Church and State Relations in Light of Three Proposals for the Purpose of Government

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Introduction

To answer the question, 'What is the purpose of government?' provides some answers to the question, 'What is the purpose of the Church?' Indeed, in the Old Testament, the people of God were the state, the palace and the temple were interrelated, and the government was a theocracy. The prophetic notion of a kingdom of God emerged in criticism of the failures of both the palace and the temple, and its fulfillment in Jesus' ministry produced the distinction of Church and state.

In this paper, I propose to explore three proposals for the purpose of government. They produce different lines of thought about the state and therefore the Church's relationship to it, but they are not irreconcilable proposals. The paper is offered to inform readers of various suggestions within the three proposals, which are that government exists for

1. The Protection of Privacy: The role of government is to protect the freedoms of people in society.
2. Moral Formation: The role of government is to create a better society by making people live with good values.
3. Punitive Purposes: The role of government is to remove people in society who support bad values.

The Bible provides no warrant for a particular form of government. Yet it does provide certain perspectives on government in light of God's reign over His creation and the role of His people in salvation history.

Scripture provides different views on the purpose of government, and yet it has a certain trajectory for how to understand the purpose of government as we move from the Old to the New Testament. To be sure, the Bible provides no warrant for a particular form of government. Yet it does provide certain perspectives on government in light of God's reign over His creation and the role of His people in salvation history.

Relevance of the Study

This study is relevant in our times. The Western nations have moved away from a Christian basis for morals, justice, and society as a whole. At the same time, European nations have seen a major influx of Islamic migrants that challenge long-standing views on the Church and State relationship. Furthermore, the established state Churches in Europe and the United Kingdom (e.g., the Church of England) have, to a large extent, relinquished their definitive role in society by rejecting historic Christian teaching on faith and practice in many aspects. Both society and government continuously reject and even persecute Christians.[1] Non-Western nations are pressured by Western nations to adopt secular forms of government and teach their emerging, post-Christian values. Many also have the challenge of the spread of Islam, sometimes by violence (e.g., Nigeria).

Proposal (1): The role of government is to protect the freedoms of people in society.

The first proposal is that government should play the role of protecting individuals from others—including the government itself. This view defends the right to private property and understands government to play a limited role. The Roman statesman, Marcus Tullius Cicero's (1st c. BC), understood the state's origin as a *natural* growth out of *human relationships*. One might contrast this view with the more autocratic view in the Ancient Near East, where the ruler ruled at the gods' direction to exclude chaos and impose order on his subjects.[2] The Old Testament understanding of government fits within this perspective, yet, with its pastoral, patriarchal heritage, was based on the natural relationships of family, clan, and tribe.

For Cicero, the first relational bond leading eventually to government is the natural bonds of husband and wife, parents and children, and the home, where everything was shared in common. He claimed that this familial unit was the 'nursery of the state'. Beyond the home were other familial relationships brothers and sisters, cousins, and relationships established through marriage. Cementing these relationships further were traditions and religious devotions:

> The bonds of common blood hold men fast through good-will and affection; for it means much to share in common the same family traditions, the same forms of domestic worship, and the same ancestral tombs (Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.54).[3]

Given this origin of the state in natural, a government's role is to protect these units and honor their traditions and religious devotions. It was especially important that it protected private property:

> ... the chief purpose in the establishment of constitutional state and municipal governments was that individual property rights might be secured. For, although it was by Nature's guidance that men were drawn together into communities, it was in the hope of safeguarding their possessions that they sought the protection of cities (*De Officiis* II.73).

Government was also to assure 'an abundance of the necessities of life' for its citizens (II.74), and 'strive, too, by whatever means they can, in peace or in war, to advance the state in power, in territory, and in revenues' (II.85). This perspective might be

[1] Cf. https://www.christian.org.uk.

[2] Cf. Rollin G. Grams, 'Reconstructing Public Theology with Old Testament Foundations,' *Journal of Religion and Public Life*, Vol. 1.1 (April, 2024), pp. 4-29.

[3] M. Tullius Cicero. *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge. Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Mass., London, England. 1913).

phrased as 'government for the people'. He opposed Roman imperialism, but he argued that a government should seek the benefits of its own citizens first.

The Old Testament also established laws protecting private property, with two such laws in the Ten Commandments. The prohibition against stealing and that against coveting one's neighbor's property contradict the attempt by some to find a Marxist interpretation in Scripture that opposes ownership of private property.[4] The expansion of government authority from judges to kings was viewed negatively: it was a rejection of God's rule and meant military conscription, palace servants and acquisition of land and assets, and the expansion of slavery (1 Samuel 8.1-18). King Rehoboam rejected the notion of government serving the people for that of the people serving the king (1 Kings 12). This led to civil war and a division of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms.

