



Politics, Church and State in the Post-Trump Era

29th April 2021

Abstract

An appeal for the intelligent engagement of Christians in the political realm following the defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 American presidential elections.

“When the righteous increase [in influence and authority], the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.” (Pro 29:2)

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Preface

This essay began as a response to a ‘prophetic mentoring session’ that I was receiving as a subscription to a training programme that had a worldwide membership. The immediate concern of the session was the “chaos” within the prophetic movement with the apparent defeat of Donald Trump after the many prophecies of his victory and how the movement should respond by assessing its immaturity and failure. I felt there was plenty that was thoughtful and provocative in the presentation but also plenty that requires questioning and challenging in so far as how the argument was constructed, the view presented, and the conclusions drawn. As Proverbs 18:17 encourages us, such an examination is not unholy or forbidden:

“The first to present their case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.”

In fact, the Hebrew in this verse suggests a strong confrontation so much so that the ancient Greek translation of it (the LXX) uses a word for your adversary in a lawcourt. So, this is a non-trivial and a thorough examination but undertaken in a constructive spirit of engagement with the issues pertinent to a reorientation of our political theology. Thus, I hope this essay will be found to be useful in this respect.

There is always more that could be said on this subject and time constraints imposed by my ongoing studies have meant the writing and editing has had to stop somewhere, even though I recognise there are deficiencies, some repetition and omissions. I direct you to the Bibliography to pick up on the themes that interest or challenge you. Hopefully, this will also be accessible through my blog at <https://planetmacneil.org/blog> and you are welcome to post responses or constructive comments.

Michael Macneil, May 3rd 2021

1 Introduction

1.1 The Aim and Outline of this Study

The aim of this work is to build a case for a revival of the position that champions active political and wider cultural involvement, attempting to prove not just the divine prerogative of our involvement, but what the precise nature of our involvement should be. It is my response as a rejection in principle of any withdrawal from the marketplace in lieu of reflections on our prophetic failure during the Trump era and the building of the case for an informed, increased involvement and commitment to see reform in the political realm.

This means a good look at Christian history to understand the different views of Christian understanding of and involvement in the political process. We look at how the individual Christian relates to the state and the political process and how that is distinct from how the institution of the church engages in the political process. We examine where the central passage of Romans 13 fits into our understanding and how it is often misunderstood as asserting an unconditional obedience to our political leaders. We discover that Christians can be revolutionaries if conditions demand it. It then considers how scripture speaks clearly about our involvement and what the nature of that involvement should be. We then have an in-depth look at what a biblical political theology should encompass and finish with a specific study on how a godly government should be constructed and operate. An appendix is added to specifically consider the “Trump problem”, and a second one to consider political conservatism as the required Christian choice and the controversial policy area of immigration.

1.2 Two Distinct Aspects

This essay makes a strong, positive statement of principles in answer to a number of propositions and assertions which are outlined at the beginning of the next section. There is a lot of theological and philosophical complexity in such an important subject, so it requires us to cover a lot of theological ground by considering at a most basic level what the bible tells us:

- a. About the relationship of ourselves as members of the body of Christ (the church) to the political state
- b. Of the relationship of the *institution* of the church to the *institution* of the political state¹.

When we get those basics right, we can establish the necessary principles to both answer the questions and evaluate to what degree what was presented to us is scriptural, complete and defensible.

1.3 Sola Scriptura and Tota Scriptura

I hope we can all recognise our debt to the Reformers if we are Protestants of any description, i.e., we do not recognise the Pope as the Vicar (intermediary) of Christ. We should always in any theological study honour these marvellous principles they gave us, "*scripture only and all of scripture*". We also need to be bold enough to recognise their mistakes which is noted in the text where appropriate. We need to understand the fallibility of their statements of faith but able to defend the foundations of our faith that they gave to

¹ We are all members of the body of Christ, what Luther called the "priesthood of all believers". However, this is conceptually and practically distinct from those who work full time in the Church as a ministerial calling. We tend to be very loose in our use of the term "church" with phrases like "church is not the building but the people" which is only true if we qualify with what sense are we using the word "church"; sometimes it is indeed the "building" be that an office in someone's house or a denominational headquarters. See Cope (2011), pp. 103-112.

us. The Reformers criticised the Fathers but some of the followers of the Reformers made popes out of those same Reformers. The evaluation is only ever against scripture and scripture alone. Arguments as Christians *must* be done on a scriptural basis at *every* step:

“Theology must always be based on an accurate interpretation of the teaching of the Scriptures. For some...there is a danger they may derive their knowledge more from philosophy than from a careful study of the Scriptures. They tend to extract just a certain number of great principles from the Bible and from there on they more or less forget the Bible and work the application out for themselves... True theology should always be based upon a careful and accurate exegesis and exposition and understanding of the Scriptures...we do not derive any theological principle from one scriptural statement only.”²

That is, disputes of praxis need to be resolved by exegeting the objective text of scripture rather than just preferring one version of subjectivity over another and then tagging on a few scriptures we used to validate our argument.

This is the governing principle of this study for the simple reason that these matters at hand are needing to be settled because they are serious enough and are recognised as just not matters of preference where we accept Christian freedom and liberty which would admit of a range of positions. That is, I am assuming here that the questions before us are of the type that can, to a large degree, be settled. They are not trivial issues of individual conscience (though we will recognise the important place of conscience) but admit of theological reflection and study. Making a mystical appeal to simply a vision or a word from the Lord as authoritative for our political theology at the expense of a systematic theological study and scriptural exegesis, is not convincing or sufficient. The issues are foundational

² Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, pp.16-17.

where we should be able to arrive at what is the scriptural position that is arguably binding in its essentials on all believers.

