ruled that the Explanatory Declaration was not absolutely necessary so long as one's ultimate allegiance and submission was reserved for Christ and His Word. Therefore, logically speaking, the post-1967 interpretation is simply this: that a political candidate is voteworthy only if his ultimate heartfelt allegiance is reserved for King Jesus and His Word in every aspect of his life (including public policy), regardless of whether he uses the Explanatory Declaration to express this conviction when taking the oath of office.

According to the decision of 1967, a consistently Christian candidate would not need to express his ultimate submission to Christ using the Explanatory Declaration. Nevertheless, he would need to give credible evidence that such submission is a reality in his life. Otherwise, the abandonment of the necessity of using the Explanatory Declaration to express one's ultimate submission to Christ would amount to an abandonment of the necessity of submitting to Christ at all. This was never the purpose of the majority report. To regard the synod's actions in 1967, on paper, as opening the door for Christians to vote for ungodly secular candidates who give no credible evidence of submitting to Jesus Christ as their Savior and King is to miss the point entirely.

## **8. The Aftermath of 1967**

So, what ultimately happened to the eight members in San Diego who voted for Barry Goldwater in 1964? Eventually, the 1968 Synod ruled that while formal disciplinary action would have been appropriate in 1965, it would no longer be necessary moving forward.<sup>345</sup> This, of course, does not mean that the synod approved of Barry Goldwater as a vote-worthy candidate. At no point did the name or reputation of either Johnson or Goldwater appear in any of the relevant reports. Furthermore, to affirm either of these men as vote-worthy candidates would have flatly contradicted RPT 30.3 and 30.8 (not to mention Ch. 30, Error 3), which require Christians to vote for men who fear God, love truth, promote explicitly Scriptural principles, and have a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the synod's response to the Goldwater voters simply reflects a wise recognition that not every moral infraction warrants formal church discipline, and that not every violation of Biblical principles should be a hindrance to church membership. Perhaps it also reflects a measure of confusion within the synod itself regarding the precise implications of RPT 30.3 and 30.8.

The existence of at least some confusion within the RPCNA at this time became evident in 1969, when the Oath Committee presented the final report of its 33-year existence, in which it detailed the sad outcome of the Marshall Smith case. Smith, an RP military officer residing in California, had been told by his superiors that he could not use the Explanatory Declaration when swearing the constitutional oath of allegiance. Upon appealing the decision, the civil courts ruled against him, arguing that such religious qualifications forced the US military to evaluate the appropriateness of his religious beliefs, which was something which the US constitution did not permit. This, of course, struck a blow to one of the key premises of the 1967 majority report:

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<sup>345</sup> 1968 Minutes of Synod, 73. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1968%20Minutes.pdf>.

namely, that the US government's acceptance of the Explanatory Declaration implied that they understood the oath of allegiance as subordinate to a higher law. This assumption was now in question, as were the precise limitations placed upon RPCNA voters by Chapter 30 of the Testimony. Recognizing this growing confusion, the Oath Committee observes,

There seems to be considerable difference in interpretation of the action of the 1967 Synod in regard to the oath. Some have interpreted it to mean that they can now use the franchise without any limitations. Others have interpreted it to mean, that though we can use the franchise, since there are few candidates who are committed to "scriptural principles of civil government" that it can be used rarely, if at all. Others interpret it merely to say that there is not sufficient evidence to condemn the taking of the oath, nor is their evidence to give it a clean bill of health. That it has neither been proved acceptable nor unacceptable. Since Synod has recommended that the oath be taken with the "Explanatory Declaration" we hope that all members who take the oath will use the declaration.<sup>346</sup>

Thus, the Oath Committee concluded its 33 years of work with a recognition that the denomination still lacked a clear understanding of exactly how to apply the Testimony's Scriptural doctrine of civil government. On the whole, both the synod and the denomination had grown weary of wrangling over political dissent. Most felt that it was time to move on, and so they did. Over time, the recommended Explanatory Declaration gradually fell out of common use, as did the practice of voting exclusively for the sorts of godly Christian candidates described in RPT 30.3 and 30.8. Nevertheless, the question of political dissent had been substantially and peaceably resolved, thus paving the way for a gradual resurgence of gospel-centered, confessional Reformed Christianity. By God's grace, this resurgence was accompanied by a period of steady numerical growth and widespread church planting throughout the latter portion of the twentieth century and into the new millennium.

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<sup>346</sup> 1969 Minutes of Synod, 22-24. See <http://rparchives.org/data/Minutes%20of%20Synod/1969%20Minutes.pdf>.

# APPENDIX THREE

**Relevant Excerpts from**  
***A Catechism of the Peculiar and More Prominent Principles***  
***of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (1853)***  
**by Rev. W.L. Roberts, D.D.<sup>347</sup>**

**Preface:** As a committee, we believe the following excerpts from Roberts' catechism provide a helpful articulation of the historic, confessional RP doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship as set forth in our existing standards. We have sought to filter out portions of the catechism which reflect views which are no longer held by the RPCNA, such as mandatory political dissent and the rejected portions of the Westminster Confession of Faith. We would urge every synod delegate to read over these excerpts carefully and to provide us with feedback — either privately via email or on the floor of the 2020 Synod — regarding any aspect(s) of this doctrine which may require additional exegetical proof or explanation. As noted in the preface to Appendix One, we are tentatively hoping to submit a brief, user-friendly booklet (15-20 pages) outlining the doctrine of Christ's mediatorial kingship for your examination at the Synod of 2021.

Q. 1. What is the import of the title mediator given to Jesus Christ?

A. It is an official title, which exhibits Christ as transacting between God and man for man's salvation; and in the discharge of the functions of this office, he acts in the capacity of the Father's servant. 1 Tim. ii. 5. There is but one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. Heb. xii. 24. To Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. Isa. xlii. 1. Behold my servant whom I uphold: applied to Christ, Matt. xii. 18. Isa. liii. 11. "My righteous servant."

Q. 2. What is the dominion of Christ?

A. The authority, or unlimited power, which he possesses over the creatures.

Q. 3. What is his mediatorial dominion?

A. Not that which essentially belongs to him as God, but that with which he has been officially invested as the Messiah, by the authoritative act of the Father.

Q. 4. What is the essential dominion of Christ?

A. It is that which pertains to him as the Son of God, a Person in the Godhead, and is the same with that of the Father and the Holy Ghost, original, inherent, and underived.

Q. 5. His mediatorial dominion is, then, that which was delegated, conferred by gift, bestowed by the Father, in short, "the government" which was "laid upon his shoulders,"—that "power" which was "given him in heaven and in earth?"

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<sup>347</sup> Roberts, W.L., *A Catechism of the Peculiar and More Prominent Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (NY, 1853). Ebooks online at <https://books.google.com/books?id=bMhNAQAAMAAJ&> and <https://archive.org/details/ReformedPresbyterianCatechism/page/n3/mode/2up/>

A. Yes. Because, as the Son of God essentially viewed, he cannot be the recipient of a gift, "but is equal in power and glory with the Father."

Q. 6. Do his essential and mediatorial kingdom differ in matter or extent?

A. No. They are really the same, both in matter and extent; the difference consists in this: The kingdom over which he, as the Son of God, rules by inherent and original right, he is, as mediator, authorized to manage and direct, for a new end, namely, the salvation of men, and the best interests of the church.

Q. 7. By whom was Christ appointed to this mediatorial dominion?

A. By the Father. Ps. ii. 6. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Luke xxii. 29. "My Father hath appointed unto me a kingdom." See John v. 20, 27.

Q. 8. When was he appointed?

A. From all eternity. Prov. viii. 23. "I was set up from everlasting." See Ps. ii. 6, 7. Mic. v. 2.

Q. 9. In what transaction?

A. In the covenant of grace. Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4. "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations."

Q. 10. What is this covenant?

A. It comprises the whole scheme agreed upon by the divine persons for the salvation of fallen man.

Q. 11. In what capacity did the Father make this appointment?

A. As the representative of Deity in the economy of redemption.

Q. 46. What is the extent of Christ's mediatorial dominion?

A. It is universal.

Q. 47. Is it not limited to the church?

A. No. The church is the special kingdom of Christ — the great central province of his empire, around which other provinces are made to revolve. Therefore, the dominion of Christ necessarily extends beyond its hallowed precincts Eph. i. 22, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church."

Q. 48. Why is it necessary that Christ's mediatorial dominion should extend beyond the limits of the church, or be universal?

A. It is necessary,

1. That he might give a general commission to his ministers to go forth among the hostile nations and preach his gospel. Matt xxviii. 18, 19, "power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go therefore, and teach all nations."

2. That he might gather from among them his elect. Jno. xvii. 2, "Glorify thy Son as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."

3. As a reward of his mediatorial sufferings. Rev. iii. 21, "To that, overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne." See also Phil, ii. 8, 9.

4. To subdue all his own and his people's enemies. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet," 1 Cor. xv. 26.

Q. 49. Is not the gospel call, as it is general to all that hear it, founded rather upon Christ's kingly than his priestly office?

A. Yes; for Christ says, Matt, xxviii. 18, 19, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye, then and teach." The commission to teach, or preach, proceeded evidently from his universal dominion.

Q. 51. In how many ways can you prove the universality of Christ's mediatorial dominion?

A. Two.

1. From those passages which assert its universality in general terms.
2. From those which describe the various departments or provinces of his dominion.

Q. 52. Which are the passages of the first class?

A. They are,

1. Mat. xi. 27, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father."
2. Mat. xxviii. 18, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."
3. Acts x. 30, "He is Lord of all."
4. Eph. i. 22, "And hath put all things under his feet."
5. Col. ii. 10, "He is the head of all principality and power."
6. 1 Cor. xv. 27, "He hath put all things under his feet."
7. Heb. ii. 8, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet."

Q. 53. Is it not Christ's essential dominion of which these passages treat?

A. No. It is his mediatorial dominion.

Q. 54. How does this appear?

A. The terms "delivered," "given," "put," designate his mediatory office; because, as the Son essentially considered, he cannot have authority conferred upon him, for as such he is equal with the Father, and all power belongs to him originally and inherently; but as mediator, the Father's servant, he is properly the subject of a gift.

Q. 55. How do these passages prove the universality of his Mediatorial dominion?

A. 1. The word all occurring so frequently designates this universality.

2. There is but one exception made-the Father, "who put all things under him," which confirms the doctrine, as all beside the Father, (even the Spirit, who is called the Spirit of the Son), are made subject to Christ for mediatorial purposes.

Q. 57. Of how many provinces does Christ's mediatorial dominion consist?

A. It consists of seven.

1. The inanimate creation. Ps. viii. 6, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Mat. viii. 27, "But the men marvelled, saying, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?"

2. The irrational tribes. Ps. viii. 7, "All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field." Heb. ii. 6-8.

3. All good angels. 1 Pet. iii. 22, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him." See also Is. vi. 1, 2; Heb. i. 4; Rev. v. 11, 12; Heb. i. 14.

4. The wicked angels. Luke x. 17, 18, "And the seventy returned with joy, Saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name and he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." See Mat. viii. 28; Rev xii. 9, 10; Col. ii. 15.

5. All men. John. xvii. 2, "Power over all flesh" (flesh, the human race at large). Ps. ii. 8, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen (THE NATIONS) for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." See ver. 10, 12; xviii. 43.

6. All associations, particularly civil and ecclesiastical. Ps. lxxii. 10, 11, "The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts; yea, all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him." Dan. vii. 14, "And there was given him dominion, glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve him." Col. i. 18, "He is the head of the body, the church."

7. The kingdom of providence. Rev. v. The sealed book of the divine purposes, respecting the church and the world, is put into the hands of the Lamb, and he rules in their accomplishment.

Q. 58. For what end is Christ invested with this universal dominion?

A. That he should render the whole administration of providence subservient to the erection, progress, and final perfection of his special kingdom, the church.

Q. 59. What is the true nature of Christ's mediatorial kingdom?

A. It is a spiritual kingdom.

Q. 60. What is the proper definition of its spirituality?

A. It is a kingdom not designed merely to promote man's corporeal and temporal interests, but chiefly the best interests of his immortal nature?

Q. 61. In what respects is it spiritual?

A. It is spiritual,

1. In its origin. It is not from men by any mode by which men convey authority—but his dominion originates solely from the spiritual grant of the Father from all everlasting in the covenant of grace.

2. In its ends—which are, in substance, To gather his church—to protect it on earth—to sanctify the hearts and lives of her members, and to render subservient all secular things (even civil rule), to the spiritual and eternal interests of men. Eph. i. 22. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.

3. In its administration. As to the ecclesiastical department. Its officers are pastors and teachers, elders and deacons (spiritual officers to administer all the temporalities of the church), persons endowed with ministerial authority, whose weapons are not carnal but spiritual (instruction, advice, censure and remonstrance)—and as it respects the civil department, those who bear rule according to his ordinance are the ministers of God, and are just, ruling in the fear of the Lord—whilst the rule in both cases is the same—The Law of the Lord.

Q. 62. Is civil government a spiritual dominion?

A. Civil government is not strictly spiritual as it is in a good measure occupied about man's temporal interests, but as it is subjected to Christ, among the all things put under his feet, it is designed to subserve, in his hands, the religious as well as temporal interests of the human race.

Q. 63. Is the mediatorial dominion of Christ in such a sense spiritual that it can have no sort of connection with the world, or with things, that are secular?



A. By no means; because,

1. Even a portion of the most spiritual of its subjects, regenerate men, for a time, have their residence on the earth, and are occupied with secular things; and their bodies are earthly and nourished by carnal things.
2. Besides, there are things specified in the grant of dominion, which are strictly and literally worldly and secular, Ps. viii. 6-8. "Thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passes through the paths of the sea."

Q. 64. Is not his kingdom deprived of a portion of its spirituality, and secularized by this connection?

A. Not in the least. Because whatever is connected with Christ's kingdom, however carnal in its nature, is, in his infinite wisdom, and by his almighty power, somehow or other, rendered subservient to spiritual objects. Eph. i. 22. "And gave him to be head over all things to the church."

Q. 65. Does not Christ himself in John xviii. 36, ("My kingdom is not of this world,") disclaim all connection between his kingdom and secular things?

A. By no means: Because,

1. His kingdom is in this world. Matt, xxviii. 18. "All power on earth, is given unto me." His Church, his peculiarly spiritual kingdom, is in this world.
2. The world itself, is a part of his kingdom. Eph. i. 20, 21. "Hath set him at his own right hand, far above every name that is named—in this world."
3. In its origin, (as stated above,) it is not of this world. This Christ himself affirms, in the disputed text. "But now is my kingdom, not from hence." (Men do not confer authority upon him.)
4. It signifies that Christ is not to reign upon earth, seated upon a visible throne as earthly kings, defending his kingdom by armies—"else would my servants fight."
5. His laws are not of this world. They are from heaven. "Its laws, its powers, are all divine."
6. It is not of this world, as to its benign moral influence upon society. worldly kingdoms debase and enslave; this is designed to free, to elevate and sanctify the subject, and subordinates all things, to the eternal happiness of men. John viii. 32. 30. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." 2 Cor. iii. 17. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

7. It is not of this world, as it is designed to overthrow all the kingdoms of this world, and put them under the dominion of his saints, that they may subserve the spiritual interests of men. Dan. ii. 44. "And in the days of those (kingdoms) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." vii. 27. "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, shall be given 'to the people of the saints of the Most High.'"

8. The doctrine of the absolute spirituality of Christ's kingdom, would deny Christians the right of holding any worldly property—engaging in any secular enterprise—or entering into any political connection whatever; because Christ says of them, using precisely the same phraseology, "ye are not of this world!" now such an interpretation is manifestly contradictory to scripture and common sense, in this case—it follows that it is equally so in the other.

Q. 182. What is civil government?

A. It is a divine institution for the government of mankind in their outward secular relations, in subservience to their spiritual and eternal welfare. Rom. xiii. 3, 4. "For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou not be afraid of the power—do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same—for he is the minister of God to thee for good."

