

THE DUTIES OF SUBJECTS AND RULERS: ALL THINGS LAWFUL

A paper delivered by Kevin McGrane at the Protestant Truth Society conference *The Christian and the State*, at Kensit Evangelical Church, London, July 9, 2022.

My topic today is on the duties of subjects and rulers. To talk in terms of 'subjects' and 'rulers' is perhaps disfavoured today, but the terms are biblical. We have them both in the Romans 13 passage that our brother has preached on, rulers in v.3 and those subject to those rulers in vv. 1 and 5. We have Paul's exhortation (Titus 3:1) 'to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates', or literally 'to obey rule'. Now, one could set out in fairly brief compass the duties of both upon which all agree: we are to 'pray for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty', which comports with a corresponding duty in rulers who are 'sent by God for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well' (1 Pet 2:14, cf Rom 13:3), thus being God's minister for good to the obedient and God's minister for wrath to the disobedient. Subjects are thus to obey their rulers, giving them honour, and paying them all required taxes and customs.

If I were to limit myself to this subset of duties on which all Evangelicals agree, and expostulate somewhat on each of those topics, then my paper would be very short. But there is a great deal more that can be said.

Heinrich Bullinger on the duties of rulers and subjects

I will first set forth those uncontroversial aspects pertaining to the duties of the civil magistrate towards his people, and of his people towards him. In this I cannot improve upon the sermons of Heinrich Bullinger, one of the first generation of Reformers, in this regard. He says,

The magistrate's office is ordained by God for men's commodity; and that by the magistrate, God frankly bestows on us very many and great commodities. The peers watch out for the common people, if they rightly discharge their office — not showing themselves to be detestable tyrants. They judge the people, they consider controversies, they keep justice in punishing the guilty and defending innocents, and lastly, they fight for the people. And for the excellence of their office, which is both the chief and the most necessary, God attributes to the magistrate the use of His own name, and calls the princes and senators of the people, *gods [Elohim]*. This is with the intent that, by that name, they should be put in mind of their duty, and that the subjects might thereby learn to hold them in reverence. God is just, good, righteous, and does not show partiality. The good judge or magistrate ought to be such a one.

[T]he magistrate is ordained by God for the safeguard of the good, and punishment of the evil — I mean, for the good and quiet state of mortal men.¹

... his office is good, holy, pleasing to God, just, profitable, and necessary for men. And the rulers who rightly execute their office, are the friends and worshippers of God; they are his elect instruments, by whom he works man's health and safeguard.

[W]hoever subverts this ordinance of God, brings utter confusion to every state, and aids wrongful dealers and violent robbers to oppress and root out the best sort of people.²

[T]he magistrate must be obeyed, and all his good and upright laws. No sedition or conspiracies should in any case be moved against him...If he chances to sin at any time, let us behave toward him as to our father...It often happens that magistrates have a good mind to promote religion, to advance common justice, to defend the laws, and to favour honesty. And yet, notwithstanding, they are troubled with their infirmities — yes, sometimes with grievous offences. Nevertheless, the people should not therefore despise them, and set aside their dignity...[I]n princes there are no small number of vices, which nevertheless neither moved nor ought to move godly people to rebellious sedition, so long as justice is maintained and good laws and public peace are defended.

We ought to pray earnestly and continually for the magistrate's welfare. We must aid him with our help and counsel, so often as need serves and occasion is given. We must not deny him our riches or bodies to assist him with.^{3 4}

¹ *The Decades of Henry Bullinger* (1549-52), Second Decade, Fifth Sermon.

² *Ibid*, Sixth Sermon.

³ *Ibid*, Fifth Sermon

⁴ In respect of the sword as it relates to capital punishment, many evangelicals would not agree with Bullinger, who remarks, '[T]he magistrate [is] ordained by God, whom God commands to use authority, and to kill, threatening to punish him most sharply if he neglects to kill the men whom God commands to be killed....If the blood of the guilty is not shed, then that is imputed as a fault, and laid to the magistrate's charge because, neglecting his office, he has pardoned those who were not worthy to be forgiven; and by letting them go, he has left the innocent unrevenged. For he is made a partaker of the injury done, and the shedding of the innocent's blood. He leaves it unrevenged by letting the murderer go untouched, on whose neck the Lord charged to let the sword fall.'

In respect of laws: 'Magistrates cannot conveniently live and rule the public welfare without laws; nor can the laws display their strength and living force without the magistrates. The magistrate therefore is the living law, and the law is the silent magistrate. By executing and applying the law, the law is made to live and speak. Those princes do not consider this, who are prone to say..."We are the right, we are the law." For they suppose that, at their pleasure, they may command whatever they wish, and all men must accept it by and by as the law. But that kind of ruling, without any doubt, is extreme tyranny.

The prince, indeed, is the living law, if his mind obeys the written laws, and does not depart from the law of nature. Power and authority, therefore, is subject to laws. For unless the prince in his heart

The Reformed Confessions

The reformed confessions are very clear about these matters. For example,

Scottish Confession of Faith 1560

[S]uch persons as are placed in authority are to be loved, honoured, feared, and held in most reverent estimation because they are the lieutenants of God...to whom by God is given the sword, to the praise and defence of good men, and to revenge and punish all open malefactors.

The Belgic Confession 1561

'[God] hath invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the protection of them that do well.'

And correspondingly it is the duty of everyone

to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honour and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God...to supplicate for them in their prayers, that God may rule and guide them in all their ways, and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

The Second Helvetic Confession 1566

The chief duty of the civil magistrate is to procure and maintain peace and public tranquillity...[to] govern the people...with good laws...Let him hold them in discipline and in duty and in obedience. Let him exercise judgment by judging uprightly: let him not respect any man's person, or receive bribes. Let him protect widows, fatherless children, and those that be afflicted, against wrong...