1.4 The Pre-eminence of the Word

Thus, it follows that this is intended to be a case argued not just *with* a scriptural foundation but *from* it. The problems arise for believers when they do not consider the text of scripture as normative but rather as something we just “*take into account*”, as we try to dynamically apply the revelation of “*walking in love and in the Spirit*” in our present age. I do not object to “*walking in love*” in contrast to cold dogmatism and certainly recommend “*walking in the Spirit*” for no other reason than the testimony of Romans 8 of the necessity of walking in the spirit *is* the normative, i.e., dogmatic command of scripture, as is the command to walk in ‘*love*’. However, the concept of ‘*love*’ in our culture is muddied by the inward-looking, sentimentalism, sensuality and most immediately for us, the romanticism and eroticism of the Victorian novel which is why the much stronger word *charity* (which is outward looking) was preferred in older English. Charity is something that is not subjective but can be measured with real estate as James forcibly rebuked his peers:

¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat well," but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself. (James 2:15-17)

It is a constant danger of the mystical impulse, even more so for the prophetic movement where there is an emphasis on “*encounter*” that we lose the objective sense of “*love*” in scripture in favour of a subjective, romantic allegory drawn from the Song of Songs³.

³ This is not prejudice on my part and certainly not a dismissal or the passion and life in the text of the Song of Songs which was a book of liberation for me. However, present Christian literature struggling to reconcile an objective biblical approach to sexuality with a subjective ‘*what do I do when I have this living, breathing, upset [same sex-attracted] person standing in front of me*’, is not hard to find.

1.5 The Importance of Our History

The prophet Isaiah once exhorted his peers:

“Look at the rock from which you were chiseled, at the quarry from which you were dug!”⁴

There is so much mysticism and irrationalism in ‘prophetic’ Christianity that we would all benefit from a good history lesson and learn from our past:

“one of the most foolish aspects of modern life is the tendency to assume that all that has happened in the past is quite irrelevant and unimportant and that nobody knew anything until this present generation came.”⁵

The past informs the present and does not exist independent of it. We do not live in one long, continuous present by which we reinterpret the entire past, no matter how much modern philosophy argues for that kind of situationism and the ‘cancel culture’ of social media demands it. In reading the book of Joshua you cannot help but be struck at how many times the phrase “remember” was used with the intention of giving succeeding generations a context for their understanding of themselves as a nation.

The Lord continually reminds His people in scripture to “remember” as a guide to the present and in deciding about the future. He requires us to consider a lot of history which is something I feel those of us who hunger for “*fresh revelation*” in a vision or word from the prophet of the hour that will just tell us what “*new thing*” that God is doing, often underestimate the importance of the past. We are not called to make an idol of the past or to canonise tradition, and we are called to “*forget those things [the excrement of religion]*”

⁴ Isaiah 51:1

⁵ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.135.

behind us"⁶ but that is something very different from ignoring the lessons of our history. That is, our healthy regard for the past and for the evangelical story (which did not begin with D L Moody in 1873 but is better associated with emerging from the dialectic between the world and God's kingdom enunciated in the philosophical theology of Augustine), is different than traditional-*ism* which makes an idol of the past, just as national-*ism* makes an idol of our nation which properly valued, should be something we value and take pride in. Traditionalism conceals truth and sometimes it requires forceful exposition as when Jesus dealt with the Pharisees, but he nevertheless told the people to respect what the Pharisees taught from the Law⁷.

Thus, as I recognise that we are not the first Christians to be faced with the problem of what our relationship to politics should be, I will use as a backdrop to what is said about the relationship of the Christian to both the politics and the state, the magisterial study of Romans 13 by Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones⁸ which were transcribed sermons given between November 1967 and May 1968. His emphasis on the *history* of the church as containing data for us now regarding the correct political attitude to adopt is telling:

"There are certain lessons that come to us very plainly from the history of the church in this matter of the church and the state, especially when it is looked at in the light of the teaching of the Scripture itself."

That said, it is a critical engagement and I do eventually depart from his view quite substantially in some respects because I believe our context differs quite fundamentally from when he was writing.

⁶ Paul refers to "dung" in his famous "forgetting the past and pressing to the future" passage of Philipians 3 which contextually, dealt with his previous life in Judaism. The word he specifically uses was what we would call a "swear word", it was only used in vulgar conversation.

⁷ See for example, the extended exposition in Matthew 23.

⁸ Lloyd-Jones, D. M., 2015 (2002). Romans - Exposition of Chapter 13. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

The principal qualification I believe necessary results because of his stated cultural assumptions, particularly that of a shared value base of Judeo-Christian origin in the wider culture, even if they were grudgingly maintained. Though this was arguable for his time, our moral decay has meant they are no longer authoritative for our culture now; indeed, the very negation of those standards is considered praiseworthy and righteous. Nevertheless, I believe that there are few studies of such substantive depth in around 150 pages that so clearly bring into focus the issues for us that allow us to respond constructively to our failure in the political realm. For that reason, I believe it is required reading for anyone interested in forming an intelligent, informed view of the subject.

2 The Case for a Reorientation of our Political Theology

2.1 The Preliminary Argument in Brief

The presenter prefaced the discussion of the session with what they perceived to be the “crisis” in the prophetic movement, particularly the American prophetic movement, because of the defeat of Trump after all the prophecies of his victory. Major figures within the prophetic movement in the US had made public prophecies and his loss meant these were now in disrepute. This indicated we have had a major failure in our political theology and to this end the argument was constructed during this session as a correction.

The discussion proper began by presenting an argument based on cultural relativism, the implication being our reading of scripture is never neutral but coloured by our cultural glasses. The application of this was then that politically, we had been unable to see that we had fallen in love with democracy and our way of doing things to the degree we had entered an inappropriate “*syncretism*” of our understanding of scripture with the understanding of the political arena and, consequently, had incorrectly formed alliances or loyalties with particular politicians or parties. Our closeness to particular ideologies had meant we were no longer capable of understanding God’s perspective and thus prophesying forcibly and accurately. The rest of the discussion was to present a corrected political theology that would restore to us this function.