Q. 185. Is civil magistracy founded in grace?

A. Civil magistracy is not founded in grace, but proceeds from God, not as the God of grace, but as the God of nature. It springs from him as the supreme moral governor of the universe, having its foundation, as we have stated in substance, in natural principles, which belong to the constitution of man, and not in the mediatorial system; At the same time (as we have proved in general, and as will be shown in the next section in relation to civil government in particular) God has placed the management of the whole affairs of the moral universe in the hands of his Son as Mediator.

Q. 186. Is God, indeed, the supreme moral governor of the human race?

A. Yes. Although man has by apostasy thrown off his allegiance to the Creator, yet God is the Lord of man, and claims his subjection. Ps. xlvii. 7. "For God is the king of all the earth." Dan. iv. 34. "I blessed the Most High and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation." Ps. xxix. "The LORD sitteth king forever." Jer. x. 10. "The LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king." Is. xliii. 15 "I am the LORD, your holy one, the Creator of Israel you king."

Q. 187. Is civil magistracy, as a legitimate authority, the ordinance of God?

A. Yes. Rom. xiii. 1, 2. "Let every soul be subject to 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."

Q. 207. To what kind of submission is this ordinance of God entitled?

A. It is entitled to conscientious submission. Rom. xiii. 5, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake:" from a love to God's ordinance, and respect for his authority, exercised by his vicegerent according to his law.

Q. 213. What is meant by the term nations?

A. Civil associations [of] men existing in civil or political institutions; including the office bearers, by whom the laws are administered, as well as the people at large, for whose good they are appointed to govern.

Q. 214. What is meant by Headship in the present application of the term?

A. A headship of authority and moral supremacy, not a headship of providential rule or physical control.

Q. 215. Are we to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ exercises a moral supremacy over the civil or political associations of men, simply as such?

A. Yes. Directly in their secular or political character, he claims dominion over them, and demands their public recognition of his authority.

Q. 216. Is Jesus Christ possessed of peculiar moral fitness to exercise dominion over the nations?

A. Yes, he is the Son of God and the Son of Man—God manifest in the flesh—and as such is qualified to exercise this authority. Is. ix. 6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Q. 217. In what character does he exercise dominion over the nations, in their political relations?

A. In his Mediatorial character, in which alone, as has been demonstrated, he is the subject of a gift.

Q. 218. Is this authority conferred as a gift upon Him?

A. Yes. It is the gift of the Father. Christ himself says, "All power is delivered unto me of my Father." Luke x. 22. And the Father says, "I will make him my first born HIGHER than the kings of any land." Psa. lxxxix. 27.

Q. 219. Is it necessary that Christ should possess this mediatorial dominion over the nations?

A. Yes. It is necessary that he should have power over the nations, that he might commission his ministers to go within their limits, and preach the everlasting gospel (Matt. xxviii. 18,19). Unless his authority were paramount to existing governments, it would have been a usurpation inconsistent with divine perfection to have sent his ambassadors to negotiate with the inhabitants of the earth.

Q. 220. For what other reason should Christ have power over the nations?

A. To make the Gospel efficient. The mediatory power to make his people willing could not reach into any nation over which his authority did not extend. The kings of the earth have sufficient forces to banish from their dominions the heralds of the cross; and there is enmity in the hearts of men sufficient to reject the Gospel of God, and to render its preaching all together abortive, unless the mediatorial efficiency accompany the ambassadors of Christ, and the message which they bring.

Q. 221. What other reason makes it necessary?

A. It is necessary that he should rule the nations as the reward of his sufferings. Phil. ii. 8, 9, "Wherefore" (because he suffered) "God hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name," &c. Christ in his humiliation was subject to rulers. Is. xlix. 7. He sat before them to be tried and judged, and although perfectly innocent, the Lord of life condescended to suffer the sentence of death, passed by an earthly ruler, to be executed upon himself. In his exalted state he must be ruler in the kingdoms of men; have a right to demand their submission to his authority, and take such measures as will secure the fulfilment of all his purposes respecting them.

Q. 222. Why is it further necessary?

A. It is necessary that Immanuel should have power over the nations and their respective governments, as the guardians of his Church in the midst of her enemies, and as the terror of all those who are his foes; otherwise his children might be in a situation in which he could not regulate them, and his enemies might act with impunity against him. Ps. cx. 1-3 "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of city strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

Q. 223. Are not the promises of the Father to the Son a forcible testimony to the truth of the doctrine of his mediatorial dominion over the nations?

A. Yes. The Father has given a number of promises; to this effect, and they are conclusive proof of his dominion over the nations.

1. Ps. lxxxix. 19, 26, 27, "Then thou spakest in vision to my holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my Salvation. Also, I will make him my first born higher than the kings of the earth."

2. Ps. 2:8, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen (nations) for thine inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession,"—upon which grant the injunction of submission is issued to the rulers and judges—vs. 10-12, "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry."

3. Is. liii. 12, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death."

Q. 224. Does not the prophet Daniel proclaim the fulfilment of the promises of the Father, in his exhibition of the actual investiture of the Lord Jesus Christ with this royal dominion over the nations?

A. Yes. Daniel in the seventh chapter, verses 13 and 14 of his prophecy exhibits this sublime event. "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him." In the context we have an array of the fierce nations of the earth, as enemies of the church, frowning upon her members. The Chaldean, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires. The latter, especially under its antichristian form. The ancient of days, Jehovah, occupies the throne. The angels conveying into his presence the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our nature, and upon him, by the authority of Jehovah, the Father, dominion is conferred, which extends over all nations.

Q. 226. Is not the Headship of Christ over the nations implied in the universality of the mediatorial supremacy?

A. Yes.

1. The declarations, Mat. xxviii. 18; Col. ii. 10; 1 Peter iii. 22. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Christ—which is the head of all principality and power. Who is on the right hand of God. Angels, mid authorities, and powers being made subject to him—imply very distinctly his dominion over the nations.

2. The idea of universality is often expressed not merely by a general term, but by the enumeration of particulars, and by the exclusion of all exceptions. Eph. i. 21; Heb. ii. 8; 1 Cor. xv. 27. "And set him at his own right hand—far above all principalities, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."—"For in that he put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him." When he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that "He is excepted which did put all things under him." It must be passing strange if, after these statements, the nations are excepted from the mediatorial rule.

Q. 227. Do not the titles given to Christ clearly demonstrate his headship of the nations?

A. Yes. They are most satisfactory and conclusive, because it cannot be conceived that the Holy Ghost would dishonour the Mediator with a series of unmeaning titles. He is "the spirit of truth," and does not bear false witness. [Q's 228-232]

1. He is entitled, Ps. lxxxix. 27, the FIRST BORN—higher than the kings of the earth. To the first born belonged the dominion. It is not as the Son of God essentially considered, but as Mediator, that he is here described as "made" higher than the kings of the earth. Besides the words might have been rendered Most High, or supreme over

the kings of the earth. מְלִיכִי is often used to express the supremacy of God, and is translated "Most High." Dan. iv. 32-34. The dominion of Messiah over civil rulers on the one hand, and the subjection of such to him on the other, are thus clearly implied in this title.

2. In Ps. xxii. 28, he is designated "Governor among the nations." This psalm unquestionably refers to Christ as Mediator. The preceding verse foretells the extension of the church of Christ. "All kindreds of the nations shall worship before him." And as what follows is introduced as accounting for the universal spread of the kingdom of Messiah, it must be considered as referring to the same illustrious personage. "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the Governor among the nations." This eminent title, consequently, must recognise the mediatorial dominion over the nations.

3. In the prophecy of Jeremiah there occurs the following passage: "Forasmuch as there is none like unto the O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O KING OF NATIONS!" Jer. x. 4-7. Nations here means organized civil bodies. King is title of office, expressive of supreme rule or government. He to whom the title belongs is the true and living God, the God of Israel, as distinguished from heathen idols. But as the God of Israel is God in Christ, the title may be regarded as equally applicable to the Redeemer.

