

# THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF THE STATE

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND RELEVANT BACKGROUND

The problem of the interrelationship between church and state has concerned Christian thinkers since the beginning of the Christian era. Today it is one of the most crucial issues of contemporary Christian thought on both the international and national levels. On the international level looms not only the paralyzing fear of atomic extinction, but an even greater danger from the erosion of the political institutions and ideals that have characterized the Western democratic societies. While on the more directly national level, recent Supreme Court decisions concerning prayer in the public schools has brought the Church-State relationship to the forefront of public interest and political dialogue.

As we approach the New Testament literature to assist in some manner in the delineation of a Christian political and social philosophy, we must be careful not to become guilty of finding a one-to-one correspondence between the holy text and our present situation. We must not see only one possible Christian form of the state, for there is no structure totally good or bad *a priori*—only the situation decides.<sup>1</sup> We must not only recognize but accept the fact of a wide sociological distance between ourselves and the sacred writers. Despite this great gap in the prevailing life styles and political structures of the first and twentieth centuries, the basic concepts and foundational principles concerning the relationship of Christ and Caesar are as relevant today as when they were first written. In reality the issue of church and state lies near the center of Christian theology. The very mention of Pontius Pilate in the Apostle's Creed is a continuing reminder of this fact. If we were to translate the superscription on the cross we would find that Jesus was executed as a Roman criminal while simultaneously, from the New Testament perspective, being in some manner a means of atonement and reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

The state may be looked at in various ways. Brunner distinguishes three elements in every state:

- 1) the realization of *community*, in accordance with the divine creative purpose;

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1. Niebuhr writes that "there are traditional non-democratic Christian cultures to the right of free societies which prove that the Christian faith does not inevitably yield democratic historical fruits. And there are totalitarian regimes to the left of free societies which prove that secular doctrine can under certain circumstances, furnish grist for the mills of modern tyrannies." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 95-90.
2. John 3:16; Romans 5:1, 8-11; II Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians 1:4; I Peter 2:24; 3:18.

2) a *disciplinary order*, which creates a kind of community by forcible means, and forms the necessary basis and the harsh framework of civilized life;

3) and an illegitimate, unjust, merely factual selfish, grasping, almost daemonic *exercise of power*.<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament record refers to all three of these aspects of the state, be it from the lips of Jesus, the pen of Paul, or the visions of John. However, the entire Biblical witness of the two testaments concerning the state is not entirely consonant. The Old Testament primarily identifies the church and state as one; the New Testament finds a dualistic tension between the Kingdom of God and the realm of Caesar. Since this investigation was principally concerned with the analysis and exegesis of New Testament teaching in regard to the state, only a succinct presentation of Old Testament conceptions was possible.

From the beginnings of the nation with the patriarch Abraham to the Zealots of Christ's time, Israel expected a kingdom of great material wealth by which she would rule over the nations. Bultmann writes:

In its traditional form the hope of Israel was nationalistic in character. It looked for a restoration of the Davidic kingdom under a Davidic King, the 'Messiah.'<sup>4</sup>

Though this Messiah perhaps could not be identified with God, nevertheless, it was the rule of God under God's law, in other words—a theocracy.

This Jewish concept was not totally futuristic or eschatological, however, for even in some of the earliest literature God was seen as Israel's king.<sup>5</sup> The Scriptural writer interprets the desire for a human king, in this case Saul, as a proof of the sin and waywardness of the people. Long prior to the writings of Isaiah (both precedent and subsequent to the fall of Samaria), or the wailings and lamentations of Jeremiah over the destruction of Jerusalem, the hope of the rule of God among men was not only promised but proclaimed.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps such passages from their sacred writings inspired the Zealots to a definite physical programme, although Jesus consistently refused, *infra* p. 208, to identify his kingdom with a physical state.

This conception of a Chosen People in a religio-political matrix may be thought of as extending to New Testament thought when Paul identifies the Church as the New Israel of God.<sup>7</sup> This view was particularly

3. Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 446.

4. Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity* trans. R. H. Fuller (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 81.

5. I Samuel 12:12.

6. II Sameul 7:11-16.

7. Galatians 5:16.

attractive after the Church acquired wealth and prestige equal to and often even exceeding the secular state. This practical coalescence is seen today in Roman Catholic countries, e.g. Spain and various South and Central American nations. This formulation, however, would appear to be a dialectical relationship to the dualistic tension seen in both Jesus and Paul, and probably John. To this we now turn, but first the eschatological milieu of the early Christian community must be tersely emphasized, and the political climate of New Testament times must be elucidated.

*Eschatological milieu.* For over a century prior to the birth of Jesus, Jewish nationalism had been expressed by apocalyptic writing. The unsatisfactory pawn relationship of the Jewish commonwealth to a foreign state had previously been attacked by the Maccabees, now less successfully by the Zealots. Throughout this period of political tension non-canonical writings appeared which conveyed, by means of symbols, etc., the promise of the eventual triumph of good over evil, and the hope of an independent restored Israel. Out of this eschatological milieu evolved the preaching of Jesus controlled by an imminent expectation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' eschatological preaching deviated from the nationalistic inclinations of Jewish apocalyptic writers. Only a few apocalyptic specifications appear in his teaching. Rather universal cosmic hopes such as resurrection and redemption, not to mention judgment, are the center of his preaching. As Bultmann says, even "these elements are absorbed in the single all-embracing thought that God will then reign."<sup>8</sup> Probably Mark best summarizes Jesus message when he records Jesus' words as "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."<sup>9</sup>

This futuristic orientation was taken over by the early church with a slightly different twist. Instead of expecting the impending reign of God, they eagerly anticipated the imminent return of Jesus as the Messiah on the clouds of heaven bringing judgment and salvation.<sup>10</sup> Prompting Bultmann to write that "Jesus proclaimed the message. The Church proclaimed him."<sup>11</sup>

There are two ways in which one may look at the early church: first, as an historical phenomenon subject to historical, sociological and psychological interpretation and laws; secondly, as an eschatological congregation guided by the Spirit and self-understanding.<sup>12</sup> In no way must these be thought of as mutually exclusive and contradictory, since a regulative tradition is a natural result of a charismatic word. The primary feature of this written guidance being a separation from the temporal

8. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

9. Mark 1:15.

10. So much so, that Paul had to admonish his Thessalonica converts to be industrious as they patiently waited for Christ's return, II Thessalonians 3:5-15.

11. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

12. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), II, 96ff.

and mundane things of the world, e.g. II Corinthians 6:14-18. The very designation of a distinct people by such terms as "chosen," "elect," and "saints" were in one sense eschatological titles. The Church, the Body of Christ, was looked upon as a vestibule to the reign of God that was shortly to appear in the person of Christ. This return of Christ was not only an eschatological occurrence, but the ultimate salvational occurrence of redemption. As Bultmann succinctly states:

The *ecclesia* is just as ambiguous a phenomenon as the cross of Christ: visible as a worldly fact, invisible—yet to the eye of faith also visible—as a thing of the world to come.<sup>13</sup>

For as Paul wrote, the Christian's citizenship was in heaven. Or as the writer of the book of Hebrews put it, "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."<sup>14</sup>

It was no doubt this rather aloof attitude toward the present realm that prevented a concise crystallization of a Christian doctrine of the state. If this life was truly only a place of pilgrimage, then surely the Christian must not become overly involved and entailed with a mere temporal manifestation. The imminent rapture of the church made the early Christians look upward rather than outward.<sup>15</sup> Thus, although this eschatological orientation became modified with the passing of time as evidenced by later New Testament writings, e.g. Hebrews 10:16-39 and II Peter 3:4-9, one cannot attempt a delineation of any New Testament doctrine without keeping this orientation ever before him, and this is especially so in regard to New Testament teaching, or lack of it, concerning the state.

*Political climate.* As in any century, the political climate, of either Palestine or the entire Roman Empire, was neither static nor uniform. Thus when we speak of the political milieu of the New Testament we must recognize three distinct political postures, coincidentally coinciding with the first three Christian "political theorists"—Jesus, Paul, and John.

Jesus' ministry was in a nation on the verge of revolution against her foreign governmental masters. Therefore Jesus walked a tightrope as he attempted to handle the delicate task of defining a position between submission to Roman authorities and outright rebellion. To side with Rome would mean the loss of much of his popular following; to side with the Zealots would mean the loss of his personal freedom, if not his life. He himself apparently had no immediate fear of political power—witness his rather derogatory reference to Herod and his trial before Pilate.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, this animosity between Jewish nationalism and Roman

13. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, I p. 308.

14. Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 13:14.

15. This was negatively conceived by Roman authorities who associated all sorts of crimes to the withdrawal of the early Christians from the world to their own exclusive called-out communities.

16. Luke 13:32; John 18:33-38.

sovereignty constantly infringed upon his teaching ministry and public acceptance. It was this tension between the two realms of Caesar and God which prompted Christ's most familiar dictum concerning church-state relations. Regardless of his recognition of a proper sphere to the temporal governmental realm of Rome, he was still executed under the pretense of refusing to pay taxes and thus inciting political turmoil and rebellion.<sup>17</sup>

Paul did not work, write, or minister in such a dichotomous environment, if for no other reason than the fact that he was seldom in Palestine. Rather he used the Hellenistic synthesis to his advantage in his travels as the "apostle to the Gentiles," often invoking his status as a Roman citizen for protection, e.g., Acts 16:37f; 22:25-29; 25:11, something Jesus could not do. Thus the lack of political controversy coupled with his preferred position might explain his authoritative view of the state in Romans 13. Even though he, too, ended life as a Roman criminal after the political climate changed with the crowning of Nero and the growing numbers of the previously inconsequential sect of Judaism.

John, then, lived at the height of the first century of Roman persecution of the Christians under Domitian. This persecution was apparently provoked over the failure of the Christians to worship the Roman Emperor. Thus not only was their loyalty to the state questioned, but their religion as well since they were apparently atheists in that they had no visible god. The writer of Revelation himself, if we hold to the traditional authorship, was a victim of this persecution as an exile on the island of Patmos when he presumably identified the beasts of Revelation 13 with the Antichrist, i.e., Emperor, *vide* I John 2:18; 4:3. Bruce summarizes this change in church-state relations quite well between the time of Paul and the book of Revelation:

The book of Revelation, at any rate, reflects the great change that had taken place in the relations between Church and Empire since the time of Paul. Paul could confidently look to the imperial administration to protect his legitimate activity in proclaiming Jesus as the true fulfilment of the age-long hope of Israel. Indeed, the true interpretation of an obscure passage in the letter to which we have just referred may be that he regarded the Roman Emperor—or the Roman Empire—as the power which hindered the last Antichrist from coming into the open: 'you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time'. But now the imperial order itself is the persecuting power, and shows itself clearly as the precursor of Antichrist. It is henceforth open war between the Empire and the Church—a war in which victory is assured to those Christians who maintain their confession steadfastly, even to death itself.<sup>18</sup>

17. Cf. Matthew 22:31 and Luke 23:2.

18. F. F. Bruce, "The Growing Day" (in *The Spreading Flame*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B.

## II. CREATION OF THE STATE AND THE NATURAL LAW CONCEPT

*Creation of the state.* The entire tenor of the Biblical witness would see the state as the creation of God. Many Biblical scholars and theologians trace the first explicit mention of such to the fourth commandment of the decalogue concerning the honoring of father and mother. In a patriarchal society where fathers have the final authority in all matters this is interpreted as an indirect acknowledgment of political authority. This in no way denies the existence of the Egyptian State or other states which were in existence at this time. Years earlier Abraham is seen as leaving Ur of the Chaldees which presumably had some sort of political structure, and Lot is found in the gate of Sodom, thought by many to be a position of political importance. In reality the Bible says nothing concerning the moment in history when the first government came into being.<sup>19</sup> Rather the basis of all authority is seen as God-given through the instrumentality of familial organization which is a minute model of the state.

In I Peter 2:13 we read, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. . . ." Scharlemann suggests that this should be rendered in such a way as to convey the meaning that the Roman empire is an "institution ordained for men."<sup>20</sup> He continues

Most translations of this passage conceal its full significance; for, in the original, Peter applies to the state a term that is used in the Scriptures only of God's work as Creator. The apostle uses this particular word (*Ktisis*) to forestall any conception of the state as being the product of man's personal ingenuity or social necessity.<sup>21</sup>

This assertion concerning the use of *Ktisis* is difficult to substantiate. Of the various modern translations checked by this author, not one translated this text as Scharlemann does.<sup>22</sup> However, Werner Foerster of Munster, writing in Kittel, succinctly states that "in the NT *Ktisis* and derivatives are used only of God's creation."<sup>23</sup> Thus it would seem that Scharlemann is on safe ground and that the New Testament explicitly sees the state as the creation of God as did other religions of antiquity. As Brunner writes:

Antiquity knew only States with a religious basis; primitive

Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), pp. 17-18.

19. Genesis 11:31; 19:1.

20. Martin H. Scharlemann, "Scriptural Concepts of the Church and State" (in *Church and State Under God*, ed. Albert G. Huegli. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1964), p. 39.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Revised Standard Version, Phillips Translation, Amplified New Testament and the New English Bible.

23. Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), III, 1028.

Christianity recognized the state as ordained by God, in spite of the fact that it was actually 'without God.'<sup>24</sup>

But why? Why did God have to establish a means by which equal men are given unequal position, prestige and power. Christian thought has always answered this question by recourse to the fall. Bennett writes that "the warning against anarchy because of the unruliness of men's sin is one of the persistent emphases in all Christian thinking about the state."<sup>25</sup> Thomas Paine once said, expressing the same feeling, that "government like dress, is the badge of man's lost innocence." No doubt a long discussion of the concept and meaning of the fall of man could ensue here, but neither space nor time will allow. Regardless of one's own anthropological and humanistic sentiments, one must admit that the New Testament sees man as at least a partially fallen being in need of redemption. The state is the intermediate and indispensable means between the "now" and the "then" of human history and destiny. As Scharlemann tersely writes:

We can say with a large degree of confidence that the state in the Biblical perspective is an emergency arrangement devised by God to order and control the social activities of mankind during the long interval of time between the fall and the return of our Lord.<sup>26</sup>

*Natural Law concept.* Instrumental to the Christian concept of the state as God's creation, although this development was probably subsequent to New Testament times, was the concept of the natural law. This idea was incorporated into Christian thought from Stoicism, and probably in some degree, from Neo-Platonism. This philosophical conception was permeated with Christian ideas. The sovereignty of God was seen as being above the law which was administered through the love of God. Stoics had both a relative and absolute natural law. Brunner states that Christianity accepted the relative conception because sin made it impossible to comprehend or equate the absolute formulation, which itself is actually relative because of the love and will of God.<sup>27</sup>

The main ingredients of the natural law are love and justice. We might say that the natural law is the requirements of humanity. These requirements of love and justice are discoverable by man's reason. Niebuhr is probably right when he says it is "not possible to state a universally valid concept of justice from any particular sociological locus in history."<sup>28</sup> Certainly this is true of any and all human concepts of justice, including man's best emulation of God's justice, but surely this

24. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

25. John C. Bennett, *Christians and the State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 28.

26. Scharlemann, *loc. cit.*

27. Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-278.

28. Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr On Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 171.

criticism is not applicable to the justice of God even if we can not clearly delineate it.

We might describe natural law in a formula thus:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} \text{thought} & = & \text{natural law} \\ \text{action} & & \text{civil law} \end{array}$$

As we must first think in order to act, we must first consider the abstract but real entities of the love and justice of God before we legislate. As Niebuhr clearly saw, natural law does not mean fixed standards of reason, but "rational efforts to apply the moral obligation implied in the love commandment to the complexities of the fact of sin."<sup>29</sup> In other words, reason works to define the obligation of love in the complexities of contemporary situations.

This then is *the* test of the validity of the laws of any state. Is it (legislation) an honest attempt to incorporate the love and justice of God in the community of man? The state must attempt to adopt current laws as close as possible to the natural law of God. Brunner sees the primary responsibility of the statesman as determining the will of God.<sup>30</sup> As Bultmann writes:

The law of nature does not depend on human whims and fancies, but is the norm of society, on which all positive law must be based. Positive law is never actually identical with natural law, but it has to realize it progressively.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that positive, enacted law is never identical with the natural law has bothered many Christian thinkers. If the validity of the law is based upon the degree in which it contains the impress of the moral law of God, how is one to ascertain this similarity? How, as Bennett asks, can "the content of the law be kept under a conception of justice that transcends the law."<sup>32</sup> It is here, to this writer, that the concept of natural law has its greatest difficulty. For the only means of appeal seems to be "we obey God rather than men," but such an appeal has a subjective flavor that is dangerously anarchic. Perhaps, idealistically speaking, we can only hope that man will not neglect or disobey positive law unless he knows that it is not synonymous with the "law written in his heart." Certainly Jesus alluded to a universal standard which he believed man was able to comprehend and implement.<sup>33</sup> Moses was interpreted as condescending to a more realistic standard in light of man's sin and subsequent inability to equate God's norm when he permitted divorce.<sup>34</sup> Paul sees man deliberately holding down the truth whether it be intrinsic or

29. *Ibid.*

30. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

31. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, p. 137.

32. Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

33. Matthew 5:44-48; 7:2; Luke 12:57.

34. Matthew 19:3-9.



revealed.<sup>35</sup> Thus, from a New Testament perspective, we conclude that without the blindness and hindrance of sin man could know and implement the law of God, but that even in spite of such a fallen condition the redeemed Christian is capable, at least to some extent, of bringing the laws of this world into harmony with the laws of the city of God.

### III. THE TWO REALMS

As we come to the core of this analysis of New Testament teaching concerning the state, we have taken Luther's phrase, "two realms," as the best description of New Testament thought concerning the relationship of church and state. Of New Testament personages, only two—Christ and Paul—say anything of length concerning the believer's attitude toward the political power.<sup>36</sup> We have turned our attention first, naturally enough, to Jesus.

Some writers contend that Jesus had no thought of the state at all, e.g., Troeltsch.<sup>37</sup> As noted above, *supra* p. 202, Jesus had the delicate task of defining a position mid-way between abject submission to the Roman state or outright rebellion to all but nationalistic Jewish authority. No doubt it was an attempt to place Jesus on the horns of a dilemma that he was asked if it was "lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"<sup>38</sup> Matthew himself records that previous to this incident Jesus had paid the temple-tax even though he apparently did not feel obligated to it but did so in order that he might not be misunderstood. Here too, Christ is willing to fulfill his moral duty both as man and citizen.

While even a Baptist may have to admit that Christ's answer to the above question is not an explicit statement advocating the separation of church and state, it is nevertheless a discreet recognition of two distinct realms, both of which make definite demands upon all human beings. The very use of the coin illustrates not only that certain items and prerogatives belong to the state, but also the other side of the coin so-to-speak in that nothing is to be rendered or given to the state that belongs to God. In other words, there is a limit to the power and influence of the state even over the temporal lives of her citizens. Associations exist in their own right and exercise power that is their own, e.g., the family whose children belong to the parents and not the state. Totalitarianism does not recognize the independent spheres of religion, culture, education, family, etc., believing that "the state is all things to all men." Thus

35. Romans 1:18-23; 2:14-15.

36. This is not to be taken as meaning that no one else refers to this relationship, e.g. John and Peter to whom reference is made, *infra* p. 24, but that the greatest volume of teaching on this subject is from the lips of Jesus or the pen of Paul.

37. Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), I, p. 59.

38. Matthew 22:17 (Phillips) If he refused to acknowledge the state's right of financial support he would be labeled a Zealot and immediately an enemy of the Roman state. If he wholeheartedly accepted the present alignment of political power he would endanger his popularity with the nationalistic populace—exactly what the questioner apparently desired.

the totalitarian state must either deny God or make Him into its own image. Such a state is guilty of overstating its case and overstepping its bounds.<sup>39</sup> The combination of church and state, regardless of the initiating influence, always results in absolute totalitarianism. Bennett comments on the pluralism of Jacques Maritain which he says emphasizes:

the difference between the state and society and the importance of the various non-political associations in society which emphasize the essential limits of the state.<sup>40</sup>

Christ too saw limits of the state because of the demands of God.