2.2 The Solution Presented

In my view, the principal feature of the position being advocated was a type of political agnosticism and detachment from the workings of the political world. That is, God is indifferent to our political systems and we should be too other than to trust He puts in the

leaders *He* wants to fulfil His Kingdom purposes. More fully these are some indicative quotes or near-quotes from the presentation:

1. “The Lord does not endorse any particular form of organised government. Monarchy, dictatorship, democracy, socialism or communism, it does not say.”
2. “Does it matter if Biden wins **outside of the democratic process**? Biblically, not at all.”
(emphasis added)
3. “We consider the bible to be a book of democracy and it usually is not. God will get a leader in whether you or I like it. Only you or I think that it is fair. God will get the man in that he sees fit in the way he sees fit.
4. “There are multiple types of government that can bring God’s purpose to Earth.”
5. If we can assert some type of influence, well and good but that is not where our focus should be, we have confused increase of political influence with kingdom building.
6. Partnership with politics is a kind of idolatry that champions anti-Kingdom structures.
 - If we have married the nation or the political system, we will have no authority to build it up or to tear it down.
7. We have become so culturally warped by our political culture because of our failure to comprehend the full arc of scripture that we have lost our distinctive Christian voice and that leads to the failure of our ability to prophesy clearly and accurately, viz. the failure of the American prophetic movement.
8. Though we should work above the political realm, we must be in submission to them, our political programme being one of “*order and flourishing in the image of God*”; this is a nation-neutral model dispensing with the prejudices of nationalism, championing any structures of international cooperation rather than parochial isolation.

9. Our programmes are to be those championing the flourishing of *all* peoples, anywhere and everywhere. We are rather to be those that “serve” our communities by championing the principles of the kingdom of God in preference to any allegiance to any party or programme.
10. We have failed to appreciate the “full arc of scripture” because of our syncretism with political ideologies.

Now there were some broader specific theological propositions within the presentation which are worthy of special mention too as I believe they too are open to challenge or in need of qualification:

1. We are not called to defend truth but to defend relationships.
2. “The Kingdom of God exerts its power by giving up power – it exerts authority by coming under authority. The more you are under authority, the more you have it. It exerts itself by using its resources to serve.”
3. “Do not *dare* revolt as you will not be seen as faithful. Thus, you must pray for your leaders for they are under God. You must submit to your leaders and submit to their authority” (emphasis original).
4. “What is allowed to me biblically in the face of a Hitler or other tyrannical leader?
 - a. Non-violent resistance.
 - b. To prophesy as one of the key weapons for the tearing down of nations.
 - c. Acts 5:29 – humble disobedience when loyalty to Jesus is compromised (expect death).”

2.3 My Response in Brief

2.3.1 This is Not the Time to Withdraw

Now, as the presenter is an anointed, exceptional, and clear communicator, they made a compelling case for their position such that there was an immediate and public repentance from some notable leaders on the call. However, I was extremely uncomfortable with some of what I had heard and particularly with its tone because it seemed to be a regressive step back into the kind of political outlook that characterised the ghettoism and cultural withdrawal of evangelicals from wider culture for about a hundred years from the 1870s. It seemed to me to be advocating some kind of strategic withdrawal from political involvement whereas I believe, more than ever before, we should be promoting political involvement of believers at every level of the political state to restrain the evil direction in which our political states are going.

Admittedly, the presentation was more nuanced and kept some of the language of dominion, as in “kingdom building” and it is perfectly possible to agree formally with some of what was said above. For example, I can agree that the US prophetic movement seems to be in disrepute, though I am not sure the Europeans are in a much better state, despite the claim made that the mantle of prophetic leadership has been transferred to us! We might also agree that under *certain* sets of circumstances, partnership with politics is a form of idolatry, for it *is* God that raises up those He chooses and casts down others. Similarly, we *can* certainly forcefully agree that God’s political programme is for the flourishing of all peoples and that as a hermeneutic principle, it *is* the failure to appreciate the full arc of scripture that gets us to where we are now.

However, that does not mean that partnership with politics is *always* idolatry or that we should *always* accept powerlessness rather than influence if we are not to make immediate nonsense of “*making disciples of all nations*” and the “*kingdom coming on Earth as it is in heaven*”⁹. The kingdom does not come independent of the political realm, you cannot have kingdom standards in social and political matters without those who can understand and implement them in positions of power and influence. In other words, the argument needs to be had not only about the legitimacy of certain principles but also in the details of working them out.

One of the biggest problems in some countries during the 20th century which had almost continual revival for fifty to sixty years was the prevalence of corruption in their societies. In some countries now which have over 90% Christian populations, there is mass poverty and corruption. This demonstrates a total failure of the “revival” to reform their societies by failing to reform the political and social dimensions of society. The gospel is a “fake” gospel if it does not change the social and political character of the nations in which it is preached. Without such a theology, we are just surrendering cultural real estate to secularism and humanism and failing in our primary objective of “discipling all nations”.

2.3.2 Our Present: The Political Imperative Arising from the COVID-Era and the “New Normal”

To expand on this more fully, for decades in the West, the church has existed *tolerated* on the fringes of society, it has not been a leader but a follower of culture. However, whereas

⁹ Mat 28,18-20 and Mat 6:10 respectively.

in the US since the early 1970s¹⁰, Christians have been noted as a constituency that *occasionally* needs acknowledging by the political establishment (especially at election time), the European church with its mixture of Established, Catholic and Independent churches is viewed as a peculiar remnant of a bygone era and has been basically ignored. Yet, up until 2020, we could rent our rooms, sign our leases and no one would bother us if we behaved.

That all changed in 2020 when the governments of the West felt able with little or no equivocation to ban public worship, ban singing, mask everyone up and even more shockingly, with one or two notable exceptions, the churches complied with any and all restrictions, closing their doors. This is why I state we were “*tolerated*”, we quickly found we had no rights constitutionally and had absolutely no moral capital with which we had cultural authority to resist our political masters. Garden centres, casinos and off-licences were re-opened, churches remained shut unless they were opened as testing or vaccination sites.

Now I was very disturbed by what was said within sections of the British prophetic movement about COVID-19 when lockdown began as an example of God rolling out a plague. Thankfully, there were notable, senior prophetic ministers, some British and some US, who came out as equally as forcefully as I felt about it being a manifestation of evil that

¹⁰ The Rowe vs Wade judgment, which was perceived as legalising abortion on demand, is generally, amongst evangelical scholars, perceived as a watershed moment where significant portions of the evangelical movement reengaged with the political sphere. The influence of presbyterian Christian reconstructionism in creating “Dominion Theology” which then went on to influence Pentecostal and charismatic theology, stems from this period. See Macneil (2016).

needed to be resisted. I was emboldened to write two responses¹¹, one to the theology that portrays it as a plague from God and another attacking the political position of submission and non-resistance to tyranny that we were being encouraged to take as prophetic believers. That was way back in April 2020.

To this day I am amazed at the amount of engagement that the theological essay has generated. The political essay has not grabbed people in the same way, perhaps because many Christians are already too agnostic or disinterested in politics. That has further emboldened me to engage critically with believers in this work, broadening the scope and sharpening up the arguments, to try and arrest our regression into further political agnosticism and disinterest in the life of our nations. To be very blunt, at this time I believe it is *imperative* for believers not to be withdrawing from the political process and retreating into some kind of parallel kingdom building sub-culture. We should rather be provoked by the manifestation of evil to be far more keenly and sharply involved in the political realm or, to put it succinctly, politicians will be:

1. Removing our rights from us, making it impossible for us to travel, work or participate fully in society without taking a vaccination “mark”.
2. Removing our liberty to disagree; that is, witnessing and worshiping openly without being imprisoned on “hate-speech” charges.

¹¹ Macneil, M., 2020. Should I Obey My Government?. [Online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340448219_Should_I_Obey_My_Government [Accessed 04 08 2021] and Macneil, M., 2020. COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus: God’s Blessing or Satan’s Curse?. [Online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340772114_COVID-19_Novel_Coronavirus_God%27s_Blessing_or_Satan%27s_Curse [Accessed 16 03 2021]

It is my view that we have witnessed a major planet wide manifestation of evil in 2020 with both the COVID-19 pandemic being used to promote major sociological reconstruction for the purpose of limiting both our political and religious freedoms, and what amounted to an unprecedented coup against a sitting American president by manipulation and corruption of an election process. Some are indeed prophesying that the church grows most rapidly and is most pure when it is forced into an “underground” mode and so see this apostasy of our nation as a *Kairos* moment of God bringing forth a pure bride from the remnant of the sifting. They see prophetic necessity and the Book of Revelation in our time.

In contrast, I see the apostasy of our nation as a sign the church has abrogated from its task of 1Tim 2:1-2 as creating the conditions for a peaceful, tranquil, flourishing culture. That is, I see it as a retreat from being the moral guardian of culture in its refusal to engage in a forceful way to ensure that our political leaders cannot make it easier to sin. We must understand that it was not that long ago that Christians were leaders in many different parts of culture, both the arts and the sciences; they *shaped* the culture around them because of their creativity, their erudition and their commitment to the task.

2.3.3 “Prophelying” in the House of God

Let us begin with what I fondly call the “*prophelying problem*”. This problem has bugged me ever since my first training with what I have called the Hamonite¹² prophetic movement.

¹² After Bill Hamon who is generally accepted to be the father of the modern prophetic movement though he is certainly not the only one to have used the term “prophet” to describe their ministry. There are plenty within the Word of Faith movement who have used that term since the early 1970s, especially in connection with Dr Kenneth Hagin who gave birth to a distinct but related arm of the prophetic movement. Dr Kenneth Copeland considered the father of the “modern” faith movement, a development of Brother Hagin’s position, also uses the designation “prophet” and recently had Bill Johnson speak on his platform, most certainly a member of the “prophetic” movement proper who confirmed to Dr Copeland that he had “cut his faith teeth” on Kenneth Hagin, “*like everyone else*”. We have had some crossover and many Word of Faith have migrated, some would say ‘matured’ into the prophetic movement.

Our 'entire' prophetic movement, as they had prophesied a Trump victory, was in disarray and disrepute, "*shaken to our very core*". The speaker at the presentation honestly demanded, "*Do we know how to prophesy and think about these issues?*" The rhetorical implication of the speaker is "*no we do not*" and that we need a complete reorientation of our relationship to politics because Trump lost. The argument is all the pro-Trump intercession, prayer, fasting and prophetic declarations of his victory have been made from a position of theological, worldview error. As we are in error in our basic theology, we are unable to prophesy accurately into our world.

For example, to make the argument of the presenter clear, we might consider the theme of a book by an accepted and recognised prophet who distinguished himself as being one of the few who predicted the rise of Cyrus" Trump¹³ and him winning the 2016 presidential race¹⁴. Now he also predicted he would win (with a little equivocation) the 2020 race. Even today, this prophet, with an international ministry still holds this position and predicts a Trump comeback. Another example is that other prophets asserted "*he did indeed 'win'*" but it was a stolen election. Another example from this era would be that first time round, Democratic Party 'prophets' predicted a Hilary win. The Republican prophets a Trump win, at least when it looked like he would win. Now most prophetically uninformed people would regard these as "false" prophecies as "*winning*" corresponds to him now

¹³ See <https://lance-learning.myshopify.com/products/cyrus-trump> for the origin of this designation. Lance is credited with giving Trump credibility among evangelicals after Ted Cruz was initially touted as the 'Christian' choice. Interestingly, Ted Cruz was one of Trump's strongest allies during his presidency. Kenneth Copeland also discusses being invited to pray for Trump before his 2016 campaign, he met him as a Ted Cruz supporter but left stating '*I prophesied over him as if he was already President*'. See Brown (2020), especially chapter 6, '*Did God Uniquely Raise Up Donald Trump?*' for the dimensions and details surrounding this issue.

¹⁴ Kim Clement, way back in 2007 is also said to have predicted Trump in the Whitehouse, <https://youtu.be/ypDFVK7Exfg>. However, he only referred to the "prophet in the Whitehouse" which is suitably imprecise to be an exciting, inspired word but nothing more. Although some state he mentions Trump, I do not hear it that way.

being in the Whitehouse unless they had also specified “*he will win but the election will be stolen by an illegitimate coup*”. That would have been *specific* and *accurate*, which, in my view, are hallmarks of true prophecy.

Now, quite reasonably, the presenter is wanting to use the Trump episode as a wedge to demonstrate dysfunction at the heart of the prophetic movement and the need for a fundamental reassessment of its political theology. However, despite a *prima facie* plausibility of the analysis, I believe on closer examination, it is shown to be a *non-sequitur* – the problem in the political realm is a symptom of a deeper problem elsewhere. The problems of the credibility of the prophetic movement did not start with Donald “Cyrus” Trump. Prophetic schism had occurred with Bush and Obama, they were loved and loathed by different sects of the same movement; in the case of Obama, often split on colour lines. I remember black evangelical pastors dancing in the street, celebrating his election.

Further, and most obviously, the movement seemed to miss the biggest event in recent history, the glorious pandemic, though I do need to grant that *perhaps* there were one or two exceptions¹⁵ to that rule. What we certainly do not need to doubt is that there were *most certainly* a whole flurry of prophecies after it broke stating, “*it would all be over by Passover*” which, other than by creatively reinterpreting what “*all be over*” and moving

¹⁵ Chuck Pierce is credited with predicting a “plague” in 2019 though his subsequent much sought after words have, sensibly, been general guidance rather than specific prophetic utterances. Heidi Baker is also credited with seeing it years ahead of time, <https://greglancaster.org/2016/02/heidi-bakers-prophetic-vision-bread.html> but that word too was specifically general in its inspiration that we can apply it in all sorts of ways.

Passover to 365 days later, means these words, too, were also false^{16,17}. This was then compounded in the distastefulness of people backfitting their prophecies after the event and the absence of any kind of public repentance for error.

My point is, we have an identical situation which does indeed ask some fundamental questions of the movement. I, personally, have repeatedly asked this question of senior leaders, *“what if someone, claiming to be a national or international prophet, clearly gets it so wrong, what are we to do?”* The standard answer given is that we, each, individually have to “test” their words. Well, this is fine if we are having a learning session or are prophesying to one another in our nests or on our training courses but is positively infantile if we are claiming any type of authority of speaking for God to the unregenerate world. It is not so much that we cannot make mistakes but the wider integrity of the movement in the eyes of those outside the kingdom that are supposed to be arrested by what we say, ‘For just as it is written, *“the name of God is being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*’¹⁸

So, in summary, we can certainly agree with the presenter there is a sense of “absolute chaos” in the movement, but it predated the Trump episode. Maybe we can even agree that our political engagement lacked wisdom and knowledge, but I will be using it to

¹⁶ Viola, F., 2020. *Prophetic Nonsense*. [Online] <https://frankviola.org/2020/12/03/propheticnonsense/> puts it this way, *“Bottom line: If someone decides to speak on God’s behalf, and what they say doesn’t come to pass, the word they gave was false. Period. End of conversation. The only exception is if it’s a word of judgment, and God’s people en masse fast, pray, and repent. And this can actually be verified.”*

¹⁷ Now, if we are to claim this is “true” then we have all been exploited and manipulated for the purposes of global sociological reform and for making big pharmaceuticals billions. I believe the latter but do not believe we need to strain the former in that way, see Macneil (2020), *My COVID-19 Thesis*.

¹⁸ Romans 2:24; in fact, read from v.17 and substitute ‘prophet’ for Jew.

argue for a reformed, wiser engagement, not a drawing back. Thus, we should be able to conclude that chaos in the prophetic movement is not a convincing argument for anything other than prophets have a general crisis in prophetic reliability on most matters, politics included. Thus, if we are “*shaken to the core*”, it is because we have had our eyes shut to our own praxis for the last 30 years.

2.3.4 Are We Wedded by our Cultural Prejudices to a Faulty Political Theology?

After this introductory statement, the presenter makes an interesting logical move in wanting to establish their thesis that our biggest error was the merging of the standards of our culture with our Christianity. The assertion was that we have zero objectivity when it comes to reading scripture because it has become so merged with our culture. This “*syncretism*”, a term which is normally used to express the reconciliation of two logical irreconcilables, means that we have lost the ability to understand the scripture clearly for we have polluted it with faulty cultural norms and a democratic mindset.

Now, despite its initial plausibility to us an argument, we must always remember that philosophically *any* argument based on asserting relativism and insurmountable cultural prejudice must *exempt itself* from its own analysis to have anything coherent to say because otherwise, it too becomes just another culturally conditioned narrative, nothing more than a possibility in the sea of competing possibilities; as the meme goes, the argument “*all judgments are relative*” is rightly footnoted “*except this one*”. The very fact I am asserting we are suffering from cultural prejudice and zero objectivity in reading scripture is asserting that I can stand outside of that prejudice and culture and make that assertion. If that is the case, then I have just refuted my own argument which is my point

about relativism above, the presenter is proceeding to give us a political theology but on their own analysis it will be just as full of inescapable presuppositions and cultural prejudice; granted, they will be different ones but present, nevertheless.

So, unfortunately for our purposes, the argument refutes itself and dies on its own sword before it ever gets off the ground, philosophically at least, though it could certainly have grabbed our hearts by its rhetorical force. We might try and rescue ourselves by claiming a special prophetic revelation from God who would be able to stand outside of our prejudices and then enlighten our minds, but we have a much more fundamental theological problem if we took that route. It is like saying we are unable to clearly understand and apply God's instruction within His Word on *any* subject without special prophetic revelation or commentary and we become operational mystics. We are forever in need of the "*now*" rhema of God before we can formulate any type of praxis for the Christian life. Of course, some *do* indeed argue this and for "*trans-rationality*" and a form of logic or life which is not understandable outside of the Christian community.

I believe this is an example of the worst excesses of the influence of postmodernism on Christianity and is shown to be thoroughly contradictory as we see that Jesus accepted the authority of the written Hebrew scriptures and quoted extensively from them¹⁹ without the need for an in-depth hermeneutic circle during his time on Earth. This issue of the authority of the *logos* in contrast to the *rhema* is one of the sources of the greatest confusion to enter into any form of 20th century charismatic Christianity.

¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.65.