4. The writer of the Apocalypse proclaims Jesus Christ "THE PRINCE OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH." Rev. i. 5. There can be no room to doubt for a moment, that it is Christ as Mediator who is here spoken of as having the supremacy over civil rulers, supreme and subordinate—all in civil authority, whether in the legislative, judiciary, or executive branches of Government. Of such Jesus Christ is PRINCE, Μαρκων, ruler, Lord, chief, the first in power, authority, and dominion.

5. The most splendid title of all remains to be noticed. It occurs twice in the Revelation of John xvii. 14; xix. 16. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS."—"His name is called the Word of God—and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written—KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." This title teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ has authority over kings as kings. "King of kings" clearly implies a sovereignty over kings in their regal character, and not merely as private members of his kingdom. A parallel case illustrates this. Esth. vii. 12. "Artaxerxes king of kings." The empire of the Persian monarch was comprised of 127 provinces or minor kingdoms. Now, was Artaxerxes king of all the inferior kings of his empire as men only, and as ordinary subjects? Or was he their sovereign in their royal character as they occupied their regal thrones? In the latter certainly. Would one of those petty kings of his empire dared to have said, "I am your subject as a man, but as a king on my throne I am your equal, and independent of your authority." The Persian "King of kings" would have soon crushed him as a rebel. The title therefore, in its specific import, teaches that Christ is the sovereign of kings in their regal official character and station. The title further teaches, that kings and the nations which they govern bear the same political relation to Christ, that the nations bear to their immediate kings. That is, kings and their

subjects are the subjects of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and should as such be obedient to his authority.

Q. 234. Was not human society, upon the apostasy of the first Adam, (whom we have seen the first example of civil sovereignty) subjected to another and more distinguished head—THE SECOND ADAM, THE LORD FROM HEAVEN, in order that the race, under him, might be brought back to Jehovah, from whom they had revolted?

A. Yes. Paul, in the second chapter of Hebrews, quotes the 8th Psalm, which we have adduced as proof of the original dominion of the first Adam, and applies it to Christ the second Adam—the Lord from Heaven thereby teaching, that the crown of dominion which fell from the head of rebel Adam, has been placed upon the brow of Jesus, constituting him "king of the whole earth." "But now we see not yet all things put under him, but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour."

Q. 241. Is it the duty of nations to render national subjection to Jehovah, by their national recognition of Christ's mediatorial dominion over them, as "Prince of the kings of the earth?"

A. Yes.

Q. 247. Can you give any direct proof from Scripture of the duty of nations to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ as their king?

A. Yes, abundant. I adduce the first proof Dan. vii. 13,14, "And there was given him (the Son of man) dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." What stronger proof can be demanded of national subjection to Christ? All nations are his subjects, and if the subject is bound to submit to his lawful king, all nations are bound to acknowledge Christ as their king, and to "serve" and obey him). They must recognise his authority and engage themselves in his service.

Q. 248. Is there any command issued to the constituted authorities of the nations to render this homage?

A. Yes. Ps. ii. 10-12, "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." 1. The kiss here demanded is expressive of civil homage. I Sam. x. 1, "And Samuel kissed Saul and said, Is it not because the LORD has anointed thee to be Captain over his inheritance?" 2. It is addressed to the constituted authorities of the nations—kings and judges—the whole national organization. 3. It is plain, therefore, that from the king, or chief ruler, down through all the departments of state, together with the whole national assemblage, there is to be an acknowledgment of the Son of God upon his mediatorial throne. He is to be kissed in token of subjection, and served as the Lord of all.

Q. 249. Is there any promise that this homage shall be rendered the Lord Jesus Christ?

A. Yes; There is a direct promise to this effect. Ps. lxxii. 8-11, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea—yea, all kings shall bow down before him, all nations shall serve him." None worthy of respect will dispute the application of this Psalm to Christ. Although David refers to Solomon in this Psalm, yet he has in view a greater than Solomon. When David intended to build a house unto the Lord, and was forbidden, God promised that a Son should be born to him who should build the house, and gave him the promise, 1 Chr. xxii. 10, "I will be his father," which Paul applies to Christ, Heb. i. 6. With such authority we are in no danger of misinterpretation, in applying the text to the subjection of kings and of all nations to the dominion of Messiah, and the duty nationally to acknowledge his authority over them. ALL KINGS SHALL FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM, ALL NATIONS SHALL SERVE HIM.

Q. 250. Are not the nations threatened with destruction if they do not render this national homage?

A. Yes. Ps. ix. 17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Men are contemplated in this passage individually, and in their associated capacity, as moral persons compacted by civil bonds, or organized national bodies; God is to be remembered by man both in his individual and national capacity. To remember God is plainly to recognise his being and authority, and to be obedient to his will. To forget God is not to recognise his being and authority, and to refuse obedience to his will. Every wicked individual that does so shall be literally turned into hell. Every nation that does so shall meet the like most terrible retribution—shall be cut off from the living and covered in the grave.

Q. 251. Is not Ps. ii. 12, "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little," another fearful threatening?

A. Yes. This passage, we have seen, is addressed to kings and judges, as they wear their crowns, and are invested with the ermine<sup>348</sup>. If they refuse the kiss of civil homage (as it means) they provoke the wrath of the Lamb, and perish under his iron rod...

Q. 252. Can you produce any other threatening?

A. Yes. It is also declared in the 110th Psalm, "The Lord at the right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath." They "withstand" him, they resist his authority, they refuse submission, therefore "he fills the places with dead bodies, and wounds the head over many countries."

Q. 258. Do not the titles given to Christ demonstrate the duty of national subjection to the authority of the Messiah?

A. They amount to a perfect demonstration. The titles, for example—"king of kings"—"prince of the kings of the earth"—"governor among the nations," &c., show clearly that kings and nations are the subjects of Christ; and, as subjects owe subjection to the lawful authority over them; so, in like manner- nations owe national subjection to the Lord Jesus

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<sup>348</sup> A royal robe or cloak.



Christ—who, by the act of the Father, is constituted their Mediatorial King. The titles are significant of his authority over the nations, and of their reciprocal allegiance to him as their lawful governor.

Q. 260. Is not this claim of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the homage of the nations in their national character, a reasonable claim?

A. It is a most reasonable claim—for it seems a self-evident principle, that, as civil government is the ordinance of God, his authority should be recognised. That, as the Lamb is the king of kings, and has the power of civil rule delegated to him, that he should be acknowledged in the exercise of his delegated authority as the vicegerent of Jehovah.

Q. 263. Are not mankind, through their ignorance, and the blindness of their minds, and the depravity of their hearts, greatly lost to the sense of the theory of moral duty, and the source of rational obedience?

A. Yes. Especially in the reasonings of self-styled philosophers upon the institution of civil government, they seem to forget that there is a God, who claims to be the Governor among the nations.

Q. 268. Is it not highly probable God has given up, in just judgment, this earth, to groan under the complicated miseries arising from tyranny and oppression, bloodshed and famine, on account of the contempt shown to his legislative character?

A. There can be little doubt of the truth of this statement: nor can we have tiny reason to believe that the disease will be removed until its causes cease.

Q. 288. God has not, therefore, created man independent of his authority, and sent him forth among his works exempted from the dominion of law?

A. By no means. The above induction brings us necessarily to the conclusion, that man is a dependent creature, he is dependent upon his Creator, and in the language of Blackstone, "consequently as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker's will."

Q. 289. What is this will of his Maker called?

A. It is called the law of nature. For as God, when he created matter, and endowed it with a principle of mobility, established certain rules for the perpetual direction of its motions, so when he created man, and endued him with freewill to conduct himself in all parts of life, he laid down certain immutable laws of human nature.

Q. 291. Was this law the basis of God's covenant with Adam?

A. It was, and was the rule of Adam's behaviour towards God, and of his dominion which he exercised over this world before his apostasy.

Q. 292. Has this law been abrogated by the apostasy of Adam?

A. By no means. Man's apostasy did not annul God's regal dominion over the rebel creature, and the law inscribed upon man's nature in his creation, whilst it binds him under its penalty, still holds him under the dominion of God; and by it he is under an indissoluble obligation to regulate his conduct in all the transactions of life.

Q. 293. Has not the satisfaction of the law, by the obedience unto the death of Jesus Christ, released man from its obligations?

A. By no means, because believers themselves are said to be under the law as a rule of life. 1 Cor. ix. 21, "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." 2. Christ did not "destroy," but "fulfilled" the law.

Q. 294. Is not civil magistracy, as the ordinance of God, founded in this law of nature?

A. Yes. Magistracy was first instituted in the human family when God gave Adam dominion over Eve and all the works of his hand on earth, (Ps. viii. 6) of which this law was the rule; and still abides the supreme rule of civil magistracy among the posterity of Adam, through all ages of the world. Rom. i. 32, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which do such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." ii. 14, 15, "For the Gentiles which have not the law (written) do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile, accusing, or else excusing, one another."

Q. 296. Is it not a first principle of this law, that God's authority be recognised by the constituted civil society?

A. Yes. The rejection of his authority and his law has been the source of the "judicial blindness" which God has inflicted upon the nations. Rom. i. 28, "For even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

Q. 297. Is this law fully discoverable by the reason of man from the light of nature?

A. Some faint traces of this law remain upon the moral nature of man, (Rom. ii. 14, 15,) and are revealed in some degree of legibility by the light of nature, (Rom. i. 20-32; Ps. xix. 1,) "so that men are without excuse;" yet man's intellect has been so much impaired and corrupted by the fall that he is not able fully to discover what the law of nature directs in every circumstance of life, as every man finds in his own experience, that his reason is corrupt, and his understanding is full of ignorance and error.

Q. 298. Has this blindness of human reason given occasion to the benign interposition of the Creator in giving a perfect transcript of this law, in a written revelation of his will?

A. Yes. God has been pleased at sundry times and divers manners to enforce his original law, by an immediate and direct revelation. The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law.

Q. 299. Where are they to be found?

A. They are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures; for until they were therein revealed they were hid from the wisdom of the ages.

Q. 300. Is this revealed law contained in the Holy Scriptures of the same obligation with the original law of nature?

A. Undoubtedly; for as the moral precepts of this law are of the same original of this law of nature, and are found, upon comparison, to be really a part of the original law of nature, as they lead in all their consequences to man's felicity, so their intrinsic obligation is of equal strength and perpetuity.

Q. 301. Is not this revealed will of God in the Scriptures of truth of even infinitely higher authority than that moral system which is framed by ethical writers, and denominated the natural law?

A. Unquestionably. Because the one is the law of nature expressly declared so to be by God himself. The other is only what, by the assistance of human reason, men imagine to be that law. If we could be as certain of the latter, as we are of the former, both would have an equal authority; but till then they are never to be put in any competition together.

Q. 303. What is this revealed law usually called?

A. The Moral Law.

Q. 304. Wherein is this moral law summarily comprehended?

A. It is comprehended in a summary manner in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Q. 305. Is this moral law, thus summarily exhibited with all the revealed precepts based thereon, placed in the hands of Jesus Christ the mediatorial King, to be administered by him in the government of the nations?

A. Yes. The law is in the hands of the mediator, and under him the human family, in its national as well as other relations, is commanded to be subject to the law of God. 1 Cor. ix. 21, "Not without law to God, but under the law to Christ."

Q. 306. Does the Lord Jesus Christ, as the "Governor of the Nations," demand that their constitution and laws be founded upon his laws, revealed in the Scriptures of truth?

A. Yes. As the King of kings he hath in the Scriptures of truth promulgated his law, and demands that all people, nations, and languages should serve him, by admitting to his sceptre and "taking the law at his mouth."

Q. 327. Is not the decalogue divided into two tables?

A. Yes. The first contains four precepts, and second six. The former teaches our duty to God—the latter our duty to man.

Q. 328. Do the precepts of the first table express the rights of God, which he demands shall be embodied in the civil constitutions of the nations, that their governments may be his ordinance?

A. Yes. They contain "the things of God," which all nations are bound nationally to "render" him.

Q. 329. Can you give a simple exhibition of these rights or claims of God by the Mediator upon the nations of the earth?

A. Yes.

1. The first requires as an inalienable right of the Godhead, that every nation as such, in its organic character, acknowledge the Lord to be its God. Exod. xx. 3. "Thou shalt have no other Gods before thee." xxxiv. 14. "For thou shalt worship no other God, for the LORD whose name is jealous, is a jealous God." Rom. iii. 29. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yea, of the Gentiles also?

2. The second precept requires the nation to establish the true worship of God, and to put down, and prevent idolatry or false worship. Exod. xx. 4. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, &c. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them," &c. Deut. vii. 5. "Thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire." See an example, by the king Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4-7. If idolatry and false worship is a moral evil—violation of the law—then the ruler must suppress it. Rom. xiii. 4. See also, 1 Cor. x. 19-21.

3. The third precept requires the nations to entertain an awful reverence of the holy name of Jehovah, and sincerely to respect everything whereby he maketh himself known. Ex. xx. 7. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Deut. xxviii. 58, 59. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name—THE LORD THY GOD—then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful," &c. Mal. i. 11. For from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; (or nations)—& in every place, incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen (nations), saith the Lord of hosts, See Rom. xv. 4; Jam. v. 12; Zech. v. 3.

4. The fourth precept enforces the claims of God upon the nations to observe the Christian Sabbath: to consecrate it as a day of national rest and devotion. Ex. xx. 8. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," &c. See also Jer. xvii. 20-22; Ex. xvi. 22, 23; Num. xv. 32, 33; Neh. xiii. 15; Mark ii. 27. Now, as God is as jealous of his DEITY to-day as of old—as his worship is as sacred—his name as holy—and his sabbath as honourable—it is the duty still of all nations "from the rising of the sun to the setting of the same," to recognise these his rights, and embody them in their national constitutions, find defend and enforce them by their laws and administration.

Q. 330. Is not the church the only agent now for the application and enforcing of this table of the decalogue?

A. No. The church is an agent in her sphere, but her influence extends over her members only—but civil government is ordained of God as a grand co-operative agent with the church in the application of the divine law to society, and its arm, in the spreading of moral influence, reaches far beyond her boundaries, into the dark places of the land. Besides, if the state is not "for the Lord," it will be "against him"—it cannot be indifferent, and may paralyse the arm of the church even in the legitimate sphere and manner of her action—as is exemplified abundantly, in our own land, in relation to all the rights of God.

Q. 333. Is not the law of God the fountain and rule of human rights?

A. Yes. The rights of men are all derived from God, and the law of God defines them; and the substance of that law, as it is the rule of human rights, is condensed in the golden precept,—“As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” This places all men upon an equality, without respect of persons or complexions. If men observe this rule, they enjoy an infallible security against oppression and wrong.

Q. 334. Can you give a summary enumeration of the several rights which the second table of the decalogue, defines and guarantees to mankind?

A. Yes. The first precept of this table is designed to preserve subordination in society by regulating the mutual duties of superiors and inferiors.

1. It maintains parental authority, which is one of the main pillars of society; whilst it secures, on the other hand, the rights of the child, who is to be honoured as a rational and immortal being, and not the abject slave of a domestic tyrant.

2. It regulates the relation of master and servant, secures obedience to the former, and the "rendering of that which is just and equal" to the latter. It does not elect the former into a lordly and irresponsible tyrant, with the scourge for his sceptre, and to reduce the latter into the grovelling condition of the brutalized slave. There is no such relation recognised by the law of God. The master is the head of the family, and the servant is as the son, subordinate to the head of the domestic establishment, and the labourer is worthy of his hire. Jer. xxii. 13. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that uses his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work."

3. It regulates the relation of husband and wife, minister and flock, and secures their reciprocal rights, as expounded elsewhere in the Scriptures.

4. Civil government, also, has its security under the aegis of this precept. It guarantees obedience to legitimate rulers administering the ordinance of God; and secures the rights of the subject, as those of the son. It presents the civil ruler as a benignant parent, and all the people surrounding him as his beloved children, whom he nourishes and cherishes as a father his son.

5. In one word, the second table guarantees to all equally the preservation of life, chastity, property, reputation, and is designed even to suppress the lustings of the depraved heart after that which is the possession of another.

6. It is true that civil government cannot reach the heart. It regulates the life. Yet it is ordained of God not only to punish overt acts in violation of any of the precepts, but to prevent crime by precautionary regulations, and a parental surveillance. As an illustration—it is the duty of civil government, for the preservation of chastity, secured by the 7th commandment to suppress the houses of temptation, and to protect society against the wiles and obscenity of "the strange women, whose house is the way to hell;" and on the other hand to protect woman from the lust of licentious and debased men, who prowl around the loveliest, that they may seize them as their prey.

7. Thus with regard to every other precept of the decalogue, civil government is its guardian, and is bound to apply it equally to all the subject-, of its sceptre, not only to punish the transgressor, but to enforce its observance by such regulations as will bring the precept to bear upon the minds and consciences and lives of all under its jurisdiction.

Q. 336. Is it not at least strange, that men favoured with a pure copy of the divine law, in the volume of revelation, should reject this fountain of light, and go back to the indistinct "dictates of conscience" to regulate any part of human conduct?

A. Yes. It is more than strange, it is extremely stupid and utterly inconsistent with Christianity; especially when God declares that it is "To the law and to the testimony we must bring all actions and all relations. If they speak not according to these it is because there is no light in them." Is. viii. 20. The truth is, that revelation is given to men to supply the imperfections of the law of nature; and to restrict ourselves to the latter, and to renounce the former, in any case in which it is competent to guide us, is at, once to condemn God's gift and to defeat the end for which it was given; and is as absurd as it would be to require men, when the sun is in the heavens, to shut out its full blaze, and go about their ordinary business by the feeble rays of a taper.

Q. 338. Is not the authority of God, therefore, and his law paramount to all other authority, even that of "We the people," in the government of man in his civil relations?

A. Yes. Man has no natural inherent rights of his own. All his are derived from God, are, of course, subject to his law, and are to be defined and regulated by it. A right in opposition to his own, God does not, cannot give; nor is it competent to any power to impart and sanction such a right. The sentiments of Blackstone should, therefore, be deemed axioms, and recorded in letters of gold in the halls of legislation. "Upon these two foundations, THE LAW OF NATURE AND THE LAW OF REVELATION, DEPEND ALL HUMAN LAWS. THAT IS TO SAY, NO HUMAN LAWS SHOULD BE SUFFERED TO CONTRADICT THESE."

Q. 339. What, according to this law, are some of the qualifications of civil rulers authorized to administer civil government as the ordinance of God?

A. The law of God, revealed in the scriptures of Truth, requires that those who rule should possess such a moral character as will fully entitle them to the designation of MINISTERS OF GOD. They should, therefore, possess the following qualifications:

1. They should be wise, able, understanding men, not children, weak, ignorant, or fools. Ex. xviii. 21: "Moreover, thou shalt provide of all the people able men." Deut. i. 13: "Take you wise and understanding men, and I will make them rulers." Ezra vii. 25: "Set magistrates and judges that may judge the people, such as know the laws of thy God."
2. They should be men of distinction, well known in the community. Deut. i. 13-18: "And known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you. So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men and known, and made them heads over you." 2 Chr. xix.
3. Just men, men of truth, fearing God and hating covetousness. 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3: "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was on my tongue. The LORD God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: HE THAT RULETH OVER MEN MUST BE JUST RULING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD." Exod. xviii. 21: "Men of truth, fearing God, hating covetousness."

Q. 360. Is not the Headship of Christ over the nations a convincing argument in proof of the duty of nations to maintain and cherish his religion?

A. There cannot be anything more conclusive. Christ's dominion over the nations, as over all other things, is for the good of the church. "He is head over all things to the Church;" and certainly so important a part of his empire, as national society, is not exempted from the duty of exerting its influence for the welfare of that church, for the special benefit of which Christ is exalted "Lord of all." As civil government is subjected to Him, it is with the intent that, in its administration, it shall contribute to the welfare of Zion. And this is done by a national embrace of his religion to the exclusion of all others, and an engagement to its support.

Q. 363. May not the duty of nations to acknowledge and support the true religion, be conclusively reasoned from the character of civil magistracy, as the ordinance of God described by the apostle in Rom. xiii. 2-3?

A. The passage is conclusive, as is evident,

1. From the title given of the ruler. "The minister of God." Can the ruler be the minister of God, and yet in his rule have no regard for religion?
2. From the objects of his office. "A terror to evil doers,"—a "revenger,"—"a terror to him that doeth evil." Are not offences against the first table, which relates to God and his worship, evils? He is also to be "a praise to them that do well." Are not the deeds of piety worthy of his countenance? If the magistrate is "the minister of God," and "a terror to evil doers," he must be so not only to the immoral, but to the profane and irreligious; and if "a praise to them that do well," he must be so not only to the moral, but also the religious—inasmuch as the works of piety are incomparably more excellent and worthy of fostering care than those of cold morality.

3. Moreover, the passage teaches that civil magistracy is especially designed for the good of the saints. For they are particularly addressed,—"to thee," "the saints." Rom. i. 7.

Q. 364. Is not this argument confirmed by the reason given for the prayer for the conversion of magistrates who were notorious enemies of Christ and persecutors of his religion? 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

A. Yes. For this is not a prayer for the success of an ungodly, immoral, civil power, but a prayer for the conversion of civil rulers to Christianity; that their government being founded upon Christian principles, and its administration regulated by the Christian law, the subjects may live under its jurisdiction "a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness" or, which is the same thing, the practice of true religion.

Q. 366 Does not the prophet Isaiah, xlix. 22, 23, write "Kings shall be nursing fathers," &c., forcibly teach the duty of civil governments to acknowledge and support the Christian religion?

A. Most clearly. The passage manifestly refers to New Testament times, and predicts that a prominent feature of those times shall be the subserviency of civil rulers to the church. The figure employed, of "nursing fathers," is a similitude which imports the most tender care, the most anxious solicitude, not mere protection, but active and unwearied nourishment and support.

Q. 367. Does this Passage give countenance to the opinion entertained by some, that the best thing the state can do for the church is "to let her alone?"

A. Certainly not. Such an idea is utterly inconsistent with the figure. Strange and unnatural nurse, indeed, who takes no interest in the welfare of her feeble charge, but lets it alone, to shift for itself! On the contrary, the just import of the figure clearly teaches that in New Testament times it will be esteemed one of the most important and interesting functions of men in the most exalted civil stations, to nourish and cherish the church of Christ, as a tender nurse the beloved child committed to her charge.

Q. 377. What will necessarily be the consequence to a nation of an entire separation of religion from the state?

A. Civil society will become essentially and avowedly infidel and the nation be subjected to the terrible judgment denounced by Jehovah. Is. lx. 12. "The nation and kingdom that will not, serve thee (the church) shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

Q. 378. Is it practicable for the nations to maintain an entire neutrality respecting religion?

A. No. The nations cannot separate themselves entirely from religion: but the evil is—they have usually assumed unhallowed supremacy over the church; and even where, in our own country, they profess indifference, they assume lordly power over the subject, and dare to place "the bride, the Lamb's wife" in the same position, as it respects their "nourishing" care, with the false systems, Muslim, Papal and Pagan. Christianity scorns mere toleration as an associate with idolatry, and superstition, and falsehood—she is exclusive and uncompromising, and demands implicit acknowledgment.



Q. 382. If the civil ruler, as you have taught, is under obligation to acknowledge and support the church of Christ, as a nurse, must he not as a nurse have authority over it?

A. The civil ruler is a nurse to the church merely as to the care he must exercise concerning it, in the supply of nourishment, &c. (Thou shalt suck the breast of kings), but he has no authority in nor over it, the authority is in the parent and Head of the church. 2 Cor. vi. 18. "I will be a Father unto you, saith the Lord Almighty."

Q. 389. Is the church, then, absolutely independent of all human control?

A. Yes, strictly so. No earthly power, be it king, prelate, Pope, or synod—or "We the people" (civilly or ecclesiastically viewed), has any right to domineer over the church. It is composed of Christ's freemen, and is itself free from all outward control. Mat. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. "Call no man your father upon the earth—neither be ye called masters."

Q. 390. May not the state extend to the church protection, and countenance, and pecuniary support, and friendly cooperation, without exercising any supremacy over her?

A. Yes. All this, we have seen, the state may legitimately do, but has no right to dictate the creed of the church, to institute its laws, to appoint its ministers, or to interfere in any one way with either its constitution or administration.

Q. 398. How are, we to regard any interference of the civil powers with the legitimate independence of the church?

A. Such interference must be regarded as an unhallowed invasion of the rights of the people, and a monstrous usurpation of the inalienable rights and prerogatives of the church's glorious HEAD.

Q. 427. What is a covenant?

A. A covenant in a mutual engagement between two parties, in which certain performances are stipulated on the one hand, and certain promises on the other.

Q. 428. Wherein does a covenant differ from a law, a vow, and an oath?

A. 1. It differs from a law in this, that it supposes mutual stipulations, while in a law there is no stipulation whatever, but simply the authority of a superior enjoining obedience on an inferior.

2. It differs from a vow, inasmuch as, while a covenant supposes engagement on both sides, a vow supposes engagement on one side only; a person who vows engaging to perform some particular service without any promise being supposed to be annexed to the performance.

3. It differs from an oath; an oath being nothing more than a solemn appeal to God for the truth of some assertion that is made, without, as in a covenant, either an engagement to duty, or promise of reward.

4. In a covenant, then, there is engagement by two parties—in a vow there is engagement by one party only—in an oath there is no engagement at all.

Q. 429. Does a covenant, whilst it differs from each, at the same time suppose the existence of a law, and include both an oath and a vow?

A. Yes. "A covenant proceeds upon the supposition of something being obligatory, and here is the idea of law. It implies an engagement to perform what is admitted to possess the obligation; and here is the idea of a vow. It supposes the covenanter to appeal to God with regard to the sincerity of his intentions, and here is the idea of an oath."

Q. 430. Are the terms covenant, vow, oath, used interchangeably to describe the same transaction?

A. Yes. According as one or other of these is designed to be prominently expressed, the same deed may be described by one or other of these terms.

Q. 435. What is public social covenanting?

A. It is a solemn religious transaction in which men, with joint concurrence avouch the Lord to be their God, and engage, in all the relations of life, to serve him by obedience to his law, in the performance of all civil and religious duties in the confidence of his favour and blessing in the fulfilment to them of all his gracious promises. Deut. xxix. 10-13. "Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Josh, xxiv. 1, 25. 2 Chr. xv. 9, 12, 15. Is. xix. 18. Jer. xi. 10.

Q. 436. By what arguments can it be proved that public social covenanting is of divine authority, and so of moral obligation?

A. By numerous arguments.

1. The light of nature. The mariners of Tarshish, Jonah i. 16. "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows." Epictetus, a heathen moralist, thus expresses himself: "To this God we ought to swear an oath, such as the soldiers swear to Caesar. They indeed, by the inducement of their wages, swear that they will value the safety of Caesar before all things; and will you, then, honoured with so many and so great benefits not swear to God or having sworn, will you not continue steadfast?"

2. Scripture precepts. Ps. lxxvi. 11. "Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God." Jer. iv. 2. "And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness." Also xlv. 26, and Deut. x. 20. 2 Chr. xxx. 8. "Yield (give the hand) yourselves unto the

LORD—and serve the LORD your God;" and Rom vi. 13, Mat. v. 33. "Thou shalt perform unto the Lord thy oaths." Rom xii. 1.

3. Scripture examples. Deut. xxvi. 15-19. "Thou hast avouched the LORD to be thy God—and the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people—that thou shouldst keep all his commandments." xxix. 10-13. Quoted above, Josh. xxiv. 1, 25—"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day," &c. 2 Kings xi. 17. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people." xxiii. 1,2; also, Neh. x. 29, &c.

Q. 438. By what arguments can its obligation in New Testament times, be solidly proved?

A. By the following.

1. It was obviously a duty under the Old Testament dispensation, and being nowhere repealed, and being moral and not typical, it is of present obligation. Ps. lxxvi. 11, "Vow and pray unto the LORD your God."

2. Scripture prophecies, evidently referring to New Testament times, and even yet to be fulfilled. Is. xix. 18, 21, 23, 24, 25, "In that day (the latter day) shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canann, and swear to the Lord of hosts," &c, &c. Jer. iv. 4, 5. "In those days (Millennial), and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

3. The New Testament recognises the obligation. Rom. vi. 13. Compare 2 Chr. xxx. 8, 2 Cor. viii. 5. The Macedonian churches, says Paul, "Not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Not in the Lord's supper, which Paul certainly hoped they would do, but to his surprise, in a public social covenant. Rom. i. 31. "Covenant breakers" have a place in the catalogue of sinners, whose conduct is denounced as displeasing to the Almighty; which could not be the case, unless on the supposition of the continued obligation of covenanting.

4. It was one of the distinguishing privileges of the Jews to be in covenant with God. "I am married unto you, saith the Lord:" The privileges of the New Testament dispensation are increased and not diminished. Heb. xii. 18, 22.

5. This duty is involved in the church's relation to God, as a married relation. Hos. ii. 19, 20; Eph. v. 30, iv. 25. Covenanting is only a solemn recognition of this relation, and engagement to evidence this by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel. Is. lxii. 4, evidently alludes, to New Testament times, and celebrates not only an ecclesiastical, but national marriage. By the marriage of a land unto God, we are not to understand that the trees of the forest, the mountains or plains come under engagements. Surely it must be the nation inhabiting the land. National marriage implies a national deed whereby the inhabitants, in their national capacity, solemnly covenant unto God.

6. The duty, when performed in its true spirit, is a source of unspeakable benefit, to a people; and, as nations seek the blessing, they should perform the duty. Ps. cxliv. 15, "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea happy is that people whose God is the LORD." Bound to God and he to them in "an everlasting covenant, not to be forgotten."

Q. 439. Have covenants a distinct intrinsic obligation peculiar to themselves?

A. Yes. Covenants possess an obligation distinct from God's law. The covenanter is brought under an additional obligation to do the will of God. He is bound not merely by the naked authority of the divine word, but by his own voluntary act. "The covenant does not bind to anything additional to what the law of God contains, but it additionally binds—it superinduces a new and different obligation. As in the case of an oath. The obligation to tell the truth is universal and perpetual; but an oath brings the person who swears, under an additional obligation. Before he took the oath, if he deviated from the truth, he was guilty simply of lying; now he is guilty of perjury. Before, he violated only the authority of God; now he violates both the authority of God and the obligation of his oath."

Q. 447. What are some of the times and seasons in which the church, or a nation, is called on to engage in this extraordinary yet important duty?

A. They are many and various.

1. Times of public humiliation for apostasy from God. Jer. l. 4, 5.
2. Times of affliction. Neh. ix. 1,38; 2 Chr. xxxiv. 29-32.
3. Times of public reformation. 2 Kings xxiii. 1-3.
4. Times of public thanksgiving for special deliverances. 2K. xi. 17-20; Ps. lxxvi. 11.
5. When there is great lukewarmness and a tendency to backsliding. Deut. xxix. 10-15
6. In view of severe conflict with the enemies of the truth, to consolidate and strengthen the Lord's host. For example -Israel before crossing the Jordan. Ps. xlv. 3; Heb, xi. 32-38. So our Fathers—and now against the combined "armies of the aliens." Rev. xix. 11.
7. Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Is. xlv. 3-5.
8. When jealousies and contentions prevail, and there is a tendency to schism, covenanting will be a happy mode of "binding up the testimony"—which is in danger of being rent by schism.

Q. 449. Has not God, in his providence, given us, in modern times, several interesting illustrations of this divine ordinance of covenanting?

A. Yes.

1. The existence of such federal deeds can be distinctly traced in the writings of Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others of the early Christian fathers.
2. During the dark ages, the testimony of the Waldenses and of the Bohemian brethren to the practice can be easily adduced.
3. In more modern times it is well ascertained to have prevailed in all the Reformed churches of the continent—in Germany, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (The league of Smalcalde, for example).
4. "The Pilgrim Fathers" employed this divine ordinance as a means of preserving the privileges of true religion among themselves, and of conveying them to their posterity.
5. But the examples in which we take the deepest interest., and in which we have the fullest embodiment of the principle in question, are those given in the British Isles; viz. The National Covenant of Scotland, and The Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms.

Q. 451. What was the substance of [the National Covenant of Scotland]?

A. This deed formally abjured all the corruptions of the Popish system; expressed unequivocal attachment to the Confession of Faith, which, indeed, it comprehended; and embodied a clause in which the covenanters called upon God to witness the sincerity of their hearts in the solemn transaction.

Q. 452. What was the occasion of the Solemn League and Covenant?

A. It was occasioned by the struggle maintained by an arbitrary and Popishly affected court against the friends of reformation and liberty in the British Isles.

Q. 454. What were the main objects of this famous deed?

A. These were "the preservation of the reformed religion in Scotland, and the reformation of religion in England and Ireland, and the bringing of the churches in the three kingdoms to the nearest conformity, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government." The Covenanters bound themselves also to preserve the civil ruler's "just power and authority," in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdom.

Q. 459. Was not the influence of those covenants highly beneficial?

A. Yes. God smiled on the work, and by the outpouring of his spirit gave the testimony of the divine approbation. Religion prospered, and the schemes of enemies were overthrown. 'Now,' said the Archbishop of St. Andrews, when he heard of the renovation of the national covenant, 'now all that we have been doing these thirty years past is thrown down at once.' 'The Lord,' says the author of the Fulfilling of the Scriptures, 'the Lord did let forth much of the spirit on his people when this nation did solemnly enter into covenant in the year 1638. 'Many yet alive do know how their hearts were wrought on by the Lord. The ordinances were lively and longed after. Then did the nation own the Lord, and was

visibly owned by him; much zeal and an enlarged heart did appear for the public cause; personal application was seriously set about; and then also was there a remarkable call of providence that did attend the actings of his people, which did astonish their adversaries, and forced many of them to feign subjection.' 'To what, 'adds Paxton, 'to what must our great and lasting prosperity be owing? We believe it has been greatly owing to the covenants of our fathers, to which a faithful and gracious God has hitherto had respect. It was not the ocean that surrounds us; it was not the number and prowess of our fleets and armies, nor the wisdom of our councils (when invasion was threatened) but the sword of the Lord, and the buckler of his favour that saved us. 'Thus has God conferred a moral sublimity and wondrous prosperity upon the nations that bound themselves in these sacred bonds—'covenants not to be forgotten."

Q. 466. Is it indeed true, that [the United States] Constitution does not recognise the being or authority of God, or the regal authority of Jesus Christ, "the prince of the kings of the earth?"

A. It does not. If it did, the acknowledgment would be found in the PREAMBLE, which is as follows:—"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquillity, provide for the Common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America."

Q. 467. Is there any recognition of the being and authority of God and his Christ in this part of this important instrument?

A. There is evidently not. The supreme authority is evidently that only of WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES; God and his Christ are not mentioned, nor the mediatorial supremacy recognised.

Q. 468. But is not the being and authority of God recognised in the oath of office required of the President of the United States, in the words, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm), that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States," &c?

A. Not necessarily of the TRUE GOD. Because,

1. We learn from a member of the convention that framed the constitution, LUTHER MARTIN, delegate from Maryland, that the subject was debated in the convention, and the recognition refused. "The part of the system which requires that 'no religious test ' shall ever be required as a qualification of any office or public trust under the United States, was adopted by a great majority of the convention, and without much debate. However, there were some members so unfashionable as to think that a belief of the existence of a Deity, and of a state of future rewards and punishments, would be some security for the good conduct of our rulers, and that, in a Christian country it would be, at least, decent to hold out some distinction between the professors of Christianity, and downright infidelity and Paganism."—Genuine Information, p. 87. From this information it appears that the president may be all Atheist, according to the constitution, and the oath of office is, therefore, not a recognition of the being of a God, as his name is not mentioned in the form of the oath, and it contains no appeal to Him.

2. The Heathen swore by their Gods, but this was not a recognition OF GOD; nor is he pleased with such service. Jer. v. 7. "How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods."

3. As it was evidently intended that Atheists might hold office, by what God would they swear, who deny the existence of a Deity, and a future state of rewards and punishments?

Q. 469. Does not the constitution recognise the Christian religion, and express its subjection to the kingdom of the Messiah?

A. It evidently does not.

1. From the above testimony of Luther Martin, that it was designed to hold out "no distinction between the professors of Christianity and downright infidelity and Paganism."

2. From the 2d Sec. of Art. 6 in which it is declared, "This constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and all TREATIES made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, SHALL BE THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND." In the treaty with "TRIPOLI, Mahometanism [i.e., Islam] is declared to be as much the religion of this nation as Christianity. "The Government," says this "supreme law," "of the United States IS NOT IN ANY SENSE FOUNDED ON THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. It has in itself no character of enmity against the laws or religion of Musselmen [i.e., Muslims]."—U. S. Laws, Vol. 4, Trip. Treat. Art. 2. Christianity—the laws of the Bible, are in no sense an element of the constitution. The supreme law is, THE WILL of WE THE PEOPLE, expressed in the constitution, laws, and treaties with foreign powers. The nation, as such, is INFIDEL. Yea, it is a nation without a God. Is. lx. 12. And the "justice" which they would "establish," is not that which is founded upon that attribute of God, but that only which the will of "we the people" shall determine to be justice.

Q. 470. Does the constitution give support to the enemies of the Redeemer, and admit to its honours and emoluments those who are adverse to his authority, religion, and laws, even Muslims, Deists and Atheists?

A. This is manifestly so; as a supreme law declares it is not in any sense founded on the religion of the Bible, and refuses, as a qualification for office, that the office-bearer should believe in the existence of a Deity, or a future state of rewards and punishments; as a consequence, infidels have occupied, and Atheists may occupy the highest seat in the gift of we the people. In contrast, the scriptures require, He that ruleth over men must be just RULING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

Q. 534. Will not Christ's mediatorial dominion cease "when he shall have delivered up the kingdom (1 Cor. xv. 24, 27, 28) to God, even the Father," when he shall have judged the world at the last day?

A. The passage referred to relates to the account which the Mediatorial King shall render to the Father of his administration of the kingdom of providence with which he had been invested—but his mediatorial dominion shall not then cease, but he shall continue for ever to rule as Mediator—as the Father's delegated king, because only in his character of Mediator can the SON (the Father's equal, essentially, in power and glory) "be subject unto the Father." As the Father's Mediatorial servant, therefore, he shall reign over the kingdom of heaven for evermore in fellowship with his saints—for "if we suffer with him, WE SHALL REIGN WITH HIM."

Q. 535. How do you prove that his Mediatorial dominion will be perpetual or eternal?

A. That his Mediatorial dominion is ETERNAL is proved by many arguments, of which we advance but two.

1. Scripture declarations. Dan. vii., "His dominion (the Son of Man's—Christ's) is AN EVERLASTING dominion, which SHALL NOT PASS AWAY, and his kingdom that which SHALL NOT BE DESTROYED." Luke i. 33, "HE SHALL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOR EVER, AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END." 2 Peter i. 11, "An entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly UNTO THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST."

2. His title KING OF GLORY. This title belongs to Christ, for he is called, 1 Cor. ii. 8, "THE LORD OF GLORY, who was CRUCIFIED." James ii. 1, "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the LORD OF GLORY, with respect of persons." To him then applies the sublime title employed in a psalm which celebrates his ascension—THE KING OF GLORY. He who reigns over the state of heavenly felicity, as the regulator and dispenser of the joys of celestial bliss FOR EVER AND FOR EVER. Myriads of angelic heralds, as they demand admission for him within the portals of the celestial palace, shout, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." And when the question is propounded, "Who is this King of glory?" they meet it with the unhesitating response, "The Lord of Hosts, HE IS THE KING OF GLORY." Psa. xxiv. 7-10.