Jesus always set himself under governmental authority—witness his execution. Nevertheless there is a sharp duality in Jesus teaching. There is a definite tension between Caesar's realm and God's. Numerous examples could be given by either his actions or his words. For example, he rejected violence in dealing with the civil authorities as seen by his rejection of Peter's action in the garden. But yet, he advised his disciples to sell their clothes to buy swords.<sup>41</sup> His disciples were to be in the world but not of the world.<sup>42</sup> In his sermon on the mount, Jesus stated that his disciples were not only the "light of the world," but "the salt of the earth."<sup>43</sup> It is doubtful that the dichotomy of Christ's duality could have been more succinctly stated than by the selection of these metaphors. For light is aloof, it can do its work from a distance without getting involved. But salt is the exact opposite. It can not accomplish its task at a distance, but if it becomes insipid through mixing with other things it is good for nothing. Salt is not an end in itself, however. To fulfill its purposes it must be intermingled with the unsavory. Thus to be a guiding light the Christian must be separate from the darkness of the following world. But at the same time the Christian must be mingled as salt in both its savory and preservative functions without becoming tasteless or uninteresting. But as Kelley sees the central problem of Christian political action:

how is the Christian to be effective in the world and not end up as something to be thrown away?<sup>44</sup>

Finally the duality is lastly expressed in Jesus' dialogue with Pilate when he stated that his "Kingdom is not of this world."<sup>45</sup>

It is easy to see how this duality could be misunderstood by those who heard Jesus in life and by those who have followed him in history. No doubt there were false expectations by many who heard him. Cull-

39. Of course, the Church has been equally guilty of attempting to incorporate all spheres of power, including the State, under its dominating influence.

40. Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

41. Luke 22:35-38.

42. John 17:11ff.

43. Matthew 5:13f.

44. Alden D. Kelley, *Christianity and Political Responsibility* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 152.

45. John 18:36.

mann contends that many of his twelve disciples were misled by thinking of Jesus as a revolutionary Zealot leader.<sup>46</sup> His failure to initiate political action is seen by Cullmann as the motivating factor in the betrayal of Judas. Paradoxically, however, Jesus was brought to trial because of accusations of just such Zealot activity.<sup>47</sup> He was executed in Roman eyes as a rebellious Jewish national.

Before turning to Paul where this dualistic tension is also present, if not in such bold relief, it is interesting to note the three primary reactions to Christ's teaching in the history of the Christian Church. Luther accepted the state's power without criticism and attempted to rationalize her claims. Thus today the church is normally just that branch of the state which meets the spiritual needs of her citizens, as other branches meet different needs, in Luthran countries. The left-wing of the Reformation (Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers) resisted political life by withdrawal from civic responsibilities. Disdain for political structures was even overtly expressed by the complete lack of or very loose ecclesiastical polities. The moderating view between these two outlooks has been to divide the realms of God and Caesar into two neat separate packages. But this is far from being as simple as some Christians have thought. The societal complexities of modern life make such packaging impossible. A new conceptual approach is needed! An approach that somehow will preserve the two realms, but at the same time acknowledge that spiritual and secular interests do not only overlap, but *coincide*.<sup>48</sup>

Turning to Paul the same duality is found. Paul's classic passage concerning the Christian's relationship to the state is Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (RSV)

46. Oscar Cullman, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), pp. 8-23.

47. Luke 23:1ff.

48. Perhaps Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965) is on the right track, but this writer must withhold complete endorsement to further development and elucidation of his thought.

Clearly within the context (Romans 12:1-2) the Christian is not to be in conformity with the thought processes or practices of the world. The Christian is a pilgrim in an unwholesome environment as he awaits the return of Christ. The eschatological hope is truly vivid in the mind of Paul as he addresses the Roman Christians (Romans 13:11-12). The fact that the day of the parousia is near is seen as a motivating factor controlling the daily moral life of the believer. But regardless of this imminent redemption, the Christian is not to withdraw from temporal society because the very rulers of this order are established by God. In reality, either there or here we are in God's domain in a more or less direct fashion.

Cullmann suggests, in a rather detailed argument, that *exousia* refers simultaneously to both the state and angelic powers.<sup>49</sup> The one who resists properly ordained authorities is actually then resisting God.<sup>50</sup> The God-ordained ruler is established for the welfare and good of society. The up-standing man has nothing to fear from a just administration of the state. Calvin wrote that rulers are "ordained protectors of public innocence, modesty, decency and tranquility" whose "sole endeavor should be to provide for the common safety and peace of all."<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless the state does "bear the sword" to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. The Christian is not to be an obedient citizen only out of fear, however. The Christian's regenerated inner man desires both order and justice and this is the very purpose of the state. Thus the enlightened Christian conscience demands obedience. To carry out its righteous purposes and goals the state must also be supported financially by the Christian citizen. In short, while the Christian is to walk as a pilgrim, he is not to ignore all temporal goodness—including the state. As Scharlemann writes:

The member of the Church must never pretend that he is already living in the glorified state of the new aeon. His destiny in glory is still heavily veiled by the circumstances in which he lives here. It is not God's intention that he anticipate his future condition by setting himself above the orders of this present existence.<sup>52</sup>

The state of Paul's day no doubt offered little opportunity for the Christian to engage in true political responsibility. The Christian himself probably desired no such opportunity since he lived in daily expectancy

49. Cullman, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-114. Foerster, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, would appear to see *exousia* as reference to supernatural powers in the New Testament, II, 566-75.

