



GOD'S SERVANT FOR OUR GOOD

**Essays on
The Reformed Faith
and Civil Government**

Compiled by

DAVID R. HUTCHINGS



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1

“The Christian and Civil Government” A Meditation on Romans 13:1-6

Robert D. Decker



Let every soul be subject unto 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: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then 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. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (Rom. 13:1-6)

THIS PASSAGE SPEAKS OF TWO MATTERS: the Christian's calling toward the civil government, and the civil government's calling toward its citizens.

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers! This means precisely what it says. Every soul means every person. No one is excluded. All people must be subject to the higher powers.

Those higher powers are those who stand above or over us and who, therefore, are superior in rank to us. The reference is to the governmental authorities, or civil rulers. In the apostle's day these higher authorities were the rulers of the Roman Empire, from the Emperor down to the lowest-ranking local officials in the Roman provinces. In our day and land, the higher powers are the national and state (provincial) governments, the judicial officials, and the police.

The translation "powers" is a bit unfortunate. The apostle does not mean to refer to raw or sheer power, but to the authority which these officials have been granted. These officials have been given the right to govern us in the civil realm. Thus, they possess the authority to rule our outward life.

These higher powers are said to be "the powers that be." These are the existing authorities at any given time in history, in whatever form, and in any given country. The point is that Scripture does not here or in any other passage sanction a particular form of government. Nor does Scripture condemn any particular form of government. A democratic form of government (American or otherwise) is not given the stamp of approval by the Bible. Nor does Scripture condemn a monarchy or socialism or a dictatorship. As a matter of fact, "the powers that be" of the apostle's day were imperial Rome, a government about as corrupt as any in all of history! Scripture does, however, condemn the sinful misuse or abuse of authority. Scripture also calls rulers to govern justly and obediently.

To these higher powers, the powers that be—the rulers (v. 3)—we must be subject. To be subject means to arrange ourselves under, to yield ourselves under, or, more simply, to obey the civil authorities.

We are subject to the higher powers when we do not resist them. Resistance the text plainly forbids! That word "resist" is interesting. It means to "range oneself in battle against." One who resists the authorities battles against them! In other words, he rebels or revolts against the authorities. This is more than disobedience; it is revolution. To resist is to attempt to overthrow the civil authorities. This the Bible plainly forbids. Revolution even against a corrupt, ungodly government such as existed in Paul's day is sinful. We may not do that! The only exception to our obedience to the rulers is when they require of us that which is contrary to the law or will of God. In that case we must say, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Cf. Acts 4:18, 19 and Acts 5:29.) But even then, we must not attempt to overthrow the

government. We obey God rather than men and suffer patiently the consequences at the hand of an unjust, corrupt government.

Still more, we must not do the evil, but we must do the good. This simply means we must live in harmony with the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture and summed in His Law. We are to obey the civil government. Our calling is to obey the laws of the land.

And it's necessary that we be good, loyal, obedient citizens, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (v. 5). In other words, we are to obey the authorities not because we fear the punishment they are authorized to inflict upon evildoers (vv. 3, 4), but for God's sake. We "know with" (this is "conscience sake") God that His will is that we should obey the civil authorities.

This the inspired apostle applies very specifically in verse 6 which reads: "For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."

Not resisting the government, refraining from doing evil, and doing good means we must pay our taxes. We must contribute to the support of the civil authorities so that they are able to carry out their God-given duties. Whether they misuse those tax monies or not makes no difference. Our calling is to pay them tribute.

Why must we obey the higher powers? Because "there is no power but of God." God is all the authority! There is no authority above God or even equal to God. God's is all the authority. Ephesians 1:19-23 makes clear that God's great, sovereign power and authority are revealed in that He raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities and authorities and might and dominion and every name that is named.

Thus, the text teaches that the powers that be are ordained of God. God ordains, sets up, puts in place the authorities. Whether the authorities acknowledge this or not, whether they know it or not, whether they strive to serve God in their positions of authority or not, they are placed there by God. And for this reason, we must obey them.

This means that if we resist them, we are resisting the ordinance of God! The one who takes his stand against the authorities has set himself against that which God Himself has ordained. To disobey the authorities is to disobey God. And the one who resists incurs damnation, the just punishment of God!

This is our calling over against the state.

But the civil authorities also have a calling over against their citizens. They are said to be God's ministers or servants. Their calling as God's servants, again whether they realize this or not, is to reward with praise those who do

good and to punish those who do evil. They must govern the outward behavior of their citizens. Thus, God has provided for good order and decency in society.

God has given the sword power to the civil authorities. They do not bear that sword in vain, or without purpose. As God's ministers they have been given the authority to punish evildoers and reward those who do good with praise.

Let us then be subject to these higher powers. God has placed them over us for the sake of His church and cause in the world. Let us obey them, since "it pleases God to govern us by their hand" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. XXXIX).



2

The Reformed Faith on Civil Government

David J. Engelsma



NO ONE CAN DOUBT THE IMPORTANCE of a sound, clear understanding of civil government, of the authority that civil government has over him, and of the duty he has toward civil government. Not only does Scripture make the Christian's relationship to the state part of his, or her, thankful, holy life (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:11-17) but also the broad sphere of the state's power assures that each of us comes into direct contact with civil government, or is affected by civil government, daily. The teenager who wants to drive must receive a license from the state, and thereafter submit to the state every time he gets on the highway. The preacher officiates at the wedding of a couple only if the state has authorized the marriage, and says so in the ceremony. The government of the United States requires parents to educate their children to a certain age, and stipulates the manner in which this is to be done. Farmers and businessmen have to contend with many laws regulating their operations. The working man is painfully aware of the state every time he notices the large chunk of his wages withheld for taxes. There are also the effects of civil government upon our lives that we usually take for granted (but should not!): the protection by the police; the security from invasion because of the armed forces; and the general order in our country because of government at all levels.

It is especially urgent that Reformed Christians be clear and sound in their thinking about civil government today because of powerful movements that tempt them to adopt erroneous notions and unlawful practices in this area of their lives. Revolution is now a Christian option! Indeed (we are told), revolution is the Christian calling! In the 60s, the liberal churches joined in the civil disobedience by which the blacks forced the state to give them their civil rights. At present, liberation theology approves violent revolution as the means of liberating the oppressed in Latin America and South Africa, if not as the primary means, then as a last resort. Of late, conservative and evangelical Christians, including some of the most prominent names, not only approve of civil disobedience, i.e., deliberate, strategic violation of certain laws of the land and flaunting of the authority of the state behind these laws, in order to compel the state to change laws regarded as unjust, by force; but they also proclaim this lawless behavior as obedience to the gospel, and call gospel-believing Christians to participate in it as the expression of discipleship to Christ. Liberals and conservatives, modernists and evangelicals are both playing the same game, the one to deliver the downtrodden from a life of poverty and misery, the other to save the unborn from the murder of abortion. "For God's sake, rebel!"

It cannot have escaped the attention of the members of our Protestant Reformed Churches that at least three cases of appeal involving the relationship of the Reformed believer and the civil government have come to the broader assemblies in the past few years. This reminds us, if we need reminding, that the matter of the Reformed faith's teaching about the state is of practical importance for the life of our own churches. In 1986, Classis West upheld a consistory's discipline of a member who refused to comply with the income-tax laws of the land, thus condemning as revolutionary the tax-protest movement. Synod, 1987 decided on a case of the remarriage of a divorced person. One important element of the decision was Synod's recognition of the state's regulation of the civil and societal aspect of marriage, so that "the sinfulness of the marriage of a divorced person does not make null and void this civil aspect of the marriage, and thus all reality of the marriage, contracted under the God-given authority of the State" ("Acts of Synod," Art. 14). Last year, an appellant asked Synod to overturn a decision of Classis East that required him to submit to the ruling of a civil court granting visitation rights to the children of his divorced wife. Synod upheld Classis' decision on the ground, in part, that "the right of a biological mother to have visitation rights with her children is recognized and protected by the State (Romans 13) ..." ("Acts of Synod," 1988, Art. 29). In all three of these cases, the assemblies

honored the authority of the state and called on our members to submit to this authority.

As Reformed churches, we confess that civil government has been ordained by God. Whatever particular government exists in a country has been ordained by God. Government is not “of the people”; government is of God: “There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). The officials of a government, from the chief executive to the bureaucrat who shuffles papers, have received authority to govern you and me “from above” (John 19:11).

The state, with its myriad of officers, is the servant of God. Three times in the classic passage in the New Testament on the Christian’s responsibility to the state, Romans 13:1-7, does the apostle call the state and its officers “ministers,” or servants, of God. This is an honorable title, indeed! Government is not only, or even primarily, the servant of the people. As the servant of God, government must serve God. What a difference it would make, if our government would see itself as a servant, not primarily of the people, but of God. In this case, great issues would not be decided on the basis of public opinion polls, but on the basis of the will of God. Even though slightly over half of the population might favor abortion on demand, the Supreme Court would rule that abortion is murder, punishable by death, on the ground that this is the will of God, plainly revealed in both the law of nature and in the Bible.

Regardless of the state’s ignorance of its servanthood, it does, in fact, serve God. The service it renders is the keeping of some outward order in society by the punishment of criminals and the protection of those who do well (I Pet. 2:14). The state’s task is the administration of external, earthly justice in a nation; and every state carries this task out, however imperfectly, even the most corrupt of them.

This is no small benefit to the church and to the Christian. Outward order in a land is a precious gift of God to us. Take away the magistrates, and, as Calvin said, “we all must live like rats in the straw.” The worst government is much to be preferred to anarchy.

God’s purpose with civil government is that, by the outward restraint of the dissoluteness of men, the church can exist and carry out her task of preaching the spiritual, inner righteousness of the gospel, thus extending the Kingdom of God. Likewise, the people of God can live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, i.e., ingdom-lives (I Tim. 2:2).

God has two great servants in the world—the church, which serves Him freely by grace, and the state, which serves Him for the most part (there are a

few Christians in government, here and there) by dint of God's sovereign might of providence, even as Cyrus in the Old Testament.

Reformed Christians ought to honor God's servant, the state. They may not view it as devilish. They should not dismiss government as "dirty politics." No God-fearing young person may ever call the policeman, "pig."

We may use the state, in the functions God intends it to serve. The Christian may have recourse to the courts in defense of his name and property. A church may claim the protection of the authorities for the possession of their property and the peace and order of their meetings, as Article 28 of the Reformed *Church Order* states. A position in government is a perfectly proper profession for a Reformed Christian. Young men must register for the draft, and serve in the armed forces when called up.

Never may the child of God revolt, or "resist," as the King James Version puts it in Romans 13:1ff. The prohibition against revolution is absolute and unconditional. This is historic Calvinism. The notion, popular today, that Calvinism is a revolutionary theology is mistaken. Both Luther and Calvin unconditionally forbade revolution by the Christian. For both, the only permissible way to bring a tyrant down was the legal resistance by the "lesser magistrates." One of the main purposes for the writing of the *Belgic Confession* was to dissociate the Reformed church from the seditious anabaptists. Writ large in our confession is the claim, "We Reformed are not revolutionaries." The *Heidelberg Catechism* makes rejection of all revolutionary conduct (including rebellion of the heart!) a creedal stand, when it binds upon every Reformed person that he submit to "all in authority over me ... and also patiently bear with their weaknesses ..." (Lord's Day, 39).

The importance is twofold:

1. Thus, we escape the wrathful judgment of God, indeed the damnation that He visits on all who resist His ordinance, His servant.

2. Thus, we distinguish ourselves from the world that is in revolt against the authority of God, pleasing our Sovereign by a holy life.

Perhaps by this time alone among Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches are, and can be, consistent in their testimony and behavior of submission to God-ordained authority. For, at the cost of great personal sacrifice by many working men and at the cost of numerical growth, these churches have resolutely opposed the revolt against the authority of the employer—the *violent* revolt against the authority of the employer—in the sphere of labor that is inherent in the labor unions. Our talk against rebellion has not been cheap.

Unconditional submission is not the same as unconditional obedience. The state is not God. The God and Father of Jesus Christ is God. Only He

commands our unconditional obedience. The state is to be obeyed except when its law demands disobedience to the will of God in Holy Scripture. Exactly because Reformed Christians obey for God's sake, or for "conscience sake," as Romans 13:5 puts it, they adopt a watchful, critical stance with regard to civil government. Caesar shall not have the things that are God's.

There are ominous signs in our country. The state deifies itself, taking to itself the prerogatives of God, as is evident in the abortion-law—the state seizes sovereignty over life and death. The state becomes totalitarian, thrusting itself into every area of life, as is evident generally in the welfare state and particularly in the state's funding of and control over the care of little children in the day-care centers. The state intrudes into the sphere of the church, attacking what the Scottish Presbyterians called the "crown rights of King Jesus." A court recently fined a church for exercising church discipline upon a member; a current case has the courts threatening a church's pastoral counseling of its members; and the fear that the state may penalize churches that refuse to allow women to hold church-office or to permit practicing homosexuals to be members is not far-fetched.

Even then, the church may not revolt. But neither will it obey. In the name of Christ, she says to the insubordinate servant of God, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Then, as has happened again and again in the history of the church, she suffers for Christ's sake, not resisting.

Still, the state is God's servant. For the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.

As for the punishing of the ungodly, unjust, corrupt, and even antichristian rulers, we let the God of these gods deal with them. He has His ways of doing so.



3

Calvin's Concept of the State

Mr. Jon J. Huiskens



CALVIN'S MAIN TREATISE ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT is found in Book IV, Chapter 20 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Since Chapter 20 constitutes the final chapter in his *Institutes*, it is considered by many to be strategically placed—a culmination of his teaching on what it means to be Christian in this world, the consequence of his theology. Whether this is indeed true we will leave for the Calvin scholars to argue, but what we do know is that Calvin gives prominence in his *Institutes* to this topic for several reasons. Certainly, Calvin's time in history forced him to think about the state. He witnessed the tyranny of the pope who claimed both temporal and spiritual power. He lived at a time when kings and rulers openly persecuted the followers of the reformation (consider the introduction to his *Institutes*, his letter to Francis I where he pleads the cause of the Reformed in France). He himself was educated as a lawyer. His first published work was on Seneca's *De Clementia*, a work considered to be a dissertation on political science. He *knew* law and government. And, added to his experience with governments and law and the Romish Church, was the turmoil created by the Anabaptists within the reformation movement. These folks seized upon their newly-found liberty and declared themselves to be free of all rule and government. Calvin knew well the history of this movement. The fiasco in Munster where the Anabaptists were holed up in the city waiting for the parousia, but who in the

end were defeated by the government forces, occurred as his *Institutes* were in press.

So Calvin's concern with civil government was indeed natural. But what I hope we will see is that it was more than that. Calvin saw government as both necessary and essential. Government was ordained of God to serve His purpose.

As is typical of Calvin's thought, however, one needs to have a global view of his thinking in order to arrive at an understanding of the concept he is writing about. One has to understand, or at least have some sense of, the context of Calvin's thinking on the topic at hand. Calvin was logical and systematic in his writing. His *Institutes* especially reflect this fact. Thus, when Calvin opens Book IV of the *Institutes* with the words, "Now, since we have established above that man is under a twofold government, and since we have elsewhere discussed at sufficient length the kind that reside in the soul of inner man and pertains to eternal life (Book III Chapters 1-19A—JJH) this is the place to say something about the other kind, which pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality ..." you know that words such as *now* and *since* and *above* are going to force you into going back to get the "lay-of-the-land" with regard to Calvin's concept of the state. We need to know where this concept of civil government fits in Calvin's thinking if we are to begin to have an understanding of it.

If we take this approach, then, in working toward an understanding of what Calvin believes the state to be, an understanding of Calvin's organization of the *Institutes* will be of help here in determining that sense of logical sequence in Calvin's thinking. What will happen, in fact, is that by setting Calvin's thoughts on the state in the context of his *Institutes*, his beliefs concerning the state will naturally unfold. (Ford Lewis Battles' *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion* is very helpful here, since it gives the *Institutes* in outline form.) The organization of the *Institutes* proceeds as follows: Books I and II give the dogmatic loci of Theology and Christology, Book III is Soteriology, and Book IV Ecclesiology. Calvin moves in Books I-III from God and Christ and salvation—that which makes God and Christ internal—to Book IV which title begins with "The External Means ..." And, to Calvin, these means are the two kinds of government referred to above—the government of the church through its offices and the government of the individual and society through the magistrate and civil government, both of which, according to the rest of Calvin's title for Book IV, are "*Means and Aids By Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Jesus Christ and Holds Us Therein.*"

Thus, it can be argued, as many do, that Calvin's final chapter of the *Institutes*, Chapter 20 on civil government, is in a real sense a necessary consequence of all that went before. Given all the theologizing that went before, Calvin now sees to it that these truths will be maintained in the church and in society. All these truths of God and Jesus Christ are to be upheld and regulated by the two kinds of government mentioned above: 1) church government which deals with the things of the inner man and 2) civil government, the necessary corollary, which concerns the outward deportment of men.

Further, Calvin is at pains to point out that these two kinds of government are not at variance; they are not antithetical, but complementary. This idea is important here if we are to understand Calvin's concept of the state. For these governments both point to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over man's life—both his inner and outer man are to recognize and believe and live in that consciousness. In order to get hold of this idea, one needs to recognize at the outset that, overreaching all of Calvin's consideration of civil government, is not first of all whether Calvin proposes a republic or a monarchy as the best kind of government, or even whether the Christian is obligated to obey the government—that will all naturally follow—but his belief in the authority of the Word of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life. Some make a crucial mistake and insist that Calvin be made the father of modern democracy (cf., for example, Boettner), and they make that the central teaching of Calvin on the state. It certainly can be argued that Calvin preferred democracy (he despised most kings, it seems), but it would be a mistake if this is what we get out of Calvin's teaching on the state. Calvin was indeed concerned with the types of government, and his preference was for a republican form of government; but the point of Calvin is that "who governs" is not the *sine qua non* for right and legitimate government, but *how* one governs and *what one does* as ruler is central. Wilhelm Niesel, in his book *The Theology of Calvin*, puts it correctly when he states that

Calvin regards the state as fulfilling its appointed role in the service of Christ's dominion. When he speaks of secular government, he is not concerned about the state as such, nor even about the Christian state; but about Christ and about the significance which the civil power has for our life in fellowship with this Lord.

Niesel (*op. cit.*), again, correctly analyzes Calvin's thought when he writes:

In the fourth book of the *Institutes* Calvin treated of the Church, the Word, and the Sacraments, and he now proposes to show that among these “outward aids or instruments by which God calls us to and maintains us in communion with Christ,” the secular government also belongs. The latter is not the same things as the spiritual reign of Christ; but neither does it function merely in juxtaposition with it, but it exists for the good of those who in this perishable world belong to Christ and His eternal kingdom. There can be no decisive separation between state and church because the state has the same Lord as the church. Christ as the Head of His church is also precisely the Lord of this world. The fundamental section containing those reflections which Calvin devotes to the subject of civil government in his *Institutes* received therefore in the first edition the title: “The civil order is necessary for the well-being of the church.”

Calvin sets forth this basic idea already in the introduction to his *Institutes*, his “Letter to Francis I,” when he asserts that all rulers rule rightly if they acknowledge themselves to be “the ministers of God.” Those who rule according to the Word of God rule rightly. As Niesel observes, “Calvin teaches that when the glory of God is not the end of government, there is no legitimate sovereignty, but usurpation.”

Calvin further solidifies this idea of government being the minister of God when he argues that civil government has its origin in God, and its institution is by God. It is not something which has been derived by a society’s sense of the need for governance, as secular anthropologists would have us believe; but government, rightly conceived, is that which recognizes that its right to rule is given by God. Says Calvin (*Institutes*, IV, 4):

It has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinances. For God was pleased so to rule the affairs of men, inasmuch as he is present with them

and also presides over the making of laws and exercising of equity in courts of justice.

Calvin believes with Paul in Romans 13:1 that power is an ordinance of God and that there are no powers except those ordained by God.

Good government, then, according to Calvin, will recognize where its authority comes from, will rule according to the Word of God, will recognize itself as God's servant doing God's will in ruling over the matters of men and society.

But we must see, further, that church and state, although distinguished by Calvin, are necessarily connected. The church gives instruction to the state as to what it must be and how it must behave; the state must see to it that the church is preserved in order that the pure gospel may be preached.

This idea becomes even clearer when Calvin speaks of the tasks of the state. Says Calvin (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 2):

... Civil government has as its appointed end ... to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity.

This is not to say, however, that civil government does not have a secular duty. It does. But this duty is subordinate (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 3).

Its function among men is no less than that of bread, water, sun, and air; ... indeed its place of honor is far more excellent. For it does not merely see to it ... that men breathe, eat, drink, and are kept warm, even though it surely embraces all these activities ... but it also prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truths and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people; it prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man may keep his property safe and sound; that men may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves; that honesty and modesty may be

preserved among men. In short, it provides that a public institution of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.

The task of government, then, has two aspects. Niesel (*op. cit.*) sums it up when he says that “Peace in a country is threatened when God is not worshipped and His commands are not heeded, and the public worship of God is imperilled when strife prevails among men.” It is the task of the state to see to both tables of the law. The state is obligated to protect the pure preaching of the word lest “idolatry, sacrilege ... blasphemies,” arise. And further, government must create an environment where the church can prosper. “They (magistrates—JJH) are ordained protectors and vindicators of public innocence, decency, and tranquillity, and that their sole endeavor should be to provide for the common safety and peace of all” (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 9).

But Calvin warns about intermingling church and state. Conscience (Book III, 19) is man’s connection with God and His law and is the preview of the church. Conscience belongs to the inner man. No human law may bind that conscience. The state, as emphasized above, governs the outer man. Maintain that distinction, argues Calvin, and there will be no problems between church and state.

Such is Calvin’s concept of the state. Much can yet be written (and has) about Calvin’s idea of war and taxes and revolution. But that all follows from his idea of the state. I refer you to Book IV, Chapter 20 of the *Institutes* if you are inclined to pursue these topics—it’s all there.



4

Caesar's Calling

Ronald Cammenga



THE CITIZEN HAS A DUTY TOWARD THE STATE. The Scriptures are clear that we have this duty and what the nature of this duty is. Equally clear is the teaching of Scripture that the state (Caesar, if you will) has a duty toward the citizenry.

The church has a calling here. As much as the church must preach the will of God with respect to the obedience owed the state by the citizens, the church must make plain the will of God for government. What tasks does God give to government? What calling does the government have towards those who are its subjects? When does government overstep its calling?

The Scriptures have some things to say about these questions, some basic things to say about the calling of civil government. The teaching of Scripture on this score comes out especially in the two classic passages in the New Testament that deal with the relationship between the Christian and the state (Rom. 13:1-7 and I Pet. 2:13-16).

The Basis for Caesar's Calling

Of fundamental importance in understanding the calling of civil government is the proper view of government itself. What government is, has everything to do with what duties government is called to perform.

The Scriptures are not uncertain on this point. Government is an institution of God. Government has been established by God. In Romans 13:1 the apostle says that "... the powers that be are ordained of God." In I Peter 2:14 we are told that government officials are sent by God.

Because government has been established by God, twice the Apostle in Romans 13 refers to the officials of government as "ministers of God." The word "ministers" is just the word "servants." Government officials (like all who hold office from God) are servants of God. Since God has instituted government, government officials are responsible to God. Since government has the basis of its existence in God, government is called to exist for God. This applies whether the officials of government are elected by a majority vote of the people or receive their position by heredity.

It ought to be obvious how important a proper understanding of the basis of government is to a proper understanding of government's calling. If, for example, the view that one has of the basis of government is that government is derived, not from God, but from the consent of the governed, that view is going to have a rather drastic effect on what one conceives the calling of government to be. Then, quite obviously, the calling of government is to uphold not first of all the law of God in the public life of the nation, but the will of the majority of the people. Then the controlling question is not what does the Word of God say on a certain issue, but what are the results of the latest poll.

Nor is the particular form of government of any significant consequence. Nowhere does the Bible prescribe one legitimate form of civil government, for example democracy, so that only those who are officials in a democratic government need be regarded by the Christian as servants of God. In the Old Testament, God ruled His people through a monarchy. At the time of the New Testament, the world was being ruled by a dictator, the Caesar in Rome. It makes no essential difference, whether monarchy, or oligarchy, or democracy, the officials of government are sent by God, and as such function as the servants of God. "The powers *that be* (whatever they may be) are ordained by God" (Rom. 13:1).

A Limited Calling

Since government is derived from God, God and God's Word prescribe the proper role of government. That role is defined in Romans 13:3, 4: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then 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. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The Apostle Peter expresses basically the same thing in I Peter 2:14 where he teaches that the officials of government are sent by God "... for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

The church must proclaim today, amidst all the confusion about what the government must do, what the proper calling of government is. For the most part, churches are not doing that. Instead of calling government to its God-assigned task, the synods and assemblies pass silly resolutions concerning nuclear warfare, concerning civil rights, and concerning our nation's foreign policy. Rather than to call government to its duty, the churches become involved in the work of the government. Church leaders dabble in politics and stick their ecclesiastical noses where they do not belong. The church makes a serious mistake here. The government does not benefit, and the church and the work of the church suffer.

The calling that God assigns to government is the punishment of evildoers and the praise of them that do well. The calling of government is to uphold the law of God in the sphere of the public life of the nation. The government must concern itself with the DOING of the law of God, that is, outward obedience to the law of God on the part of the citizens. It must protect and praise (reward) the well-doer. And it must punish the evildoer. It must protect the well-doer BY punishing the evildoer.

From this it is plain that government has a LIMITED calling. God does not give government authority over everything. Government has a limited sphere of authority. It has a calling as regards the well-doing and evil-doing of its citizens—no more, no less.

That is why totalitarian governments are evil. Communist governments are evil because they usurp authority over everything. They set the government itself up as God, as the absolute authority for every area of life. And then, quite naturally, they refuse the citizens the right to worship God.

Our government, too, is moving in this direction. It is a matter of serious concern that, more and more, our government refuses to recognize the limited area over which God gives it the right to rule. This is the wrong in such a thing

as our government's involvement in social welfare programs. God does not give the government the duty to support me. Nowhere in Scripture does He give the government that duty. I am called to support myself. And then, if there is a legitimate reason why I am unable to do this, if there is mercy that needs to be shown, that is the duty of *the church* through the office of the deaconate.

That is also the wrong in the government's present involvement in education. Now I believe that the government has a legitimate interest in education. The government has the right to insist on it that children receive an education, an academically sound education. The welfare of the state itself is involved here. But the government does not have the right actually to *do* the educating of children, nor the right to dictate what is and what is not to be the content of our children's education. Government is disobedient to God when it involves itself in areas where God has not given it authority. The calling of government is a limited calling.

A Calling to Bear the Sword

An important aspect of the calling of civil government is its calling to punish evildoers. This is often referred to as the sword power. In Romans 13:4 the Apostle says that the government "beareth not the sword in vain." He goes on to refer to the government as "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The Apostle Paul says that government officials are sent "for the punishment of evildoers" (I Pet. 2:14).

Especially has God given the government the calling to punish serious offenders of His law by taking away their life. A sword, after all, is an instrument of *death*. God, in other words, has given the government the duty to exercise capital punishment. To put it in today's language, God has given the government the electric chair, the gas chamber, the hangman's noose, or the firing squad, in order to punish evildoers, and by that very fact protect well-doers.

How our government is disobedient to this plain word of God!

How our government refuses to carry out its God-given calling when it neglects to punish the evildoer. That is obvious in the whole attempt of the government to reform and rehabilitate criminals today. Our government spends millions of tax dollars on this endeavor annually. Nowhere does God give government the calling to reform or rehabilitate evildoers. The calling God gives to the government is to PUNISH evildoers. The government's refusal to do this today is judged by God in the lawlessness that prevails in our

country.

Not only is our government remiss in its duty to punish the evildoer, it fails also in its calling to praise and reward the well-doer. In many cases, in fact, it is the well-doer who is being punished. Think once of the millions of abortions performed in our country, a thing sanctioned by the government and, in some instances, even paid for by government tax dollars. In this matter the government is responsible for taking up the sword against those who are not evildoers. Or think of the government's ominous encroachment in recent years on the Christian school movement, and its mistreatment of and penalties against certain well-doers in this area. Admittedly, the future looks dark.

In order that the government may carry out its God-given task, God has given the government the right of taxation. Now a government must not abuse its right of taxation in order to fund all sorts of activities that the government ought not be involved in, as our government certainly does. But government does have the right from God to tax its citizens. Part of the submission of the Christian to the government is that he is faithful in paying his levied taxes. The Apostle exhorts us in Romans 13:6, 7: "For this cause pay ye tribute also ... Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom ..." The Christian takes seriously the admonition of the Lord, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's ..." (Matt. 22:21).

This is the task of government, the calling of Caesar. For the carrying out of this calling, he will be held accountable before God, now and in the day of judgment. Woe to that servant of God, that government official, who is not able to give good account of the charge that was entrusted to him!



5

Our Duty to the State

James Slopsema



THE SCRIPTURES TEACH THAT EVERY CITIZEN has various obligations to the civil government under which he finds himself. Our Reformed fathers understood these duties and set them forth very beautifully in the confessions of the church. The duties of the citizens to the state are summarized, for example, in the *Belgic Confession*, Article 36.

Moreover it is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to *subject himself to the magistrates*; to *pay tribute*, to *show due honor 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.

We find something similar in the Westminster Confession,

It is the duty of people to *pray* for magistrates, to *honor their persons*, to *pay them tribute* and other dues, to *obey their lawful command*, and to *be subject to their*

authority, for conscience sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him ...

It is the duty of every citizen, first of all, to honor the civil magistrate.

By the civil magistrate is meant all government officials. This includes all those who make the laws, judge the laws, and enforce the laws in all levels of government, whether the national, state (provincial), or local level. This includes everyone from the President (Prime Minister) down to the local policeman.

Our duty as citizens is to honor these officials. Speaking of rulers, the Scriptures in Romans 13:7 teach us, "Render therefore to all their dues ... fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." In I Peter 2:17 we are instructed, "Honor all men ... honor the king." This means we are to hold the civil magistrate in high esteem. We are to show this honor to the magistrate when we deal with him as well as when we speak of him to others.

We certainly need to be reminded of this duty in our day. Government officials are generally held in very low esteem. They are made the butt of endless jokes; they are harshly criticized; often they are held in open contempt. It is true that much of this is occasioned by the ineptness and greed of the magistrate himself. Nevertheless, the Scriptures instruct us to honor the magistrate even then. The kings and rulers which the apostolic church was commanded to honor were just as inept and greedy as the magistrate of our day.

We are commanded to honor the magistrate for especially two reasons.

First, we must bear in mind that the powers that be are ordained of God (cf. Rom. 13:1). This means that God has ordained civil government and has given to every magistrate his place of rule and authority. God has done so because it is His good pleasure to rule and regulate our lives through the magistrate. This was true even of the corrupt magistrates in the days of the apostles. The magistrate occupies a high office. And for that reason, he must be honored.

Secondly, we must remember that the magistrate is the minister or servant of God to the church for good (cf. Rom. 13:4). This was true even of the wicked magistrates in the days of the apostles. The magistrate is the servant of God in that God uses the rule of the magistrate to preserve good order in society so that the church may be gathered and survive on the earth. Also for that reason we are to honor the magistrate.

In harmony with all this, it is also the duty of every citizen to submit himself to the rule of the state. In Romans 13:1 we are taught, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.” The higher powers here refer to the powers of the civil government. In I Peter 2:13-14 we read, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers.” Finally, there is the instruction of Paul to Titus: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates ...” (Tit. 3:1)

Submission or subjection to the civil magistrate means that we place ourselves under their rule and authority. This submission implies, first, that we obey the magistrate. After instructing Titus in Titus 3:1 to remind the saints to be subject to principalities and powers, he adds, “to obey magistrates.” This means that we must do our best to comply with the rules and regulations the magistrate establishes for the regulation of our lives as citizens in the state. This includes the traffic laws, the safety regulations, and other laws we tend to ignore so easily. We must obey the magistrate even when he misuses his office for personal gain or when we fail to see the wisdom of the laws he establishes. The only time we may refuse obedience to the magistrate is when he requires that we disobey God. Then we are taught to obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 4:19). But even then, we may not be rebellious, seeking the overthrow of government. Even when for conscience sake we can not obey the magistrate, we must still be submissive.

The duty of submission to the magistrate also implies that we pay our taxes. In Romans 13:6, 7 we are instructed, “For this cause pay ye tribute also ... Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom ...” For the maintenance of civil government, the magistrate has the right to tax the citizenry. Jesus went even so far as to say that the tribute levied by the magistrate *belongs* to the magistrate. Referring to the paying of taxes, Jesus taught, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars” (cf. Luke 20:25). Payment of taxes is really implied under obedience to the magistrate. But the Scriptures emphasize this duty especially because it is one of the hardest duties to perform. The taxes the government exacts of us take hard-earned money directly out of our pocket. In some cases, these taxes have taken food off the table and clothes from the back. In addition to that, consider how foolishly these tax revenues are spent. Often the taxes the citizens find so difficult to pay are squandered by a few in high places through extravagant living. That was the case no less in the days of the apostles than it is now. Nonetheless, the instruction of God through the apostles was, “pay ye tribute also” (Rom. 13:6).

As we consider these duties towards the state, we ought to be reminded of what we are taught in Romans 13:5: “Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” This means that we must not subject ourselves to the magistrate for fear of his wrath and punishment upon disobedience. We must submit to the magistrate rather *because this is the will of God and pleasing to Him*.

In light of all that we have said, it ought to be very clear that it is also our duty to promote the welfare of the magistrate and the civil government. This follows from the fact that civil government has been ordained by God and that every magistrate has been given his place of rule by God for the sake of the church. Through the rule of the magistrate, God provides for the decency and good order in society necessary for the church to be gathered and survive. Hence, by promoting the welfare of the magistrate and civil government, we are promoting the welfare of the church.

We promote the welfare of civil government by praying for the magistrate. The Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy (I Tim. 2:1-2) “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” This instruction is given to the church for her public worship but also applies to the prayers we utter as families and individuals in our homes. We must pray for those in authority. We must pray that God will lead the magistrate to rule in harmony with His Word, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. As the following verses make clear, this also implies that we pray for the salvation of those in authority.

We promote the welfare of civil government also by assisting the magistrate as much as possible in ruling according to the will and Word of God. According to Romans 13:3-4, the calling of the magistrate is to praise that which is good and to execute wrath upon him that does evil. In this way, civil government serves the cause of the church. But this requires that the magistrate rule according to the law of God. What God forbids, he must forbid. What God requires, he must require. To be very specific, it is the duty of the magistrate to forbid and punish profanity, murder by abortion, the destruction of marriage and the home through adultery and unbiblical divorce, and many other abuses to which natural man tends. It is the duty of every citizen to encourage the magistrate so to rule and to admonish him (always showing respect) should he fail. This can be done face to face, through letters, and (in a democracy) through voting. What a golden opportunity we have to promote the welfare of civil government when we are given a voice in government through voting. This is something we should not neglect.

Finally, God calls some to serve as magistrates in civil government. Some are of the opinion that due to the corruption found in government the child of God may not serve as a magistrate nor be involved in the political process. This opinion conflicts, however, with the truths that government has been ordained of God and that the magistrate is the minister of God. Certainly, we must not abandon this high office to the unbeliever. In addition, we have the examples of Joseph and Daniel, who served in high places in two of the most godless governments of history. In harmony with this the Westminster Confession teaches (Chapter XXIII, Section II),

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of magistrate, when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth ...

Should God call us to execute the office of the magistrate by opening the way for us to do so, then our duty is to accept this responsibility and serve as the minister of God.



6

Our Obligation to Vote

Meindert Joostens



IN KEEPING WITH THE TOPIC OF THIS PUBLICATION, it falls to me to say a few words concerning the practical aspect of the political process as it affects each of us. When the issues have been debated at length, we have the opportunity to step behind the curtain and cast our vote. What is the calling and responsibility of the child of God here? Should we consider this a Christian duty? For whom must we cast our ballot? Or, would it be better for the child of God to withdraw himself altogether from the political process?

Christians, in the nature of the case, hold a dual citizenship. We are, first of all and primarily, citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. This citizenship is not by birth; but, by being reborn from above, we belong to the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. By virtue of this heavenly citizenship, we have become pilgrims and strangers in the earth. We are the spiritual children of father Abraham who looked for the city with foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. Yet, at the same time, we are born into a citizenship in the land of our earthly sojourn. The two are not on a par. They are not on the same level. They may, and often do, conflict! When this happens, we are under the clear scriptural injunction that we must seek first the Kingdom of God! Our place here below, in whatever country or under whatever regime God has placed us, must be in total subservience to our heavenly citizenship.

There are certain principles, discussed in the other sections of this publication, that we must clearly understand in order properly to function in our dual citizenship. Government is ordained of God. All authority is derivative. The risen Lord, who is the Head and King of His church, exercises the counsel of God through the human agency of government. The hearts of the kings of the earth are in His hand and He turns them at will as a river of water. God is sovereign in the bringing into power and disposition of government. In the second place, Peter instructs us that it is our calling to submit to this ordinance of God as His servants. In as far as possible we must obey for God's sake. We submit to government until it requires a disobedience to the laws and precepts of the Kingdom of Heaven. We must obey the earthly, ordained government as long as we do not have to deny the Lordship of Christ. When the two conflict, we humbly "obey Christ rather than men." Thirdly, we must understand that the purpose of God in the ordination of earthly rulers is that they be His ministers to us for good and an avenger for wrath to evildoers. Walking in all good works, the Christian need not fear the sword of the magistrate but expect his praise. We leave much unsaid about these principles as it does not directly find application to the issue at hand.

The exercise of government is politics. In that political process, we become involved at the voting booth. We set aside a broader discussion of various other involvements in the political system in order to keep our focus on voting clear.

There are a couple of errors we must avoid. We may be tempted to take the anabaptist approach on non-involvement in the political process. This is the practice of a political asceticism whereby we hide ourselves behind the walls of total political inactivity, or, worse, take a stand of fatalism and say to ourselves, "These things are in the Lord's hands and He will take care of it." If there is still a small pang of being guilty of neglect, we say to ourselves, "One vote won't make a difference anyway." Whatever we may say (pro or con) regarding the political process we call a democracy, it is God-ordained! It is a system put in place by His hand, though gained through revolution. We have the God-given privilege and obligation to exercise the vote we have been given, whether that be on the national or municipal level. This has to do with the manner in which it has pleased God to appoint the "ordained authority." It has pleased God to do that through the popular vote. As Calvin observed long ago, it is "... an idle pastime for men ... to dispute what would be the best kind of government in the place where they live. [But] ... divine providence has wisely arranged that various countries should be ruled by various kinds of governments" (*Institutes* IV, 3).

Before we engage the question as to whom we must vote for, it may not be superfluous to say a few words regarding the question whether women should vote. Though the question has long been laid to rest politically, it often lingers in the church. We understand the place of the woman in the church. But her right to vote in the political sphere is sometimes questioned. In Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, but all are equal as believers. Men and women share equally in the benefits of Christ's atonement. They have both been anointed in the office of all believers as prophets, priests, and kings under Him. They both have the calling to exercise themselves in that threefold office. Both have the right and obligation to exercise their civic responsibility to cast their ballot. God's will that the woman keep silent in the government and teaching of the church must not be confused with her civic responsibility, whether married or single.

Having the right and obligation to cast our ballot, the matter of choice confronts us. What criteria must we use to determine the candidate for whom we will mark our ballot? Often, we find ourselves upon the horns of a dilemma. We seldom wholly approve of either candidate. We are never entirely happy with the slate that is placed before us. We sometimes feel as if our choice is simply a matter of seeking the lesser of two evils! We must remember that we are dealing with the selection of a man to be placed in a God-given office of authority. The responsibility of that office is clearly set forth in the Scriptures. Government is ordained of God. He is a minister of God to us for good, but he does not bear the sword in vain. He is, as well, an avenger of God to execute wrath upon evildoers. That is the guiding principle. These are the matters which control the casting of our ballot.

Understand a moment that we are not engaging in a lofty idealism of the insidious post-mil variety. It is not our vision that the kingdoms of this world shall evolve into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know much better than that. The scheme of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation is clearly before our minds. We live in the latter days. More and more that Man of Wickedness becomes revealed. We see fearful indications of the possibility of a unified antichristian world. The fearful reality of the number of the Beast seems close at times! The Lord will guide history according to His purpose! We may not help the propagation of the wickedness that will bring the terrible things of the end of the ages along. We may not vote for a candidate who stands on a platform that is patently anti-Christian. We must be careful to compare and evaluate the candidates and select from among them those who most nearly represent the God-ordained purpose in government. There are usually a host of issues, such as crime and abortion, that plainly illustrate the convictions of the candidates. It is our desire for the church of Christ to live

as long as possible in peace, quietness, and tranquility in the midst of the world, for that is for the advancement of God's covenant and church and gives to us opportunity to minister in the cause of His Kingdom, raise our families, and proclaim the Gospel to the hastening of the anticipated day of Christ's coming.



7

The Duty of the Church in Respect to the State in Preaching, Praying, and Positions

Dale H. Kuiper



THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, as she honors her Head as the Lord of lords and King of kings, is very conscious of the fact that she lives and witnesses in the midst of a world which contains governments of many different kinds and at many levels. Her attitude towards the magistracy in her official labors, as well as in the life of her members, is very definitely set forth in Holy Scripture; it is set forth as binding and for all time. Since this is part of God's Word, it becomes part of the preaching; as part of the preaching, it belongs to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Rather than adopting an attitude of superiority on the part of believers towards the magistracy, or encouraging ignorance in them regarding the purpose, source, and function of civil government, or engendering disobedience against the law of the land, the church in her preaching calls the people of God to submission and obedience, with understanding and joy. That the church must do this periodically in the preaching is clear from the powerful Word of God found in such passages as Matthew 22, Romans 13, I Peter 2, and Titus 3. Further, this is plainly demonstrated by the examples of David, Daniel, the apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself.

The Gospel's call to submission unto the civil magistrates is a matter of thankfulness to God. For this reason, those Reformed churches that still

carefully preach the *Heidelberg Catechism* hear this call under the third part of the catechism, “Of Thankfulness,” when the fifth commandment of the Law of God is expounded and when the requirement to “show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother, and all in authority over me” is set forth (Lord’s Day 39). That *thankfulness* enters in here, rather than fear or merit, ought to be seen from two points of view. First, we testify by this submissive conduct gratitude toward God for providing Jesus Christ as the perfect Keeper of the law in our place, as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. In the knowledge of that, the believer, with the law as his guide, shows his love to God. But more, he finds in the keeping of the fifth commandment an opportunity to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, because he understands that the powers that be are ordained of God, and are ordained of God to function as the means through which the exalted Christ rules! He submits always, and obeys unless for conscience sake he cannot, as unto the Lord.

The Gospel’s call to submission carries with it the call to the church to be witnesses of God. When the apostle Peter exhorts us to “submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,” he does so under the heading of “an honest conversation among the Gentiles.” When the unconverted see the good works of the saints, they shall, under God’s grace, “glorify God in the day of visitation.” This truth the catechism includes in Lord’s Day 32: “... and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.”

Without controversy, the church preaches the Word of God as that Word of God describes civil government, and calls the believer to honor that government. Thus, sermons on the paying of taxes, the honoring of authority, the lawful work of government, and the end of earthly governments, are perfectly in order in the church.

What is not so clear is how the church *prays* in respect to the government God has instituted in this world in general or in a particular part of the world specifically. Here there is some controversy. Pastors hear from members of their flocks, from time to time, that they are not praying for the government. At a recent office-bearers conference in the West, the complaint was sounded that our ministers don’t pray for government officials nearly enough. Are these well-meant criticisms justified? Scripture makes clear that prayers must be made for kings and others in eminent places *by the church*. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in I Timothy 2:1-7, part of which reads:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings and for all that are in authority;

that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Before we face the questions, *how* are earthly rulers to be mentioned in our prayers? and, what is the *purpose* of these prayers for them? let us get two points firmly in mind. The purpose of Paul's first letter to Timothy is that he and the church may know how to behave in the house of God (I Tim. 3:15). Therefore, the apostle is giving instruction regarding the public prayers of the people of God during the worship services—we would say during the congregational prayer offered by the minister. So, too, the exhortations regarding the dress of women and the silence of women pertain to their behavior and their silence in the church. Secondly, the word "all" in this passage (I Tim. 2:1, 4, 6) does not mean "every." The word "every" counts noses, refers to each individual in a group; it is distributive in nature. The word "all" is collective; it looks at people as groups, without saying anything about every member within the group. Unless this is appreciated, the only alternative is the Arminian notion that God wills every man to be saved and Christ gave Himself a ransom for every individual in the world. And then we are to pray for every person in the world (I Tim. 2:1) without distinction. Indeed, a Reformed commentator claims, "the church must remember that she is the intercessor for the world. The world cannot pray. The church is to bring the needs of the world before the throne of God. Herein too she is the salt of the earth. The world will not last long if the salt has lost its savor. When the church is gathered for worship, she is to bring the world's needs to God's mercy seat." With this we cannot agree. See Jesus' prayer in John 17:9.

Prayer must be made for all men, that is, for all kinds or classes of men. This is borne out by Titus 2 and Galatians 3 where we read of these various classes of people: Jews and Greeks, bond and free, male and female, young and old. Paul must have noticed that in Ephesus a certain class or group of people was being neglected in the congregational prayers: the kings and princes. How surprised Timothy and the saints at Ephesus must have been to receive this instruction! Nero was the Roman emperor; the governors, proconsuls, and town clerks, for the most part, were decidedly against the Christian faith and were ready to do the Jews a favor. But it is wrong to exclude any class of people from our prayers.

The reason that prayers are made also for government officials is that God wills to save His elect also from this group, have them come to the

knowledge of the truth, and enjoy the ransom that Christ paid for them. The church is to pray for the salvation of kings and princes! This does not require, as a matter of fact, that a certain segment of the congregational prayers be given over to petitions on behalf of these officials, at length and by name! But they are to be included as the church prays for the salvation of the people of God, known unto Him before the foundations of the world!

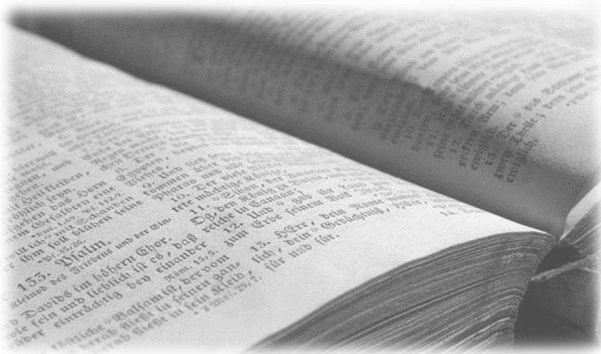
There is another aspect to all this. After all, God does not will to save many from the class of the powerful, rich, and mighty (I Cor. 1:27-28). But these rulers do have a great influence upon the life of the church and the labors of the church. If there is a believing ruler over a certain domain, it certainly is easier for the believers there to live a “quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” We think of laws concerning the Sabbath, concerning the right to work, and the right to assemble. On the contrary, unbelieving magistrates, ruling according to opinion polls, taking bribes, lusting for power, can cause hardship for the church—perhaps no right of assembly, sermons to be approved by the secretary of religion, no religious programs on radio or television, or no mission work allowed in the country! And since God wills to gather His church from all classes of people and from every nation of the world, prayers are to be made that Christ may so rule that the work of the preaching of the Gospel be not hindered. Finally, let us who live in lands of religious freedom, such as the United States and Canada, be sure to express thanksgiving to God for these liberties that we presently enjoy! How easily we take for granted these wonderful freedoms which many people of God do not presently enjoy, and which will be taken from us before Jesus returns.

Briefly we wish to consider yet the duty of the church in respect to the actions or proposed actions of various governmental bodies—the whole matter of the church writing position papers on certain issues which are then presented to the government with the purpose of influencing legislation. Many church bodies are engaged in such activity. Synods and other assemblies of the church formulate positions on nuclear bodies, abortion, the righteousness of a certain war, pollution of the environment, admission of Red China to the UN, apartheid in South Africa, and the like. Here we must make a clear distinction between the activity of the church as an institute on the one hand, and the individual member of the church who is a citizen of a certain country on the other hand. Elsewhere in this publication, the calling of the child of God toward his government and the issues that face his government will be discussed. Here we are concerned only with the proper involvement of the *church* in these things. How ought the church to behave?

We find nothing in Scripture to suggest, much less demand, that the church concern herself with matters of civil legislation. The church by her very

marks is busy with the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the application of Christian discipline to unrepentant sinners within her membership. The church is not called by God or directed by Scripture to discipline the *world*. The church is not the salt of the earth in the sense of getting out into that world to preserve it; Scripture never speaks of salt as a preservative. Salt is that which renders something savory or tasty! And the presence of the faithful church on the earth makes the entire earth tasty unto God! Let the church be busy in preaching all the truth, and applying that truth to the problems and trials that believers face in this world. Thus armed, the child of God can go forth to battle as a saint who is a citizen of some earthly kingdom for a time. Thus informed, he votes according to the dictates of his conscience, signs petitions as he sees fit, trains his children to honor the king.

That this is the Reformed view of the duty of the church regarding the things of the state is clear from Article 30 of our *Church Order* where we find that in Consistory, Classis, and Synod “ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted.” This maintains the separation of church and state. This helps to insure that the church does not mistake her mission in this world. And this shows that the church becomes involved only when one of her membership *breaks* a civil law, or when the state so intrudes into the sphere of the church, that under oppression the church addresses the State for relief and points it to her God-given duty.



8

A Nation of Laws? or Lawlessness?

Mr. James Lanting



“Truth is the majority vote of the nation that can lick all the others.”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

“There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”

—Allan Bloom

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work ... The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan ... with all unrighteous deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth ...”

—II Thess. 2:7, 9, 10 (NKJV)

IT IS ALMOST A YEAR NOW SINCE the U.S. Senate rejected President Reagan’s nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. Distracted by the inevitable clamor and chimera of an election year, and always suffering from an alarmingly short memory, our nation has largely forgotten the unprecedented and bitter battle that broke out last year over the scholarly jurist’s nomination to the highest court in our land. The

announcement of Bork's nomination galvanized scores of liberal political organizations which joined forces to wage collectively an unparalleled political assault against a Supreme Court nominee. The A.C.L.U., the National Organization of Women, People for the American Way, Planned Parenthood, and countless others spent millions of dollars nationwide disseminating propaganda, scandalously characterizing Judge Bork as a right-wing fascist intent on stripping Americans of their hard-won constitutional civil rights. This historic mobilization of liberals was ironically spearheaded by perhaps the two least-likely politicians to challenge anyone's credentials, Senators Joseph Biden and Ted Kennedy. Although observers expected typical partisan opposition to such a significant assignment, many were bewildered by the passionate antipathy towards Bork displayed by his liberal detractors. Indeed, was there something more than a prestigious appointment at stake?

A War for the Constitution

In a recent speech in Chicago, Bork sounded his own call to arms, declaring that the nation is embroiled in nothing less than "a war for control of the Constitution." What is at stake, he said, is the "very idea of the rule of law in this country." He warned that we are confronted by a leftist political movement that is attempting to "gain control" of the Constitution. We are now engaged, he asserted, in an ideological civil war involving the most fundamental issues of democratic freedom.

He accused his liberal foes of having a "hidden agenda" that no legislature would ever adopt; their only hope is that some sympathetic judges will implement it by judicial fiat. Their agenda is "egalitarian and redistributionist," he charged, and also includes such controversial goals as abortion-on-demand, affirmative action programs, and homosexual rights. But since the Constitution insures no such liberties, the liberals embrace "judicial activism." This doctrine views the Constitution as a "living document" which can be subjected to new readings by each generation of jurists. Judges, then, should be free-wheeling and expansive in their interpretation of the document, creatively forging new rights and notions which (in their view) address contemporary society's problems.

It is generally acknowledged that the most infamous product of judicial activism is the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision wherein a Texas state statute outlawing abortions was struck down by the Supreme Court as violative of a newly discovered constitutional guarantee—a woman's "right to privacy" over her own body, a right admittedly nowhere mentioned in the Constitution or

its supporting historical documents. And, more recently, an attempt to persuade the Supreme Court to strike down Georgia's sodomy statute as violative of another new constitutional right—the right to engage in homosexual conduct—failed by only one vote.

Judicial Restraint and Original Intent

Bork argues that such unfettered activism by the judiciary is a frightening usurpation of the power of the legislature. The “moral content” of the law, claims Bork, should be given by the legislature; the judge's only role is to apply that law to unforeseen circumstances. Rather than yielding to the temptation to wield power to accomplish societal goals ignored or even resisted by the legislatures, the judiciary should instead scrupulously exercise deference and restraint.

Coupled with this conservative doctrine of “judicial restraint,” Bork also espouses the belief that judicial Constitutional interpretation must be limited by the “original intent” of its authors. No judge may fashion or finagle new rights or notions that were never incorporated in the Constitution. If, for example, state legislatures outlaw abortion or sodomy, the judiciary may not strike down such laws as violative of some newly found Constitutional guarantees unknown to the Framers, but rather must defer to the “moral content” of the law enacted by the legislature as representative of the majority of the people. To do otherwise would result in an “undemocratic” substitution of the moral preferences of the legislature for that of the judiciary. Such “judicial activism” is not rule by law in a democracy, suggests Bork, but rather rule by oligarchy.

A Moral Catastrophe

Bork's judicial conservatism is embraced generally by evangelical Christians, but his implicit trust in the ability of the legislature to afford law its “moral content” is perhaps unduly optimistic and naive. For it can be argued that the great legal problem today is not that our jurisprudence is becoming “undemocratic.” The profound crisis, rather, is that all moral debate—legislative, judicial, or otherwise—has become arbitrary and meaningless. Many religious writers have lamented America's abandonment of the Christian ethical tradition since the 1940's. And now even reputable secular scholars today, such as Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*) and Alisdair

MacIntyre (*After Virtue*), have announced that a “moral catastrophe” has occurred in this country. “We have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality,” writes MacIntyre.

If so, then Bork has ignored the foundational question that lurks beneath the conservative/liberal debate in jurisprudence: How can anyone (including legislators) make moral judgments in a society that is now morally adrift without any charts or navigational aids? And Bork himself offers us little hope. Not a member of any church and describing himself facetiously as a “generic Protestant,” Bork personally refuses to declare that abortion-on-demand and homosexuality are morally wrong. Presumably, then, his only objection to *Roe v. Wade* is that it is an “undemocratic” decision contrary to the moral preferences of the majority of Texans (at least in 1973). He does not explain, however, why the caprice of a majority of Texans is any less arbitrary than the whims of a Washington, D.C. judiciary. But perhaps Bork is essentially a relativist not unlike Justice Holmes, the father of American legal skepticism, and believes that principles of truth and justice are to be determined solely by the *vox populi*.

Christian Duties

The Reformed jurist, legislator, and citizen rejects such relativism and refuses to look to the collective preferences of citizenry or the judiciary for the fundamental notions of morality and justice needed in making, interpreting, and obeying our laws. Rather, he will appeal to the “natural law” concepts of truth and justice which are implicit in the creation (Romans 1), written in man’s heart and conscience (Romans 2) and more fully and clearly known in the Holy Scriptures. And, unlike Bork, he will unequivocally declare that abortion-on-demand and homosexuality, for example, are violative of “natural law” and Scripture, and therefore should be proscribed by the civil law of the state.

If a legal system that is fundamentally arbitrary is essentially lawlessness, then the “mystery of lawlessness” is already at work in this country. But even in the face of this apostasy being ushered in by the “lawless one,” Paul urges the Christian to “stand fast and hold the traditions” which he was taught (II Thess. 2:15). The Reformed citizen must remain undaunted and fulfill his duties to all three branches of our government. He must pay taxes, show due honor and respect, and obey “in all things not repugnant” to the Word of God.

But the Reformed citizen is called to more than passive obedience. He has a mandate actively to be the salt of the earth by witnessing to the

government by speaking to or corresponding with his elected representatives, lawfully demonstrating when necessary, and exercising his right to vote and take office. Finally, the Christian citizen will pray for his legislators and judges that “God may rule and guide them in all their ways, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (*Belgic Confession*, Art. 36).



9

Church and State in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession

Herman Hanko



ARTICLE 36 OF OUR BELGIC CONFESSION has been a source of considerable controversy in the church, especially in the last century or so. This article deals with the subject of magistrates and discusses, among other things, the “office” of magistrates which is defined as being,

... 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 honored and worshipped by every one, as he commands in his Word.

It is very clear from this statement that the *Belgic Confession* supports the idea that the magistrate is called, not only to enforce the second table of the law (punish those who commit, murder, adultery, theft, slander, and their

related sins), but the magistrate must also enforce observance of the first table of the law (punish those guilty of idolatry, false worship, Sabbath desecration, and public blasphemy).

That the Reformers held to this position is clear enough from history. John Calvin supported this position in Geneva; John Knox did the same in Scotland; the Anglican Church in England was established on the same principle; the Reformed Church in the Netherlands was founded on the basis of this same view. In fact, it was not until 1834 (the year of the Secession under De Cock) that a Reformed Church was established in the Netherlands which was completely free from state control; and this freedom from state control came about only after a period of struggle, strife, and persecution of the Seceders. In the early history of our own country, although the First Amendment forbade the intrusion of the government into religious matters, the various states passed laws against taking God's name in vain, and a man could be imprisoned for opening his store on the Lord's Day.

In more recent years, the First Amendment has been applied more broadly with the result that all laws which give to either state or local governments any kind of right to enforce the observance of the first table of the law of God have been struck down by Supreme Court rulings. One may now publicly blaspheme without penalty of the law; he may desecrate the Sabbath either by opening his store or going to the beach and not worry about offending the police officer. He may, as a matter of fact, spout in any public place any heresy he wishes and be guaranteed freedom of speech. The government is "neutral" in all matters of religion—so "neutral" that no religion (except the religion of evolutionism) may be taught in the public schools; no prayers may be offered in the classrooms; and no public buildings may contain any reference to any religion at all—not even a copy of the Ten Commandments hanging on the wall.

But this same principle has even been extended now to the second table of the law. To oppose the murder of unborn babies is a matter of religion and not, therefore, a matter of the state—so it is said. To oppose adultery, homosexuality, pornography, etc. is to be religious, and to insist that the state enforce laws against these sins is said to be the intrusion of religion into the affairs of state, and, therefore, a violation of the Constitution. So, our country is fast going in the direction of holding that the magistrate must not enforce either the first *or the second* table of the law of God.

So, at least in this country—and in most countries in the world—Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* is said to be hopelessly out of date.

Another problem with Article 36 is that the state is almost always in the hands of unbelievers. If, therefore, the state would take it upon itself to

enforce and promote what *in its judgment* was the true religion, the true church of Christ would be persecuted. To understand this, we need only ask ourselves the question: How often has it happened in the history of the world that a government anywhere was genuinely Christian and favored that church which held to the truth of God's Word? Or we could ask the question: What would happen to all those who are Reformed and Calvinistic in our own land if our present government would decide to defend, promote, and enforce only one religion which it considered to be the true religion? We would have to go to prison, see our churches shut down, and attempt to escape to some other country. So, you see, Article 36 seems so abstract, so far removed from the practical realities of life, so filled with incipient dangers that it is reason to be grateful to God that no one believes this article anymore.

At any rate, the position that the magistrate must enforce the first table of the law as well as the second led to the idea that it was the duty of the magistrate to establish a state-church, "one denomination of Christians within the land which would enjoy governmental approval and support" (P.Y. DeJong, *The Church's Witness to the World*, p. 407). In fact, in some instances the idea of a state-church went beyond this to include the notion that all people within a given land, by virtue of birth alone, belonged to that one state-church, to be baptized and confirmed in it, married by its ministers, and buried under its auspices. Or, if this idea of all within a country actually belonging to a church was too stringent, at least the church was in some way responsible for every single person which lived within its boundaries—the boundaries of the church being the same as the boundaries of the state.

Because of these objections to the article, Reformed churches have done things about the article and to it that tried to avoid these problems.

In 1896, in the Netherlands, certain objections were brought to the Synod of the Reformed Church against these statements of Article 36. The Synod, after careful study, deleted from the confession this entire section of Article 36 which we quoted above. In 1910, the Christian Reformed Church in this country considered the same problem. It seems, however, that, rather than delete the section of Article 36 which seemed so offensive and out of date, the Christian Reformed Church simply adopted a footnote to the article. The footnote is worth reading here.

This phrase, touching the office of the magistracy in its relation to the Church, proceeds on the principle of the Established Church, which was first applied by Constantine and afterwards also in many Protestant countries. History, however, does not

support the principle of State domination over the Church, but rather the separation of Church and State. Moreover, it is contrary to the New Dispensation that authority be vested in the State to arbitrarily reform the Church, and to deny the Church the right of independently conducting its own affairs as a distinct territory alongside the State. The New Testament does not subject the Christian Church to the authority of the State that it should be governed and extended by political measures, but to our Lord and King only as an independent territory alongside and altogether independent of the State, that it may be governed and edified by its officebearers and with spiritual weapons only. Practically all Reformed churches have repudiated the idea of the Established Church, and are advocating the autonomy of the churches and personal liberty of conscience in matters pertaining to the service of God.

The Christian Reformed Church in America, being in full accord with this view, feels constrained to declare that it does not conceive of the office of the magistracy in this sense, that it be in duty-bound to also exercise political authority in the sphere of religion, by establishing and maintaining a State Church, advancing and supporting the same as the only true Church, and to oppose, to persecute and to destroy by means of the sword all the other churches as being false religions; and to also declare 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 Father and Son, They may not, however, encroach upon each other's territory. The

Church has rights of sovereignty in its own sphere as well as the State.

The Christian Reformed Church was, however, not satisfied with this statement either. When objections were raised against this “footnote” to the article, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1958 adopted a revision which deleted the controversial part (which we quoted at the beginning of this article) and inserted instead:

And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, while completely refraining from every tendency towards exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them and with the means belonging to them to remove every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship, in order that the Word of God may have free course, the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress, and every anti-Christian power may be resisted. (Note: All this historical material is found primarily in P. Y. De Jong’s *The Church’s Witness to the World*—HH)

A couple of general remarks about all this.

In the first place, the revision adopted by the CRC in 1958 really leaves the matter somewhat in doubt. What is left for the state to do is “contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God” and “remove every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship.” It can be argued that for the state to do this would require that the state enforce the first table of the law. But if this was the intended meaning, then the original footnote was sufficient and there was no need to tamper with the article itself. The Synod apparently had something less than enforcement of the first table of the law in mind when it defined the duty of magistrates.

In the second place, as far as our own Protestant Reformed Churches are concerned, we are not bound by the decisions of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in 1896, nor the decisions of the Christian Reformed Church in 1958. But the decisions of 1910 are our decisions. This is evident from the fact that the Synod of our churches in 1946 published *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. This *Church Order* was, according to the “Preface,” the same (with a couple of changes which are enumerated in the Preface) as

the *Church Order* adopted by the Combined Consistories at the very beginning of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And the *Church Order* adopted by the Combined Consistories was the edition of “Keegstra and Van Dellen of 1915, adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914” (Preface to the 1946 edition of the *Church Order*). With the references in the *Church Order* to the creeds (see Article 53 as well as the *Formula of Subscription* adopted at the same time), the obvious implication is that the footnote to Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* was also adopted. (It is a point worth making because repeatedly questions have come up concerning this matter, i.e., whether the “footnote” to Article 36 is indeed binding upon our Protestant Reformed Churches. It is my conviction that it is.)

The result is that the official position of our churches contains Article 36 as it originally read *and* the footnote adopted by the CRC in 1910. For this I am thankful, for I agree not only with the original article of the *Belgic Confession*, but I agree also with the footnote. And I agree with the footnote, not as a *revision* of Article 36 (which it is not), but as the *correct explanation* of Article 36.

* * * * *

We ought now to take a closer look at Article 36 and attempt to understand what it is saying and why it is still important.

In order to understand why this article was included in the *Belgic Confession* to begin with, one has to know a bit about the situation which existed in the Lowlands, at the time the *Belgic Confession* was written by Guido de Bres (1561).

The Reformation had come into the Lowlands (what is now the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) and a Reformed church had been established there. But the Reformed believers were being sorely persecuted by the Spanish magistracy which was the arm of Roman Catholicism in the Lowlands and which ruled in that part of Europe called the Lowlands. The Reformed churches were charged, among other things, with being Anabaptistic, a charge which was extraordinarily serious, for it implied the charge of treason. The *Belgic Confession* was written in part to show the authorities that the Reformed churches were not Anabaptistic and were not guilty of the crime of treason.

To understand this charge of treason, one must understand just a bit of what Anabaptism was all about. (For more detailed information on the Anabaptists and on this question of the relation between church and state, the interested reader can consult such books as: W. R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* and W. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*.) The Anabaptists, particularly troublesome in their early history in Zurich and Berne of Switzerland, were

the “left-wing” of the Reformation. They went along with the Reformation in its earlier history, but were more radical than the Reformers and eventually parted ways with the Reformers over some important questions. We cannot go into all these questions here, but one of the issues was the issue of the role of the secular magistrate and his relation to the church.

Generally speaking, the Anabaptists (called such because they rejected infant baptism and insisted on the “rebaptism” of all who joined their movement) believed that the state existed only to curb the wickedness of unbelievers and had little or nothing to do with believers. Believers belonged to the kingdom of heaven, after all. They formed a holy community in this world which could and should put into practice, even while in this world, the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Believers, therefore, had really nothing to do with the earthly magistrate, and it was preferable that the community of believers live entirely separate from the surrounding people and from the secular state.

It is true (as Leonard Verduin points out in his books, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid* and *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*) that the Anabaptists did not all advocate the overthrow of existing governments, and that not all Anabaptists scorned the secular magistrate and refused obedience to them; but the fact is that the logic of their position freed them from obedience to the secular magistrate and brought at least some of them to the excesses of Munster—where an attempt was really made to set up an earthly kingdom which lived independently from the secular authorities.

The Reformers saw this position of the Anabaptists as an extremely serious error (cf. especially Balke’s book to learn how serious Calvin considered this error to be). To the Reformers, such a position meant a denial of the biblical principles of Romans 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-17, etc. It meant a denial that the civil magistrate is a servant of Christ Himself. On the contrary, the Reformers believed that the believer, though a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, exactly reveals his heavenly citizenship by submission to the magistrate; that any refusal to submit to the magistrate on the seemingly pious grounds of heavenly citizenship was a grievous perversion of the believer’s calling; that any position which could lead to refusal to submit, to resistance of the magistrate, to the overthrow of the magistrate, was a position entirely out of keeping with God’s Word and would bring God’s fierce anger upon such who committed that sin; that any kind of scornful or contemptuous attitude towards the magistrate was to be condemned; that, in fact, the magistrate was not appointed by God simply to curb the excesses of a world of unbelievers, but was in the world by God’s appointment *for the church*. These positions were important to the Reformers and were crucial in a time when

the Reformation itself was threatened by a “left-wing” which wanted to lead the whole movement into unbiblical excesses and into radical positions contrary to the Word of God.

But in rejecting the “left-wing” radicalism of the Anabaptists and committing themselves and the cause of the Reformation to the principle of the great importance of the civil magistrate, they also were careful to define, not only what the church’s obligation towards the magistrate is, but also what the magistrate’s obligation before God is. And in dealing with the latter question, they were convinced that the magistrate was required by God to enforce obedience to the first table of the law as well as the second table. And included in the first table, especially the second commandment, was the obligation to worship God as He commands in His Word. For the magistrate to enforce the second commandment, therefore, required of him that he “protect the sacred ministry, and thus remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship.” Where, through the influence of the Reformation, a Christian state was set up (Calvin’s Geneva, The Netherlands, Scotland, and England), the Christian magistracy enforced the first table of the law of God as well as the second.

This all was according to Scripture. It ought to be clear that when Scripture speaks of the obligation and task of magistrates, Scripture makes no distinction between the first and second tables of the law—as if the magistrate had to enforce observance of the second table only and not of the first. In Romans 13:1-7, where the office of the magistrate is discussed in detail, the magistrate is described as “the power of God.” The magistrate is a “minister of God”; he is a “revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” In I Peter 2:14, the duty of magistrates is said to be “the punishment of evildoers” and “the praise of them that do well.” The Holy Spirit does not say that the magistrate is for the punishment of those evildoers who break the *second* table of the law. *All* evildoers are to be punished and *all* well-doers are to be praised by the magistrate.

That no distinction is made between the two tables of the law in the duty of magistrates is clear also from the fact that the two tables of the law are really bound together. The Jews asked Jesus what the *one* great commandment of the law was—to which Jesus responded: Love God and love your neighbor. To love God and to love the neighbor is one commandment because one cannot love his neighbor without loving God. One cannot keep the second table of the law without keeping the first table. One cannot require obedience to the second table, therefore, without requiring obedience to the first table. This is true of a parent, a school teacher, an elder in the church, and a magistrate in the state.

It is objected that, from a practical point of view, this will never work. The simple fact of the matter is, so it is said, that throughout most of the world's history the civil power in any nation, country, state, or kingdom is in the hands of *wicked* men. Only rarely has it happened that a true Christian state ruled in a land. The civil government is almost always anti-Christian. The result is that if we would really insist on this practice, the state would enforce a false religion and the church would find it impossible to survive. And this is, of course, exactly what is going to happen in the days of Antichrist.

We grant the objection. I would even go a step farther: I am thankful to God that we live in a land where we have freedom of religion. I am thankful that the government of the United States does *not* attempt to enforce one religion that is, in its judgment, the true religion—that would be the end of the church in this land.

But the principle is not changed for all that. The principle remains true.

We ought, at this point, to insist, however, that to take the position that the state is obligated before God to enforce the first table of the law as well as the second, does *not* imply an “established church.” That brings us back to Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession*. The footnote adopted in 1910 says that the article “proceeds from the principle of the Established Church.” This is wrong.

An established church is a church such as the Anglican Church in England, the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands, and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. The state officially recognizes and supports one denomination as the approved church. It gives its approval to that one denomination not only, but it does much to make that denomination the official church of the realm. In earlier centuries, the state even required in some instances all to belong to that denomination.

I do not believe that the obligation of the state to support the true religion “proceeds from the principle of the Established Church.” In that respect the footnote is wrong. Whatever may have been the opinion of the Reformers (and there is reason to doubt they wanted an established church), Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* does not say this; and such a conclusion cannot be drawn from the article. I cannot find anything in Scripture to support the notion of an established church.

The footnote is right when it says that we ought to feel “constrained to declare that [we] do not conceive of the office of the magistracy in this sense, that it be in duty-bound to also exercise political authority in the sphere of religion, by establishing and maintaining a State Church ...” And we ought also to insist, as Article 36 does and as the footnote binds upon us, 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 ...” In other words, the government ought to enforce the first table of the law as well as the second; but both tables must be enforced by the government *only in the civil or secular sphere*. Never may the state encroach upon the church—or, for that matter, the home or school. It has no authority there at all.

You may object once again and insist that it still remains true that this is of no significance whatsoever. Even the limitation that the government must enforce God’s law only in the secular or civil sphere implies a *Christian* government. Again, I agree. And again, I will even go so far as to say that I am thankful that we have freedom of religion in our land and that the government does not attempt to enforce the first table of the law even in its own limited sphere.

But this is not the point. Nor is the question abstract. It is extremely important that we maintain the principle, even though it may not have any immediate practical consequences, and even though we personally prefer to see a religiously “neutral” government—if indeed there is such a thing.

There are reasons for maintaining the principle. There are good reasons for holding to Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession*. What are they?

The first good reason is to remind us that, whether or not magistrates truly enforce the first table of the law, Christ, the King of all, *requires* of them that they do. Really, the office of magistrate arises out of the *creation ordinance*. It belongs to the work of God in creation itself. It is an institution of society which has developed organically out of the *family*—as have all the institutions of society. God requires of magistrates that, within their own God-given sphere, they enforce God’s law and live in obedience to God. The fact that magistrates, as a general rule, do not do this does not alter the obligation which rests upon them. Just as God still requires of the totally depraved sinner that he serve God, so God requires of the magistrate that he represent God in the sphere of the state. He shall have to give account for his failure to do this. “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” (Ps. 2:10-12). This is important. God must be justified also when all the evil magistrates of all time failed to represent the righteousness of God, but who went about setting up their own kingdom.

