

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS AND THE THREE FORMS OF UNITY SUPPORT PROTESTANT NATIONALISM

It should come as no surprise that the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity of historic Reformed Christianity support Protestant nationalism. After all, Protestant nationalism characterized the British and Dutch nations by the conclusion of the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, it is useful to trace out precisely how these Biblical confessional standards support Protestant nationalism and its chief underlying tenets.

As averred in the recently published book *Protestant Nationalism Proffered*, which is [free online](#) as well as in [paperback format](#), robust Protestant nationalism rests upon three main Biblical doctrines:

- The Establishment Principle
- Postmillennial historicism
- A Biblical form of nationalism

Let's consider what each of these doctrines means and how the confessional standards support each of them either expressly or implicitly, and then conclude how it all should issue in support by God's grace for Protestant nationalism today by those who profess agreement with the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity.

The Establishment Principle is the doctrine that the civil government ought to be explicitly Christian, serve God, and protect Christ's true church. It seeks to carry out the command of Psalm 2 and many other passages: "...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..." This doctrine has ramifications far beyond politics, because:

- If fallen man is able to govern wisely without God and His word, then it implies that man is not really totally depraved, and if man is not really totally depraved, then man is capable of assisting God in man's salvation. If fallen man is able to govern a nation well without God and His word, then fallen man can likely govern himself well without God and His word. Denial of the establishment principle thus overturns the Biblical gospel.
- If fallen man can govern nations without obedience to God and His Ten Commandments, then does it not follow that God's Lordship is significantly limited?

The Westminster Standards teach the Establishment Principle in the Confession's Chapter 23: "GOD, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and 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. 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: yet he 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..." The Three Forms of Unity teach the Establishment Principle in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession: "We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, has appointed kings, princes and magistrates, willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose he has invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evildoers, and for the protection of them that do well. And their office is, 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 antichrist 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, as he commands in his Word..."

Postmillennial historicism is the view that Biblical prophecy teaches:

- The Papacy is that Anti-Christ, the Man of Sin of II Thessalonians 2, and a Beast of Revelation 13.
- The Book of Revelation outlines the history of the Church from the Apostolic Era to the future Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

- Before the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, God will bless the proclamation of His word such that the Roman Catholic Anti-Christ and his kingdom will be extinguished and Christ's kingdom promoted and widespread. The latter is generally understood to include the conversion en masse of the Jews to Biblical Christianity.

This understanding of Biblical prophecy was practically important for Protestantism because it meant that Christians should not try to stay in the Roman Catholic Church and reform it, but rather should separate from it and seek its extinguishment through the Holy Spirit working through the preaching of the Biblical gospel. The Westminster Standards teach postmillennial historicism in the Confession's chapter 25: "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof: but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God." Also, the Larger Catechism states in its answer to question 191: "...we pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrates; 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 those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming..." The Three Forms of Unity teach postmillennial historicism in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession: "...their office is, 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 antichrist may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere..." [Dr. Francis Nigel Lee points out](#) how "the Preamble to the 1618-19 Decrees of Dordt had mentioned that the Protestant 'Church was...redeemed from the tyranny of the Romish Antichrist and the terrible idolatry of the Papacy by the mighty hand of God.' Indeed, it was precisely the Synod of Dordt which had commissioned the production of the Dordt Dutch Bible." The term Antichrist was understood at the time to mean and had special reference to the Roman Catholic Papacy, as also agreed the Westminster Standards. The Dordt Dutch Bible interpreted the Man of Sin of II Thessalonians 2 as referring to the Papacy and interpreted the phrase "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming", like John Calvin did, to mean "by the pure preaching of the holy Gospel, through which the Spirit of the Lord works powerfully in the hearts of men. See, similarly: Isa. 11:4 and Heb. 4:12 and Rev. 1:16", as [Dr. Lee notes](#). In other words, Article 36's statement regarding the destruction of Antichrist's kingdom and promotion of Christ's kingdom should be understood in a postmillennial historicist sense, occurring before Christ's future Second Advent. The postmillennial historicism of both [James Durham's commentary on Revelation](#) and [Wilhelmus à Brakel's commentary on Revelation](#) reflect the Reformed Christian mainstream of the Protestant Reformation that is reflected in the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity.

A Biblical form of nationalism is the doctrine that recognizes the propriety of political self-governance and well-being for each people group and of magistrates ruling over such people groups in their dominions. This contrasts with both Romish and Islamic forms of imperialism. Implicit to this is that there truly are people groups descended from the patriarchs Shem, Ham, and Japheth, such that race and ethnicity are not mere social constructs lacking substance. This understanding of Biblical doctrine was practically important because it gave a magistrate for his people license to protect his nation from foreign enemies, including the Roman Catholic Pope. The Westminster Standards teach a Biblical form of nationalism in Confession's chapter 23: "Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them, (1Pe 2:13-14, 16): from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, (Rom 13:1; 1Ki 2:35; Act 25:9-11; 2Pe 2:1-11; Jud 8-11); much less hath the Pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretence whatsoever (2Th 2:4; Rev 13:15-17). Also, the Larger Catechism in question 136 recognizes the propriety of "lawful war", which is predicated on the sovereignty of nation-states and their right to protect themselves from foreign enemies. The Three Forms of Unity teach a Biblical form of nationalism in Article 36's reference to how God "has invested the magistracy with the sword", indicating the propriety of such magistrate over a given people group protecting his people from their foreign enemies, including the Roman Catholic Pope. It is a "lawful war" concept.

Robust Protestant nationalism is the view that incorporates all three of these Biblical doctrines into one summary system of belief, with the overarching principle that Jesus Christ as revealed in the Old and New Testaments of holy scripture is to be our Lord and Savior for all areas of our life, including civil governance. It hence calls us all to support Protestant nationalism, to the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ.