

**NATIONAL APOSTASY  
CONSIDERED: IN A SERMON  
PREACHED IN ST. MARY'S OXFORD,  
BEFORE HIS MAJESTY'S JUDGES OF  
ASSIZE, ON SUNDAY, JULY 14, 1833**

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National apostasy considered: in a sermon preached in St. Mary's Oxford, before His Majesty's judges of Assize, on Sunday, July 14, 1833 by John Keble

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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SINCE the following pages were prepared for the press, the calamity, in anticipation of which they were written, has actually overtaken this portion of the Church of God. The Legislature of England and Ireland, (*the members of which are not even bound to profess belief in the Atonement,*) this body has virtually usurped the commission of those whom our SAVIOUR entrusted with *at least one voice* in making ecclesiastical laws, on matters wholly or partly spiritual. The same Legislature has also ratified, to its full extent, this principle;—that the Apostolical Church in this realm is henceforth only to stand, in the eye of the State, as *one sect among many*, depending, for any preeminence she may still appear to retain, merely upon the accident of her having a strong party in the country.

It is a moment, surely, full of deep solicitude to all those members of the Church who still believe her authority divine, and the oaths and obligations, by which they are bound to her,

undissolved and indissoluble by calculations of human expediency. Their anxiety turns not so much on the consequences, to the State, of what has been done, (*they* are but too evident,) as on the line of conduct which they are bound themselves to pursue. How may they continue their communion with the Church *established*, (hitherto the pride and comfort of their lives,) without any taint of those Erastian Principles on which she is now avowedly to be governed? What answer can we make henceforth to the partisans of the Bishop of Rome, when they taunt us with being a mere Parliamentary Church? And how, consistently with our present relations to *the State*, can even the doctrinal purity and integrity of the MOST SACRED ORDER be preserved?

The attention of all who love the Church is most earnestly solicited to these questions. They are such, it will be observed, as cannot be answered by appealing to precedents in English History, because, at most, such could only shew, that the difficulty might have been raised before. It is believed, that there are hundreds, nay thousands of Christians, and that soon there

will be tens of thousands, unaffectedly anxious to be rightly guided with regard to these and similar points. And they are mooted thus publicly, for the chance of eliciting, from competent judges, a correct and early opinion.

If, under such trying and delicate circumstances, one could venture to be positive about any thing, it would seem safe to say, that in such measure as it may be thought incumbent on the Church, or on Churchmen, to submit to any profane intrusion, it must at least be their sacred duty, to declare, promulgate, and record, their full conviction, that it *is* intrusion; that they yield to it as they might to any other tyranny, but do from their hearts deprecate and abjure it. This seems the least that can be done: unless we would have our children's children say, "There was once here a glorious Church, but it was betrayed into the hands of Libertines for the real or affected love of a little temporary peace and good order."

July 22, 1833.

1 SAMUEL xii. 23.

*As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.*

ON public occasions, such as the present, the minds of Christians naturally revert to that portion of Holy Scripture, which exhibits to us the will of the Sovereign of the world in more immediate relation to the *civil* and *national* conduct of mankind. We naturally turn to the Old Testament, when *public* duties, *public* errors, and *public* dangers, are in question. And what in such cases is natural and obvious, is sure to be more or less right and reasonable. Unquestionably it is a mistaken theology, which would debar Christian nations and statesmen from the instruction afforded by the Jewish scriptures, under a notion, that the circumstances of that people were *altogether* peculiar and unique, and therefore irrelevant to every other case. True, there *is* hazard of misapplication, as there is whenever men teach by example. There is *peculiar* hazard, from the sacredness and delicacy of the subject; since dealing with things supernatural and miraculous as if they were ordinary human precedents, would be not only unwise,



but profane. But these hazards are more than counterbalanced by the absolute certainty, peculiar to this history, that what is there commended was right, and what is there blamed, wrong. And they would be effectually obviated if men would be careful to keep in view this caution:—suggested every where, if I mistake not, by the manner in which the Old Testament is quoted in the New:—that, as regards reward and punishment, God dealt formerly with the Jewish people in a manner analogous to that in which He deals now, not so much with Christian *nations*, as with the *souls of individual Christians*.

Let us only make due allowances for this cardinal point of difference, and we need not surely hesitate to avail ourselves, as the time may require, of those *national* warnings, which fill the records of the elder church: the less so, as the discrepancy lies rather in what is revealed of God's providence, than in what is required in the way of human duty. Rewards and punishments may be dispensed, visibly at least, with a less even hand; but what *tempers*, and what *conduct*, God will ultimately reward and punish,—*this* is a point which cannot be changed: for it depends not on our circumstances, but on His essential, unvarying Attributes.

I have ventured on these few general observations, because the impatience with which the

world endures any remonstrance on religious grounds, is apt to shew itself most daringly, when the *Law* and the *Prophets* are appealed to. Without any scruple or ceremony, men give us to understand that they regard the whole as obsolete: thus taking the very opposite ground to that which was preferred by the same class of persons two hundred years ago; but, it may be feared, with much the same purpose and result. *Then*, the *Old Testament* was quoted at random for every excess of fanatical pride and cruelty: *now*, its authority goes for nothing, however clear and striking the analogies may be, which appear to warrant us in referring to it. The two extremes, as usual, meet; and in this very remarkable point: that they both avail themselves of the *supernatural* parts of the Jewish revelation to turn away attention from that, which *they*, of course, most dread and dislike in it: its authoritative confirmation of the *plain dictates of conscience* in matters of civil wisdom and duty.

That portion, in particular, of the history of the chosen people, which drew from Samuel, the truest of patriots, the wise and noble sentiment in the text, must ever be an unpleasing and perplexing page of scripture, to those, who would fain persuade themselves, that a nation, even a Christian nation, may do well enough, as such, without God, and without His Church.

For what if the Jews *were* bound to the Almighty by ties common to no other people? What if He *had* condescended to know *them* in a way in which He was as yet unrevealed to all families of the earth besides? What if, as their relation to Him was nearer, and their ingratitude more surpassing, so they might expect more exemplary punishment? Still, after all has been said, to exaggerate their guilt, *in degree*, beyond what is supposed possible in any nation whatever now, what can it come to, in *kind* and in *substance*, but only this;—that they rejected God! that they wished themselves rid of the moral restraint implied in His peculiar presence and covenant? They said, what the prophet Ezekiel, long after, represents their worthy posterity as saying, “*We will be as the heathen, the families of the countries.*” “Once for all, we will get rid of these disagreeable, unfashionable scruples, which throw us behind, as we think, in the race of worldly honour and profit.” Is this indeed a tone of thought, which Christian nations cannot fall into? Or, if they should, has it ceased to be displeasing to God! In other words, has He forgotten to be angry with impiety and practical atheism! Either this must be affirmed, or men must own, (what is clear at once to plain unsophisticated readers,) that this first overt

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. xx. 32.