The second good reason for maintaining this principle is to remind us that God also saves magistrates. And because God is pleased to save magistrates, we are duty-bound to pray for them. “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority: that we may lead a quiet and

peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:1-4). The point is that we must not become so wrongly Anabaptistic that we simply turn our backs on the magistrate, plead our heavenly citizenship as a reason to ignore the civil government, and consign the whole of the magistracy to the everlasting oblivion of hell. I Peter is quite clear on the matter: We express our loyalty to the kingdom of heaven and conduct ourselves properly as pilgrims and strangers in the earth when we honor and show respect for the magistrates whom God is pleased to put over us. And we do so (and even pray for them) because God is pleased to save His people also from their number.

The opposite is always a great danger. If we become Anabaptistic in our attitude towards civil magistrates, the end will be that we no longer submit to them, honor them, obey them, when to obey is not in conflict with God’s Word; but that instead we scorn the magistracy, mock it in our words and deeds, and eventually end in refusing to submit to its rule.

The third good reason to maintain this principle is the fact that by it we are reminded that the magistrates serve the good of the church.

There is more than one truth implied in this.

In the first place, if magistrates are truly Christian, they will seek the welfare of the church. And we ought to remember that even if a given government is basically unchristian, Christian men in government can nevertheless so exert their influence that the cause of the church and of the gospel is advanced through government policy and legislation. One example is surely the matter of labor unions. Although the government may be unchristian, *Christian* men in government may so influence legislation and government policy that the power of labor unions is curbed and various right-to-work laws are passed which enable God’s people to earn their daily bread. In given instances, Christian lawmakers can influence legislation so that pornographic publishers are closed, abortion clinics are shut down, stores are prevented from opening on the Lord’s Day—all of which is conducive to the welfare of the church.

Paul, in the passage in I Timothy 2, speaks also of this. When urging upon us the necessity and importance of praying for our magistrates, Paul gives us a reason: “that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (v. 2).

In the second place, however, the principle is always true—and we ought to remember it: Christ always rules sovereignly through the magistracy. If, therefore, the magistracy becomes the enemy of the church, becomes Anti-Christ, turns in the fury of persecution against the saints, still it serves the good

of the church. Christ uses the blood of the martyrs also as the seed of the church.

But even this does not negate the principle that Christ is often pleased to rule in such a way through the magistrate, even though he may be wicked, that peace and well-being is the lot of the church. Christ is pleased to do this so that the church may be about her business of preaching the gospel, bringing the gospel to the mission fields of the earth, working in the great tasks of the kingdom—work which she would be unable to do if she were being persecuted. To this end, the church holds to Article 36, prays for the magistrates, and is thankful when the Lord is pleased to rule through the magistrates that we may live quiet and peaceable lives.

Article 36 is important for the confession of the church, especially in these days when many temptations press in upon us to take an unbiblical view of the magistracy. We need this article and we ought consciously to make it an important part of our confession.





APPENDIX A

Another Look at Non-Resistance: The Testimony of Calvin and Luther

David J. Engelsma



THERE IS GOOD REASON TO TAKE ANOTHER, CLOSER LOOK at the Christian's duty to submit unconditionally to the authority of the civil state. (As to this duty and other aspects of the relationship of church and state, confer [chapters 1-9 of this booklet].) Reformed Christians everywhere in the world today must work out their salvation in a revolutionary environment. Many Reformed people in the United States have been taught from childhood on in the Christian schools (but not in Protestant Reformed Christian schools) that the Revolution in which this nation was born was justified, if it was not a Christian, indeed a Calvinistic, enterprise. The black revolutionary of the 1960s, H. Rap Brown, gleefully seized on this axiom of American political life to silence the critics of his incendiary behavior on behalf of freedom and justice for the blacks: "Revolution is as American as apple pie!" Martin Luther King, Jr.'s tactics of "civil disobedience" find widespread approval in the Reformed community. Reformed churches join the world community of churches in vigorously supporting the very active resistance to the government of South Africa by a segment of that nation's population, one of whose leaders is the Reformed preacher, Allen Boesak. Influential Reformed theologians teach that revolution under certain circumstances is an option for Christians. In his essay, "Church and State," Karl Barth maintains

that serious Christians must reckon “with the possibility of revolution, the possibility . . . that we may have to ‘overthrow with God’ those rulers who do not follow the lines laid down by Christ.” Barth’s disciple, the Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, followed Barth’s advice by involving himself in a plot to assassinate Hitler, for which Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis.

The reference to South Africa calls to mind the fact that the issue of resistance or non-resistance to governments that are regarded as unjust and oppressive is not an academic question for many Reformed saints. Rather, it is an agonizing question, involving not only the risk of earthly liberty and even physical life, but also, and much more importantly, a good conscience before God. What is the calling of the Reformed Christian in South Africa as regards the use of physical force to resist the laws of that nation and thus the government itself? What is the calling, let us say, of a black Reformed Christian in South Africa who is convinced that the laws of the land are unjust and oppressive?

Presbyterian Christians in Northern Ireland are under similar pressure. Mobs in the streets, paramilitary organizations, strategic disobedience to certain laws, threats to make the nation “ungovernable,” and other rebellious actions are the order of the day as tactics by which Ulster is to be saved for Protestantism and for God. The Presbyterian who refuses to countenance this political activism, much less participate in it, runs the risk of condemnation as a traitor to church and country. In the midst of the turmoil of this passionate, volatile mixture of politics and religion, the Presbyterian Christian must know how to please God and must find his way, and the way of his family, to heaven.

The Testimony of John Calvin

Living in the same kind of turbulence, tugged at by the same kind of temptations, and writing with one eye on his beloved France and the persecution of the Reformed Church there (a persecution unto death), John Calvin flatly and absolutely forbade resistance (revolution) on the part of Reformed Christians. Even though the civil rulers “perform not a whit of the princes’ office,” but are “intent upon their own business, put up for sale laws, privileges, judgments, and letters of favor . . . drain the common people of their money, and afterward lavish it on insane largesse . . . exercise sheer robbery, plundering houses, raping virgins and matrons, and slaughtering the innocent,” they must be “held in the same reverence and esteem [as] . . . the best of kings,” because in their office they possess God’s “holy majesty”

(*Institutes*, IV, XX, 24, 25). “If we are cruelly tormented by a savage prince, if we are greedily despoiled by one who is avaricious or wanton, if we are neglected by a slothful one, if finally we are vexed for piety’s sake by one who is impious and sacrilegious,” our only recourse is “to implore the Lords help” (*Institutes*, IV, XX, 29). The duty of the citizen to submit is not conditioned by the rulers’ faithfulness in carrying out their responsibilities. Rulers have responsibilities; and Calvin reminded them of those responsibilities sharply. “But if you conclude from this that service ought to be rendered only to just governors, you are reasoning foolishly” (*Institutes*, IV, XX, 29). Under the most intolerable governments, private individuals may only “obey and suffer” (*Institutes*, IV, XX, 31).

The instruction of Calvin to the individual Christian is simple: “You must submit unconditionally to the civil rulers ‘who, by whatever means, have got control of affairs,’ which means that you may never, under any provocation whatever, actively resist; you must obey all laws that do not require you to disobey God; if you must disobey (and you must, if, e.g., the state forbids you to worship God according to the Reformed faith), you may not use the disobedience as a launching-pad for revolution, but rather patiently bear the consequences of suffering at the hands of the wicked rulers; and you must do all this, not as shrewd policy that knows that revolution is usually futile and results in worse misery (though this is true), but as faith’s submission to the Lord Christ—you are willingly, joyfully, actively serving the Lord Jesus, even as every rebel is in reality resisting, not the state, but Christ.”

Students of Calvin’s theology do not take issue with this presentation of Calvin’s teaching as to the political calling of the Christian. But they reject the teaching itself, as unworthy of the Reformed theologian. Writing in the recently issued book, *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1988), the noted Calvin scholar, W. Fred Graham states:

There is little doubt that the genius of Calvin did not extend to his analysis of political order, especially to his advice to Christians who labored under rule so unjust that their very lives were in jeopardy. Students (like myself) who appreciate his balanced, supple, and insightful work in Christian doctrine and scripture exegesis are suddenly brought up short at his impoverished and traditional views of political order, and his injudicious use of the Bible as he tries to explicate hard cases, such as Huguenots who daily

walked down the valley of death in his beloved France.

Graham is displeased with Calvin's insistence on non-resistance.

There are at least three reasons why Calvin took the position that he did. None of them is that Calvin was unsympathetic towards Reformed saints suffering under tyranny, or that Calvin was a passive individual, or that Calvin had deep psychological problems. All of the reasons hold good today, as in every age, so that those who engage in resistance towards the state, or support those who are resisting, come under the judgment of these reasons for submitting.

First, Calvin found non-resistance to be the teaching of the Bible. Jesus' command to Peter to "put up again thy sword into his place" in Matthew 26:52 and Jesus' declaration to Pilate in John 18:36 that the heavenly nature of His kingdom is evident in that His servants do *not* fight, are law for Jesus' church, that she may not defend Jesus Christ from violent assault (which is what persecution for the truth's sake really is), nor promote His kingdom by physical force. The prohibition of Romans 13:1-2 against resisting the authorities, even when the authority is ungodly and antichristian Rome, and the command of I Peter 2:13ff. to submit to the civil rulers with explicit appeal to the example of Jesus Himself, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," are the clear rule of the Word of God for the Christian personally, particularly for the Christian suffering injustice, and even persecution, at the hands of the magistrates. We ask Reformed men and women who are revolting and we ask Reformed thinkers and churches that are encouraging such revolt, "What do you do with these scriptures?" and, "Produce your biblical basis for resistance!"

Second, Calvin's concern was to guide the believer on the way of a thankful, holy life which would bring honor to God here and which would bring the believer to eternal glory hereafter. Calvin was not interested to give a general political policy for all the citizens of a nation; nor was his purpose to change earthly nations so that earthly justice would prevail. The Christian has a calling from God with regard to government; and Calvin taught him what that calling is. We ask those who enthusiastically teach professing Christians to rebel, "Does your way honor the God and Father of Jesus Christ?" and, "Does this way lead men and women to eternal life in the Day of Christ?" "What if resistance, even though successful to overturn an unjust government and to gain some measure of physical relief for the citizens, defames Jesus as

just another leader of a revolutionary band and brings down upon the rebels God's damnation, as Romans 13:2 warns is the case?"

Third, for Calvin this earthly life was secondary and relatively unimportant in comparison with the heavenly life to which it leads and for which it is the training-ground for the believer. Christians ought to be willing to bear all manner of injustice and oppression; indeed, they ought to expect this, in the patient hope of the life to come. This was Calvin's encouragement of the cruelly-persecuted Reformed saints in France in a letter in 1559:

Let us not then suppose that we are forsaken of God when we suffer persecution for his truth, but rather than he so disposes matters for our greater good. If that is repugnant to our senses, it is so because we are always more inclined to seek for our rest here below than in the kingdom of heaven. Now since our triumph is in heaven, we must be prepared for the combat while we live here upon earth. (*Letters of John Calvin*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, 1980)

It is common for professing Christians to sneer at this spiritual philosophy today as "pie-in-the-sky Christianity"; but this only indicates the rarity of genuine Calvinism, i.e., true Christianity.

To dismiss non-resistance as mere passivity is the merest nonsense. Was Calvin then a theologian of passivity? Also, the doctrine of non-resistance allows the Reformed Christian a great deal of political activity within the law—activity to speak out; to petition; to vote; and even to form political organizations. But even as regards non-resistance itself, every believer knows from experience that the hardest work of all, a great and glorious activity of faith, is submitting to injustice for the Lord's sake. To strike back when abused, to join the howling mob on the streets of Belfast or Johannesburg, to take up arms and fight the persecuting state so that one sheds a little of their blood before he pours out his own—this is the easier way.

In his teaching on the Christian's political calling, as in so much else, Calvin learned from Luther. Our look at non-resistance ought to include the doctrine of Luther, if for no other reason than that it is outrageous that Reformed churches should be directed in their political action by Martin Luther King, Jr., while remaining ignorant of Martin Luther.

The Testimony of Martin Luther

In five treatises written early in the Reformation, between 1522 and 1525, Luther addressed the question, whether a Christian may ever revolt against the authorities. These short works (we would call them pamphlets) are “A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard against Insurrection and Rebellion”; “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed”; “Admonition to Peace, A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia”; “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants”; and “An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants” (cf. *Luther’s Works*, published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, volumes 45 and 46). The first of these is a warning against violence in opposing the spiritual authorities (pope, priest, and Roman church); church reformation must be carried out in an orderly manner by the Word of God—not by means of force, as advocated by the radicals. But the last four speak directly to the issue of resistance to the state.

These writings belong to any collection of the invaluable, foundational documents of Protestantism. Here Luther develops the truth of the divine institution of the state in contrast to the prevailing Roman notion that the church is the source of all earthly authority. He sharply distinguishes the state and its calling from the church and her calling; there are two swords, the temporal sword wielded by the state and the spiritual sword wielded by the church. He defines the task of the state to be the maintenance of outward order in society: “... the temporal [government] ... restrains the unchristian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.” The magistrates are “God’s executioners and hangmen; His divine wrath uses them to punish the wicked and to maintain outward peace.” This is what Paul means by the “sword” in Romans 13; and this is Peter’s teaching in I Peter 2, where he speaks of the state’s duty as “the punishment of evildoers.” The state must not, may not, and cannot promote the gospel or destroy heresy. It has neither authority nor competency to rule men’s souls. Luther saw clearly, as Calvin did not (with distressing consequences in the history of the Reformed church), that the state has no calling to oppose heresy. Replying to the argument that the temporal power must see to it “externally that no one deceives the people by false doctrines,” Luther stated:

This the bishops should do; it is a function entrusted to them and not to the princes. Heresy can never be restrained by force. One will have to tackle the

problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God's word alone avails here.

All that the state must do on behalf of the gospel—and this is a great deal—is to permit it to be preached; “indeed, no ruler ought to prevent anyone from teaching or believing what he pleases, whether it is the gospel or lies. It is enough if he prevents the teaching of sedition and rebellion.”

Luther was not always consistent with his own teaching, particularly in handing over the support and supervision of the church to the government; but in these treatises he is at his biblical best. All Protestant theory on church and state must take Luther's work into account.

Our interest is the Reformer's absolute prohibition of resistance to the state on the part of the Christian citizen. No matter how unjust the rulers, no matter how grievous the misery of the citizens under the sorest oppression, rebellion is never permitted. And rebellion includes making demands upon the authorities under the threat of revolt if the demands are not met. Even if the government forbids the reading of Scripture and of Reformation literature, as well as the pure worship of God, and persecutes those who disobey, the Christian may not resist, i.e., use earthly force against these ungodly magistrates. “Outrage is not to be resisted, but endured.” “Suffering! suffering! Cross! cross! This and nothing else is the Christian law.”

This was Luther's counsel at a time when Germany was erupting in the “peasants' revolt.” Powerful pressure was put upon the Reformer to approve the revolt. The Reformation gospel had been making headway among the peasants. This multitude of workers was looking to Luther for leadership. Indeed, in their manifestos they grounded their demands for freedom in the liberty proclaimed by the gospel of Luther. In “The Twelve Articles” in which the peasants made their demands, they claimed earthly freedom on the basis of their spiritual freedom in Christ: “Christ has redeemed and bought us all with the precious shedding of his blood, the lowly as well as the great, excepting no one. Therefore, it agrees with Scripture that we be free and will to be so.” In fact, they were sorely oppressed—burdened with crushing taxation; worked like beasts; and held in the virtual slavery of serfdom. This, Luther recognized; and because of this he excoriated the rulers, pleading with

them to cease their oppression and warning them that they would be responsible for the bloodshed in Germany if the peasants did revolt:

We have no one on earth to thank for this disastrous rebellion, except you princes and lords ... as temporal rulers you do nothing but cheat and rob the people so that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance. The poor common people cannot bear it any longer ...

Nevertheless, “the fact that the rulers are wicked and unjust does not excuse disorder and rebellion.”

Why not?

First, resistance is usually fruitless, resulting in worse misery for the rebels than that which provoked their revolution. This is not only a lesson from Scripture, but also the lesson of history. Nor is this merely some natural law of history; rather, this is due to the judgment of God upon rebels already in this life.

Second, resistance lets loose upon a land the horrors of social and civil disorder. For Luther, as for Calvin, “there is nothing on earth that is worse than disturbance, insecurity ... violence ...” “Rebellion is no joke, and there is no evil deed on earth that compares with it.” For preachers of the gospel to encourage resistance, and even to incite it, is grossest dereliction of office. Luther called such preachers in his day—the Munzers, Hubmaiers, and Carlstadts—“murder-prophets.” We have them also in our day, the preachers calling for the mobs to resist the state in the name of Jesus. Though dressed in the garb of a bishop or bearing the title of a Reformed or Presbyterian clergyman, they are murder-prophets. When they are finally successful to unravel the frail fabric of order in the nation, so that civil war breaks out, they will stand with bloody hands before God.

Third, resistance is disobedience to the plain calling that God gives the believer in the Bible. Again and again, Luther holds before the revolutionaries the Word of God in Matthew 22:21 (“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s”); in Romans 13:1ff. (“Let every soul be subject to the higher powers”); and in I Peter 2:13ff. (“Honor the king”).

Fourth, resistance is rebellion against the exalted Christ and the sovereign God Whose authority He possesses. The authority of the magistrate is given him “from above,” as Jesus told Pilate in John 19:11. Therefore, the rebel can never prosper, even though his revolution may succeed. For he himself will be damned. “Afterward, both you (the rebels—DJE) and they (the preachers who

stirred up the rebels—DJE) will be damned eternally in hell.” Luther flatly declared, “I am and always will be on the side of those against whom insurrection is directed, no matter how unjust their cause; I am opposed to those who rise in insurrection, no matter how just their cause ...” In a time when churches are proclaiming that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed regardless of their spiritual state, it ought to be loudly preached by the true church that God is not on the side of the poor and oppressed who resist, but is against them.

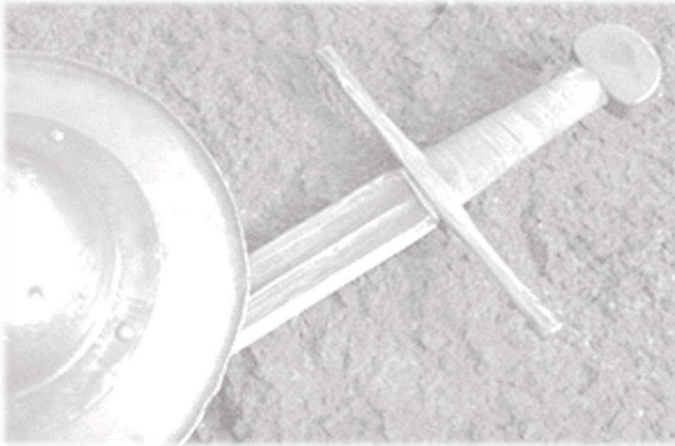
Fifth, resistance by those claiming to be Christians brings disgrace on the gospel and on the name of Jesus Christ. “In this way the gospel would be brought into disrepute, as though it taught insurrection ...” This more than anything else weighed with Luther. Surely we feel something of his grief at the dishonoring of Christ’s name by such wickedness in our own day. “Christians” murder Moslems in Lebanon! “Protestants” respond to the terrorism of the Roman Catholic I.R.A. by killing Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland! “Evangelicals” resort to mob-action to coerce the government in the United States! Christians? Protestants? Evangelicals?

For these reasons, when the revolt of the peasants came, Luther responded with his “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants” in which he gave the much-criticized exhortation, “let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel.”

The position of Luther and Calvin that resistance to the state is always forbidden the Christian (which was also the position of Augustine before them) must be the stand of the church of Christ and of the believer today. Those who take another position, justifying resistance by the Christian citizen when the state is perceived as unrighteous, or approving resistance as a legitimate means to oppose a specific law that is regarded as evil, should be aware that the implications of their position are far-reaching. The very same argument that justifies resistance to the state also justifies children’s resistance to their parents, if the children judge the parents to be unjust. Not only may the children now refuse to obey a command that would require them to sin, but they may also actively resist, with force, to bring the parents down—to destroy them—or to compel the parents to change some rule in family life which aggrieves the children. This is not far-fetched. For the authority of the state and the authority of the parents in the family flow from the same earthly source. The state is a creation ordinance, originating in the headship of Adam over his family.

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers! This is the Word of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Who Himself submitted to the most unjust rulers. This

is a word of sanity in a world (and in a church-world) gone mad with revolutionary fever. And this is a word that translates into the word that is dearer to the child of God than riches, comforts, earthly liberty, and physical life itself, “Let every soul reverence the Lordship of Jesus Christ and honor the sovereignty of the Triune God.”



APPENDIX B

Rutherford and Resistance: An Outline of *Lex, Rex*

Mr. John Clarke



SAMUEL RUTHERFORD WAS THE LEADING THEOLOGIAN in Scotland during the first half of the seventeenth century. To most of us, he is probably best known by his letters—which are said by Spurgeon to be “the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men.” But this is not his only work. He wrote extensively against Arminianism and as a defender of Presbyterian church government. His fame was soon established. He was made Professor of Divinity of St. Andrews and was more than once invited to serve as a Professor of Theology at Utrecht. As one of the Scottish Divines who took part in the Westminster Assembly, he had a prominent and active role in drawing up the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

His great treatise on civil government, entitled *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince*, was published in 1644. Its publication was occasioned by the appearance of a book by John Maxwell, an Episcopalian, who contended for the right of kings to rule independently of parliaments and people, and required of the people passive obedience in the most absolute and unqualified terms. This belief in the absolutism of the divine right of kings was held and practiced by the Stuart kings who ruled throughout most of the seventeenth century in Scotland.

The opposition expressed against this belief by Rutherford was not the first in Scottish Presbyterian history. Almost a century before, John Knox's memorable reply to the question put to him by Queen Mary, "Think you that the subjects having the power may resist their princes?" was this:

If princes exceed their power, no doubt they may be resisted, even by power. For no greater honour is to be given to kings than God has commanded to be given to father and mother. But the father may be struck with a frenzy, in which he would slay his children. Now, Madam, if the children arise, join together, apprehend their father, take the sword from him, bind his hands, keep him in prison till the frenzy is over, think you, Madam, that the children do any wrong? Even so, Madam, it is with princes that would murder the children of God that are subject to them.

Nor was it the last to be published on this subject, amongst Scottish Presbyterians. It was followed in 1687 by Alexander Shields' book, *A Hind Let Loose*, which can be ranked almost with Rutherford's own as a study in political science, and is in line with the thinking of Rutherford and the early Scottish reformers.

Although Rutherford's arguments are particularly directed toward the form of government that existed in his day, namely, a monarchy, the principles he expounds have a much wider application. Through forty-four chapters, or "Questions," Rutherford develops his argument. The book itself, according to Dr. Hume Brown, is "tediously pedantic," and the reading of it for us today is not without difficulty. Nevertheless, the reader who perseveres will find a work of real power, and amidst the minute details will discover the passion of a man who has a great love for liberty.

At the outset, Rutherford states the source of all government. Government is established not only by divine law but also by "natural law." This law does not exist by itself but is the result of God's having made human beings with the desire to join together and provide themselves with government. Rutherford insists that all men are born free, and that, by birth, one does not have authority over others. "No man cometh out of the womb with a diadem on his head or a sceptre in his hand." The authority to rule must come from the people as a whole, since it is to them that God has given this authority by nature. He accepts that the authority of the king is a trust

originating with God, but he insists that it reaches the king by the suffrages of the people. He asks,

Whence is it that this man rather than that man is crowned king? and whence is it—from God immediately and only—or is it from the people also and their free choice? For the pastor and the doctor’s office is from Christ only, but that John rather than Thomas be the doctor or the pastor is from the will and choice of men. The royal power is three ways in the people: 1) Radically and virtually, as in the first subject. 2) *Collative vel communicatue*, by way of free donation, they giving it to this man, not to that man that he may rule over them. 3) *Limitate*—they giving it so as these three acts remain with the people (1) that they may measure it out by ounce weights, so much royal power, no more and no less, (2) so as they may limit, moderate, and set banks and marches to the exercise, (3) that they give it out, *conditionate*, upon this and that condition, that they may take it again to themselves what they gave out upon condition if the condition be violated.