As for his subjects,

let them honour and reverence the magistrate as the minister of God... and pray for him as their father; and let them obey all his just and equal commandments. Finally, let them pay all customs and tributes, and all other duties of the like sort, faithfully and willingly.

agrees with the law, in his breast writes the law, and in his words and deeds expresses the law, he is not worthy to be called a good man, much less a prince. Again, good princes and magistrates have power over the law, and are masters of the laws — not that they may turn, put out, undo, make and unmake, laws as they wish, at their pleasure; but because they may put them into practice among the people, apply them to the necessity of the state, and temper their interpretation to the meaning of the Maker. Therefore, they are deceived as far as heaven is wide, who think that for a few privileges, granted by emperors and kings to the magistrate, to add, diminish, or change some point of law, that they may therefore utterly abolish good laws, and live against all law and seemliness.'

Westminster Confession, 1647

God... hath ordained civil magistrates...[for] the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers...It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honour their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority.

With the qualifiers that we are to obey 'in all things not repugnant to the Word of God' (Belgic Confession), i.e. their 'just and equal commandments' (Second Helvetic), and 'lawful commands' (WCF), these extracts pretty much exhaust what Evangelicals today believe are the duties of subjects and rulers.

But there is far more on the duties of subjects and rulers in the confessions than in those short extracts I have mentioned, and there are some difficult issues. For example, does the civil magistrate have duty to promote the reformed faith, and punish idolaters, heretics and blasphemers — in a word not only maintaining the second table of the law, but also the first insofar as there is any public element to the sins thereof? The confessions mentioned earlier say that they do, as we shall see.

Further, does the civil magistrate have a duty himself to acknowledge the true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, or is it merely desirable that he does?

Does the Christian have a duty to lay down his life for the civil magistrate when called to do so in time of war, or public emergency?

Given that 'the powers that be are ordained of God' and that we are to be subject to 'every ordinance of man', are all civil powers legitimate?

To push this further, may a Christian ever rebel against his rulers - not merely to refuse to enact some unlawful command, but actively to work to overthrow the government? Can he take up arms against his rulers; indeed does he ever have a *duty* to do so?

Another theological difference is whether the civil magistrate, as an ordinance of God, is only necessary because of the fall, and will disappear in the everlasting state.

Is Magistracy a post-lapsarian ordinance?

To deal with this latter question first, according to the Dutch tradition from the Belgic Confession, and through the political doctrine of Abraham Kuyper at the end of the Nineteenth century, the civil magistrate is only there because of sin. The Belgic Confession states that it is 'because of the depravity of mankind' that 'God...hath appointed kings, princes, and magistrates'. Certainly it belongs to the civil magistrate

to be a terror to those who do evil, but it is a formal fallacy to argue that because the civil magistrate must apprehend and punish evildoers then his office depends on the existence of the same. By the same argument we could argue that marriage depends for its existence upon the fall, since it is for the preventing of uncleanness. But there are many positive aspects to marriage that have nothing to do with restraint of sin, and we are certain that it was ordained before the fall, so is not dependent upon it. Likewise the positive aspects of the civil magistrate, being a praise to those who do good, and being God's minister for good, can also be exercised apart from sin.

The **Second Helvetic Confession** does not tie the origins or the operations of civil magistracy with depravity *per se*, for example it states that

The magistracy, of what sort soever it be, is ordained of God himself, for the peace and quietness of mankind; and so that He (that is, God) should have the chief place in the world...The chief duty of the civil magistrate is to procure and maintain peace and public tranquillity: which, doubtless, he shall never do more happily than when he shall be truly seasoned with the fear of God and true religion.

But Kuyper is uncompromising in tying the origin of civil magistracy to depravity:

Without sin there would have been neither magistrate nor state order...in a world without sin...every rule and ordinance and law would drop away, even as all assertion of control of the power of the magistrate would disappear...every assertion of power of the magistrate...is therefore always something unnatural...against which the deeper aspirations of our nature rebel...Calvinism has here placed in the foreground, as the primordial truth – that God has instituted the magistrates, by reason of sin...and thus to the first Calvinistic thesis that sin alone has necessitated the institution of governments.⁵

I beg to differ, but would not be dogmatic. I would ask how the institution of governments must be suspended upon the existence of sin when we look at angelic creation, where among the angels that did *not* sin there appear to be governments: thrones, principalities and powers, as well as ranks of angels and archangels. It seems from the example of *that* creation that delegated power does not originate from the fact of sin but is part of the creation order itself.

In passing, you might have wondered why St Peter calls magistracy an 'ordinance of man' whereas St Paul call the same an 'ordinance of God'. The reason is that civil government is ordained of God and must exist, whereas the particular form of it, as Peter says, 'whether Kings as supreme, or governors' is determined by man in various circumstances and conditions.

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (delivered 1898).

William Ames asks and answers the question in relation to 1 Peter 2:

Why is the Magistracy called an 'ordinance of man' v. 13, seeing all powers are ordained of God, and every power is the ordinance of God, Rom. 13:1-2?

Answer: The superiority of power, or government itself, is simply and absolutely commanded by God, and in that respect is called the ordinance of God; but this or that special manner of power or government is not determined by God, but by men; and is therefore called an ordinance of man, which as touching the nature of it, may also be called an ordinance of God: And this is the difference betwixt an ecclesiastical and a civil office: An ecclesiastical office is not legitimate if it be not directly determined by God Himself, and consequently cannot be changed by men: but this or that civil office may be made and changed by men. And the reason of the difference is this, because God and Christ alone has dominion and power in spiritual matters; but in civil matters men are also gods, though not absolute.⁶

To put it in other words, the regulative principle applies to the form of government in the church, but not in the state. For Presbyterians, at any rate.