To quote Landa Cope²⁰:

“the law given to Moses [is] to disciple the nearly free nation of Israel. God begins to speak for himself and gives *clear, concise, and very specific* instruction for how to achieve justice in a community.”²¹ (emphasis added)

We will all stand before the judgment seats of both the Father and the Son to give account according to the moral and social principles of this same Law. Though we may have cultural idiosyncrasies and we may need to probe beneath the application to find the principle, God’s Word is not rendered null and void by our culture. Again, Landa clarifies this for us whilst fully admitting our responsibility for establishing the application of the Law in our culture:

“Remember that the truths of the Bible are told primarily in story form. We study the history and the context, but we will never be in the same circumstances as Moses and Israel, so their application will not necessarily work for us. The *principles*, however, are God’s truth and are applicable in new and dynamic ways in any age, any set of circumstances in any nation.”²² (emphasis added)

Now the mystical amongst us will jump on the words “*new and dynamic ways*” but those “*new and dynamic ways*” do not extend to contradicting the explicit outworking of those principles in the nation of Israel that are given, as the Apostle Paul tells us, “*for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training*” (2 Tim 3:16). Now, and this is my main

²⁰ A much underrated and underappreciated thinker (if her You-Tube stats are anything to go by); she was one of the cofounders of YWAM and one of the chief evangelical thinkers who developed a form of dominion theology apart from the Reconstructionists but nevertheless arrived at the same, albeit in places a more nuanced, theonomical position (Cope 2011; Cope 2015). At a basic level, a “theonomist” is simply one that believes the Law of God is objective and still applicable to us today with the exception of the typological and cultic dimensions of the Law which are seen to pass away with Christ. For theonomists, Christ is demonstrating to us the proper application or “fulfillment” of the Law, i.e., the fullest and most accurate application of the Law, not as a matter of salvation but of ethics for the believer (Matt 5:17). It is thus fundamentally distinct from legalism (which advocates salvation through law-keeping) though theonomists are frequently accused of legalism by critics. It proved to be an extremely controversial position, particularly for theonomists who believe that the penal sanctions of the Law are still applicable and binding for Christians today, but has proven extremely difficult to refute from an exegetical perspective. See Bahnsen (1977) for the fullest statement of the position and Cope, *Old Testament Template*, Ch.6. Her most recent book *God and Political Justice* (2015) is really a full expansion of the basic position she established in this chapter.

²¹ Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 231

²² Cope, *Old Testament Template*, p.62

philosophical point, you cannot be “*corrected or reproof*” in any type of just fashion, there must be *objective* standards of correction or reproof. It can only be just if it applies equally to all in morally equivalent circumstances. It is God who defines the “morally significant” components of our reasoning through His Law – polygamy becomes no more acceptable to us, even if it is culturally normal for us. To argue otherwise, is simply the Christian form of cultural relativism and needs to be dismissed as such.

To take a much more politically significant specific example, we can consider the social gospel movement, even the more “evangelical” version of it associated with evangelicals such as Ron Sider. It is often stated by apologists for that movement that God “*told us ‘not to steal’*” but “*did not define ‘stealing’ for us*”. This is an outright fallacy, we have chapter upon chapter within Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and the restatement in Deuteronomy, that establishes the principle of private property, your right to it and that stealing is the illegitimate violation of those property rights. It further gives a penal code and authorises the punishment of thieves; not all theft is treated as criminal²³, but all theft is defined as sin and retribution is always made. As Landa says, they are “dynamic” in the sense we do not talk about boundary markers and oxen when we talk about property rights, but it will apply to our cars and tax systems. This is not to deny that there are not places of ambiguity or of great challenge as to how we are to understand and apply God’s Word, but it becomes very clear whether our cultural practices measure up to His Law or not in many cases because of the fruit that they bear.

²³ That is, there is a civic sanction associated with it. One example in scripture is associated with the stealing of a small amount of fruit; restitution is made but there is no further punishment. In other cases, there is a fine, compensation and restitution. It is an oft neglected feature of the Law code in the Hebrew scriptures that it encourages intelligent discrimination of the nature of a misdemeanour or a crime.

That is, if our political theology gets us to a place where we are indifferent to, or worse, are actively arguing for candidates or parties which represent a rejection of the Christian worldview and are publicly stating that they will make it easier to create social sin, it is not a “new and dynamic” application of the political theology presented to us in the Hebrew scriptures. We cannot, for example, justify supporting candidates who *personally* say they object to the sin of abortion but who then qualify that immediately by saying they will mandate the taxation of *all* to fund abortion. It is one thing to permit safe-abortion out of social necessity because abortion, like poverty, will ‘*always be with us*’ despite God instructing ‘*there shall be no poor among you*’. It is quite another thing to legislate and tax for it as a “human right”, it is a human wrong because scripture puts the highest priority on preserving life. That is a non-negotiable, objective, scriptural standard revealed to us through His Word.

2.3.5 Are We Called to Defend Truth?

Another strong statement was made that as a matter of principle, “we are not called to defend truth but relationships”. Certainly, we can all accept that truth might be progressive for us and that we do not need total agreement amongst ourselves to value each other’s views and perspectives. In that respect, we can “defend” our relationships, particularly from those outside. We give one another grace and we recognise our friends from our enemies. However, I immediately question the proposition that we are not called primarily to defend truth in preference to “relationships”. Our early fathers of the faith really had to work hard in sorting out our basic theology in the midst of both internal schism and external philosophy. It was a painful and sometimes explosive process but the results of say the

Council of Chalcedon or the Council of Nicea are still with us. This is even more the case with the forensic logic of both Wycliffe and Luther in challenging papal dogma with scriptural precedent that began the Reformation. The strength that came from taking a position and then defending it was of benefit to us all.

There are matters of subjective preference over which we do not divide²⁴ but there is solid ground on which most evangelical Christians should stand if they are thinking clearly. The testimony of scripture for us *is* normative, we are called to be intelligently “dogmatic” in the face of challenge. If we are not defending truth, then apologetics is redundant, and our faith is arbitrary, but I believe Christianity is objectively defensible and presentable in such a way the unbeliever understands the challenged intellectually that is given to them. Only the spirit of God *saves* people, but Peter addresses us that we should be ready to give an *apologia*²⁵. An *apologia* is not simply a testimony, but a *reasoned* defence of our faith.

Similarly, Jude counselled us to “*contend [fight for] the faith*”²⁶ in the face of error. Paul recognised divisions would emerge because some are approved of God, others are not²⁷. James and Paul had an intense exchange of which we have scriptural record in the Book of James of his questioning Paul’s interpretation fundamentally and insistently, he mirrors Paul’s argument, using the same scriptures and asserting an opposite conclusion. In this case, the argument was principally settled in Paul’s favour as the church adopted his

²⁴ 1 Cor 1:12; Rom 14, 1-23.

²⁵ ἀπολογία, ας, ἡ defense; as a legal technical term, a speech in defence of oneself *reply, verbal defense* (2Tim 4:16); BDAG emphasizes this is a *speech* in defence, it is a reasoned, rather than inspirational or preached.

²⁶ Jude 1:3.

²⁷ 1 Cor 11:19.

gospel, but James has survived in the canon by some creative hermeneutics²⁸ despite being called “an epistle of straw” by Luther²⁹.

In other words, to be a reasoned defence, it is more substantive than proposing we live a life of continuous reform where truths are recycled as they are renewed and improved. Doctrine can be established and should be defended; over 50 direct uses of the word translated “doctrine” are found in the Christian scriptures and it by its very nature, has objective reference. We cannot contradict the testimony of scripture; we must be able to rationally defend why we believe what we believe. If we cannot define what it is that we believe, we can never defend it. It needs defence and it needs justification at every point and correction that we can preach the truth about Jesus in a rational and spiritual manner.

Though the phrase “*truth is always growing and always revealing*” seems compelling to us and seems to express something of theological importance, its referent seems, in the final analysis to be a proposition out of mysticism. Now, it is certainly true that we need to remain in a place of epistemic openness, and intransigent religious dogmatism, most of us will agree, is destructive when it is defended without understanding but simply because “*that is our religion*”. That is, we are aware that our understanding of the faith may change

²⁸ It is of note that Luther found James unpalatable, the “epistle of straw”. He felt he was contradicting Paul’s conception of justification by faith alone and I agree that he was. However, people rescue James by asserting he is talking about the fact that a real faith must have a visible working out, whereas Paul is arguing theologically about justification by faith. There is something to this thought but it is driven more by the desire to see scripture as a seamless garment than by the record of the texts.

²⁹ This does not mean we are agreeing it *is* an epistle of straw, we just agree it has a very different emphasis and near opposition to the Pauline view.

as we receive fresh revelation or even re-read the “old” revelation but that does not invalidate the testimony of scripture that we “*should watch our doctrine*”³⁰.

So, whilst there is a valid case for our overcommitment to small truths that then distorts the greater body of truth and we destroy our relationships because we divide over them, this does not mean we have established the supremacy of maintaining relationships. It is a false dilemma - we need to maintain our relationships *and* have our dogma established. The two are not in contradiction to one another, if we lay aside doctrine to maintain relationship, we have compromised. The problem of dogmatism and its effects on relationships has been correctly identified, and we understand that our analysis that breaks down and the synthesis that reassembles the understanding needs to be carefully and responsibly executed to preserve the unity of the spirit whenever possible. Nevertheless, as Paul counselled his spiritual sons Titus and Timothy, doctrine must be watched, perceived, understood and defended.

2.4 Summary

Thus, we can see that though the argument has a lot of powerful rhetoric and *prima facie* plausibility, it has some fundamental weaknesses when we probe it. Most significantly, the best we can establish from the argument, even on its own terms, is that we have been given an alternative narrative but just another competing subjectivity in a sea of possibility. That said, both of us recognise the urgency of reorientating our political thinking in lieu of the Trump era, this is a disagreement amongst friends, not enemies. I agree with the

³⁰ 1 Tim 4:16; Titus 1:7.

presenter's stated aim, we need to establish just what *is* biblical thinking about politics. This is the task to which we now attend.

3 Biblical Theology I - The Relationship of the Individual Christian to the State

3.1 The Given of Involvement

A question that could be in some minds and which concerned me greatly a few years ago as I became frustrated with what I considered insipid evangelical theology regarding our political and cultural positions, is whether it is right for Christians to be involved *at all* in the wider cultural or political processes. Are we not rather to be engaged in loading up the arc of the church before we are removed either by the Rapture or the Second Coming? A famous radio preacher during the 1940s, put it this way “*you do not polish brass on a sinking ship*”.

Thankfully, I believe it is straightforward to answer this question as the apostle Paul had to write very early on in the life of the church³¹ to prevent people leaving their employment to wait for the coming of the Lord despite that the Second Coming was considered imminent even by himself³². For even while having this conviction, he at times engaged by insisting on his political and civil rights as a Roman citizen³³. He had no problem addressing Agrippa in a political context and eventually appealing to Caesar to prevent his undoubted martyrdom at the hands of the Jews.

That is, we do not cease to have rights, a political relationship and a responsibility to our nation because we have joined the kingdom of God. Lloyd-Jones summarised it this

³¹ 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The injunction “*if one does not work, one does not eat*” was made in the eschatological context within these letters.

³² 1 Cor 7, 26ff.

³³ Acts 22:25; Acts 16:37.

way, “our citizenship is in heaven does not mean we do not stop being citizens [on earth] in contrast to various movements within the church. Thus, we should [remain] involved in politics.”³⁴ It would seem self-evident from scripture that when evil prospers, it is all the more incumbent on the righteous to make more of a stand to force it backwards (Prov. 29:2). However, two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote those words and many modern evangelical preachers assert, we are in “*the last of the Last Days*”.