In support of this position that “the people make the king,” he quotes such scriptures as I Kings, chapter 16 where the people make Omri king and not Zimri, and Deuteronomy 17:15ff. The king having been chosen, there exists between the people and the king a covenant (II Sam. 5:3) which imposes certain obligations on both ruler and people. In answering the question, what happens if the king fails to fulfill his obligations and becomes a tyrant, we discover Rutherford’s views on resistance. Here, having regard for the due process of law, Rutherford, like Calvin, places the leadership of resistance in the hands of the lesser magistrates, they being “vicars” of God just as much as the king. Central also to Rutherford’s view of resistance is the importance of the Law: *Lex est Rex*. To the sovereignty of law, as agreeable to God’s Word, king and people must be subject. He states, “A king essentially is a living law, an absolute man is a creature they call a tyrant, and no lawful king.” To the question, who shall be judge between the king and the people when the people allege that the king is a tyrant, he replies, “There is a court of necessity no less than a court of justice and the fundamental laws must then speak; and it is with the people in this extremity as if they had no ruler.”

He believes in the justice of a defensive war against a king by his own subjects. He says, "If it be natural for one man to defend himself against the personal invasion of a prince, then it is natural and warranted to ten thousand, and to a whole kingdom, and what reason to defraud a kingdom of the benefits of self defence more than one man." When the king acts as a tyrant he is acting contrary to his God-given power; and since such an abuse of power is not from God, it may be resisted. Hence Rutherford distinguishes between a ruler who is of God and a particular exercise of power that is not of God. He says, "That power which is contrary to law, and is evil and tyrannical, can tie none to subjection."

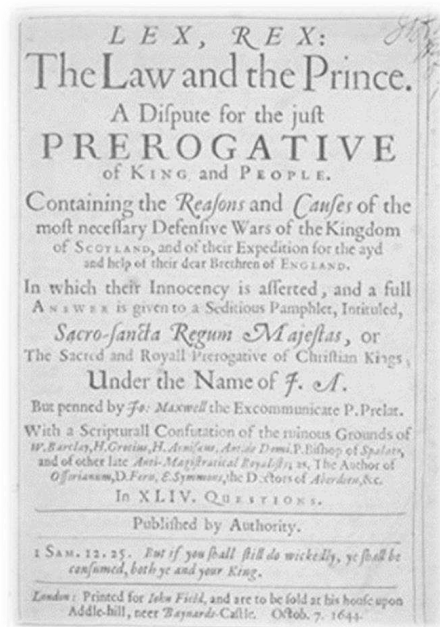
In his explanation of Romans 13 he contends that this passage refers to the office of magistrate (the magistrate *in abstracto*), i.e., to a person using his power lawfully. When a king acts unlawfully, he is not a "higher power," but is acting as an ordinary man. The lawful ruler is not to be resisted because he is not a terror to the good works but to the evil; but that ruler who persecutes the church becomes in these acts a terror to good works, and therefore the reason in the text proves that a man who does these things against the office is to be resisted. We are only to be subject to the power and royal authority *in abstracto*, in so far as, according to his office, he is not a terror to good works, but to evil.

In answering the question as to whether or not a kingdom may lawfully be purchased by the sole title of conquest, he asserts, "Mere conquest by the sword, without the consent of the people, is no just title to the crown." He accepts, however, that, "This title by conquest, through the people's after consent, may be turned into a just title."

Having looked briefly at some of Rutherford's main arguments in his treatise, we conclude with a short analysis of the impact of his work. It was received with great excitement by the Scottish General Assembly. "Every member," says Guthrie, "had in his hand the book lately published by Mr. Samuel Rutherford which was so idolized that whereas Buchanan's treatise, *De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, was looked upon as an oracle, this coming forth, it was slighted as not anti-monarchical enough and Rutherford's *Lex, Rex* only thought authentic." The principles taught in *Lex, Rex* were those that undergirded the Puritan revolution in England. So, this book is their best theoretical vindication. It became the political textbook of the Covenanters and its arguments are their justification for their taking up arms against the king. It helped to lay the basis for the establishing of the constitutional monarchy in Britain; and the bringing over of William of Orange was the practical outworking of the principles of *Lex, Rex*. It has been said, "The principles of this book, however obnoxious they may be to the devotees of

arbitrary power and passive obedience, are substantially the principles on which all government is founded and without which the civil magistrate would become a curse rather than a blessing to a country.”

“It is reported,” writes Howie, “that when King Charles saw *Lex, Rex* he said, it would scarcely ever get an answer, nor did it ever get any, except what the Parliament in 1661 gave it, when they caused it to be burned at the Cross of Edinburgh by the hands of the hangman.”



APPENDIX C

Conditional Submission? A Reformed Response to Samuel Rutherford

David J. Engelsma



IN THE FEBRUARY 15, 1989 ISSUE OF THIS MAGAZINE appeared a letter out of strife-torn Northern Ireland referring to the views on the Christian's calling towards the civil government of the Scottish Presbyterian, Samuel Rutherford. This letter asked whether the teaching of Rutherford is in harmony with the teaching of John Calvin, or whether it is "a departure from the Reformed Faith and Scripture itself and therefore to be exposed and repudiated as error?" In response to our request, our correspondent has written a summary of Rutherford's beliefs on this matter, which we publish in this issue under the heading, "Rutherford and Resistance" [see Appendix B of this book—Edit.]. The article sets forth in brief the contents of the book in which Rutherford propounded his political theory, the famed *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince*.

Because Rutherford's position on the calling of the Christian towards the state is, by this time, the prevailing position, not only of Presbyterian and Reformed people, but also of evangelicals of every stripe, and because this position is spiritually perilous to believers in times peculiarly suited to make Rutherford's position appealing to believers, an examination of this position, as our correspondent has requested, will be profitable for us all. We will be assuming, and not restating, the doctrine of the state that was developed by

many writers in the special issue of December 1, 1988 that occasioned the request [chapters 1-9 of this book—Edit.], and that was enlarged upon in two subsequent editorials on “Another Look at Non-Resistance” [Appendix A of this book—Edit.]. We remain convinced that this doctrine of the state is, in the main, the Reformed teaching, based squarely on the inspired Scriptures.

Rutherford’s position, which is that also of many Presbyterians, Reformed, and evangelicals, is that the Christian has the perfect right to revolt against the rulers of the nation under certain circumstances. It is not merely Rutherford’s position that the believer is required at times to refuse to obey the rulers (which no one denies); but it is his teaching that the Christian may take up arms against the existing government in order to overthrow it and set up a new government. The calling to submit is conditional. The condition is that the rulers faithfully carry out their duty. When the magistrates become unfaithful to their duty, ruling unjustly and tyrannically, the Christian is released from his obligation to submit and may freely resist the officials of the state.

Presbyterian men and women put this doctrine into practice. Rutherford issued *Lex, Rex* (in which this teaching was set forth) in the heat of the conflict between Scottish Presbyterianism and the tyrannical Stuart kings. Encouraged by the license given them in this book, Presbyterians declared themselves free from the authority of the kings and parliaments of their country, fought against the king’s officers and armies with the decidedly carnal weapons of bullet and steel, and refused to pay taxes. When the Presbyterian preacher, James Renwick, was on trial for his life in 1688, he was asked if he acknowledged King James II to be his lawful sovereign. He answered, “No! I own all authority that has its prescriptions and limitations from the Word of God . . .” To the question whether he had taught that it was unlawful to pay taxes to the king and his government, Renwick replied that “it was unlawful so to do” (that is, pay taxes to such a king and such a government) (see Jock Purves, *Fair Sunshine*, pp. 111, 112). Presbyterians resisted the higher powers. Not all did, as Purves reminds us in his delightful little study of the Scottish “Covenanters,” as the Presbyterians of that day were called, for many bore their persecution at the hands of the wicked, tyrannical, and anti-Christian Stuart kings patiently. But some revolted. And they did so because they believed that submission to government was conditional. For this belief, Samuel Rutherford was largely responsible.

Rutherford’s position in *Lex, Rex* is erroneous.

It has already been shown in a previous editorial [Appendix B of this book—Edit.] that this position is violently in conflict with the teaching of John Calvin. Rutherford, like his fellow countryman, John Knox, rejected Calvin’s

teaching as to the unconditional nature of the believer's calling to submit to the state.

This departure from Calvin is serious because Calvin faithfully gave the teaching of the Word of God.

The error is, first, that Rutherford supposes the source of the state, and its authority, to be the people. There is very little difference between his view and the modern view that holds that government is the result of a compact between the ruler and the ruled, so that whenever the ruler fails to keep his end of the bargain, the ruled have every right to withhold their submission, and rebel. Scripture, however, teaches that the source of government is *God*. Not only government in general, but *every* existing government—whatever government there may be—has been set up in authority by God. “For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). Even when it is the case that God uses election by the people to put rulers in office, as is the case in our own country, the source of these rulers' authority is not the people, but God. Besides, the notion that government is due to a “social compact” is a pure fiction, historically. God established government in the headship of Adam, quite independently of any agreement of wife Eve or of the posterity of Adam. Government through democratic process has been very rare in history, and is relatively recent. Were the Roman Caesars of the apostles' time chosen by popular vote? Did the Christians addressed by the first epistle of Peter suppose that the royal power of the kings whom they were called to honor in reality lay in them? Did our Lord teach that Pilate's authority came to him from below (the people) or from above (God), in John 19:11?

This error about the source of the state's authority is basic. If the “royal power is three ways in the people,” as Rutherford, and many today, teach, submission by the citizens is indeed conditional. I would go further and say that, in this case, submission depends upon the whims of the people. For the ruler is nothing but a creature of the people. But if the source of the state is God, submission depends, not upon the will of the people, but upon the will of God.

It is a second error of Rutherford that he misinterprets the crucial passage of Scripture on this question: Romans 13:1-7. At bottom, the issue is one of the authority of the Word of God; but then the Word must be rightly divided. Rutherford explains Romans 13 as teaching that the Christian citizen must submit to the government only if the government on its part is carrying out its duty, namely, punishing evildoers and praising well-doers. The submission enjoined in Romans 13 is a *conditional* submission. This fits his theory as to the origin of government in a contract between the people of a nation and its rulers. They have made a bargain. As soon as the rulers fail to keep their part

of the bargain, the people are freed from their obligations. Verses 3 and 4, then, are the condition for the calling of the Christian in verses 1, 2, and 5.

This has become a popular interpretation of the passage among Reformed and evangelical theologians. It is the interpretation of Francis A. Schaeffer in his *A Christian Manifesto*, in which (with express appeal to Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*) this influential evangelical thinker legitimizes the use of civil disobedience and the resort to force by Christians against the government. This is also the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 of so conservative a Bible expositor as William Hendriksen. Hendriksen does not think that Romans 13:1-7 explicitly answers the question, "Does the moment ever arrive when, because of continued governmental oppression and corruption, the citizens have the right, and perhaps the duty, to overthrow such a government and to establish another in its place?" In fact, he supposes that the passage implies that the answer to this question is yes—for Paul is thinking only of the ruler who does his duty, i.e., rules justly. Hendriksen goes so far as to mistranslate verse 6: "... for when the authorities faithfully devote themselves to this end, they are God's ministers." The text, of course, does not contain the word, "when," reading simply, "for they are God's ministers ..."

This classic passage on the Christian's calling towards the state *does indeed* lay down the state's duty towards the people, as well as the Christian citizen's duty towards the state; but the duty of the Christian is not conditioned by the faithfulness of the state. Paul does not write, "Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities, *if they show themselves just and good.*" The gospel-precept of submission is *unconditional*. It is based solely on the government's being *ordained of God*. Peter expressly says that submission must be given to the "froward" authority, as well as to the good and gentle authority (I Pet. 2:18). The Roman government of Paul's day was certainly not a good, just, Christian state. It was corrupt. It was the fulfillment of the prophecy of the fourth beast of Daniel 7, which blasphemes the Most High, opposes the Kingdom of God, and oppresses the saints. Every Christian to whom Paul wrote knew this well; for this state had condemned and crucified Jesus. But it was still the "higher power." The Christian had still to submit to it. Indeed, most governments and most officials of governments are ungodly, unjust, and unfaithful to their calling as servants of God. Rutherford was correct in his response from his deathbed to the officials of Charles II who served him with a summons to appear for trial, that the heaven to which he hoped shortly to go was a place "where few kings and great folks come." If Christians must submit only to Christian governments or to rulers who are righteous, they will submit to no government at all and to precious few government officials.

In explaining I Peter 2:13 (“Submit yourselves ... to the king”) and Titus 3:1 (“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates ...”), Rutherford tries to evade the force of the apostolic admonition by distinguishing between the *office* and *the man occupying the office*, as though one might reverence “kingship” while revolting against the current “king”:

Also, it is true, subjection to Nero (the New Testament requires submission to the moral monster, Nero!—DJE) ... is commanded here, but to Nero as such a one as he is obliged, *de jure* (by right—DJE) to be ... but that Paul commandeth subjection to Nero, and that principally and solely, as he was such a man, *de facto* (in actual fact—DJE), I shall then believe, when antichristian prelates turn Paul’s bishops ... (*Lex, Rex*, Question XXXIII).

This evasion is not unfamiliar even among us. It is used by the wife who professes to honor the “headship” of the husband as a general principle, but who rebels against her own particular “husband.” It is the tactic of the very pious church member who is loud in his protestations that he has the greatest respect for the office of “pastor” and the office of “elder,” but who treats his own particular pastor and his own particular elders shamefully. It is the clever distinction that teenagers know how to make: “Oh, yes, I believe that the parental office is authoritative; but I rebel against my own particular parents because they are unworthy of my respect.” But the distinction is unbiblical. Scripture calls us to submit to the *flesh-and-blood men and women in their offices on account of the office they occupy*. Specifically, Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-14 call us to submit to President Bush, Prime Minister Thatcher, my own parents, and the policeman who patrols the highway.

A third error of the Rutherford-position is that it confuses the *theocracy of the Old Testament* with *the nation to which those who maintain this position belong*. Rutherford viewed Presbyterian Scotland as the kingdom of God. It ought, therefore, to resist the heathen king and his Arminian, Roman Catholic-leaning bishops with force, just as Israel warred against her godless foes in ancient times. And the Presbyterians ought in this way to restore the kingdom of God in Scotland. This explains his use of the Old Testament to justify resistance. But Scotland never was the kingdom of God! Nor is Northern Ireland God’s kingdom, or South Africa, or the United States of America. The kingdom of God is the true church in these nations. It is entirely and radically

different and distinct from the state. It is not, and may not be, identified and entangled with the government of the nation. It is spiritual, not earthly. Its power is spiritual, not physical. Its weapon is the Word of God, never gun and sword. The confusion of church and state that began with Constantine in the fourth century has been disastrous. Luther and Calvin began to straighten things out again, so that the church would be the church and the state would be the state—each with its own *sphere* of authority, each with its own *kind* of authority, each with its own *calling*. For Presbyterians to engage in political resistance against ungodly rulers in the name of establishing, or restoring, a Christian nation in the United States, or God’s kingdom in Ulster, is *ignorance of the fundamental reality of the kingdom of God*.

A fourth error in Rutherford is the sad misunderstanding of the calling of the Presbyterian Christian and of the Presbyterian church under a government that oppresses the saints because of their confession of the truth. This calling is not that the saints defend themselves and the purity of their worship with force—much less that they take the offensive to overthrow the persecuting government. But our calling is to *suffer for Christ’s sake*. Suffering for Christ’s sake is not the ultimate evil, to be avoided at all costs, but a privilege and a blessing: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). That was the true glory of the Covenanters in the “killing time.” It was not the marching of some of them to do battle with the king’s dragons, though they were singing Psalm 68 as they came on. But it was their patient endurance of cruel suffering for the sake of the “crown rights of King Jesus.” Even when the state becomes the persecuting beast, the believer may not resist.

The submission that has such an important place in the Christian life is *unconditional*. Unconditionally, we submit to God. Unconditionally, we submit to those whom God puts over us (which does not, I repeat, imply unconditional *obedience*). Conditionality is the bane of the Christian life and the ruin of the vital institutions in which this life is to be lived (as it is the spoiling of the gospel of grace). Wives now submit to their husbands, conditionally—if their husbands please them. Children submit to their parents, conditionally—if they approve their parents’ rule. Church members submit to their elders, conditionally—if they like the particular elders and if the elders’ decisions suit them. This is supposed to be Protestant Christianity. It is not. It is revolution and anarchy. It does not come from the Spirit of Him Who submitted to unjust authority. It arises from the king that sits in the breast of each of us. The result is divorce, strife in the home, schism in the church, and shame heaped on the name of Jesus Christ.

Rutherford himself recognized that the practical consequence of his position was the chaos of the mob. To the question, who finally determines whether the rulers are tyrants, his answer was, “There is a court of necessity no less than a court of justice and the fundamental laws must then speak; and it is with the people in this extremity as if they had no ruler.” This is to dissolve all order in the nation, and to baptize the disorder as Presbyterian. The dreadful evils to which Rutherford’s position leads were starkly illustrated in the cold-blooded murder of Archbishop James Sharp by a band of Presbyterians in the course of their resistance to the higher powers in the seventeenth century. The deed was dreadful, not only because it was murder, but because it was murder done in the name of Jesus Christ as confessed by the Reformed religion. Of it, even Alexander Smellie, sympathetic though he was to the “men of the covenant,” had to say, “The deeds were foully done.” But the deed was born from the notion that submission to the state is *conditional*. Whenever Christians take up the sword to defend Jesus Christ, or to promote His gospel, against a hostile state, similar atrocities will stain His banner. Indeed, the very act of taking up the sword is a blot on His glorious standard.

This is no mere academic study of a slice of history.

The question, conditional or unconditional submission to the higher powers, is a living issue for every Reformed Christian in every nation. Without exception, Christians are living under governments that are not Christian and under governmental officials who are unjust. Increasingly, the state exalts itself as the ultimate reality in human life, taking on the features of the Antichrist. Pressure will be exerted upon the confessing church. Her calling will be what it has always been, namely, faithfulness to her Lord Jesus Christ—faithfulness in pure worship; faithfulness in orthodox confession and preaching; faithfulness in a biblical liturgy and right church government; faithfulness in the godly rearing of the covenant children. There may be no compromise! Jesus Christ is Lord—not the state. We are ready to seal this confession with our blood.

But exactly this faithfulness to King Jesus forbids resistance, unconditionally.

APPENDIX D

“In Submission to Government” A Meditation on I Peter 2:13-16

Marinus Schipper



*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake:
whether it be to the king, as supreme;*

*Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the
punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.*

*For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence
the ignorance of foolish men:*

*As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but
as the servants of God. (I Pet. 2:13-16)*

HAVING YOUR CONVERSATION HONEST AMONG THE GENTILES! That is the main exhortation in this section of the epistle, and it must be borne constantly in mind. Proceeding now to apply this truth, that we are to walk honestly in every department of life, the apostle calls attention to what our conversation is to be with respect to the government which is over us.

Not to the *world* is this exhortation directed, but to the *church*, to the elect strangers; who are in the world, but not of it.

The world of Peter's day, as well as the present world, is characterized by lawlessness. Rioting and violence have become in our time a way of life. Disrespect for authority, and open rebellion and revolution are not a

peculiarity one finds only in our own country, but this situation obtains in all nations and in every part of the world. This is understandable, for when men will not reckon with the law of God, neither will they honor the ordinances of men.

But, as we said, the apostle is not directing the words of our text to those lawless in the world. Rather he is writing to the members of Christ's church. He has in mind those who are under the rule of Christ, Whose is all authority, power, and dominion in heaven and on earth. He directs the words of our text to those who are the citizens of a heavenly kingdom, yea, whose citizenship is in heaven, though temporarily they are required to be pilgrims and strangers in this world, and therefore also for a time must needs be in subjection to the rulers of this world. And, we hasten to add, in subjection to a government which, at the time of the writing of this epistle, was thoroughly antichristian.

And the question arises: but why should these heavenly citizens be exhorted to be in submission to these worldly governments? Perhaps this was the question which lived in the souls of them to whom Peter is writing, along with several other questions. If Christ is King supreme, would it not be sinful on our part to honor any other king or governor? If the government which imposes its rule over us is antichristian, should we not oppose it with all that is in us? If Christ has made us free from the law by His own obedience, are we not free from all laws? If the government persecutes us who are the children of God, is it not then an ungodly government whose laws we *need not* respect? Perhaps these and many more questions resided in the hearts of those to whom the apostle is writing. And with one sweep of the pen, the apostle answers in the text: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."

Submit yourselves!

Whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well!

Shall we be able to understand this scriptural mandate, it is necessary, first of all, that we have a clear, scriptural idea of what government is.

It is a principle of the Word of God that all government is of God. It makes no difference what the form of government may be, whether it is a monarchy, a democracy, or a dictatorship that is in power. The powers that be are ordained of God, not of man.

Most instructive in this connection is what we are told in Romans 13:1-4. "Let every soul be subject unto 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; and they that resist shall

receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then 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. But if thou do that which is evil be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

There are three elements in this passage that are emphasized: “there is no power but of God,” “the powers that be are ordained of God,” and, “whoever is in power is God’s minister.” And we would remind you that the government, the power which the apostle had in mind, was the power of *Rome*, of which *Caesar* was the ruler.

Jesus, when confronted by Pontius Pilate, who was Caesar’s governor, and who boasted that he had power to crucify Him or set Him free, did not hesitate to say to him: “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”

And Daniel in his prophecy (Dan. 2:21) declares: “And he (i.e., God) changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings.”

Clearly all these passages teach that both the king and his government are of the Lord. It is He that sets kings on their thrones, and it is He that takes them down from their thrones, in order to put others in their place.

How contrary to this principle is the modern conception of government! Today, the majority in our own country follow the philosophy that “the government of the people, by the people, and for the people” implies that the government is of man. In fact, the term “democracy,” which means literally “the rule of the people,” also has come to imply that the government is determined by and has its origin in man. It should be plain from the Scripture passages cited above that this idea of government is *contrary to the Word of God*.

Moreover, still speaking of the idea of government, it should also be established that, though the government is by divine appointment, it is nevertheless limited in its sphere of authority. By this, we mean that the government is not divinely intended to rule over everything. It should have no jurisdiction in our private affairs. Nor should it have anything to say in the church. Church and state should remain sovereign each in its own sphere.

And to this must be added that, whereas the government has authority only in the public sphere, it is the divine intention that it shall maintain the law of God. All the laws which the government enacts and enforces should find their basis in the Decalogue with its two tables. And for the enforcement of this authority, God has given the government sword power, according to which it is to punish the evil doer, and to bless and protect the good.

There is also one more thought which should be injected here, and that is: God has exalted Christ to be King over all kings, dominions, and powers. Of this He was deeply conscious when He said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." It is He, by divine right, Who places kings and rulers on their thrones, and through the governments of the world He rules over and over-rules all, so that they do His good pleasure. Though they generally do not recognize Him, and still more generally stand in open rebellion against Him,—for "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed,"—they nevertheless are obliged to be His ministers, and do Him service.

It is especially this last thought that the apostle has in mind when he exhorts his readers to "submit themselves to every ordinance of man *for the Lord's sake*."

Bearing in mind that the government may be and often is antichristian, such as it was when the apostle wrote these words, then the principle will be in reverse. Then the good, which should be praised and protected by the government, will be persecuted for their well doing; while the evil-doers, whom the government should punish, will be condoned, exonerated, and praised. Precisely what happened to Christ will happen also to the children of God. He Who did nothing but good, was maltreated, persecuted, and put to death by those in authority. And the Lord Jesus forewarned us that what they did to Him they will also do to us.

What then? Should we rebel?

Should we flee somewhere to form an underground movement, train guerrilla bands that will be bent on destroying those in authority? Should we start a revolutionary movement that will cast out those in power, and that will put in office those whom we will be reasonably sure will legislate on Christian principles?

The apostle answers all these questions with: Submit yourselves!

Mark well, he does not say: "obey!"