The Magistrate's Care of the Church

With regard to the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments, the magisterial reformers were so called, whether Lutheran or Reformed (and of course excluding the sub-Christian doctrines of the Anabaptists), because they believed that the civil magistrate has a most important role in enforcing outward observance, and in caring for the church. If magistrates are, as Peter says, 'sent by God for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well'; if they be 'God's minister' for good and for his wrath against evil, then this is meaningless apart from with reference the moral law. And if we are to attract the praise of the civil magistrate, and he be God's minister to us for good, and secure our rights to 'a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty', does not this imply positive support of those institutions that favour and promote such things, not least the church? Indeed, from a practical perspective, the arrangement most conducive to those ends is the establishment of religion.

Modern day voluntaryists not only argue against the establishment of religion but against the duty of the civil magistrate to have the care of religion. They readily forget that the first four major ecumenical councils, where the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and Christology were formulated, were called by the civil magistrate. That the Reformation itself, and the liberties they enjoy, was secured by the civil

⁶ William Ames, *An Analytical Exposition of Both Epistles of the Apostle Peter* (London, 1641).

magistrate. The Westminster Assembly itself was brought into being by Parliament and reported to Parliament. Its aim was one common established reformed church in the nations of England and Scotland.

The duties of the civil magistrate in his care for religion are clearly set out in the reformed confessions:

Scottish Confession

[T]o kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates, **we affirm that chiefly and most principally the conservation and purgation of the religion appertains**; so that not only they are appointed for civil policy, but also for maintenance of the true religion, and for suppressing of idolatry and superstition whatsoever.

Belgic Confession:

[Rulers are] not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also **that they protect the sacred ministry**; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of anti-Christ may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honoured and worshipped by every one, of what state, quality, or condition so ever he may be.⁷

The Second Helvetic Confession:

[The civil magistrate] shall, after the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, advance the preaching of the truth, and the pure and sincere faith, and shall root out lies and all superstition, with all impiety and idolatry, and shall defend the Church of God. **For indeed we teach that the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate...**[L]et him govern the people, committed to him of God, with good laws, made according to the Word of God in his hands, and look that nothing be taught contrary thereunto...Therefore let him draw forth this sword of God against all malefactors, seditious persons, thieves, murderers,

⁷ Although most of North America has been captured by the idea of a separation (rather than a distinction) between church and state, and thus of the disestablishment of religion, there were still some who held confessionally to the Belgic confession and saw that the civil magistrate had responsibility to uphold the first table of the law and that church and state have mutual duties. Thus at an Act of Synod 1910 of the Christian Reformed Church in America:

The Christian Reformed Church in America...declare[s] that it does positively hold that, within its own secular sphere, the magistracy has a divine duty towards the first table of the Law as well as towards the second; and furthermore that both State and Church as institutions of God and Christ have mutual rights and duties appointed them from on high, and therefore have a very sacred reciprocal obligation to meet through the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and Son.

oppressors, blasphemers, perjured persons, and all those whom God has commanded him to punish or even to execute. Let him suppress stubborn heretics (who are heretics indeed), who cease not to blaspheme the majesty of God, and to trouble the Church, yea, and finally to destroy it.

Perhaps the best known formulation in these islands is the WCF, which sets out the duties and powers of the civil magistrate in respect of religion thus:

The civil magistrate...hath authority, **and it is his duty**, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

He also has power to suppress opinions and practices 'destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church', and persons maintaining such 'may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against... by the power of the civil magistrate.'

Maybe you do not relish the idea of the civil magistrate punishing sin. Well, you don't have to, because he doesn't punish crime as sin but as civil disturbances to good order. Samuel Rutherford explains:

Magistrates as Magistrates have neither calling, office, place nor power to threaten or inflict eternal punishment; if Magistrates do persuade the equity of abstinence from adultery, incest, murder, in their statutes, or acts of parliament, from the Word of God...they so persuade not as magistrates, but as divines, and as godly and Christian men... Magistrates as Magistrates hold forth in their Law, abstinence from these sins, not as the ambassadors of Christ, craving subjection of conscience and divine-faith to those charges, but only external obedience: ... nor is he in Christ's stead to lay divine bands on the conscience, to submit the soul and conscience to believe and abstain; he is the deputy of God as the God of Order, and as the Creator, and Founder, and another of human societies and of Peace, to exact external obedience... when the magistrate punishes spiritual sins, heresy, idolatry, he punishes them only with temporary punishment.⁸

The duties and powers that the civil magistrate has are *circa sacra*, around sacred matters, but not *in sacris*, in sacred matters, upon which the WCF is quite clear:

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

⁸ Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government* (London, 1646).

The WCF thus distinguishes two governments, which are distinct but not to be separated since both are united in sacred matters, the one *circa sacra* and the other *in sacris*. These are set out as follows:

God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people...

The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

Note the distinction being made here: God, the supreme Lord and King of the world has ordained the civil magistrates, whereas the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church has ordained the church officers. This is not the result of some sloppy drafting, but reflects a theological position.

Indeed, one's theological positions significantly affect one's view of the civil magistrate, and I will briefly mention three aspects.; a first is whether Christ the Mediator is Lord and King of all, not only the church; and a second, related to this, is whether there is one kingdom of God, or a duplex, twofold kingdom, or two distinct kingdoms; and a third is whether the apostles' descriptions of the civil magistrate, as in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, are to be taken abstractly or concretely.

Two Kingdoms?

It is interesting to note that the near final draft of the WCF chapter on the civil magistrate read 'Christ, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people'. This reflected the view that all power absolutely had been given to Christ the Mediator, as he himself expressed it at the Great Commission 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth'. But a 'therefore' follows and sets out the ministry alone of the church in respect of word and doctrine and sacraments. Also, Paul in Ephesians 1 declares that 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory...hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things **to the church.**'

It is a matter of record that only on its final reading in Session 752, on Friday December 4, 1646 was the WCF wording changed from 'Christ' to 'God' being the supreme Lord and King of all the world, under whom is the civil magistrate.

To understand the background to this we need to explore the matters of the kingdom or kingdoms. St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The Church Father John Chrysostom explains it thus:

The Scripture acknowledges two kingdoms of God, the one by appropriation, the other by creation. Thus, He is King over all, both Greeks and Jews and devils and His adversaries, in respect of His creation: but He is King of the faithful and willing and subject, in respect of His making them His own. This is the kingdom which is said also to have a beginning... This kingdom then He does deliver up, i.e., bring to a right end.⁹

It is common today to suggest that the Reformers held a 'two kingdoms' approach, and there is a modern spin on two kingdoms which aligns with the Enlightenment-influenced view of the separation of Church and State as promulgated especially in America by the founding fathers.¹⁰ The church fits neatly into one kingdom, and everything else in the other, and ne'er the twain shall meet. However, this is not how the Reformers saw things. Firstly, they saw one kingdom in a twofold state, a duplex kingdom with distinctions but not separation. And they certainly did not see a line of demarcation running along the edge of the visible church. The sixteenth century Reformers such as Luther and Calvin saw the twofold nature of the kingdom as dealing with the external and the internal. The civil magistrate and the *visible* church, including church officers, were part of the external aspect of the kingdom, and the *invisible* church and man's conscience was part of the internal aspect.

It is very confusing trying to trace the development of ideas on this because different writers made progress at different times, and new vocabulary was introduced. But suffice to say that, in the main, by the mid-seventeenth century the universal rule of the world, including civil magistracy, was viewed as coming under the Son in his essential nature, together with the Father and Holy Spirit of course, whereas both the invisible and the visible church with its officers were generally considered to be under the God-man Jesus Christ the Mediator in the economy.

George Gillespie, a Scottish commissioner in the Westminster Assembly, is typical in describing what he called the 'twofold kingdom of Jesus Christ', and in its two aspects

one, as he is the eternal Son of God, reigning together with the Father and the Holy Ghost over all things; and so the magistrate is his vicegerent, and holds his office of and under him; another, as Mediator and Head of the church, and so the magistrate doth not hold his office of and under Christ as his vicegerent.¹¹

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homily 39 on First Corinthians (delivered between AD 398 and 404)

¹⁰ Notably Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

¹¹ George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (London, 1646).

Among Reformed theologians we have description of the twofold kingdom with respect to the Son in his essential nature, and with respect to the God-man in the office of Christ the mediator:

Franciscus Junius (1545-1602), the student of Calvin and Beza, writes:

For the kingdom of Christ is twofold: (1) one is essential from nature, which is had in common by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and (2) the other is personal from a dispensation of the will, which is properly of the person of Christ. The former is eternal, but the latter will have an end.¹²

Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) is similar:

Christ's kingship is twofold, essential and personal; the essential, which is also called natural and universal, Christ holds with a glory and majesty equal to the Father and the H. Spirit; the personal, which is also called the donative, the economic and the dispensative, Christ administers as the *θεάνθρωπος* in a single mode.¹³

But by the time we get to the later seventeenth century the **one** kingdom in its twofold aspects is starting to morph into two kingdoms:

Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633–1698), principal author of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675):

For the one kingdom is also of Christ, and he shares it with the Father and the Holy Spirit as essential; the other belongs to him as mediator, and is unique, personal, mediatorial, and economical. The former kingdom Christ administers as God, together with the Father and Holy Spirit over all his creatures which, just as he made them by his word alone, so by that same word he sustains, preserves, and governs them; ...The latter kingdom he administers as *theanthrōpos*, both God and man, the mediator and saviour of the faithful, with respect to his church.¹⁴

Once developed from a single kingdom in a twofold aspect into two distinct, though not separate, kingdoms, it does not take much further development to drive a wedge between them and divide them, as of course the Enlightenment did, as both the wedge and hammer, increasingly relegating religion to the private realm. To that extent, seeing the civil magistrate under God, but the church under Christ the mediator, unwittingly become a launching pad for further development towards a separation of church and state once the leaven of Enlightenment thinking was kneaded in.

¹² Latin original in *Opera Theologica Francisci Junii* (Heidelberg, 1608)

¹³ Latin original in Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, (Frankfurt, 1618)

¹⁴ Latin original in Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae christianae* (Zurich, 1732)

Separation of Church and State

To digress a little on this, the separation of church and state is the prevalent view in the United States, but even there it is not as is often made out. Contrary to popular belief, the US constitution does not call for a separation of church and state. It requires that at the federal level there shall be no establishment of religion: the federal government may not impose an established church over the heads of the states. The recent overturning of the 1973 *Roe vs Wade* judgment has some parallels here: when President Biden stated that the Supreme Court had removed the constitutional right to an abortion he could not have been more wrong: the ruling clarifies that there was never a constitutional right to an abortion under the US constitution. It was a matter for each state to decide individually. Likewise, when the constitution held that there would be no federally imposed established church, it was protecting the rights of states to establish their own churches – or not, as the case might be. Several *did* have established churches, which were not disestablished until the mid-nineteenth century when such movements (e.g. voluntaryism) became all the rage.

The effect of Enlightenment thinking is blazed across the 1788 revision of the Westminster standards by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in relation to the civil magistrate.¹⁵ As Chad van Dixhoorn has pointed out, the revision articulates ‘themes and phrases which would be echoed at the First United States Congress and in the American Bill of Rights’ of the following year.¹⁶ The magistrate’s duty for the care of religion was not altogether lost, but was significantly attenuated and modified, and as the text is much less familiar to British readers than the original 1647 version it bears reading aloud:

as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession of belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretence of religion or infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the 1788 revision of the Westminster Larger Catechism deleted ‘tolerating a false religion’ as one of the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment, Q109, and, rather ominously for the native population, removed ‘depopulations’ as a sin forbidden in the Eighth Commandment.