In the modern era, John Locke (1632-1704) agreed with Cicero that governmental authority was based in nature and under God. For him, natural law provided protection of life, liberty, and property. Civil governments passed positive laws that ought to be based on natural law (*Two Treatises* 2.12). If a government created or broke laws against natural law, the people had just cause to overthrow it (2.212-17).

Modern views of government are more likely based on a contractual understanding of the state. Neither natural bonds nor a divine mandate justify 'rights' or the state, but humans come together and to form a contract for a governing authority. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was significant in the defense of this view. He gave three reasons for forming a social contract: human competition, diffidence (distrust), and desire for glory. These, then, are the basis for state formation: 'The first, maketh man invade for Gain; the second, for Safety [the need for defense], and the third, for Reputation' (*Leviathan* 13.62).[5] Hobbes' negative view of human motivations, reinforced by the destruction of the English Civil War in the 1600s, led him to support rule by an absolute sovereign. This meant, among other things, the right of the king over anyone's claim to private property. The state of nature was not positive but negative, and a sovereign needed to rule his people with absolute power for their own good. The people, for their part, submit to such a social contract for protection from others.

The American founding fathers rejected Hobbes' defense of a king but accepted the idea that government is a social contract. They turned to Locke for the idea that government was under God and that it existed to assure natural rights given by God. Government was to be by the people, of the people, and for the people. The American system of government was, at its core, a limitation of government's powers and a balancing of powers through various systems of checks and balances to protect the people from the very government they contracted to have.[6] Even democracy could be a tyranny of the majority (as Plato and Aristotle had warned), and therefore a representational government under a constitution and guided by laws was better.[7]

America was established by those fleeing the oppressive rule of government, even over religious beliefs. The heavy hand of government, including over religious affairs, had been the order of the day in the 16th century. Queen Mary I ('Bloody Mary') well illustrates how this played out as she reversed the recent introduction of Protestantism in England. During her brief reign from 1553-1558, she aggressively sought to use her power to reinstitute

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[4] E.g., Jose P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

[5] Hobbes, *Leviathan,* rev. student edition, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1991).

[6] James Madison's writing in the 47th *Federalist Paper* makes the argument for the separation of powers, basing this on Montesque's *The Spirit of Law* (1748).

[7] One of America's founding fathers, James Madison, addressed the matter of the tyranny of the majority in the 10th *Federalist Paper*. He argued that, to mitigate this problem, a representational government rather than a straight democracy was preferable. (Hence two senators from each state and the electoral system, e.g.).

Catholicism. According to the royal website, 'Mary restored papal supremacy in England, abandoned the title of Supreme Head of the Church, reintroduced Roman Catholic bishops and began the slow reintroduction of monastic orders.'[8] She also persecuted Protestants standing in her way of Catholisizing England. Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer of the Anglican Church were burned at the stake in 1555, and a further 3,000 Protestants were killed. Bloody Mary also opposed free speech by restoring laws against heresy.

In the next century, Oliver Cromwell led the Civil War against the monarchy, and King Charles I, a Catholic, was executed in 1649. Cromwell was a religious Independent, advocating local, congregational governance of church matters rather than wider ecclesiastical or political control. The revolution was unsuccessful, however, and in 1660, the monarchy was restored with King Charles II. The power of the monarch over England's colonies came to a head 100 years later, with King George III on the throne.

In light of such a history, the American colonies took up arms against the crown of England. Affirming divine sovereignty over government rather than the divine authority of government, natural law and inalienable rights, the idea that government is formed as a social contract, and that government exists for the governed, the founding fathers declared independence from England and her king. The American Declaration of Independence based the decision to oppose British rule on four premises:

- 'All men are created equal';
- 'they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights' (Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness);
- 'governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed';
- 'whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.'[9]

These four premises, note, *limit* government's role rather than expand it. Government plays the role of protection. The first premise limits the power of some group or class of persons to rule others (such as the British ruling the American colonies without their representation). The second premise insists that government is to have no authority over natural rights given to citizens by their Creator, not the people or the government. The third premise limits government by requiring consent from those governed. The fourth premise argues that governments can and should be altered or even replaced when they use their form (or mechanisms) and power for destructive purposes. Particularly in mind are purposes that fail to protect the safety and happiness of its citizens.

In each of these four premises, one can see that the view of government endorsed is that government exists to protect the freedoms of people—individuals—in society. It does not exist to advance an ideology or social programme that requires the conformity of its citizens. Indeed, expansive, socialistic forms of government proposed in the 19th century (and today) were fundamentally a departure from America's founding principles of government—and opposition to monarchical authority in the Old Testament, for that matter.

The Constitution of the United States follows this statement of the role of government in the

[8] 'Mary I (r. 1553-1558),' online: https://www.royal.uk/mary-i (accessed 7 April, 2024).
[9] 'Declaration of Independence', online: Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives (accessed 7 December, 2024).

Declaration of Independence with a further understanding:

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Cicero would have approved. While this preamble states that the first goal is to 'form a more perfect Union,' this is not meant in the sense of the government's making people support good values but in the sense of limiting the role of government to certain values. These values are: justice, domestic tranquility (peace), common defense, general welfare ('pursuit of happiness'), and the blessings of liberty. The alternative between a limited government and an expansive government was highlighted in the American and the French Revolutions, respectively, as we shall further see.

The peaceful life is not a private religious existence for the Church but the freedom to be a missional community, with protection from those in authority.

Paul does not provide a perspective on types of government, as we see in discussion in Greek and Roman philosophers of his time. He does, however, pray for a governmental authority that protects the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—so to speak—for Christianity to flourish. He says, 'I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way' (1 Timothy 2.1-2; ESV and throughout). This suggests a distinction of the Church from the government, with the latter leaving the Church to its own way of life. As the passage continues, the freedom of the Church to evangelize is of particular importance (2.3-7). The peaceful life is not a private religious existence for the Church but the freedom to be a missional community, with protection from those in authority.

Proposal (2): The role of government is to create a better society by making people support good values.

Those who see government's role enlarged rather than limited present their case in a positive light. They say that they wish to create a better society and that governmental powers should be used to make people support good values. Such a view may be popular in theory, but in reality those in power seem bent on a more Machiavellian approach to governing. Niccolò Machiavelli said in 1513/14 that

> a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil. Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity (*The Prince* 15).[10]

One should not rule with virtue in mind, Machiavelli averred, but with a *realpolitik* exercising power to maintain power. I propose to discuss some views to the contrary in this section.

Aristotle

Aristotle argued that, although the bonds of the household precede the existence of the state (as Cicero later argued), the bonds forming the state are prior to it—as well as to the individual. He reasoned

[10] Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. W. K. Marriott (The Project Gutenberg, 2006); online at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#link2HCH0015 (accessed 8 June, 2020).

that, as parts of the body exist for the whole body, so individuals exist for the state. Thus, an understanding of the individual follows an understanding of the state in which he exists (*Politics* 1252a-1253a). He wrote, 'Man is by nature a political animal' (1253a).[11]

Following his teacher, Plato (cf. *Republic*), Aristotle understood politics in terms of six types of government, monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional governance, and their opposites, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy. What distinguishes the positive forms from the negative forms in each case is that the first aim to serve the community whereas the second are self-serving (*Politics* 3.1279b).[12] For our purposes, he further says that the essential basis for the formation of a good state is the concern of citizens for civic virtue and their opposition to vice. He denies the sufficiency for social cohesion, for forming a government, merely on the basis that a people share economic, commercial, or military interests, or even because they desire law and order or wish to live by some social contract (constitutional government) (*Politics* 3.1280a-b). Rather, the state must have a moral foundation. It is, therefore, a moral force.

Aristotle wrote, 'it is also clear that any state that is truly so called and is not a state merely in name must pay attention to virtue; for otherwise the community becomes merely an alliance' (*Politics* 3.1280b). Reducing the state to a merely legal entity, guaranteeing people's just claims against one another, will not address the deeper cohesiveness of a society formed with virtuous intents. The goal of the state is for all to live the good life, and, for this to work, society must go beyond contractual relations; it must exist in friendships between family and clans, cemented through marriages between them. Familial bonds and friendships will lead to noble actions (*Politics* 3.1281a). In *Nichomachean Ethics,* Aristotle says, '…the Supreme Good was the end [goal] of political science, but the principal care of this science is to produce a certain character in the citizens, namely to make them virtuous, and capable of performing noble action' (I.IX.8).[13]

This line of argument can take a socialist turn over private interests, as it did for both Plato and Aristotle. For example, in regard to social versus private education, Aristotle prefers the Spartan model:

> And inasmuch as the end for the whole state is one, it is manifest that education also must necessarily be one and the same for all and that the superintendence of this must be public, and not on private lines, in the way in which at present each man superintends the education of his own children, teaching them privately, and whatever special branch of knowledge he thinks fit. But matters of public interest ought to be under public supervision; at the same time we ought not to think that any of the citizens belongs to himself, but that all belong to the state, for each is a part of the state, and it is natural for the superintendence of the several parts to have regard to the superintendence of the whole. And one might praise the Spartans in respect of this, for they pay the greatest attention to the training of their children, and conduct it on a public system (*Politics* 8.1337a).

Here is the ancient version of the view that the state owns the children and oversees what they are taught. Therefore, education must be public and not private. Aristotle was not advocating a 'nanny state' form of socialism, where the state serves the citizens and supplies them with their wants. The Spartans are rather the model: citizens serve the state. Aristotle

[11] His further argument is that humans are gifted with speech and are therefore social animals. Also, humans know good from bad and right from wrong, as well as other moral matters. The bond that they form around moral matters is the basis of the household and the state (*Politics* 1253a). Quotations from *Politics* are from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 21, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944).
[12] Democracy was understood as direct rule by voting, as opposed to constitutional government. Note that the alternatives are those King Rehoboam faced (1 Samuel 8).
[13] Aristotle. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

would have agreed with Germany today in opposing homeschooling.

With the winds of 19th century Positivism at his back and just prior to the First World War, in 1912, an American Baptist pastor, Walter Rauschenbusch, laid out his vision for the Social Gospel:

> An unchristian social order can be known by the fact that it makes good men do bad things. It tempts, defeats, drains, and degrades, and leaves men stunted, cowed, and shamed in their manhood. A Christian social order makes bad men do good things. It sets high aims, steadies the vagrant impulses of the weak, trains the power of the young, and is felt by all as an uplifting force which leaves them with the consciousness of a broader and nobler humanity as their years go on....[14]

The more that Western nations reject Christian values, Rauschenbusch's view of the authority of a social order—a government—enforcing good values fades. Yet, beyond this, is it ever the role of a government to be a moral force in society? Christendom in Europe long debated the roles of the Church and the state. The Old Testament, too, presents this debate in preferring Godly judges to kings and sending prophets to challenge wayward kings.

Gospel witness, not some endorsement of or opposition to abusive authority, is the goal.

Peter argued that Christians should be 'subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution' (1 Peter 2.13). The emperor and governors are sent by God 'to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good' (2.13-14). Yet Christians should live as people who are free (from external authorities) because they are slaves of God (2.16). Peter applies this next to the master-slave relationship and particularly to Christian slaves serving non-Christian, abusive masters. Even in such a case, Christians are to be subject and show respect (2.18). The reason for this may have been that expressed in the case of Christian wives and their unbelieving husbands: by their good conduct, they may win their husbands to the 'word' (the Gospel) (3.1; cf. 1 Corinthians 7.16). Gospel witness, not some endorsement of or opposition to abusive authority, is the goal.

The early Christians knew that governments had been and could be an evil authority and miscarry justice, as noted in 2 Thessalonians 2.3-9 and Revelation. Revelation presents Roman political and economic power as wicked and oppressive (cf. chs. 13 and 18 in particular). The early Christians knew that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod Antipas and Jesus by Pontius Pilate, and they also shared the Jewish suspicion of governmental power. The story of the Old Testament included the utter failure of the monarchies of the northern and southern kingdom and the need for God's rule. The precariousness of God's people at the hands of governmental authority was told in the books of Daniel and Esther. The story of Antiochus IV Epiphanes' attempt to enforce godly Jews to conform to Hellenistic religion and culture in the 2nd c. BC was remembered in the Feast of Lights each year. In the 60s, both Paul and Peter would be killed in the time of Nero. The book of Revelation may have been written during the persecution of Christians by Domitian. The most Christians could say was that, where justice existed and was enforced in law and order, government played a role in God's purposes (so Romans 13.1-7), but no government held divine right to rule apart from divine justice. The Church existed, like the Old Testament prophets, to remind the state that it was not the Kingdom of God and was subject to God's justice.

The French Revolution

The French Revolution offered some similar yet different values to the American Revolution. One popular proposal promoted the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Yet one might ask, as some did, whether liberty secured equality or

[14] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (NY: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 127.

equality secured liberty. If the former, then people would be given equal opportunity. If the latter, then government would play a greater role in assuring equal outcomes—now termed 'equity'. François-Noël Babeuf (1760-1797) argued that equality should be understood as equal results rather than equal opportunity. Babeuf advocated reform of the agrarian tax system by abolishing feudal dues, a redistribution of the land, and an equal income for all. His revolutionary beliefs included the view that a government might be overthrown and a new one formed by an elite minority. If so, again, government must play a greater, controlling role. Indeed, the value of fraternity highlights the French commitment to a social rather than individual understanding. The differences between the American and French understanding of government have played out historically, although within America there is also an ongoing debate about the limited (protection of individual rights and values) versus the expanded (enforcement of social rights and values) view of government. Progressives have supported a French revolutionary understanding, advocating equal outcomes enforced by a socialist, sometimes even Marxist, state.

Voluntary contributions and community practices rather than government enforcement of ethics created a distinction between the roles of religion and government, of the Church and the state.

The early Church practiced voluntary communalism in Jerusalem, as we read in the early chapters of the book of Acts. This was not practiced elsewhere, but almsgiving was already an established religious practice in Judaism that continued in the Church, and giving to the poor was definitive for Christian community (cf. Galatians 2.10; 6.10; 2 Corinthians 8-9). The temple tax was not required (cf. Matthew 17.24-27), and tithing in ancient Israel was associated with the Levites and the Temple, not the palace. In other words, voluntary contributions and community practices rather than government enforcement of ethics created a distinction between the roles of religion and government, of the Church and the state. The French approach to government oppressed and replaced the Church as a moral entity, controlling people's lives. A socialist might limit government's role more than what one finds in the French Revolution, but socialism in general transfers the voluntary and religious role of the Church to state control.

Marxism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1847 to outline the views of communism. The document begins by arguing that history is the story of an age-old clash between classes—the oppressors and oppressed—and has become focused in the modern age of capitalism on the clash between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and employers of wage earners) and the proletariat (those without the means of production who must sell their labor). The bourgeoisie replaced the feudal lords, patriarchs, and idealist groups of the past (religious, chivalrous, 'philistine sentimentalism'). They wielded superiority over others with 'the icy water of egotistical calculation' (i.e., capitalist greed). The enemy of the communist system, then, is Free Trade—'veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.'[15] Class now revolves around money, and one significant result of this is a globalization not only of markets but of civilisation, making 'barbarian nations' dependent on the civilized ones. Another result was urban growth and the cities' domination of the countryside.

Socialist governance requires an expansion and centralization of political authority. Communism's economic and class conflict analysis of history and politics creates a moral mandate for government to aid the proletariat against the capitalist bourgeoisie. This also removes the moral role from the Church (or other institutions) and transfers it to the government, even more than is typically the case in

[15] The translation is found at https://www.marxists.org/admin/books/manifesto/Manifesto.pdf (accessed 8 April, 2024).

other forms of socialism. This is even true for the most basic component of society, the family. As in Sparta, children belong to the state and are to be educated by them.

Islam

While communism represents an atheistic form of government enforcing morality, Islam as a political religion does as well. Writing in the context of issues facing India and Pakistan in the 1930s, Abdul A'la Maududi opposed nationalism as inconsistent with Islam. Islam makes no distinction between the state and religion, and it is transnational in a religious rather than economic (as in communism) way. Maududi established an Islamic state within the political state of India around 1940 called Jamaat-e-Islami. Shortly thereafter, in 1947, Pakistan became an Islamic state, independent from India. His writings have continued to be important for Islamic states. In a paper first delivered in 1971, "The Theory of Political Islam", he commends 'theo-democracy'.[16] Any Muslim in any place is a part of the Islamic State that transcends geographical or national borders. Early in his career, he wrote that

> Islam requires the earth — not just a portion, but the entire planet — not because the sovereignty over the earth should be wrested from one nation or group of nations and vested in any one particular nation, but because the whole of mankind should benefit from Islam, and its ideology and welfare programme.
>
> It is to serve this end that Islam seeks to press into service all the forces which can bring about such a revolution. The term which covers the use of all these forces is 'Jihad'. To alter people's outlook and spark a mental and intellectual revolution through the medium of speech and the written word is a form of Jihad. To change the old tyrannical system and establish a just new order by the power of the sword is also Jihad, as is spending wealth and undergoing physical exertion for this cause.[17]

An International Revolutionary Party (cf. the communist state's politburo) is needed to destroy any non-Muslim system and replace it with the Word of Allah. By it, Islamic functionaries will work to remove 'oppression, wrongdoing, strife, immorality, arrogance and unlawful exploitation from the world by force of arms.'[18] Maududi argues that Islam seeks to establish virtue and prohibit evil, not only individually but also socially, to establish world peace.[19] Thus, an Islamic understanding of ethics and religion has the power of the state behind it and is international. The options for non-Muslims in a Muslim state are to convert, pay a tax (if they are 'people of the book'—Jews and Christians—but not if they are something else), or be killed.

The way of the cross and the understanding that moral change comes from God's work within, not external control, provides a very different approach to morality and power.

While Christendom in European history also took such an approach to using the state's power to enforce moral values, this has no justification in the New Testament. The way of the cross and the understanding that moral change comes from God's work within, not external control, provides a very different approach to morality and power.

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[16] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, "Political Theory of Islam," in Khurshid Ahmad, ed., *Islam: Its Meaning and Message* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999).

[17] Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *Al Jihad fil Islam*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, ed. Huda Khattab (1930): online: Jihad in Islam.pdf (accessed 7 December, 2024), n.p.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *Al Jihad Fil Islam [Jihad in Islam]*, trans. Syed Rafatullah Shah (Lahore: Irfan Afzal Printing Press, 1927), n.p.; online: Maududi, Sayyid Abul A'la Al Jihad Fil Islam By Syed Abul Aala Maududi : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive (accessed 7 December, 2024), cf. pp. 70-72.

Proposal (3): The role of government is to remove people in society who support bad values.

The previous vision and this vision for government's role are extensive and forceful. Possibilities within them are also wide-ranging. The difference is that the former vision is positively construed (whatever its practical outworking), whereas this vision is negative. Here, government wields the rod, not the carrot.

Plato

In his *Republic*, Plato offered a blueprint for the good state. In *Laws*, he explained in greater detail what virtues and laws should be affirmed for the healthy state. In the latter work, Plato argued for the need to purify society. By this, Plato means punishment by execution or exile of those who are corrupt because of their nature or nurture. The governors of a state are responsible for separating the healthy from the unhealthy. This separation also involves an immigration policy that welcomes good people with open arms but excludes the bad if they fail certain tests of character and do not change after attempts to persuade them.

After a discussion of land redistribution and debt forgiveness, he turned to the subject of religion. The state should not make changes to established religion but support whatever is necessary for its continuance. This would involve not accepting changes to religions called for by persons claiming to have apparitions or heavenly inspiration to do so. It would involve allowing images, altars, and temples, and accepting the sacred domains for each. It further entails allowing people to meet for religious celebrations, since religion contributes to social cohesion. Through religious association, citizens develop relationships and come to know each other. Religion was good for society.

In Plato's view, the socialist state was to play a strong role in establishing whatever it considered to be a healthy society. His description of this is eerily reminiscent of nationalist socialism of Nazi Germany, yet the details of what is meant by a pure society lead in different directions. (The latter's grounding on eugenic theory was a critical component to fascist nationalism.)[20] Interestingly, Plato's view of a healthy society did not involve a separation of the state and religion that led to privatization of religion, as in our day, but to the state's promotion of diverse religions in a polytheist society—at least, to what it regarded as acceptable religions. (The Areopagus oversaw religious matters in Athens at the time.)

Augustine

The Church's position in society throughout the first three centuries often involved persecution of one sort or another. Christianity did not enjoy the same position among other religions. Romans respected religions for their antiquity and association with a particular people (e.g., Judaism). It was regarded more as a kind of atheism alongside Epicurean philosophy or as a superstition. In the beginning of the 4th century, however, the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and gave state support to the once persecuted faith. This altered the relationship between the Church and the State, leading to the long history of Christian expansion in Europe with state support: what we know as Christendom.

The Donatist Controversy in the 4th – 5th centuries concerned the purity of the Church's clergy. The origins of this matter began when some North African clergy during the persecution of Christians by Emperor Diocletian (284-305) handed over their Scriptures as a token renunciation of the faith. The Donatists—followers of bishop Donatus Magnus, argued that the clergy who did this ('*traditores*') could not administers the sacraments. While Donatist

[20] For my discussion of this, see 'What is Fascism--and Do We Need to Worry about This in the American Presidential Election?,' *Bible and Mission Blog* (29 October, 2024); online: *Bible and Mission: What is Fascism--and Do We Need to Worry about This in the American Presidential Election?.*

rigorists held that nobody was eligible for the clergy who had committed apostasy, the majority of the Church held that even repentant apostates could be readmitted after a long process of penance. In St. Augustine's (354-430) day, Donatists rioted and resorted to violence in support of their cause. In response, the government stepped in with force, adding further questions about the Church's attitude toward government authority in ecclesiastical matters and the use of force in defense of what one group or another considered to be a worthy, religious cause.

Augustine argued in favor of the use of force to put down the Donatists. Vincentius, bishop of Cartenna in the Roman province of Mauretania Caesariensis (now in northern Morocco), held that nobody should be compelled to be righteous (as we learn from Augustine in his *Letter* 93.5). Writing to his fellow bishop in 408, Augustine rejected this position, stating:

> if we were so to overlook and forbear with those cruel enemies who seriously disturb our peace and quietness by manifold and grievous forms of violence and treachery, as that nothing at all should be contrived and done by us with a view to alarm and correct them, truly we would be rendering evil for evil. For if any one saw his enemy running headlong to destroy himself when he had become delirious through a dangerous fever, would he not in that case be much more truly rendering evil for evil if he permitted him to run on thus, than if he took measures to have him seized and bound? (*Letter* 93.2).

(The matter faces Christians attacked and killed by Muslims today, as in northern Nigeria.) Augustine defended his position by appeal to Scripture. From Jeremiah,[21] we learn that God punished even when her continued rebellion was a surety (*Letter* 93.3). Persuasion not only by instruction but also by fear was necessary in the just cause of salvation, he averred. Moreover, since some may have wanted to abandon their error yet feared to do so because of persecution, meeting such fear with the fear of force from good men would give them reason to do so.

Augustine also appeals to Proverbs 27.6: 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy' (*Letter* 93.4). He notes that love is the motivation behind the infliction of such wounds. In the parable of the banquet, the servants are instructed to 'compel' guests to come in (Luke 14.23).[22] He further notes Jesus' words, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him' (John 6.44) (*Letter* 93.5). Augustine allegorically interprets Genesis 16.5, Sarah's restraint of Hagar, as a lesson on the spirit inflicting hardship on the carnal (cf. Galatians 4.29), motivated by love. The literal use of force is found in suffering inflicted on the Egyptians when they wished to maintain power over the Israelites (Exodus 5.4-9), Elijah's killing Jezebel's false prophets in response to her killing God's prophets (1 Kings 18.4, 40) (*Letter* 93.6). Augustine defended his position from the New Testament as well. First Corinthians 5.5 and 1 Timothy 1.20 (he mentions other passages), make the point that punishment can and should be motivated out of a desire for correction (*Letter* 93.7).

The use of violence is bad when done for injury but good when done with good intentions—for correction and in defense of the truth (*Letter* 93.8). Augustine illustrates this from the story of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who did evil when he threw Daniel's friends into the fiery furnace for not bowing to his idol but did good when he later decreed that anyone speaking against their God would be punished (Daniel 3.1-7, 29). Applying this lesson to his day, Augustine argued that, now that the Emperors are converted Christians, they should apply force in the cause of right belief (*Letter* 93.9, 19). The application of force aids people to take their stand one way or the other (*Letter* 93.16). Clemency, however, should be shown, and the motivation for inflicting punishment should be restoration (*Letter*

[21] 'In vain have I struck your children; they took no correction' (Jeremiah 2.30a, ESV).

[22] The Greek word, *anagkazō*, means 'compel, use force, constrain', and the Latin is '*compelle intrare*'.

93.10). Augustine says, in fact, that his own view changed when he witnessed how his town rejected Donatism once fear of imperial edicts threatened them (*Letter* 93.17). Augustine maintained that Paul affirmed this in Romans 13.1b-3

> For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval....

Augustine would have rigorously opposed universalist theology affirming other religions[23] or settling on arguments for coexistence with other religions. God's purpose is to make His name great among the heathen (Malachi 1.11) and extend His rule universally (Psalm 72.17-19) (*Letter* 93.20). Thus, the mission of the Church is to expand throughout the whole earth (Luke 24.44-47; Acts 1.8; Psalm 19.4; Matthew 24.14; *Letter* 93.21-22).

Gratian

Several hundred years later, a twelfth century scholar by the name of Gratian compiled a collection of existing laws known as the *Decretum*. It included a discussion of the problem of heretical bishops and others oppressing the apostolic, catholic Church. This led the latter to summon for help from the emperor and his army. The Church's earlier response to the Donatist controversy is then offered as a precedent, and the conclusion in Gratian is that God Himself beseeches, threatens, rebukes, and uses temporal powers (C. II). The intervention of the state meant that some people were killed, some lost their property, and some were imprisoned in order to restore the unity of the Church by means of compulsion (C. 23).

One of the questions that this raised was, 'Are the bad to be forced to do good?' (C. 23 quest. 6). The answer to this question acknowledged the value of peace among different orthodox groups but not of peaceful coexistence or unity with the unorthodox heretics. Peace required the restraint of evil and the relief from oppression of the good. To this end, the government could use force with the Church's approval, but it was inappropriate when used for greed or out of cruelty (C. VI). In support of this view, the Church argued that St. Paul was compelled by Christ to stop his persecution of the Church and then instructed in the faith: he was first struck, then consoled (C. I).

A Final Word: Being the Church in the World

Such arguments find no development from the Old to the New Testament, from Israel to the Church. A religious state is radically different from an international people of God. A righteous king's rule in Israel is not the same as a crucified Messiah. Ezra required Israelites to cut off idolatrous influence by divorcing foreign wives (10.11), whereas Paul encouraged Christians to remain in such marriages if possible so that the unbelieving spouse might come to faith (1 Corinthians 7.10-16). The relationship to culture changes when the purpose is not only purity but also witness and invitation to conversion. Jesus prayed, 'I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one (John 17.15).

Three forms of government appear in the Old Testament: a familial, clan structure by nomadic pastoralists, a religio-militarily government by tribal judges (from Moses to Samuel), and a monarchical, often tyrannical government patterned after other Ancient Near Eastern nations. No particular form of government receives singular support in the Old

[23] The current pope has affirmed universalism. See my ''Is the Pope Catholic?' A Response to the Universalism of Pope Francis,' *Bible and Mission Blog* (15 September, 2024); online: *Bible and Mission: 'Is the Pope Catholic?' A Response to the Universalism of Pope Francis.*

Testament as only obedience to God counts. The prophets played the role of calling the people, including the kings, to obedience to God. This prophetic role, standing outside the government structure, concludes with John the Baptist. Jesus brought God's Kingdom, distinct from any government (whether Herodian or Roman) and critical of the existing religious authorities (Sadducees, chief priests, Pharisees, scribes) and the elders. The Church as God's holy people had the role of creating a better society by offering God's salvation to those who received Christ as Lord and teaching God's Kingdom righteousness.

A close alliance of Church and state does not reflect the New Testament's perspective. While the Church might approve of the State's exercise of justice, it does not enter into an alliance with the state to defend or advance orthodoxy. About to be crucified, Jesus told Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18.36). The distinction between Church and state is also seen in Paul's writings. While the Old Testament Law gave civil authorities the right to put someone to death, this did not apply to the Church. For example, the Law called for the death penalty for someone sexually involved with his father's wife (Leviticus 20.11; cf. 18.8). Paul uses this law to condemn such a man in the Corinthian church, but the punishment was excommunication, not execution (1 Corinthians 5.1-5). The local church has authority to enforce morality on its own congregants and not with the force that the government could exercise. Nor could it enforce its morality on those outside the Church (1 Corinthians 5.9-13). Removing evil from the midst of the Church by excommunication was important (1 Corinthians 5.6-8), but the state alone had the power of the sword (Romans 13.4), not the Church. The state should punish criminality but not heresy; it might punish persecution or murder of Christians for injustice, but not for opposition to faith.

Paul appreciated the role of government to involve the negative role of administering justice to criminals (Romans 13.1-7), but this instead of Christians using violence:

While the Church might approve of the State's exercise of justice, it does not enter into an alliance with the state to defend or advance orthodoxy.

> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it[9] to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

While government is not thought of as a moral authority that 'makes bad people do good things', it does punish those who do wrong. Paul's view is in line with what Cicero says about government, including the notion that its administration of justice is a God-given trust:

> It is, then, peculiarly the place of a magistrate to bear in mind that he represents the state and that it is his duty to uphold its honour and its dignity, to enforce the law, to dispense to all their constitutional rights, and to remember that all this has been committed to him as a sacred trust (*De Officiis* 1.124).[24]

For Paul, God gives us an outward and an inward authority that judges our conduct. He gives us a government official who 'is God's servant for your good' (13.3), and He gives us a conscience to condemn our misdeeds for our own good (cf. 13.5). Natural laws written on human hearts are witnessed to by our consciences (Romans 2.15; cf. 9.1; 2 Corinthians 1.12). Governments, of course, may be unjust, and consciences may be weak (1 Corinthians 8.10, 12) or

[24] M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913).

seared (1 Timothy 4.2): this is no absolute endorsement of any government's actions but only of the concept of a rule of justice by which governments and consciences should be guided. His view for government is judicial: it punishes evildoers. Yet he does not understand government positively as an authority that shapes people morally. Indeed, this was the role of the Church. Government is approved by God to be an avenger that carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Romans 13.4). Peter also expected government to punish evildoers, and it could also commend those doing good (1 Peter 2.14).

The Church favors a limited government in which it is free to evangelize and live in obedience to God. It offers an alternative way of life to all, including the government, while acknowledging its role to exercise justice. As Paul says, 'Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Philippians 3.20). Peter calls believers 'exiles' in the world living as God's slaves (1 Peter 1.1; 2.11, 16). They represent God's will, His good, to the world (2.15). They are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light' (2.9).

The Church recognizes that those outside the Church have bad values, and it calls them to repent and turn to God. As Paul says,

> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity' (Ephesians 4.18-19).

He says, 'the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4.4). God has given 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus' to believers, and it is the Church's role to shine that light in the darkness of the world (4.5-6).

Thus, about the last thing expected of government is that it would have the role of creating a better society by forcing people to have good values. People need to hear the Gospel and convert and thereby be transformed by the power of the Gospel. Western nations have increasingly attempted to sideline the Church, make religion private, mask believers, and even criminalise its teachings. Islamic nations and groups have persecuted and killed Christians, as in Nigeria and Pakistan. China is forcefully 'sinicizing' the Church—turning it into a cultural fancy and platform for state propaganda.[25] Christians in various regions of India have been persecuted by Hindus. In all this, the Church's response must be to 'speak boldly' the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9.27-28; 13.46; 14.3; 18.26; 19.8; 26.26; Ephesians 6.18-20). The Church is not dependent upon the state or a support for the state. To quote Stanley Hauerwas, 'The primary social task of the church is to be itself: a people with a story which provides the skills for the negotiation of the dangers of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption.'[26]

[25] Cf. Rollin G. Grams, 'Sinicization: State-Enforced Enculturation of the Gospel and Church,' *Bible and Mission Blog* (10 August, 2023); online: *Bible and Mission: Sinicization: State-Enforced Enculturation of the Gospel and Church*.

[26] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 10.