O, indeed, where it is possible to obey the government without violating any of our Christian principles, then obedience must be the rule of the day. Obedience is *implicit* in submission, yea, the very heart of it. But obedience and submission are always to be governed by our relationship to God and to Christ. We obey our parents, not simply because they are our parents who are older, wiser, and stronger than we, but *for God's sake*. We obey the government also only for God's sake. When we obey the government, we do so to show that we are in obeisance to Christ Who is our Lord. On the other hand, when the government or whoever is in authority over us commands us to do that which is contrary to the law of God, which would make us to be disobedient

to Christ,—then we must disobey, while we remain in submission. A beautiful illustration of this we find in Daniel 3, where the friends of Daniel were required to bow before the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Not only did these obedient children of God refuse to obey the king, but they signified their willingness to submit to the punishment the king had threatened for disobedience. Willingly they gave themselves over to the fire of the furnace. This is submission, which is obedience to God. The apostle Peter, when confronted by the authorities because he taught in the Name of Jesus (Acts 5), answered them: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But before he was let go, he suffered severe beating by the authorities. This was submission, which is obedience to God.

Let it be established, then, that strict obedience to all authority is impossible when that authority commands us to be disobedient to God and His Christ. But submission is always necessary. Then we honor authority, in loving obedience to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for this submission is two-fold. In the first place, “for the Lord’s sake.” We must remember that we obey Christ when we are in submission to human ordinances; and we are also in obedience to Christ when we disobey the human ordinance which is contrary to His will. We are to serve the Lord Christ and seek the honor of His Name. In the second place, “we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” Also, here we are to remember that the world of ungodly men, whether in the government or not, does not understand why the child of God does what he does. When the children of God disobey the authority, the world expects them to be revolutionaries. But when the child of God does not become a revolutionary, yea, rather gives himself over to the consequences of his disobedience, suffers willingly the inflicted punishment, then he puts the ignorant foolish to silence.

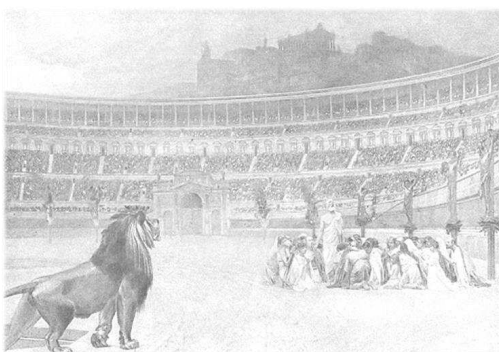
But why should the elect strangers be exhorted to be in submission to the government? If they truly love God, and know that they stand in loving service to their King, Christ Jesus, will they not then spontaneously do what the apostle urges in this exhortation?

There are especially two reasons why this exhortation is necessary. The first is the danger of antinomism. This is suggested in the last part of the text when the apostle writes: “as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” The antinomist is one who believes he is free, free from the law. Piously he points to the doctrine of justification, according to which Christ has fulfilled all obedience to the divine law for us, so that we are freed from the dictates of the law. We are now under grace, so he says. Therefore, any attempt to live in conformity to the law is to deny the justifying grace of Christ. Consequently, these apparently pious

people live as they please, with no respect for the law of God or of man. They live under the slogan, "Not under the law, but under grace." These antinomian sects have given the church no end of trouble, and also a bad name. The apostle would agree with them as to the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free, only he adds: "use not your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness." He means to say, your liberty does not give you license to do as you please; but your liberty is also bound by law. True liberty is the freedom to walk in the light of the law, which you could not do when you were the slaves of sin. We are not to perform the law in order to be saved, but we honor the law because we are saved. And since the laws of government, and the government which imposes the law is ordained of God, therefore you are to live in submission to it.

But there is more. In the second place, as we already suggested, there is always the reality of antichristian government. It was there when Peter transcribed our text; and Scripture assures us that it is also a future reality. What then? Shall Christians unite to overthrow such a government? When the government shall insist that you cannot buy or sell without the mark of the beast, shall we rush to obtain that mark lest we perish from the earth? The answers to these questions are negative.

Positively we shall honor Christ by being in submission to that evil government; and while we take the consequences of disobedience, death if necessary, we will commit our cause to Christ Who will surely justify us in the day when He shall judge also the government for all the ungodly deeds they have committed.



APPENDIX E

The Scottish Reformer's View of the Magistrate in the Church-State Relationship

Thomas Miersma



WHILE THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND HAS MANY FEATURES in common with the Reformation on the Continent, at the same time it has certain aspects which are unique to it. In Germany it was the disposition of the rulers and princes which determined the course of progress of the Reformation and led to the division of that country into Lutheran and Roman Catholic regions. In France and Spain, the opposition of the temporal powers ultimately destroyed the Reformation there. In Switzerland, the Reformation developed from the people, in connection with the civil government, while the progress of the Reformation in England was controlled by the kings and queens to a larger extent. In Scotland, however, it was particularly the people and the lesser nobility which accomplished the Reformation, and that in the face of sustained opposition from the supreme ruler of the country. In this sense, the Reformation in Scotland is unique.

The course of that Reformation may be divided into several phases. There was first of all a pre-Reformation phase, that is preparatory to the Reformation proper, which was characterized by the suppression of the preaching of the gospel by the Roman clergy, including the martyrdom of some notable preachers. The second phase occurred during the regency of Mary of Guise, at which time the reform movement gained momentum and culminated in the

official establishment of a Reformed church. There was, following the deposition of Mary from the office of Regent, a brief interim of establishment and consolidation. Then followed the rule of Queen Mary which was a period of conflict and trouble. The Reformation in Scotland may be said to close with Mary's abdication and King James VI's accession to the throne (though as an infant), during which period Scotland was ruled by a Protestant Regent.

Two factors tend to compound the complexity of the Scottish Reformation. First, during the regency of Mary of Guise, there was a two-fold struggle in the country. Mary was pro-Catholic and pro-French, and accordingly those who opposed her did so from differing motives: either because they were pro-Reformation, or because they were anti-French, and in some cases, pro-English. In many instances both elements were blended together. The second factor follows from the first: namely, that with the death of the husband of Mary Queen of Scots and her return to Scotland, the problem of pro- or anti-French feeling largely disappeared. This accounts for the apparent defection of many of the nobles from the Protestant cause to the Queen's side. The Queen on her part was determined to maintain Catholicism for herself and to re-establish it in Scotland. Hence the second conflict developed.

These political factors had a significant impact on the direction and shape of the Scottish Reformation. The political interests, factions and conflicts form the background for the Reformation proper. Because of this, one of the key issues in the Scottish Reformation was the biblical idea of the magistrate, and questions regarding the relationship of the subject to the ruler, in the context of the biblical injunction to be subject to the powers that be. There were a number of complexities to this question. Among these were the nature of the magistrate's office, his authority, duties, powers, and the limits of those powers. Further, there was the question of the calling of the magistrate at various levels of government, his proper duty to those over him and to the Reformation, and the obedience due to him. The "powers that be" in Scotland at this time did not consist merely of an autocratic monarch, but in addition to the monarch, there were also Parliament, various grades of nobility, city councils, bailiffs, provosts, and other officials, not to mention the role of the semipolitical authority of the Roman Catholic prelates and bishops. In addition to this was the fact that during most of the initial period of reformation, Scotland was under the rule of a regent, ordained such by Parliament, namely, Mary of Guise. The relation of church and state and the role of the magistrate formed then a predominant element in the history of the Reformation in Scotland.

It is particularly this question of the magistrate which must be discussed, therefore, in treating the Reformation in Scotland. Because of the complexity of the question, however, and of the history, certain limitations must be laid down.

The key figure in the Scottish Reformation was John Knox, and it is therefore in particular his perspective on and conception of the magistrate which is of chief importance. His *History of the Reformation in Scotland* presents his own perceptions of the issues which are important. Knox himself was not concerned with all that happened, but only with the Reformation proper and that which pertained to it. It is from his point of view that we wish to treat the history in connection with the question concerning the magistrate.

The broader political history was not his concern. He writes in his preface:

And yet, in the beginning, must we crave of all the gentle readers not to look of us such an History as shall express all things that have occurred within this realm during the time of this terrible conflict that has been betwix the saints of God and these bloody wolves who claim to themselves the title of clergy, and to have authority over the souls of men; for with the Policy (editor's note: that is, political affairs; the polity) mind we to meddle no further than it hath Religion mixed with it.¹

In spite of this limitation, Knox still deals with the history in great detail. It is not our intention, however, to go into detail concerning all of the events and movements of that history, as many of the conflicts and events in the history were similar in character to one another. During the first major phase under the Regent, Mary of Guise, the shape of that history was largely as follows. Mary of Guise, in order to obtain Parliament's consent to the marriage of Mary Stuart to Francis II, promised by oath that after the bestowal of the crown matrimonial, she would agree to allow the reform of religion to go forward. This oath she broke. The result was an iconoclastic uprising in the town of St. Johnston, in which the Protestant lords of the town and town officials removed the Roman Catholic idols and abolished the mass. In reaction, Mary of Guise surrounded the town with an army of French mercenaries. In discussions with the Protestants, she negotiated a settlement

¹ John Knox, *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), Volume I, p. 6.

whereby she was permitted to enter the town with the understanding that the reforms taken there would stand. This promise she violated. and upon entering the town, she took it over with the intention of putting the Protestants to death if she could lay hands upon them. The result was that the Protestants and officials fled and that a form of civil war broke out in Scotland between the Queen Regent and her French mercenaries, aided by Scottish Catholics, against the Protestant nobles. It culminated in the Queen's military defeat by the Protestants with the aid of English soldiers, and her deposition from office.

The second major phase of the conflict occurred with the return to Scotland of Mary Queen of Scots after the death of her husband, Francis II of France. At this point. the Reformed religion had been established by Act of Parliament, and idolatry, which included both the worship of saints and the mass, had been outlawed. This act had been passed in the Queen's name. The Queen herself refused to ratify it, however, because it was her intent and design to re-establish Roman Catholicism. The consistent point at issue between the Protestants and Mary Queen of Scots became, then, first of all, her own private idolatry at the mass, which was illegal and which she persisted in practicing, to the offense of the people. In connection with this, stood her consistent lying and oath-breaking, her dissolute life and ultimately her apparent connivance at the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley, at the hands of Bothwell, who then became her third husband through the instrument of an unbiblical divorce on his part, to the added offense of the reformers. The Queen was ultimately forced to abdicate in favor of her son, James VI, and because he was an infant at the time, Scotland was placed under the regency of the Earl of Moray, a Protestant noble. Throughout the periods of both Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots, the royal history was characterized by falsehoods, broken promises, murders, and acts of violence. In the midst of all this was also the perpetual rise and fall of various nobles in the favor of the Queen or Regent, and their replacements. With this background sketch of the history of the period, we will pass from a consideration of the specifics of the history to a consideration of the issues which are our main interest.

In order to understand the nature of Knox's views on the magistrate, which formed the basis of the conduct of the Protestant lords and nobles, and which he shared with his fellow-ministers in Scotland, certain other aspects surrounding the question must be considered. In the mind of the Scottish reformers, the Roman church in Scotland was the kingdom of Antichrist and of Satan. This becomes evident already from Knox's preface where he writes,

It is not unknown, Christian Reader, that the same cloud of ignorance that long hath darkened many realms under this accursed kingdom of that Roman Antichrist, hath also overcovered this poor realm; that idolatry hath been maintained, the blood of innocents hath been shed, and Christ Jesus His eternal truth hath been abhorred, detested, and blasphemed.²

In speaking of the persecutions which preceded the Reformation proper, Knox writes, “Thus ceased not Sathan, by all means, to maintain his kingdom of darkness, and to suppress the light of Christ’s Evangel.”³

The bishops or prelates of the Roman Church, whom Knox repeatedly termed the “congregation of Satan,” were some of the most corrupt men in Europe. They were given over to murder and robbery of the people, failed to discharge any semblance of office, and were guilty of virtually every vice imaginable. Knox documents this extensively in his *History*. An example of these crimes and gross miscarriages of justice may serve to illustrate this point. Knox relates the following incident:

At Saint Paul’s Day, before the first burning of Edinburgh, came to St. Johnston the governor and cardinal, and there, upon envious delation, were a great number of honest men and women called before the Cardinal, accused of heresy; and albeit that they could be convicted of nothing but only of suspicion that they had eaten a goose upon Friday, four men were adjudged to be hanged, and a woman to be drowned; which cruel and most unjust sentence was without mercy put in execution. The husband was hanged, and the wife, having a sucking babe upon her breast, was drowned.⁴

Over against the Roman Catholics stood the Reformed party and the Reformed church, which, as a whole, was denominated “the congregation.” Knox is not always consistent in his conception of the congregation. At times

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

he speaks of it as if it embraced the whole nation of Scotland. At other times he limits it to the godly in Scotland. Furthermore, Knox's conception of the congregation virtually identifies the church of Christ in Scotland with Israel. He does this not merely in the sense of the organic unity of the church of all ages, but also carries over the manner in which God dealt with Israel under the Old Testament economy. The result of this is that Knox appropriates God's dealings with Israel from the Old Testament and brings them to bear directly upon the contemporary situation. Writing to the nobles, the lords of the congregation, from Dieppe just before his return to Scotland from Geneva, he says,

But this will I add to my former rigour and severity, to wit, if any persuade you, for fear of dangers that may follow, to faint in your former purpose, be he never esteemed so wise and friendly, let him be judged of you both foolish and your mortal enemy: foolish, for because he understandeth nothing of God's approved wisdom; and enemy unto you, because he laboureth to separate you from God's favour; provoking his vengeance and grievous plagues against you, because he would that ye should prefer your worldly rest to God's praise and glory, and the friendship of the wicked to the salvation of your brethren. I am not ignorant that fearful troubles shall ensue your enterprise (as in my former letters I did signify unto you); but O joyful and comfortable are those troubles and adversities, which men sustaineth for accomplishment of God's will, revealed by his word! For how terrible that ever they appear to the judgment of the natural man, yet are they never able to devour nor utterly to consume the sufferers: For the invisible and invincible power of God sustaineth and preserveth, according to his promise, all such as with simplicity do obey him. The subtle craft of Pharaoh, many years joined with his bloody cruelty, was not able to destroy the male children of Israel; neither were the waters of the Red Sea, much less the rage of Pharaoh, able to confound Moses and the company which he conducted; and that because the one had God's promise that they

should multiply, and the other had his commandment to enter into such dangers. I would your Wisdoms should consider that our God remaineth one, and is immutable; and that the Church of Christ Jesus hath the same promise of protection and defence that Israel had of multiplication; and further, that no less cause have ye to enter in your former enterprise, than Moses had to go to the presence of Pharaoh; for your subjects, yea, your brethren are oppressed, their bodies and souls held in bondage: and God speaketh to your consciences (unless ye be dead with the blind world) that you ought to hazard your own lives (be it against kings or emperors) for their deliverance.⁵

Of particular interest in this connection is Knox's understanding of the judgments of God, as they manifest themselves temporally. God dealt with the church in Scotland the way He dealt with Israel. When that church sinned or declined from the truth, God sent upon them troubles and distress, even as He sent famine and the sword upon Israel.

This also means that the conflict between the visible church and the visible manifestation of the kingdom of Satan took on a concrete physical form. To perceive that Knox and his contemporaries so understood and interpreted the acts of God's providence is important if one is to understand that which often motivated them in their actions. Describing the period of pre-Reformation, Knox recounts the labors of Master George Wishart in the city of Dundee. Wishart preached there and was not well received by the people, and was ultimately expelled from the city. At his leaving of the city Wishart spoke to the people thus,

“... But and if trouble unlooked for apprehend you, acknowledge the cause and turn to God, for he is merciful. But if ye turn not at the first, he shall visit you with fire and sword.” These words pronounced, he came down from the preaching place.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

Not long afterward, while Wishart was occupied in Kyle, a plague broke out in Dundee which was extremely vehement in character. Knox quotes Wishart as saying,

“They are now in trouble, and they need comfort. Perchance this hand of God will make them now to magnify and reverence that word which before (for the fear of men) they set at light price.”⁷

When the governor broke his oath to the English and the English retaliated, Knox describes it as the execution of God’s judgment. He writes,

This was a part of the punishment which God took upon the realm for infidelity of the Governor, and for the violation of his solemn oath.⁸

Violation of an oath, therefore, brought upon the realm of Scotland God’s judgment. When the Regent, who had been deposed, was being besieged by the Protestants at Leith, an assault on the part of the combined Scottish and English forces was repulsed. In the ensuing defeat, Knox relates the following incident.

The French, proud of the victory, stripped naked all the slain, and laid their dead carcasses before the hot sun along their wall, where they suffered them to lie more days nor one: unto the which, when the Queen Regent looked for mirth she happit (editor’s note: skipped) and said, “Yonder are the fairest tapestry that ever I saw: I would that the whole fields that is betwix this place and yon, were strewn with the same stuff.” This fact was seen of all, and her words were heard of some, and misliked of many. Against the which John Knox spake openly in pulpit, and boldly affirmed, “That God should revenge that contumely done to his image, not only in the furious and godless soldiers, but even in such as rejoiced thereat.” And the very experience declared that he

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

was not deceived: for within a few days thereafter (yea some say that same day) began her belly and loathsome legs to swell, and so continued till that God did execute his judgments upon her, as after we shall hear.⁹

The disease mentioned by Knox in this case shortly led to the Regent's death.

In the war and at about the same time as the events described above, a fire broke out in the city of Leith which Knox describes as follows,

While the siege thus continued, a sudden fire chanced in Leith, which devoured many houses and much victual; and so began God to fight for us, as the Lord Erskine in plain words said to the Queen Regent: "Madam (quoth he), I can see no more, but seeing that man may not expel unjust possessors forth of this land, God himself will do it; for yon fire is not kindled by man."¹⁰

Thus, as with Israel of old, it is God Who fights for the congregation. When the kings and princes of the realm violate their oath, God's judgment comes upon the nation physically. Similarly, when idolatry goes unchecked and the Protestants declined from their duty, God sends famine upon the nation, just as He did with Israel. Thus, for tolerating Queen Mary's idolatry in the mass, Knox describes a famine which God sent upon the country. This famine was particularly severe in those regions in which the queen had travelled and the mass had been erected. He writes,

The year of God a thousand five hundred threescore three years, there was a universal dearth in Scotland. But in the northland, where the harvest before the Queen had travelled, there was an extreme famine, in the which many died in that country. The dearth was great over all, but the famine was principally there ... And so all things appertaining to the sustenation of man, in triple and more exceeded

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319. While the historicity of this particular incident may be doubtful, it is the fact that Knox believed it to be true which is of importance here.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

their accustomed prices. And so did God, according to the threatening of his law, punish the idolatry of our wicked Queen, and our ingratitude that suffered her to defile the land with that abomination again, that God so potently had purged by the power of his word. For the riotous feasting and excessive woman repaired, provoked God to strike the staff of bread and to give his malediction upon the fruits of the earth. But, O alas, who looked, or yet looks to the very cause of all our calamities.¹¹

In connection with His judgments, God also sent signs and portents of the coming of these judgments. Knox relates accounts of signs in the heavens. Thus, during one winter, he describes the appearance of a comet and certain other signs, which he understood to be warnings or omens to the Queen, which the Queen ignored. Thus he writes,

In the end of the next harvest, was seen upon the Borders of England and Scotland a strange fire, which descended from the heaven, and burnt divers corns in both the realms, but most in England. There was presented to the Queen Regent, by Robert Ormiston, a calf having two heads, whereat she scripped (editor's note: scoffed) and said, "It was but a common thing."¹²

What is significant about this view is first of all the idea of the direct and visible operation of God's providence, which is conceived of in Old Testament terms as direct visitations of God, and secondly, that this idea lies as a motivating principle behind the actions and concerns of the reformers in Scotland, and this is particularly the case in connection with the sin of idolatry.

In Knox's view, these judgments and signs were not seen merely as precursory signs of Christ's second advent, but also as direct operations of God which had specific revelatory content. They could be interpreted and understood. Famine came upon the land because of idolatry—in particular, the Queen's mass.

¹¹ John Knox, *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), vol. II, pp. 69-70.

¹² Knox, vol. I, p. 124.

The mass, in the view of the reformers and the Protestant lords of Scotland, was idolatry. The preachers from the pulpit declared how odious this idolatry was in God's presence and what commandment He had given for the destruction of the idols in Israel. They declared the law of God concerning idolatry, which was the death of the idolater, and the fierce judgment of God upon the nation which practiced idolatry. It is particularly at this point that the Scottish reformers draw upon the civil legislation given to Israel under the Old Testament economy and apply it directly to the contemporary situation in Scotland. In this they lifted all that was to be found in the Old Testament concerning God's pronouncements against idolatry in Israel and applied it directly to the situation in Scotland. This raised a question in connection with the Queen: whether Mary Queen of Scots could be allowed to have her own private mass or not, and if not, who was to suppress it, since she was the supreme ruler of the land? Further, would such suppression be a rebellion against the powers that be? Thus, in a debate between Knox and Lethington, the following discourse takes place. Lethington speaks first.

"... Our question is, Whether that we may and ought to suppress the Queen's Mass? Or whether her idolatry shall be laid to our charge?"

"What ye may (do)," said the other (Knox), "by force, I dispute not; but what ye may and ought to do by God's express commandment, that I can tell. Idolatry ought not only to be suppressed, but the idolater ought to die the death, unless that we will accuse God."

"I know," said Lethington, "the idolater is commanded to die the death; but by whom?"

"By the people of God" said the other; "for the commandment was given to Israel, as ye may read, 'Hear, Israel,' says the Lord, 'the statutes and the ordinances of the Lord thy God,' etc. Yea, a commandment was given, That if it be heard that idolatry is committed in any one city, inquisition shall be taken; and if it be found true, that then the whole body of the people shall arise and destroy that city, sparing in it neither man, woman, nor child,"

"But there is no commandment given to the people," said the Secretary, "to punish their King if he be an idolater,"

“I find no more privilege granted unto kings,” said the other, “by God, more than unto the people, to offend God’s majesty.”

“I grant,” said Lethington; “but yet the people may not be judges unto their King to punish him, albeit he be an idolater,”

“God,” said the other, “is the Universal Judge, as well unto the King as to the people; so that what his word commands to be punished in the one, is not to be absolved in the other.”¹³

It is noteworthy that in this debate the question of the death of the idolater according to the law given to Israel, and its application to the then-current situation in Scotland is not an issue, but only the way in which the law is to be executed upon the supreme magistrate and by whom.

This same question of rebellion against the powers that be arose in connection with the Regent, Mary of Guise, and the reform movement which was occurring in the country at that time. There again, the law concerning idolatry was involved, but in this instance, it was connected with the question of justice and right judgment upon the part of the magistrate in a fair trial. The Protestants had overthrown the papal worship in parts of the country and removed also the images from some of the churches, particularly in the town of St. Johnston. In response to this, they were accused by the Regent of insurrection and rebellion. It is in this context that the congregation writes a letter to the nobility of Scotland. An excerpt from this letter follows.

“TO THE NOBILITY OF SCOTLAND, THE
CONGREGATION OF CHRIST JESUS WITHIN THE
SAME, DESIRES THE SPIRIT OF RIGHTEOUS
JUDGMENT.”

Because we are not ignorant that the Nobility of this realm who now persecute us, employing their whole study and force to maintain the kingdom of Sathan, of superstition and idolatry, are yet none the less divided in opinion; WE, the Congregation of Christ Jesus by you unjustly persecuted, have thought good, in one letter, to write unto you severally. Ye are

¹³ Knox, vol. II, pp. 120-121.

divided, we say, in opinion; for some of you think that we who have taken upon us this enterprise to remove idolatry, and the monuments of the same, to erect the true preaching of Christ Jesus in the bounds committed to our charges, are heretics, seditious men, and troublers of this common wealth; and therefore that no punishment is sufficient for us: and so, blinded with this rage, and under pretence to serve the Authority, ye proclaim war, and threaten destruction without all order of law against us. To you, we say, that neither your blind zeal, neither yet the colour of authority, shall excuse you in God's presence, who commandeth, "None to suffer death, till that he be openly convicted in judgment to have offended against God, and against his law written," which no mortal creature is able to prove against us: for whatsoever we have done, the same we have done at God's commandment, who plainly commands idolatry, and all monuments of the same to be destroyed and abolished. Our earnest and long request hath been, and is, that in open assembly it may be disputed in presence of indifferent auditors. "Whether religion, which they by fire and sword defend, be the true religion of Christ Jesus or not?" Now, this our humble request denied unto us. our lives are sought in most cruel manner. And ye, the Nobility (whose duty is to defend innocents, and to bridle the fury and rage of wicked men, were it of Princes or Emperors) do, notwithstanding, follow their appetites, and arm yourselves against us. your brethren. and natural countrymen; yea, against us that be innocent and just, as concerning all such crimes as be laid to our charges. If ye think that we be criminal because that we dissent from your opinion, consider we beseech you, that the Prophets under the law, the Apostles of Christ Jesus after his ascension, his primitive Church, and holy martyrs, did dissent from the whole world in their days; and will ye deny but that their action was just, and that all those that persecuted them were murderers

before God? May not the like be true this day? What assurance have ye this day of your religion, which the world that day had not of theirs? Ye have a multitude that agree with you, and so had they. Ye have antiquity of time, and that they lacked not. Ye have councils, laws, and men of reputation that have established all things, as ye suppose: But none of all these can make any religion acceptable unto God. which only dependeth upon his own will, revealed to man in his most sacred word. Is it not then a wonder that ye sleep in so deadly a security, in the matter of your own salvation, considering that God giveth unto you so manifest tokens, that ye and your leaders are both declined from God? For if “the tree shall be judged by the fruit” (as Christ Jesus affirmeth that it must be) then of necessity it is that your Prelates, and the whole rabble of their clergy, be evil trees. For if adultery, pride, ambition, drunkenness, covetousness, incest, unthankfulness, oppression, murder, idolatry, and blasphemy be evil fruits, there can none of that generation, which claim to themselves the title of Churchmen, be judged good trees; for all these pestilent and wicked fruits do they bring forth in greatest abundance: And if they be evil trees (as ye yourselves must be compelled to confess they are), advise prudently with what consciences ye can maintain them to occupy the rounge and place (editor’s note: the appointed place) in the Lord’s vineyard? Do ye not consider, that in so doing ye labour to maintain the servants of sin in their filthy corruption; and so consequently ye labour that the Devil may reign, and still abuse this realm by all iniquity and tyranny, and that Christ Jesus and his blessed Evangel be suppressed and extinguished?¹⁴

It is in this context that we understand the whole question of the magistrate in the Scottish Reformation and the reformers’ views on the relation between church and state. Just as the issue in Luther’s Reformation

¹⁴ Knox, vol. I, pp. 167-168.

was originally indulgences, so the issue in the Scottish Reformation was the question of the suppression of idolatry, as found in the mass and in images, and, in connection with that, the calling and duty of the magistrate. Because they believed God would judge the nation for idolatry, the law against idolatry became a strong motivation for the reformers' actions.

Idolatry and the law concerning the suppression of idolatry stood related to the duties of the magistrate and Knox's conception of the magistrate. God's judgments upon a disobedient nation, moreover, stood behind this issue. It is important to remember in this connection that during the second phase of the conflict between Mary, Queen of Scots and the reformers, idolatry had been outlawed by act of Parliament. The law abolishing idolatry had a twofold character. In the first place, it was the law of God, which stood above princes and human authority. Secondly, idolatry was illegal by act of Parliament from the time of the deposition of Mary of Guise as Regent.

It is from this perspective that we must consider Knox's view of the magistrate and the question of obedience to the higher powers. Knox conceived of the magistrate as an office. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1c). Thus, Knox can write, "All authority which God hath established, is good and perfect, and is to be obeyed of all men, yea under the pain of damnation."¹⁵ The function of this office of magistrate is to execute just judgment. The magistrate, whether that be the higher powers of the realm or the lower judicial officials, are under the law. Therein lies also the duty of the magistrate. The seat of judgment is principally the seat of Christ, who is King. The powers that be are, therefore, according to their office, a manifestation of God's majesty on earth. Thus, Knox writes,

The least of us knows better what obedience is due to a lawful authority, than she or her Council does practise the office of such as worthily may sit upon the seat of justice; for we offer, and we perform, all obedience which God has commanded; for we neither deny toll, tribute, honour, nor fear to her. nor to her officers. We only bridle her blind rage, in the which she would erect and maintain idolatry, and would murder our brethren who refuse the same. But she does utterly abuse the authority established by God: she profanes the throne of his Majesty in earth, making the seat of justice, which ought to be

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

the sanctuary and refuge of all godly and virtuous persons, unjustly afflicted, to be a den and receptacle to thieves, murderers, idolaters, whore-mongers, adulterers, and blasphemers of God and all godliness.¹⁶

Because the calling of the magistrate is to sit in judgment. and because of the failure of some to do so, Knox makes a distinction between the person and the office. Thus, he writes,

But do ye not understand, that there is a great difference betwix the authority which is God's ordinance, and the persons of those which are placed in authority? The authority and God's ordinance can never do wrong; for it commandeth, That vice and wicked men be punished, and virtue, with virtuous men and just, be maintained. But the corrupt person placed in this authority may offend, and most commonly doth the contrary hereof; and is then the corruption of the person to be followed, by reason that he is clad with the name of the authority? Or, shall those that obey the wicked commandment of those that are placed in authority be excusable before God? Not so; not so. But the plagues and vengeances of God taken upon kings, their servants, and subjects, do witness to us the contrary. Pharaoh was a king, and had his authority of God, who commanded his subjects to murder and torment the Israelites, and at last most cruelly to persecute their lives. But was their obedience (blind rage it should be called) excusable before God? The universal plague doth plainly declare that the wicked commander and those that obeyed, were alike guilty before God. And if the example of Pharaoh shall be rejected, because he was an ethnik, (editor's note, a Gentile, that is a heathen) then let us consider the facts of Saul; he was a king anointed of God, appointed to reign over his people; he commanded

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to persecute David, because (as he alleged) David was a traitor and usurper of the crown; and likewise commanded Ahimelech the High Priest and his fellows to be slain: But did God approve any part of this obedience? Evident it is that he did not. And think ye, that God will approve in you that which he did damn in others? Be not deceived: with God there is no such partiality. If ye obey the unjust commandments of wicked rulers. ye shall suffer God's vengeance and just punishment with them. And therefore as ye tender your own salvation, we most earnestly require of you moderation, and that ye stay yourselves, and the fury of others. from persecuting of us, till our cause be tried in lawful and open judgment.¹⁷

This distinction between person and office is fundamental to Knox's conception. It arises out of the dilemma of ungodly men holding the office of magistrate. Obedience to the person and obedience to the office must be distinguished. There are limits to the authority of the higher powers, and in transgressing those limits, the person holding office abrogates his own authority. To obey the evil commands of the magistrate is therefore sin.

The magistrate's calling is to promote the true religion and to suppress idolatry and superstition. The magistrate must fulfill both tables of the law. Thus, Knox writes to the nobility of Scotland,

... and God speaketh to your consciences (unless ye be dead with the blind world) that you ought to hazard your own lives (be it against kings or emperors) for their deliverance. For only for that cause are ye called Princes of the people, and ye receive of your brethren honour, tribute, and homage at God's commandment; not by reason of your birth and progeny (as the most part of men falsely do suppose), but by reason of your office and duty, which is to vindicate and deliver your subjects and brethren from all violence and oppression, to the uttermost of your power. Advise diligently, I

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

besech you, with the points of that letter, which I directed to the whole Nobility, and let every man apply the matter and case to himself; for your conscience shall one day be compelled to acknowledge that the reformation of religion, and of public enormities, doth appertain to more than to the Clergy. or chief rulers called Kings.¹⁸

This idea of office also comes to expression in *The Scottish Confession of Faith*.

CAP. XXXIV: OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

We Confess and acknowledge empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities to be distincted and ordained by God: the powers and authorities in the same (be it of Emperors in their empires, of Kings in their realms, Dukes and Princes in their dominions, or of other Magistrates in free cities), to be God's holy ordinance, ordained for manifestation of his own glory, and for the singular profit and commodity of mankind. So that whosoever goes about to take away or to confound the whole state of civil policies, now long established, we affirm the same men not only to be enemies to mankind, but also wickedly to fight against God's expressed will. We further Confess and acknowledge, that such persons as are placed in authority are to be loved, honoured, feared, and held in most reverent estimation; because (that) they are the lieutenants of God, in whose session God himself doth sit and judge (yea even the Judges and Princes themselves), to whom by God is given the sword, to the praise and defence of good men, and to revenge and punish all open malefactors. Moreover, to 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

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

appointed for civil policy, but also for maintenance of the true Religion, and for suppressing of idolatry and superstition whatsoever, as in David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others, highly commended for their zeal in that case, may be espied. And therefore we confess and avow, that such as resist the supreme power (doing that thing which appertains to his charge), do resist God's ordinance, and therefore cannot be guiltless. And further, we affirm, that whosoever deny unto them their aid, counsel, and comfort, while the Princes and Rulers vigilantly travail in the executing of their office, that the same men deny their help, support, and counsel to God, who by the presence of his lieutenant craveth it of them.¹⁹

The difficulty then arises when a prince or ruler fails to execute his office, promotes idolatry, fails to render judgment, but instead commits murder, persecutes the church of God, and violates the oath, all of which sins bring down upon the nation God's judgment. To this must be added the question of the relation between the higher and lower magistrates, since it was particularly the chief rulers in the nation who were corrupt, while the lower nobility and magistrates supported the Reformation. Both held the office of magistrate. Both were of "the powers that be" which are ordained of God. And so, the question which arose in the Scottish Reformation was in part, what was the calling of the lower magistrate when that calling conflicted with the sinful designs of the higher powers? In this connection, Knox deals with the question of what constituted sedition or rebellion against the powers that be. The following may illustrate the point at issue.

If it be seditious (for men) to speak the truth in all sobriety, and to complain when they are wounded, or to call for help against unjust tyranny before that their throats be cut, then can we not deny but we are criminal and guilty of tumult and sedition. For we have said that our commonwealth is oppressed. that we and our brethren are hurt by the tyranny of strangers, and that we fear bondage and slavery,

¹⁹ Knox, vol. II, p. 271.

seeing that multitudes of cruel murders are daily brought in our country, without our counsel, or knowledge and consent.²⁰

* * * * *

The principle which developed in the Scottish Reformation was that it pertained as much to the lower nobility and magistrate as to the higher to fulfill the calling of the magistrate and to reform religion. In this connection they served notice to the Queen Regent that her power was limited by God's Word and that they felt it their calling, as magistrates and as nobility of the realm, as well as citizens of the realm, to take up the sword, in the just defense of the innocent. They speak as follows:

Where that she says that it is no religion that we go about, but a plain usurpation of the Authority, God forbid that such impiety should enter into our hearts, that we should make his holy religion a cloak and coverture of our iniquity. From the beginning of this controversy, it is evidently known what have been our requests, which if the rest of the Nobility and community of Scotland will cause be performed unto us, if then any sign of rebellion appear in us, let us be reputed and punished as traitors. But while strangers are brought in to suppress us, our commonwealth, and posterity, while idolatry is maintained, and Christ Jesus his true religion despised, while idle bellies and bloody tyrants, the bishops, are maintained, and Christ's true messengers persecuted; while, finally, virtue is contemned, and vice extolled, while that we, a great part of the Nobility and commonalty of this realm, are most unjustly persecuted, what godly man can be offended that we shall seek reformation of these enormities (yea, even by force of arms, seeing that otherways it is denied unto us)? We are assured that neither God, neither nature, neither any just law, forbids us. God has made us councillors by birth of

²⁰ Knox, vol. I, p. 226.

this realm; nature binds us to love our own country; and just laws command us to support our brethren unjustly persecuted. Yea, the oath that we have made, to be true to this commonwealth, compels us to hazard whatsoever God has given us, before that we see the miserable ruin of the same. If any think this is not religion which now we seek, we answer, that it is nothing else but the zeal of the true religion which moves us to this enterprise: For as the enemy does craftily foresee that idolatry cannot be universally maintained, unless that we be utterly suppressed, so do we consider that the true religion (the purity whereof we only require) cannot be universally erected, unless strangers be removed, and this poor realm purged of these pestilances which before have infected it. And therefore, in the name of the eternal God, and of his Son Christ Jesus, whose cause we sustain, we require all our brethren, natural Scotsmen, prudently to consider our requests, and with judgment to discern betwix us and the Queen Regent and her faction, and not to suffer themselves to be abused by her craft and deceit, that either they shall lift their weapons against us their brethren, who seek nothing but God's glory, either yet that they extract from us their just and debtful support, seeing that we hazard our lives for preservation of them and us, and of our posterity to come ...²¹

For the nobility and magistrates to allow murder and persecution to occur under them, would be to abrogate their own office, and that they might not do before God. As councillors of the realm, they must enforce both tables of the law, even if that means opposition to the higher authority by them who are lower magistrates. The culmination of this process was found in the deposition of the Regent from her office by the nobility because she had abrogated her office. The grounds for that deposition are as follows:

²¹ Knox, vol. I, pp. 243-244.

The whole Nobility, Barons, and Burghs, then present, were commanded to convene in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh the same 21 day of October, for deliberation of these matters. Where the whole cause being expounded by the Lord Ruthven, the question was proponed, “Whether she that so contemptuously refused the most humble request of the born Councillors of the realm, being also but a Regent, whose pretences threatened the bondage of the whole commonwealth, ought to be suffered so tyrannously to empire above them?” And because that this question had not been before disputed in open assembly, it was thought expedient that the judgment of the Preachers should be required; who being called and instructed in the case, John Willock, who before had sustained the burden of the Church in Edinburgh, (being) commanded to speak, made discourse, as followeth, affirming:

“First, That albeit magistrates by God’s ordinance, having of him power and authority, yet is not their power so largely extended but that (it) is bounded and limited by God in his word.

“And Secondly, That as subjects are commanded to obey their magistrates, so are magistrates commanded to give some duty to the subjects; so that God, by his word, has prescribed the office of the one and of the other.

“Thirdly, That albeit God hath appointed magistrates his lieutenants on earth, and has honoured them with his own title, calling them gods, that yet He did never so establish any but that, for just causes, they might have been deprived.

“Fourthly, That in deposing of Princes, and those that had been in authority, God did not always use his immediate power; but sometimes He used other means which his wisdom thought good and justice

approved, as by Asa He removed Maachah, his own mother, from honour and authority, which before she had brooked (editor's note: possessed); by Jehu He destroyed Jehoram, and the whole posterity of Ahab; and by divers others He had deposed from authority those whom before He had established by his own word." And hereupon concluded he, "That since the Queen Regent denied her chief duty to the subjects of this realm, which was to minister justice unto them indifferently, to preserve their liberties from invasion of strangers, and to suffer them have God's word freely and openly preached amongst them; seeing, moreover, that the Queen Regent was an open and obstinate idolatress, a vehement maintainer of all superstition and idolatry; and finally, that she utterly despised the counsel and requests of the Nobility and Barons of the realm, might not justly deprive her from all regiment and authority amongst them."

Hereafter was the judgment of John Knox required who, approving the sentence of his Brother, added,

"First, That the iniquity of the Queen Regent and (her) disorder ought in nowise to withdraw neither our hearts, neither yet the hearts of other subjects, from the obedience due unto our Sovereigns.

"Secondly, That and if we deposed the said Queen Regent rather of malice and private envy than for the preservation of the commonwealth, and for that her sins appeared incurable, that we should not escape God's just punishment, howsoever that she had deserved rejection from honours.

"And Thirdly, He required that no such sentence should be pronounced against her, but that (it should allow), upon her known and open repentance, and upon her conversion to the commonwealth, and submission to the Nobility, place should be granted

unto her of regress to the same honours, from the which, for just causes, she justly might be deprived.”

The votes of every man particularly by himself required, and every man commanded to speak, as he would answer to God, what his conscience judged in that matter, there was none found, amongst the whole number, who did not, by his own tongue, consent to her deprivation.²²

Just as a minister, elder or deacon may be deposed from office by the church, through its officebearers, so the same principle was applied to the civil authority by the Scottish reformers. Thus, Mary of Guise was removed from office in the realm for her unrepentance, but with the provision for her restoration in the way of repentance.

In connection with the question of the role of the people in the suppression of idolatry, the reformers took the position that as idolatry was contrary to the law of God, it must be purged from the country, lest God’s judgment come upon the nation. If the nobles refuse to do this, then the people must.

In his reasoning with Lethington in 1564, Knox does not hesitate to say that it was the bounden duty “of the people of God” to arise and destroy idolatry “sparing ... neither man, woman, nor child ...”²³

It is in this way that Knox faces the whole question of rebellion against the powers that be, both by the lower magistrate and by the people. The person and office are to be distinguished. The person may be resisted and the ordinance of God not violated. In his debate with Lethington, Knox argues when Lethington asks him,

“How will ye prove your division and difference,” said Lethington, “and that the person placed in authority may be resisted, and God’s ordinance not transgressed, seeing that the Apostle

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 249-251.

²³ William Croft Dickinson, editor, *John Knox’s History of the Reformation in Scotland*, Introduction, vol. I, p. liii.

says, 'He that resists (the power), resisteth the ordinance of God.'"

"My Lord:" said he, "the plain words of the Apostle make the difference; and the facts of many approved by God prove my affirmative. First, the Apostle affirms, that the powers are ordained of God, for the preservation of quiet and peaceable men, and for the punishment of malefactors; whereof it is plain, That the ordinance of God, and the power given unto man, is one thing, and the person clad with the power or with the authority, is another; for God's ordinance is the conservation of mankind, the punishment of vice, the maintaining of virtue, which is in itself holy, just, constant, stable and perpetual. But men clad with the authority, are commonly profane and unjust; yea, they are mutable and transitory, and subject to corruption, as God threateneth them by his Prophet David, saying, 'I have said, Ye are gods, and every one of you the sons of the Most Highest; but ye shall die as men, and the Princes shall fall like others.' Here I am assured, that persons, the soul and body of wicked princes, are threatened with death. I think that such ye will not affirm is the authority, the ordinance and the power, wherewith God has endued such persons; for as I have said, as it is holy, so it is the permanent will of God. And now, my Lord, that the Prince may be resisted, and yet the ordinance of God not violated, it is evident; for the people resisted Saul, when he had sworn by the living God that Jonathan should die. The people (I say), swore in the contrary, and delivered Jonathan, so that one hair of his head fell not. Now, Saul was the anointed King, and they were his subjects, and yet they so resisted him that they made him no better than mansworn."

"I doubt," said Lethington, "if in so doing the people did well."

"The Spirit of God," said the other, "accuses them not of any crime, but rather praises them, and damns the King, as well for his foolish vow and law

made without God, as for his cruel mind that so severely would have punished an innocent man. But herein I shall not stand: this that follows shall confirm the former. This same Saul commanded Ahimelech and the Priests of the Lord to be slain, because they had committed treason, as he alleged, for intercommuning with David. His guard and principal servants would not obey his unjust commandment; but Doeg the flatterer put the King's cruelty to execution. I will not ask your judgment, Whether that the servants of the King, in not obeying his commandment, resisted God or not? Or whether Doeg, in murdering the Priests, gave obedience to a just authority? For I have the Spirit of God, speaking by the mouth of David, to assure me of the one as well as of the other; for he, in his 52nd Psalm, damns that fact as a most cruel murder, and affirms that God would punish, not only the commander, but the merciless executor. And therefore, I conclude, that they who gainstood his commandment, resisted not the ordinance of God.

“And now, my Lord, to answer to the place of the Apostle who affirms, ‘That such as resists the power, resists the ordinance of God’; I say, that the power in that place is not to be understood of the unjust commandment of men, but of the just power wherewith God has armed his Magistrates and Lieutenants to punish sin and maintain virtue. As if any man should enterprise to take from the hands of a lawful judge a murderer, an adulterer, or any other malefactor that by God's law deserved death, this same man resisted God's ordinance, and procured to himself vengeance and damnation, because that he stayed God's sword to strike. But so it is not, if that men in the fear of God oppose themselves to the fury and blind rage of princes; for so they resist not God, but the Devil, who abuses the sword and authority of God.”²⁴

²⁴ Knox, vol. II, pp. 117-118.

The question of the mass in particular became a focal point for this issue, as it was a matter of conscience for the Reformed party in Scotland. In the first place, they were faced with the question as to whether they could participate or submit themselves to those sacraments, and secondly, with the question as to their calling as Christian magistrates and citizens. Thus, we read of the Barons of Scotland as follows:

While that the Queen Regent practised with the Prelates how that Christ Jesus his blessed Evangel might utterly be suppressed within Scotland, God so blessed the labors of his weak servants, that no small part of the Barons of this Realm began to abhor the tyranny of the Bishops: God did so open their eyes by the light of his word, that they could clearly discern betwix idolatry and the true honouring of God. Yea, men almost universally began to doubt whether that they might (God not offended) give their bodily presence to the Mass, or yet offer their children to the papistical baptism. To the which doubts, when the most godly and the most learned in Europe had answered, both by word and writ, affirming, "That neither of both we might do, without the extreme peril of our souls," we began to be more troubled; for then also began men of estimation and that bare rule among us, to examine themselves concerning their duties, as well towards Reformation of Religion, as towards the just defence of their brethren most cruelly persecuted. And so began divers questions to be moved, to wit, "If that with safe conscience such as were judges, lords, and rulers of the people, might serve the upper powers in maintaining idolatry, in persecuting their brethren, and in suppressing Christ's truth?" Or, "Whether they, to whom God in some cases had committed the sword of justice, might suffer the blood of their brethren to be shed in their presence, without any declaration that such tyranny displeased them?" By the plain Scriptures it was found, "That a lively faith required a plain confession, when Christ's truth is

oppugned; that not only are they guilty that do evil, but also they that assent to evil.²⁵ And plain it is, that they assent to evil who, seeing iniquity openly committed, by their silence seem to justify and allow whatsoever is done.²⁵

Knox's position on the resistance to the higher powers and the duties of Christian citizens shows a certain variation from the views of the other reformers on this subject. In his debate with Lethington, Lethington reads to Knox the judgments of the most famous men of Europe regarding the question of submission to the magistrate. Knox describes the incident and his response:

And with that he called for his papers, which produced by Mr. Robert Maitland, he began to read with great gravity the judgments of Luther, Melanchthon, (and) the minds of Bucer, Musculus, and Calvin, how Christians should behave themselves in time of persecution; yea, the Book of Baruch was not omitted with this conclusion. "The gathering of these things," said he, "has cost more travail than I took these seven years in reading of any commentaries."

"The more pity," said the other, "and yet, what ye have profited your own cause, let others judge. But as for my argument, I am assured, ye have infirmed it nothing; for your first two witnesses speak against the Anabaptists. who deny that Christians should be subject to magistrates, or yet that (it) is lawful for a Christian to be a magistrate; which opinion I no less abhor than ye do, or any other that lives do. The others speak of Christians, subject unto tyrants and infidels, so dispersed that they have no other force but only to sob to God for deliverance. That such indeed should hazard any further than these godly men will them, I cannot hastily be of counsel. But my argument has another ground; for I speak of the people assembled together

²⁵ Knox, vol. I, p. 147.

in one body of a Commonwealth, unto whom God has given sufficient force, not only to resist, but also to suppress all kind of open idolatry: and such a people yet again I affirm, are bound to keep their land clean and unpolluted. And that this my division shall not appear strange unto you, ye shall understand that God required one thing of Abraham and of his seed when he and they were strangers and pilgrims in Egypt and Canaan; and another thing required he of them when they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and the possession of the land of Canaan (was) granted unto them. At the first. and during all the time of their bondage, God craved no more but that Abraham should not defile himself with idolatry. Neither was he, nor yet his posterity commanded to destroy the idols that were in Canaan or in Egypt. But when God gave unto them the possession of the land, he gave unto them this strait commandment, “Beware that you make league or confederacy with the inhabitants of this land: give not thy sons unto their daughters. nor yet give thy daughters unto their sons. But this shall ye do unto them, cut down their groves, destroy their images, break down their altars. and leave thou no kind of remembrance of those abominations which the inhabitants of the land used before: for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God. Defile not thyself, therefore, with their gods.”