50. This insight would help to elucidate the meaning of I Corinthians 6:1-8. The reason believers are not to go to law with each other is that they both will one day judge the very powers behind the state-appointed judges.

51. Taken from John T. McNeill, *John Calvin on Civil Government* (in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 34.

52. Scharlemann, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

of its catastrophic end. The contemporary Christian, however, who is both a citizen of a modern democracy and a possessor of a more realistic eschatology, must endeavor to transform society through love rather than practice isolation and reject societal obligations. As Kelley succinctly writes:

It is a matter of conscience that society and its institutions and processes be of concern to the Christian because it is through them that God works.<sup>53</sup>

Paul's viewpoint concerning subjection to the governmental authorities would appeal to be qualified, however. There is no unlimited allegiance.<sup>54</sup> Resistance and even civil disobedience is possible under certain circumstances. As Calvin wrote, we "obey the statutes and ordinances which do not contravene the commandments of God."<sup>55</sup> Though rulers are to be ministers of good, they may overstep their God-given limits, *supra*, p. 207. This seems to be the case in Acts 5:28, 29 where Peter and the other apostles are recorded as being guilty of what we call civil disobedience. For when they were commanded to cease from their preaching, Peter answered "we ought to obey God rather than men." This course no doubt is full of danger—for who is to determine the objective will of God? Nevertheless, when one is confident that his course is on the side of God, while his government's certainly is not, can we disagree with Calvin when he commented on Daniel 6:22 thus:

Earthly princes lay aside their power when they rise up against God and are unworthy to be reckoned among the members of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy them than to obey them.<sup>56</sup>

There is, according to Bennett, "no resistance against one order without hope of a new order."<sup>57</sup> The Christian's conscience would forbid any such conception. A totalitarian government that usurps all authority and power to itself from the family, church and other similar associations, thus overstepping God-given bounds, must be resisted. This seems to be the position of John on the island of Patmos. The Roman Emperor had transgressed his governmental limits when he demanded what is the sole prerogative of God—worship. Bennett remarks on Revelation that it is "not always true that the Christian should obey the governing authorities."<sup>58</sup> It is a case of "obeying God rather than man." A case that often confronts the Christian citizen for the old cliché that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" still seems to be in vogue in

53. Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

54. Paul illustrated this by accepting execution rather than obey the Roman authorities order to curtail his preaching endeavors and missionary activities.

55. McNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

57. Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

governments at either end of the political spectrum. Berdyaev recognized this when he wrote the following:

Caesar always and irresistibly tends toward demanding for himself not only that which is Caesar's but that which is God's—Caesar wishes to subject to himself the whole of man. This is the main tragedy of history, the tragedy of freedom and necessity, of man's fate and historic destiny.<sup>59</sup>

While the Christian may be civilly disobedient in such cases, he is never lawless. Like Socrates, he will do nothing against law. Thus he should never run from the penalty of the broken law, i.e., the early Christians suffered martyrdom rather than acknowledge Roman law over God's will, but few were fugitives from the law. The Christian was not, as Peter pointed out, to use his freedom in Christ or an appeal to obey the will of God in a socially irresponsible manner.<sup>60</sup> Rather it was "God's will that by doing right" the Christian might "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." But the inner witness of God's Spirit was to take precedence over the law of man. This Biblical emphasis upon theistically inspired personal belief being superior to human law but still subject to that law's penalty was asserted to by Supreme Court Chief Justice Hughes when in the *Macintosh* case he wrote:

When one's belief collides with the power of the state, the latter is supreme within its sphere and submission to punishment follows. But, in the forum of conscience, duty to a moral power higher than the state has always been maintained.<sup>61</sup>

We must now turn to a brief synthesis of these Biblical perspectives.

#### IV. CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STATE

J. C. Bennett, writing on what he considers New Testament views of the state, remarks that it is a:

mistake to insist on harmony between writings which come from contrasting historical situations and with different problems in mind.<sup>62</sup>

While this may be generally true, this writer is not sure that it is relevant to the picture the New Testament paints of the Christian's attitude toward the state. There is certain tension between the Kingdom of God and the realm of Caesar. Only a Christian notices this tension for only he is a member of both orders. Neither sphere can be incorporated into the other, however, least of all the state, which, while it may be of divine character, is necessitated by the fact and presence of man's sin,

59. Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Realm of the Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 78.

60. I Peter 2:13-16.

61. Joseph Tussman (ed.), *The Supreme Court On Church And State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 62.

62. Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

ignorance and plurality. The tension is heightened in that these are the only two communities capable of claiming universal loyalty. It is precisely when this happens, be it the Church or State, that the Christian feels the duality of his faith to be more heavy than ever. The solution of some, as pointed out above, *supra*, p. 19, is to supposedly increase spirituality by withdrawal from society and political life. But as McNeill so tersely writes:

Political indifference on the part of Christians is not a mark of superior piety but of defective ethics.<sup>63</sup>

Brunner attempts to weaken the tension by enumerating certain definite distinctive aspects of function between church and state even though both are God-given. He sees the state as being primarily concerned with order and legalistic obedience to preserve that order. The church, however, is primarily a source of fellowship with God through personal relations as a free community of faith.<sup>64</sup> Niebuhr sees the Christian responsible to the state only until its main task of order is accomplished. After that he is free to live on a "higher" code of conduct. But while such a responsible relationship to the political order exists, the unqualified disavowal of violence is impossible.<sup>65</sup> This tension between the universal claims of the state and its limitation because of the existence of the Kingdom of God with its independent spiritual demand is resolved by MacIver by simply pointing out that it is universal upon all within the territory of the nation state, but that it is and must be limited because it cannot possibly regulate all beliefs.<sup>66</sup>

Christianity may be a promoter of civil and political liberty, but as Niebuhr states, the Church itself should be a transforming community above conflicting forces contending for societal advantage.<sup>67</sup> We must also realize that in reality the Church is also an interest group because of sin and the interests of her members. Human finiteness makes it subject to sociological pressures and a victim of the particular prejudices and illusions of the various ages.<sup>68</sup> Extreme piousness may make the Church guilty of attempting to make all sin into a crime under the law. Thus the increase of tension is not always due to the state overreaching its limits.

The ideal form of the state cannot be determined from the New Testament. It is certainly true that it assumes a source of authority from the standpoint of which the individual may defy the authorities of this world. The appreciation of the unique worth of the individual makes it wrong to fit him into any political structure as a mere mechanistic instru-

63. McNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

64. Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 552-554.

65. Davis and Good, *op. cit.*, p. 142f.

66. R. M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 172f.

67. Davis and Good, *op. cit.*, p. 202ff.

68. *Ibid.*

ment. Thus the seed bed of democracy is sown. But as Brunner points out, there is no Christian form of the state because none are wholly good or wholly bad. He sees the form being determined by the purposes of the state.<sup>69</sup> He writes that "anarchy must be prevented by the exercise of the authority, tyranny must be checked by democracy."<sup>70</sup> Whatever the form, the entire New Testament echoes the thought that all law-makers stand under judgment of what they think ultimate.

Referring to Brunner one last time, we find him in the middle of the New Testament duality when he says that we cannot say an inclusive 'Yes' because of the inmost sanctuary of privacy, but neither can we utter an exclusive 'No' because of the fact that the state is God's gift and a necessity to the believer and unbeliever alike.<sup>71</sup> In conclusion, the best synopsis of New Testament teaching would seem to be the remarks of Albert Huegli:

Existing side by side, these two institutions are God's instruments for different purposes. Government is to keep order, using the sword. The church is to bring men back to God, using the Gospel. Both are God's agencies. Each calls for a response. Tension arises because the Christian is a member of two kingdoms. Conflict comes when government overreaches itself or when the church forgets its proper sphere. The two have mutual responsibilities over against each other, and the Christian citizen has obligation toward them both.<sup>72</sup>

69. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 465f.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

72. Huegli, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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