¹⁶ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (Edinburgh, 2014).

person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

Doesn't that just sound like a child of its age? It is a creature of circumstance and political opinion, and reeks of the spirit of 1788. What I find astonishing is that, viewed historically, it is not more evident to those who oppose establishment and the magistrate's duties towards both tables of the Law just how reliant their views are on the development of Enlightenment principles. Here we have a mere safeguarding of a broad principle of freedom of worship, with, as Van Dixhoorn points out, 'no effort to limit or qualify its definition to exclude anti-Trinitarians, biblical sceptics, and self-made prophets...Socinians and Deists.'¹⁷

There can be no question that from the fourth century to the dawn of the Enlightenment there was no significant opposition to the view that the care of the church was one of the principal duties of the civil magistrate. The matter was of course wholly opposed by the Anabaptists, and weakened by the Baptists, who in their 1689 Confession of Faith based on the Westminster text deleted 'piety' where the Westminster Assembly had ascribed to the civil magistrate the maintenance of 'piety, justice and peace according to wholesome laws', and eliminated the entire subsection dealing with the duty of the civil magistrate to take order in matters relating to the church *circa sacra*.

To return to the majority Reformed view, the civil government's authority and power was from God the Holy Trinity as Creator via nature and not from Christ as Mediator. Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom does not include the world because a kingdom must be for the good of all its subjects; but Christ's dashing those who resist Him through providential judgments is not for their good, but for the good of the Church, his Kingdom.

But we must remark on some historical differences. We might say that the confessionally Reformed believed that it was the magistrate's task to *defend* the church, whereas the Erastians believed it was his task to *define* the church. The Erastian party in the seventeenth century were more than happy to have all government under Christ the Mediator, as Christ the King, with the church being subject to that government, in practice becoming a department of state. From a very different perspective, another minority in the Westminster Assembly, namely Stephen Marshall, Thomas Case and Cornelius Burgess, were also of the opinion that all governments were under Christ the King. This view was shared by some Scottish Presbyterians, the predecessors of the Covenanters, whose successors are still with

¹⁷ Ibid.

us, particularly in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and North America as the Reformed Presbyterians. These hold that as civil government is placed under Christ the King as mediator then no constitution that does not recognize him as the head of civil government is valid. Accordingly, the Reformed Presbyterians regard the US government as illegitimate, as also the governments in the UK which in the Seventeenth century repudiated the Solemn League and Covenant.

Samuel Rutherford held this particular view in his earlier years,¹⁸ but when he saw in the Westminster Assembly how such a position was abused by the Erastians, he switched to the duplex approach of a kingdom of God and a kingdom of Christ the mediator as later well expounded in 1646 by his fellow commissioner, George Gillespie, in his work *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*. As we have seen, the final draft of the WCF on the Civil Magistrate shifted in the same direction. The minutes record that

Upon a motion by Mr. Gillespie for an alteration in the chapt[er] about the Civil Magistrate and upon debate it was: Resolved... 'That in the said chapter for the word "Christ," the word "God," shall be put in three places.'

What of the Tyrant?

What should a Christian think of a government that is oppressive, one that promotes evil and punishes good, what we might call tyranny? The question is an old one. The church Father Origen, writing against Celsus, admits that there are many questions and disquisitions about the passage in Romans 13: 1-7 arising from consideration of the cruelty and tyranny of many princes.

Of course, this was a very real concern to the congregation in Rome to whom Paul wrote his epistle. The emperor Nero was heinously wicked, a monster of iniquity, not only within his own family, but in society at large, and especially towards the Christian church, would have known that the book of Daniel described the Roman government as 'dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly', which 'made war with the saints, and prevailed against them' and 'shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High.'¹⁹ This government

¹⁸ In his *Divine Right of Presbyteries* (1644), Rutherford set out the two views thus: 'Some of our Divines will have the kingly power to come from God as Creator, in respect God giveth Kings, who are his Vicegerents, to those who are not redeemed, and to Nations who never heard of Christ; and others hold that the kingly power floweth from *Christ-Mediator*, in respect he accomplishes his purposes of saving of his redeemed people, by Kings authority, and by the influence of their kingly government, procureth a feeding ministry; and by their princely tutory, the edification of his body the Church.' As of the date of this writing, Rutherford inclined to the latter view but would shortly change his mind.

¹⁹ Later, the Book of Revelation would describe Rome as a beast that had characteristics of Greece, Persia and Babylon taken from Daniel: Revelation 13: 'And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw

certainly does not remotely fit the character of the civil magistrate in Romans 13: a terror not to good works, but to the evil, a praise of Christians and God's minister to them for good.

Knowing the character of Rome not only from prophecy as a horrid beast but from genuine experience, these Christians may have been particularly susceptible to the notion that all civil magistracy was evil, as theirs was. Paul's letter, therefore, gives a corrective to this in outlining the divine institution properly exercised, the form of magistracy that comports with the revealed will of God. It also stands to combat the tendency of some in the church in all ages to deprecate the civil magistrate as something worldly and beneath the spiritual man. The office set forth in Romans 13 is one in which a Christian man should be pleased to serve and do his duty to God and his fellow man.

So I was astonished, and not a little disgusted, recently to read Robert Haldane's famous commentary (of 1835) on Romans, where he says concerning chapter 13:

Every one, without exception, is... to be subject to the *existing* powers, whatever were the means by which they became possessed of the situation in which they stand... The worst government in any country is of God, and is calculated to effect His purposes and promote His glory. Wicked rulers are necessary... [and] are to be obeyed, because there is not one amongst them, not even the worst on earth, which is not of God. When the government is wicked, cruel, and oppressive... [it] forward[s] the object He has in view.

This strikes me as the most deplorable interpretation of Romans 13 imaginable, and yet it is widely held in some form or other amongst Christians to this day. But this is at best an accumulation of half-truths, and more really a smuggling in by the back door of an amalgam of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, the repulsive views of Thomas Hobbes the atheist, the 'might is right' philosophy of Frederic Nietzsche, with a little Machiavelli the Prince thrown in for good measure. It commits the

a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard [Greece], and his feet were as the feet of a bear [Persia], and his mouth as the mouth of a lion [Babylon]: and the dragon gave him his **power**, and his seat, and great **authority**... And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and **power was given him** over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.'

The beast is given great power and authority. The word John uses for 'power', ἐξουσία, is the same as Paul uses for 'power' in Romans 13. Is such power and authority to be submitted to for conscience' sake?

cardinal error of conflating providence with right action. Commentators who, like Haldane, enjoin blind obedience to tyrants except where they enjoin sinful acts, are not distinguishing between providence and the revealed will of God. They are essentially fatalistic, having a pagan, heathenish and Islamic outlook. All evil exists in the providence of God, but providential existence is not a good argument for action. Indeed, all being and all power is ultimately of God, including the being and power of Satan, but we do not submit to the devil or his agents for conscience' sake.

St Peter states that kings and governors are 'sent' by God, but are all 'sent' in the manner and sense that Peter means? Apparently not, for, speaking of the kingdom of Israel, God says in Hosea 8:4

They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not.

Of which Calvin [Commentary on Hosea] says

'I knew it not', that is, without my consent; for God is said not to know what he does not approve... But someone may object and say, that God knew of the new kingdom since he was the founder of it. To this the answer is, that God so works, that this pretext does not yet excuse the ungodly, since they aim at something else, rather than to execute his purpose.

God then denies that the kingdom, with respect to the people, was set up by his decree; and he says that what was done was this, — that the people made a king without consulting him; for the people ought to have attended to what pleased him, to what the Lord himself conceded; this they did not, but suddenly followed their own blind impulse.

Foolish men at this day, not versed in the Scripture, excite great commotions among us about the providence of God; yea, there are many rabid dogs who bark at us, because we say, (what even Scripture teaches everywhere,) that nothing is done except by the ordination and secret counsel of God, and that whatever is carried on in this world is governed by his hand... These men show, while they would be deemed acute, how stupid they are, and also how absurd... For the Prophet here shows that the same thing was done and not done by the Lord, but in a different way. God here expressly denies that Jeroboam was created king by him; on the other hand, by referring to sacred history, it appears that Jeroboam was created king... by the command of God. After it was done, who could have denied but that Jeroboam was set on the throne, as it were, by the hand of God? All this is true; but with regard to the people, he was not created by God a king... [T]he Israelites appointed a king, but not by God; for it was sedition that impelled them, when, at the same time, the law enjoined that they should choose no one as a king except him who had been elected by God.

Certainly the view of Haldane, and those who follow such sentiments, are not traditional Reformed views, the views of those who believed that it was the duty of the civil magistrate to uphold in the public sphere both tables of the Law. We could pile up numerous examples, but here are a few:

Heinrich Bullinger:

The good magistrate is the one who, being lawfully ordained, lawfully executes his office and duty. The evil magistrate is the one who, when he has gotten the authority by evil means, turns and disposes it as he himself lusts. And upon this, the question is usually demanded whether an evil magistrate, that is, a tyrannical one, is from God or not? To this I answer that God is the author of good, and not of evil. For God is good by nature, and all his purposes are good, being directed to our health and preservation, not to our destruction. Therefore, the good and healthful ordaining of the magistrate, without any doubt, is from God himself, who is the author of all goodness.

[T]he evil prince, seduced by the devil, corrupts the ways of God, and by his own fault and naughtiness he transgresses God's ordinance. He does this so far, that he worthily deserves the name of devilish power, and not divine authority.

[W]hen Nero... hung up and beheaded the apostles of Christ, moving a bloody persecution against the church, that did not spring from elsewhere than from the devil, the father of murder. So then, truly, we should at no time defend tyrannical power, and say that it is from God. For tyranny is not a divine, but a devilish kind of government; and tyrants themselves are properly the servants of the devil, and not of God.²⁰

It is interesting to see that Bullinger cites the very emperor who was in power when Paul penned Romans 13.

What does Calvin say in his commentary on Romans 13:1?

[P]owers are from God, not as pestilence and famine, and wars, and other visitations for sin are said to be from Him, but because He has appointed them for the legitimate and just government of the world...[T]yrannies and unjust exercise of power, as they are full of disorder (ἀταξίας) are not an ordained government.

What of Samuel Rutherford?

Tyranny being a work of Satan, is not from God, because sin, either habitual or actual, is not from God; the power that 'is' [Rom. 13:1], must be from God; the magistrate as magistrate, is good, in nature of office, and the intrinsical end of his

²⁰ Bullinger op.cit, Second Decade, Sixth Sermon

office, Rom. 13:4, for he is the minister of God for thy good; and therefore a power ethical, politic, or moral, to oppress, is not from God, and is not a power, but a licentious deviation of a power, and is no more from God (but from sinful nature, and the old serpent) than a license to sin.

It is evident from Rom. xiii. that all subjection and obedience to higher powers commanded there is subjection to the power and office of the magistrate *in abstracto*, or, which is all one, to the person using the power lawfully, and that no subjection is due by that text, or any word of God, to the abused and tyrannical power of the king... The powers that be are ordained of God, as their author and efficient; but kings commanding unjust things, and killing the innocent, in these acts, are but men, and sinful men; and the power by which they do these acts, a sinful and an usurped power, and so far they are not powers ordained of God, according to his revealed will, which must rule us.²¹

Rutherford makes the important distinction between the office and the man holding the office. He develops this at length in his *Lex, Rex*, showing that the duties of the office of the civil magistrate are revealed or manifest, but that when the office holder acts outside the power of the office, when he uses the powers granted him by God for discharging his office for ends other than those of the office, then he acts *ultra vires* and sinfully. Although Rutherford carefully and comprehensively develops this argument, it is not original to him. It has both Lutheran and Reformed antecedents.²² For example, Heinrich Bullinger:

It is requisite that we make a distinction between the *office* which is the good ordinance of God, and the evil *person* who does not rightly execute that good office. If evil is therefore found in the magistrate, and not the good for which he was ordained, then that comes from other causes. The fault is in the men and persons who neglect God and corrupt the ordinance of God, and not in God, nor in his ordinance.