“To this same commandment, I say, are ye, my Lords, and all such as have professed the Lord Jesus within this realm, bound. For God has wrought no less miracle upon you, both spiritual and corporal, than he did unto the carnal seed of Abraham. For in what estate your bodies and this poor Realm were, within these seven years, yourselves cannot be ignorant ...²⁶

²⁶ Knox, vol. II, pp. 121-122.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it is also evident that Knox's conception of the magistrate was intimately connected with his Old Testament hermeneutic. Knox proceeded from a particular exegetical viewpoint, which not only identified Israel and the church, but identified the *kingdom of Israel* with the *kingdom of Scotland*. His arguments for the conduct of the nobility and for the resistance of citizens against the unjust acts of rulers, were largely developed from Old Testament examples, and were applied directly to the state in the new dispensation. With regard to the apostles and prophets on the subject of submission to the magistrate, Knox and Lethington had the following exchange:

Lethington said, "In that point we will never agree; and where find ye, I pray you, that ever any of the Prophets or of the Apostles taught such a doctrine that the people should be plagued for the idolatry of the Prince; or yet, that the subjects might suppress the idolatry of their rulers, or punish them for the same?"

"What was the commission given to the Apostles," said he, "my Lord, we know: it was to preach and plant the Evangel of Jesus Christ, where darkness afore have dominion; and therefore it behoved them, first, to let them see the light before that they should will them to put to their hands to suppress idolatry. What precepts the Apostles gave unto the faithful in particular, other than that they commanded all to flee from idolatry, I will not affirm: But I find two things which the faithful did: the one was, they assisted their preachers, even against the rulers and magistrates; the other was, they suppressed idolatry wheresoever God gave unto them force, asking no leave at the Emperour, nor of his deputies. Read the ecclesiastical history, and ye shall find examples sufficient. And as to the doctrine of the Prophets, we know were interpreters of the law of God; and we know they spake as well to the kings as to the people. I read that neither of both would hear them; and therefore came the plague of God upon both. But that they more flattered kings than that they did the people, I cannot be persuaded.

Now, God's laws pronounce death, as before I have said, to idolaters without exception of any person. Now, how the Prophets could rightly interpret the law, and how the causes of God's judgments, which ever they threatened should follow idolatry, and (the) rest of (the) abominations that accompany it (for it is never alone; but still corrupt religion brings with it a filthy and corrupt life), how, I say, the Prophets could reprove the vices, and not show the people their duty, I understand not. And therefore I constantly believe that the doctrine of the Prophets was so sensible, that the kings understood their own abominations, and the people understood what they ought to have done, in punishing and repressing them. But because that the most part of the people were no less rebellious unto God than were their princes, therefore the one and the other convened against God and against his servants. And yet, my Lord, the facts of some Prophets are so evident, that thereof we may collect what doctrine they taught; for it were no small absurdity to affirm that their facts should repugn to their doctrine.²⁷

Knox then proceeded to argue with Lethington from the examples of the prophets and the anointing of Jehu. He argues from the binding character of Old Testament Scripture, from the conspiracy against Amaziah in connection with Joash, from Uzziah's attempt to offer sacrifice in the temple and the priests withstanding him. Earlier, Knox had cited the incident of Saul's oath and Jonathan's eating of honey in which the people resisted Saul, and in connection with Saul's command to kill Ahimelech and the priests for aiding David, as well as the history of Jeremiah. Knox's conclusion of the matter, he expressed thus to Lethington:

“Albeit ye cannot ... yet I am assured what I have proven, to wit:

“1. That subjects have delivered an innocent from the hands of their king, and therein offended not God.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

“2. That subjects have refused to strike innocents when a king commanded, and in so doing denied no just obedience.

“3. That such as struck at the commandment of the king, before God were reputed murderers.

“4. That God has not only of a subject made a king, but also has armed subjects against their natural kings, and commanded them to take vengeance upon them according to his law.

“And last, That God’s people have executed God’s law against their king, having no further regard to him in that behalf than if he had been the most simple subject within this Realm.

“And therefore, albeit ye will not understand what should be concluded, yet I am assured that not only God’s people may, but also that they are bound to do the same where the like crimes are committed, and when he gives unto them the like power.”²⁸

Knox’s basis for his position is exegetical. It is this same perspective which shaped his conception of his calling as a minister of the word. It is important to note this, moreover because many writers on this subject seem to miss this point. Thus, one writer, in commenting on Knox’s background, states:

At the University of Glasgow ... he (Knox) had among his teachers John Mair, or Major, who had been in the University of Paris, and had brought home with him the Gallican theory of church government, together with radical opinions upon the right of revolution, and the derivation of kingly authority from popular consent. Major had also imbibed the opinion of the ancients that tyrannicide is a virtue. He was not an able man; yet he may have contributed somewhat to the development of kindred opinions in the mind of Knox.²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁹ George P. Fisher, *The Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1873), p. 354, quoting McCrie’s *Life of Knox*, 6th edition, 1839, p. 30.

In the light of the evidence presented and Knox's consistent biblical argumentation, this conjecture must be considered doubtful. Another writer, describing the interviews between Mary Queen of Scots and Knox, writes:

What makes these interviews stand forth in history is that they exhibit the first clash of autocratic kingship and the hitherto unknown power of the people ... "What have ye to do" said she, "with my marriage? Or what are ye within this Commounwealth?" "A subject borne within the same," said he, "Madam. And albeit I neather be Erie, Lord, nor Barroun within it, yitt hes God maid me (How abject that ever I be in your eyes) a profitable member within the same."

Modern democracy came into being in that answer. It is curious to see how this conflict between autocratic power and the civil and religious rights of the people runs through all the interviews between Mary and Knox, and was, in truth, the question of questions between them.³⁰

This understanding of Knox's position is not correct, as Knox proceeded to make plain to the Queen in the interview in question. To the Queen's question, "What have ye to do with my marriage?" Knox responded as indicated above, but he also said,

"Yea, Madam, to me it appertains no less to forewarn of such things as may hurt it, if I foresee them, than it does to any of the Nobility; for both my vocation and conscience crave plainness of me. And therefore, Madam, to yourself I say that which I speak in public place: Whensoever that the Nobility of this Realm shall consent that ye be subject to an unfaithful husband, they do as much as in them lieth to renounce Christ, to banish his truth from them, to betray the freedom of this realm, and

³⁰ Thomas M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 313-314.

perchance shall in the end do small comfort to yourself.”³¹

The point at issue in the discussion was not John Knox’s place as a citizen, but the fact that he was a minister of the gospel, and was called as a minister to warn and admonish. The church has a certain calling in relationship to the state. Knox conceived of that calling as including in the office of minister, the obligation not only to pray for the magistrate, and to exhort the people to be obedient to the magistrate, but also to be to exhort the magistrate as to his duty before God. The marriage which was being proposed was that of Mary Queen of Scots to the King of Spain, a Roman Catholic. The concern of Knox was that, in the first place, a wife must be in subjection to her husband, and secondly, that the potential husband in question would be an idolater, and would therefore bring the nation and the church into bondage to the papacy again. The perspective of Burleigh is more correct:

It would be an anachronism to interpret this as the voice of democracy. It was the voice of the preacher conscious of his vocation “to speak plainly and to flatter no flesh.”³²

As is that of Henderson, in the *Burning Bush*, a collection of essays on Scottish church history.

He (Knox) had not himself much respect for mobs, and was no democrat in any modern sense of the word; but both in his later writings and in his speeches to Mary Queen of Scots he made clear his conviction that a monarch who proves unworthy may be deposed, and that rulers should be open to censure for their sins like anyone else.³³

Knox conceived of his ministerial office in the following terms which he declared to Queen Mary:

³¹ Knox, vol. II, p. 83.

³² J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 185.

³³ G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957), p. 120.

“If it please your Majesty,” said he, “patiently to hear me, I shall show the truth in plain words. I grant your Grace offered unto me more than ever I required; but my answer was then, as it is now, that God hath not sent me to await upon the courts of Princesses, nor upon the chambers of Ladies; but I am sent to preach the Evangel of Jesus Christ to such as please to hear it; and it hath two parts, Repentance and Faith. And now, Madam, in preaching repentance, of necessity it is that the sins of men be so noted that they may know wherein they offend; but so it is that the most part of your Nobility are so addicted to your affections, that neither God’s word, nor yet their Commonwealth, are rightly regarded. And therefore it becomes me so to speak, that they may know their duty.³⁴”

Knox conceived of the minister’s calling to be like that of the Old Testament prophets. He was a prophet. As such he must, like the prophets of old, admonish those in authority. He, in several places, cites the examples of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, to prove his point. And again, we see Knox’s Old Testament idea influencing the way in which he shaped his calling as a prophet.

This leads to the question of the broader relation of the church and the state which stood as a contributing factor to the problem of the magistrate and which was partly shaped by the foregoing, the two factors interacting upon each other. The precise relation between the church and state during the time of Knox took on the character of two separate spheres, each with duties and responsibilities to the other. The state must promote the true religion and suppress idolatry. And the church must support the state, admonish subjects to be in subjection to the powers that be, in so far as that does not violate God’s law, but it must also admonish rulers as to their duties and calling in the office of magistrate, and that publicly and from the pulpit. Thus, the nobility who sat in church must have the word of God applied to them. Both the church and state are subject to the law of God. The exact relationship between church and state was not precisely defined. Speaking of *The Confession of Faith*, one writer comments,

³⁴ Knox, vol. II, pp. 82-83.

But indeed not only were the relations of the civil magistrate to the Church in Scotland postponed and subordinated to the more immediate claims and more absolute authority of “truth” ... but at this early stage these relations were almost wholly ignored, even in the Confession itself, while the magistrate’s relation to truth is made more emphatic and express.³⁵

Gordon Donaldson, in commenting on the relation of church and state, writes,

But the circumstances and the outlook of the sixteenth century were quite different. Church and nation were then coterminous: each consisted of the same people; each was coextensive with the whole population; church and state were but different aspects of one and the same society. From this identity it was a logical inference that the magistracy which exercised authority in the state should exercise authority in the church as well ... Leaving theory aside, it was only with the help of the crown that papal authority could be abrogated and the papacy superseded, and only with the help of the crown could the existing bishops and other holders of church property and offices be brought either to accept the reformation or to relinquish their benefices to those who would ... It is hard to find any writer of the period who would have restricted the magistrate to this negative activity and denied to him the further, positive duty of maintaining the church reformed constraining his subjects to submit to its discipline and exercising a general oversight of its life.³⁶

³⁵ A. Taylor Innes, *The Law of Creeds in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1902), p. 11.

³⁶ Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 131-132.

This is true within certain limits. The reason for the overlapping in authority of the church and state was primarily to be found in the question of the temporal needs of the church. The church must have freedom to worship and assemble. The ministers must be supported. It is particularly in the question of the temporal support of the ministers that much conflict arose between the Queen and the church. The reformers felt that it was the state's calling to provide the financial support for the ministers. This went back to the practice of the middle ages in which prelates and bishops possessed lands over which they exercised civil dominion, and from which they received income. Those lands, Queen Mary appropriated to herself upon her return from France and bestowed them upon her Roman Catholic favorites. As these lands and benefices were for the purpose of supporting the clergy, the reformers objected to this on two grounds: the first was that the people holding these benefices claimed to themselves the title of bishop, and upon that title based their right to hold those lands, but in fact, they were not pastors of God's flock. They fulfilled nothing of the office of a bishop. They did no work of the ministry. The reformers, therefore, argued that the money which was intended to support the ministers should not go to Mary's favorites, but to those who properly fulfilled the calling of a minister. The second objection made was that this money was also being used to finance the crown, and that the crown was using it for its own entertainment, in the way of worldly amusements, particularly dancing and parties. Further it was the duty of the crown to care for the poor, which calling was being neglected. Repeatedly, the assemblies of the church sent protests and petitions to the crown concerning this matter with little or no result. Further, adding insult to injury, the crown nominated people to these holdings who were unfit for office. These unfit persons were not tolerated by the church nor were they allowed to function in any office in the church. The result was an impasse, which was never resolved during the reign of Mary. Thus, one author writes,

Thus, even parochial benefices, benefices traditionally involving the care of souls, were being distributed, (by the crown) mainly to lay titulars without any ecclesiastical control over appointment. Crown action in this particular showed hardly any indication that the existence of the reformed church was so much as acknowledged.

This trend towards secularisation did not go without challenge from the general assembly. In 1562 it petitioned that "persons to be nominated to

kirks” were not to be admitted without the “nomination of the people and due examination and admission of the superintendent.” ... But the assembly’s requests were not acceptable to the crown, and it remained the law that, while superintendents could admit to pastoral charges, they had no authority to give collation to benefices. There was, indeed, something of an impasse: ... while the patron could have his nominee put into possession of the fruits of a benefice, he could not have him invested with the spiritual responsibilities properly pertaining to the office.³⁷

Thus, while it is true to some extent, that ultimately Presbyterianism was established as the state religion in Scotland, nevertheless, the authority of the magistrate over the church was largely limited to temporal matters in the time of Knox, such as financing and benefices, and to the suppression of idolatry. Within its own sphere, the church of Scotland developed its own discipline, even deposing a minister for adultery in one instance.

Another factor influencing the situation was that, while *The Confession of Faith* had been approved by Parliament, the *Book of Discipline*, that is, the church order, had not.

But with this, the very first General Assembly and its work, commenced the long and fated question of Church independence. By it the Book of Discipline of the Church was “examined, allowed, and approved,” and then, like the doctrinal confession a few months before, presented to the nobility, but with a different result. The Council from the first refused to sanction it; and when the queen returned shortly after, it became hopeless to expect that this could be obtained.

The result was remarkable, and throws the strongest light upon the interesting period between 1560 and 1567, when there was a creed of Scotland established but no Church of Scotland established. The Book of Discipline being rejected by the State,

³⁷ Donaldson, pp. 150-151.

the Church itself approved ... this scheme of its polity; and it instantly proceeded to carry it into execution, so far as all matters within its own control were concerned. The General Assembly continued to meet by the authority of the Church itself, and year by year laid the deep foundations of the social and religious future of Scotland ... During all this time the records of the first fifteen General Assemblies, preserved in the book of the Universal Kirk, show abundantly that the Church did not shrink from exercising all judicial and administrative and legislative—in short, all conceivable—functions of a Church; while for all civil objects and results that her unaided powers ... failed to attain, she constantly and clamorously appealed to the State, which for the time refused to hear.³⁸

The effect of this situation in Scotland was that to a large extent, the reformed church that took root there, did so apart from the state, though not disconnected from it altogether. The result is that while a state church can be said to have developed in Scotland, the internal ecclesiastical control of the life of the church was, during the reign of Mary, firmly rooted in the hands of the ministers, the General Assembly, and the superintendents. Thus, while the General Assembly did indeed include laymen and nobles, nevertheless, the nobles did not totally dominate. Furthermore, while the church in Scotland acknowledged the temporal powers' authority in things ecclesiastical and temporal, yet because of the conflict with the rulers, that authority neither developed to the point of, nor took on the character of, that of England.

Thus, it was particularly the question of the place and authority of the magistrate in relation to the church and the calling of Christian citizens and magistrates, which shaped the Scottish Reformation and gave it its peculiar character.

The issues which are raised by it concerning the magistrate are of abiding significance. Our own *Belgic Confession* takes the view that the magistrate is an office ordained by God and circumscribed by His Word. It is also evident from Article 36 of that confession, and the footnote attached to it, that it is the Reformed view that the magistrate, in his own sphere, has a duty both to the first as well as the second table of the law.

³⁸ Innes, pp. 19-21.

There are, however, certain features of Knox's approach which are worthy of evaluation. This is particularly true of his conception of the relation between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Scotland. Knox, in his use of the Old Testament, fails to clearly distinguish between the Old and New Testament economies. The Old Testament was the time of types and shadows. Though Israel and the church form an organic unity, yet, due to the administration of the Old Testament economy, Israel is also *typical*. This means that the civil legislation was the expression, first of all, of a *spiritual* principle, and may not be imported directly into the new dispensation and applied to the state.

The law concerning idolatry may serve as a case in point. In the Old Testament the idolater was to be put to death. By his death he was removed from the people of God and the kingdom of Israel; he was cut off from Canaan, the land of the living. Thus, in a concrete way, God revealed that such a person was cut off from the heavenly land of Canaan, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Putting the idolater to death was, therefore, under the Old Testament economy, an *exercise of the keys of the kingdom*. Its counterpart in the New Testament economy is *excommunication* and the use of the key power in the church. Its New Testament application is, first of all, to the church and to the spiritual kingdom of God, and not to the state.

It is in harmony also with the typical character of the Old Testament economy that we are to understand God's chastisements and judgments upon the nation of Israel. They were accompanied by the Word of God through direct revelation. Knox fails to carefully distinguish between this and God's temporal judgments and chastisements in the new dispensation. In the Old Testament they had a *typical* dimension, were *revelatory* in character and purpose, and were connected with the revelation and realization of the wonder of grace in Christ.

That Knox fails to make a clear distinction between the Old and New Testament economies lies partly in the historical circumstances under which he labored. Church and state were so intertwined at the time of the Reformation that it was difficult and often impossible to draw a clear distinction between them. Moreover, while the civil legislation of Israel may not be carried over directly to the state in the new dispensation, but speaks first of all spiritually to the church, nevertheless, imbedded in that legislation are certain sound principles which have application to the proper conduct of the state and the exercise of the office of magistrate.

Nor may Knox's examples from the Old Testament concerning lawful resistance to "the powers that be" be rejected out of hand as irrelevant to the situation in Scotland. Behind most of them lies the biblical principle of

obeying God rather than men. The same thing is true concerning his distinction between the person and the office. The ordinance of God is good, and the office of the magistrate is designed for the temporal welfare of the church, that the people of God may live quiet and peaceable lives. The office of magistrate is therefore good, not only in the absolute sense that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” but also from the viewpoint of God’s design that the welfare of the church of Christ might be promoted. In this sense Knox is correct that when wicked men occupy that office, they abuse it, and pervert it in the service of sin so that in some sense, the person who holds the office and the office as such must be distinguished. Yet at times Knox carries this distinction too far so that the principle of submission to the higher authority is somewhat neutralized. In Knox’s defense, one must remember that the whole problem of submission versus resistance to the higher power must be placed in the context of the particular problems of the Scottish Reformation, of the duties and relation of the higher and lower magistrates. Both higher and lower magistrates had essentially the same calling and the wicked purposes of the one often stood in conflict with the calling of the other.

The problem thus becomes a question of when submission to evil rulers becomes participation in their evil deeds. And, when is one called to resist out of the principle of obeying God rather than men? The confusion between the Old and New Testament economies and the identification of the kingdom of Israel sometimes with the church of Scotland (and sometimes with the kingdom of Scotland) add to the complexity, particularly as there was at the time of the Reformation no clear distinction between church and state.

Thus, the Scottish Reformation gives a clear historical example of the difficulties involved in applying the Reformed principle that the state has duties towards both tables of the law. It further illustrates the problem of determining what the limits of the power given to the state in connection with the relation of church and state are. And, moreover, it confronts us with the question of how and when the principle of obeying God rather than men may be invoked, with the question of what is lawful submission to the powers that be, and what is not, and with the question of what constitutes sinful rebellion.

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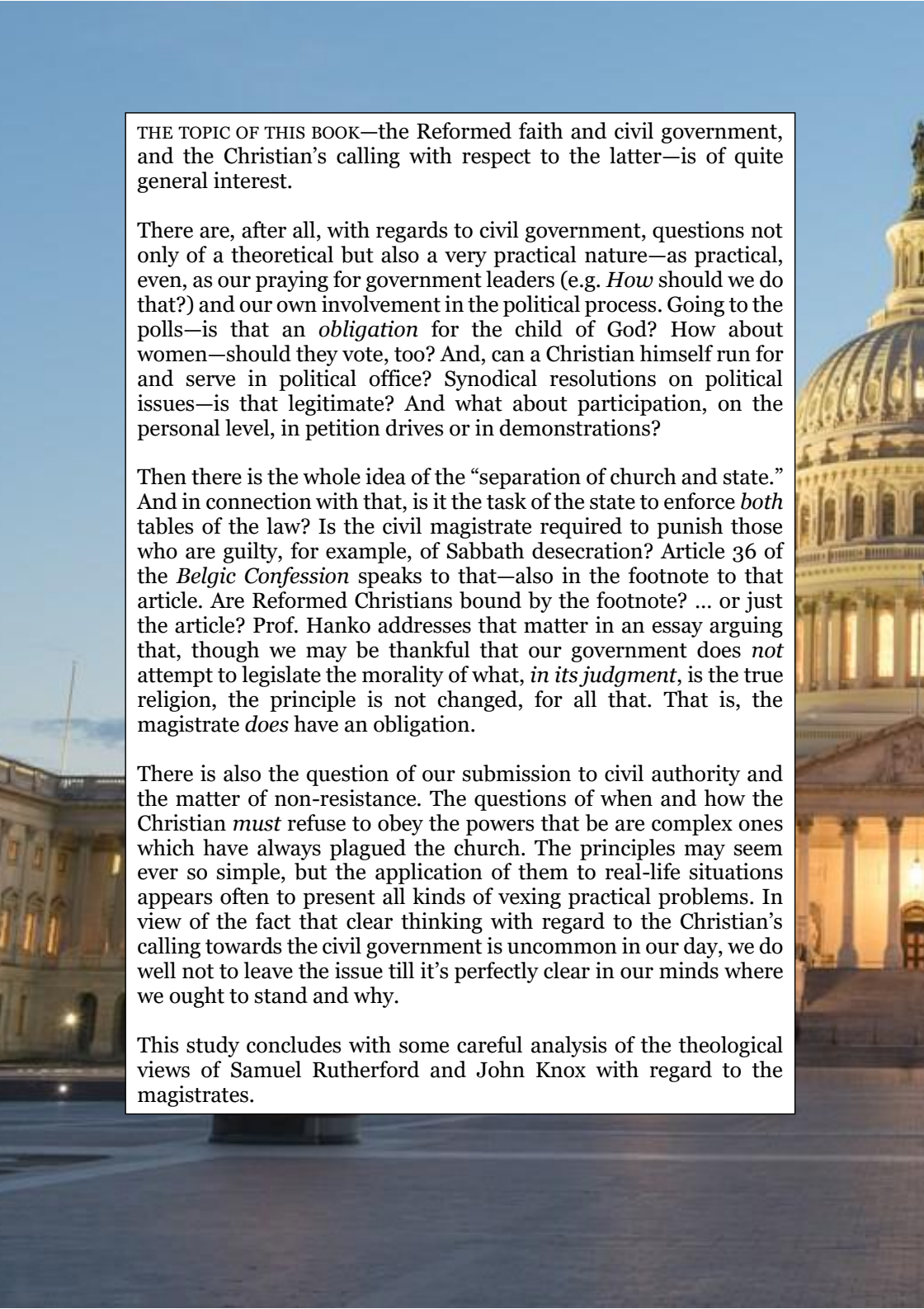
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THE TOPIC OF THIS BOOK—the Reformed faith and civil government, and the Christian’s calling with respect to the latter—is of quite general interest.

There are, after all, with regards to civil government, questions not only of a theoretical but also a very practical nature—as practical, even, as our praying for government leaders (e.g. *How* should we do that?) and our own involvement in the political process. Going to the polls—is that an *obligation* for the child of God? How about women—should they vote, too? And, can a Christian himself run for and serve in political office? Synodical resolutions on political issues—is that legitimate? And what about participation, on the personal level, in petition drives or in demonstrations?

Then there is the whole idea of the “separation of church and state.” And in connection with that, is it the task of the state to enforce *both* tables of the law? Is the civil magistrate required to punish those who are guilty, for example, of Sabbath desecration? Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* speaks to that—also in the footnote to that article. Are Reformed Christians bound by the footnote? ... or just the article? Prof. Hanko addresses that matter in an essay arguing that, though we may be thankful that our government does *not* attempt to legislate the morality of what, *in its judgment*, is the true religion, the principle is not changed, for all that. That is, the magistrate *does* have an obligation.

There is also the question of our submission to civil authority and the matter of non-resistance. The questions of when and how the Christian *must* refuse to obey the powers that be are complex ones which have always plagued the church. The principles may seem ever so simple, but the application of them to real-life situations appears often to present all kinds of vexing practical problems. In view of the fact that clear thinking with regard to the Christian’s calling towards the civil government is uncommon in our day, we do well not to leave the issue till it’s perfectly clear in our minds where we ought to stand and why.

This study concludes with some careful analysis of the theological views of Samuel Rutherford and John Knox with regard to the magistrates.