

Christianity, or such as either in their own nature or in the manner of publishing them, are destructive to the external peace and order of the Church—such persons may, notwithstanding their *pretence of liberty of conscience*, be proceeded against by the Church and the magistrate. The meaning of this clause will therefore be that *any one* doing the things specified shall not, on the plea of conscience, be permitted to escape the just censure of the Church for *these* their sins, or the just punishment of the civil power for *these* their crimes. The object of this clause is evidently to guard liberty of conscience from abuse, to repel the objection that it permits lawless license either in matters religious or civil; and so far as the general doctrine which it embodies is concerned, the judgment of our day is at one with that of the Westminster divines. But we feel constrained to object to the specifications of civil offences which the clause contains, even with Dr. McCrie's explanation, and would rather generalise its particulars into such a form of expression as that they may be consistent with the present universally accepted views of civil and religious liberty. We cannot in these days admit that *any class* of persons may or ought to be punished by the civil power for publishing opinions or maintaining practices simply because they are what may be deemed "contrary to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, or to the power of godliness." Neither can we sanction a law that would subject *any class* of persons to punishment for opinions or practices published or maintained which might be thought "destructive of the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church." We do not understand the Confession to use these terms in any sense that would require this, or that could be regarded as sanctioning persecution for conscience sake. In our resolutions of 1854 we solemnly declare that we "do not understand the passages relating to the duty of the civil magistrate as teaching or sanctioning the persecution of individuals for conscience sake; principles which the Synod heartily disclaim," &c. We would, therefore, as we have said, rather generalise the particulars of this clause, and say that they simply mean that persons doing the things specified, even on the plea of liberty of conscience, expose themselves to the censure of the Church, and if in the doing of them they disturb the peace and good order of society, or invade the liberties of the Church, they further expose themselves to civil pains and penalties. If any one says that the clause in question means more than this, or that it sanctions compulsory or persecuting and intolerant principles in religion, then we say, that not only do we not accept it in that sense, but we repudiate such an interpretation of its terms.

But, having cleared our way through this rather difficult passage of the Confession, and seen what it is understood to teach, we find that it says nothing about the civil magistrate's duty in relation to the Word of God. It treats certain actions and forms of actions as *crimes*; that is, as destructive of the good order of civil society; and on this ground it declares that the persons guilty of them may be punished by the civil magistrate. Now, there is nothing in this open to debate. Both parties acknowledge that *crimes* or violations of public law or right lie within the proper jurisdiction of the civil magistrate; and that too not because they are sins against God, but because, whatever else they may be, they are sins against civil society. We have therefore, so far, found nothing in the Confession that directly bears upon the duty of the civil magistrate in his official capacity to recognise the obligations of the revealed Word of God.

We turn now to the 23rd chapter of the Confession. Here we find it represented that "God, the Supreme Lord and King of all the World, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people." This is in terms of that Scripture which says "The powers that be are ordained of God." This article,