... We have an example of this in the magistrate of Jerusalem. For although he was able to refer the beginning of his power by degrees to Moses, and so to God himself who ordained it — yet, because he arrests the Saviour in the garden and binds him, it is said to his servants, "You have come out as though for a thief, with swords and staves. When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not stretch out your hands

²¹ Samuel Rutherford *Lex, Rex* (London, 1644)

²² Philipp Melancthon: 'Authority is to be distinguished from the person; for Paul loved civil organization and authority, but Nero and Caligula he execrated as monsters of nature, instruments of the devil, and pests of the human race.'

against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." [Luke 22.52-53] Look, here he calls the ordinary magistrate *the power of the devil*, when he abuses his power. What could be more evidently spoken? But here you must mark that the reproach was in the *person*, and not in the *office*.²³

Before moving on, I would like to make it quite clear that although I believe that tyrants may be resisted (I would go so far as to say that it is a Christian's duty to resist them), and that not all governments are legitimate, I am far from advocating the private citizen wielding the sword against the magistrate, though he be a tyrant. Although the Christian may not be able to submit to tyranny for conscience' sake, circumstances may render it expedient, even dutiful to submit for wrath's sake, that is, a subjection based upon no higher principle than the impossibility of successful resistance, and fear of making things worse. Bullinger makes a practical point:

Sometimes [God] stirs up noble captains and valiant men to displace tyrants, and set God's people at liberty; we see many examples of this in the books of Judges and Kings. But lest any man fall into abusing those examples, let him consider their calling by God. If a man did not have this calling, or else prevented it, he is so far from doing good in killing the tyrant, that it is to be feared he may make the evil double what it was before.²⁴

We really cannot have assassins going around who think they do God's service by murdering rulers, or banding together to raise armed rebellions. Armed resistance can only be justified at the command of a lawfully ordained civil magistrate.

The life of David is instructive here. Although he had a militia, he did not use it offensively until he became a magistrate himself (first at Ziklag) except in aid of another lawful magistrate. At Keilah he was willing to employ his militia at the invitation of the governor there.

He came close to sinning in using his militia without authority of the civil magistrate, when also he himself was not one:

1 Samuel 25:32-33 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.

And David repeatedly disavowed any *private* attempt to kill a magistrate, whether that magistrate was Saul or Ishbosheth.

²³ Bullinger op. cit., Second Decade, Sixth Sermon.

²⁴ Ibid.

May Christians serve under tyrants and unjust governments?

It is perfectly valid to ask whether Christians may serve tyrants and in unjust governments. It would appear from the examples of Joseph and Daniel that they can. The office is a divine one and where a Christian can discharge it faithfully and honourably he does a good work. He may, of course, need to resign if he cannot execute an unlawful command, or run the risk of being fired, beaten, imprisoned, exiled, or executed for refusing to do so if resignation is not a possibility. But holding office does not suppose either that the government is lawful, or that the officer is a party to immorality.

An office may be held if the duties attaching to it are right in themselves and can be regulated by just laws. But a sticking point may be the oath of office. If it is to a good constitution then such an oath can be discharged; one cannot, however, swear to uphold false religions or serve false gods. And what if there is no constitution, or the constitution is, in effect, whatever the king says it is, the law of the king? A Christian cannot swear an oath always to apply the will of the sovereign, because that is to swear something that he cannot perform. If he refuses to swear such an oath and is thereby not permitted to enter some office, or is required to leave it, then so be it. He can, however, swear that he will always faithfully execute official duties, knowing that he is released from such an oath the moment that his office is terminated.

Romans 13

It is worth spending a little time re-visiting the passage in Romans 13. The first thing to establish is whether Paul is speaking abstractly about the office of the civil magistrate, having the specific powers granted by God and lawfully exercised, and outlining by revelation the character of government as God approves it, or whether he is speaking about civil magistrates concretely, whatever they might be and however they might behave in his providence, and with particular reference to the situation prevailing in Rome. It is not clear from verses 1 and 2, but it becomes clear from verses 3-5, for the civil magistrate here spoken of is the one who attends continually upon the ministry given him of God, which is to be a minister for good, and to praise the good, and an avenger of God and terror to evildoers. It is to this office, properly discharged, that we are to submit not only for wrath but for conscience' sake.

The mere fact that one possesses power can be no reason why one's claims should be acknowledged, for providence is not a rule of action. The apostle asserts nothing more here in Romans 13 than that there is no authority properly exercised other than what God has established. Neither does it follow that resistance to an unlawful

exercise of power, i.e. a power exercised *ultra vires*, is resisting God's ordinance; indeed it is maintaining or establishing it since God's ordinance is only his power lawfully exercised.

Unlimited and unquestioning obedience is taught by those who have no regard for God's ordinances, who hold that 'might is right', and that the will of the legislature is the standard of morality. This appears to be the effective working principle of many today – if it's the law then it must be lawful. Even Christians look askance at Christians who ask—as did Paul—'is it lawful' and seek judicial review. One need only read the letters in *Evangelical Times* to see that many evangelicals thought it deplorable that Christian ministers and ruling elders, i.e. governors in the church of Christ, should seek a judicial review as to whether the closure of churches during the so-called pandemic was lawful. And though in March 2021 it was declared by the highest court in Scotland unlawful, many Christians still defend the government's actions to this day. That is wickedness, and it turns the Reformed confession on its head. Whereas the WCF states that we must obey the civil magistrate's *lawful* commands, these Christians are effectively saying that we must obey their *unlawful* commands also.

Now, resistance to legitimate authority that gives *lawful* commands is a sin, and heinous in character. But it is not seditious to contend against corruption, maladministration, abuse of power and unlawful commands – that is not 'resisting the ordinance' since it is seeking for the ordinance that God has revealed to be properly established.

The civil magistrate is only the 'minister of God to thee for good' if he performs the duties that God has prescribed. The office of the civil magistrate is a divine institution for the promotion of the ends that accord with the will of God – and it is to that end that we pray 'for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.' I cannot but believe that this extends to the care of the church and other governments instituted under God, not merely the care of individuals. Are we to say that, under God, the magistrate is to aim for the welfare of citizens, but that such welfare excludes spiritual welfare? To be sure, the direct aspects of nurturing the saints is given to the church, but does not the role of the civil magistrate extend to the care of the church that cares for the welfare of citizens spiritually?

To be a minister of God for good, he is not merely to secure religious liberty and toleration, a mere absence of persecution, as we saw how the 1788 revision of the WCF in the USA had reformulated it. Surely there must be something positive – and there is: he is to be a praise, an encourager and sustainer in 'good works', which are acts rendered acceptable to God by the merits of Christ.

The church itself has power to deal with heretics and blasphemers and the immoral through church discipline, but the judicial powers afforded the church by Christ are, of course, ministerial, and its justice is to be restorative, not retributive. The church is not the avenger of God's wrath, but the state is, and the state has coercive power to restrain such as trouble the church. He to whom the sword is entrusted does rather bear it in vain if he never wields it to defend the kingdom of God.

Yet rulers are to be more than policemen, apprehending and punishing evildoers. They must take an interest in what promotes the quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty that we pray for by them, and so should have an eye to morality, ethics, and true religion.

The closure of churches in 2020 (and 2021 in Scotland)

You may wish me to say something about the civil magistrate's order to close the churches during the so-called Covid pandemic. I have already spoken at length about the situation in a PTS meeting in Reading last November, and I have mentioned it earlier in respect of the fact that it was judged even by the law of the land to have been unlawful.

It was found on judicial review to have been incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, to which the United Kingdom was a signatory, and to which Scotland, as part of the UK, was thus bound. That ruling is welcome because the principle applies throughout the UK.

Of course, things being as they are, the court was not going to settle the matter on a Scriptural principle, or a confessional one, taking account of the demarcation between the civil magistrate's powers *circa sacra* as opposed to *in sacris*. The matter was resolved on the basis of human rights, whether it was lawful to prevent the practice and expression of one's religion. The Scottish government argued that it was, because derogations from the ECHR were permissible in cases of emergency, such as a health emergency. Had the court not heard that there was a pandemic on? But the government got itself into difficulties because the court was sitting and hearing the case. If it was safe enough on health grounds for a court to sit then it must also be safe enough for a church to meet, provided reasonable safeguards were taken. In the end, the Scottish government admitted that the closure of the churches had not, in fact, been a public health measure, as they had been maintaining all along, but that it had been a political act. Derogations to the ECHR are certainly not permitted for political reasons – after all, the ECHR is in place to defend the citizen against political removal of his rights, so the Scottish government inevitably lost the case.

As I say, this was still welcome, though based on a ruling against the ECHR and an admission by the Scottish government that they had misrepresented the case for a year. But how would an individual, or a church, have decided whether the criminalization of public worship was lawful and should be obeyed. Even if ultimately it is a matter of conscience, the conscience must be informed.

To me, there are a number of indicators that show that this crossed the line, both in meddling in matters *in sacris*, and in the invasion of the basic rights of a man.

Firstly, attendance at public worship became a criminal offence. Three crimes were committed: a crime of leaving home for public worship, the crime of gathering with others for public worship, and a crime in allowing a building to be used for public worship. However, it was not a crime to leave home for lots of other reasons, or to gather, for example in the workplace, or even to gather in a church building, since homosexuals were permitted to gather in them to give each other support, as were toddler groups and several other activities. Thus the ban on public worship on health grounds was obviously a sham. A specific activity was being criminalized, whereas meeting together in a church was not itself criminalized or regarded as unsafe.

Secondly, no mitigations were allowed. There were no measures that could be put in place that would allow public worship. But mitigations were allowed in other situations, on public transport, in shops, in the workplace etc to allow people to be together. As mentioned, even church buildings could be used if for certain activities other than public worship. Those mitigations were supposedly suitable to allow those congregations of people to take place safely, and thus the specific ban on public worship on health grounds was again a sham.

We recognize that the civil magistrate has a duty in respect to public safety, either to close an access road to a church, or condemn a building as unsafe unless remedial work is done, or refuse it to be used because it is liable to be shelled; or to prevent its being illuminated after dark which might make it a beacon for enemy aircraft. However, the ban on public worship came through no such health and safety considerations. In fact, no church buildings were actually closed by law: they could still be used for activities other than the purpose for which they were built: pews could be removed and machinery brought in and the premises operated 24/7 as a factory if so desired, with a busy workforce. No one in authority would have batted an eyelid. But entering such a building even for silent prayer was a criminal offence.

In my opinion, it was incredibly naïve for Christians to believe that the government was criminalizing public worship for the greater good. It was transparently obvious from the start, in the way that the laws were drawn up and enforced, that this was a

political act, and having dissembled about this for a year the Scottish government finally confessed what they had done and were required immediately to rescind it.

This should thus ever be remembered as an occasion when the civil magistrate went well beyond his God-given duties and responsibilities *circa sacra*, and meddled in affairs *in sacris*.

Should a Christian obey the civil magistrate who meddles *in sacris*, and imposes laws that are a political attack upon the church, which even by the law of the land are unlawful, and that prevent a Christian from fulfilling his duty before God? Even if he might, in weakness, do it for wrath's sake, he surely cannot do it for conscience' sake.