The predominance of this negative view about culture in large sections of the modern evangelical mindset was the result of a great innovation of premillennial theology known as *dispensationalism* that occurred during the latter half of the 19th century when Christians began to have prophecy conferences about the “End Times” and withdrew from engagement and involvement. The position, which also asserted a secret “rapture” of believers before or as part of the Second Coming³⁵, came to dominate fundamentalist and later charismatic theology, particularly after the World Wars had destroyed postmillennial optimism and the restoration of the state of Israel in 1948 seemed to vindicate the dispensationalist readings which considered that event as the great marker of the “final”

³⁴ Lloyd-Jones, p.17

³⁵ It is very difficult scripturally to justify a “secret” rapture. For those scripturally sensitive ministries who want to maintain a belief in the rapture (like the one I now work for), their statement of faith makes the secret rapture of believers a part of the Second Coming. This stretches the Second Coming from a point in history to as much as seven years which is a difficult interpretation on the basis of the semantics of the word (which are to do with the presence of the object) and that the apostles seem to refer to it as a definite event. Dispensationalism pivots on the interpretation of Daniel’s 70th “week”, an unqualified “seven” in Hebrew which in this case is read as a year. The culmination of history before the millennium is said to mean this seven-year period. Some believe the Rapture occurs at the beginning, the middle or the end of this seven-year period. This period is the reign of the Antichrist.

generation. However, something is clearly wrong in this view as 1988 came and went (1948 + 40) as did 2015 (1967 + 40)³⁶ as the times for our rapture into the eternal state.

Thus, I would suggest that any question about involvement in principle only *seems* a reasonable one because of the great decay in our political theology that resulted from the influence of dispensationalism. “Rapturism” was an aberration and a distortion of classical premillennialism unknown before the 1830s and really gained very little traction outside the “prophecy conferences” until the publication of the Scofield Bible notes of 1909 popularised the view. Classical premillennialism had envisaged a persecuted but a powerful church that is vindicated by the Second Coming; dispensationalism majored on the Antichrist dominating the earth for 7 years and a defeated but faithful church rescued by the rapture from the evil kingdom as part of the Second Coming. It was thus an eschatology of defeat, a tiny remnant rescued from worldwide perdition. The political implications of this view are thus obvious – it makes absolutely no sense to be involved and aggressive evangelism is the only task of the church, viz. the evangelicalism of the vast majority of evangelicals during the 20th century.

In contrast, previous generations of Christians were active as reformers in the political realm even alongside the great awakenings and outpourings in the spiritual realm when the sense of the Coming of the Lord was most imminent. Indeed, some of the

³⁶ Jesus said that “*this* generation [that saw the budding of the figtree, i.e., understood as the reformation of Israel] shall not pass away until all is fulfilled”. A “generation of Israel” was 40 years, i.e., 1988. After 1988 came and went some asserted that Jerusalem did not come under Jewish control until 1967 so we should take that date as the marker for the final generation, i.e., with the terminus being 2015. The “Rapture” fever around those dates, seeing the blood moons and alignment of planets all as imminent signs of the Lord’s coming, are all rooted in dispensationalist premillennial eschatology of this sort.

greatest political progress came in the wake of the same spiritual revivals of previous centuries. In summary, regardless of our final eschatological perspective, the classic position of any of the three major eschatological positions before dispensationalism was of a triumphant church and that implies an involved church.

3.2 Our Civic Responsibility – Why We Lost It

In light of the discussion above, we can see why there was a progressive withdrawal from “the world” into a Christian version of Noah’s ark. Lloyd-Jones exposition was one of the first major rebuttals of this view in mainstream evangelicalism, he was forceful that evangelicals needed to engage both in the church and the state, *“if you do nothing, the decisions will be taken for you and you will find yourself facing a fait accompli...that is something we should all denounce”*³⁷. There was a movement in the early church that believed that once you became a believer you were “finished with this world” and essentially contracted out of the State, waiting for the return of the Lord as we indicated above that some of the Thessalonians were doing.

For the reasons outlined above, we can say that the first wave of the Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s were a modern expression of this view. The world was sinking and our only role as the Church is to snatch souls from the burning fire. Thus, in such a view, the wider culture of the Arts and the Sciences, was to be engaged and interacted with only to the degree that the primary role of the church, which was the salvation of souls, was advanced. Fundamentalism of this kind was hostile to social action

³⁷ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.134.

and most intellectual study³⁸, considering it a “distraction”. Lloyd-Jones captures this fear of reason and scholarship created an obscurantism among 20th century protestants in reaction to the social gospel of the Liberals:

“I am old enough to remember a generation of evangelicals who would have nothing to do with scholarship...Scholarship is a menace and a danger; have nothing to do with it!...Whatever you study...don't study theology or you will lose your faith”³⁹

Now, the second wave of the Fundamentalists, perhaps encapsulated by the publication of J.I. Packer's 1958 book⁴⁰ examining the theological underpinnings of the movement of which he was probably a part in the Presbyterian branch at that point, was far less hostile to intellectual study⁴¹ and is now acknowledged as a distinct grouping within conservative evangelicalism⁴². In fact, the intelligent fundamentalist today, is far more likely to prefer the denomination of “conservative evangelical” or “neo-evangelical”⁴³, because of the pejorative connotations, generalisation and imprecision now connected with the term

³⁸ See for example, the personal testimony of D Martyn Lloyd Jones in ‘The Place of Reason’ in his *What Is An Evangelical?* He was speaking there to students in 1971.

³⁹ Jones, *What Is An Evangelical?*, p.49.

⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1958)

⁴¹ See for example, George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, p41. This book also has a useful academic review of the fundamentalist movement from a position outside of the movement but not openly hostile to it, covering its prehistory to the mid-1980s. A rather different view is presented by Falwell et al in *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, pp78-108 which is written as a history from within the Fundamentalist Baptist movement but has much to commend it as a scholarly work.

⁴² Poythress (2012), p13n

⁴³ There are also a grouping that liked to be known as “post-evangelicals” who believed that evangelicalism was too narrow and restrictive in its view but who nevertheless wanted to retain some tenuous connection to evangelicalism much as some of the post-modernists wanted to retain some intellectual connection to modernism because of the “success” of modernism in giving us “science”. David Tomlinson (2003 (1995)) is perhaps one of the most famous charismatics to have adopted that view and perhaps did more than any other minister to popularise it. However, it is a term I seldom hear now, though Tomlinson did release a new edition with an additional preface in 2014 and there are others working with the term. It seems to have been subsumed with other attempts to revise and “modernise” evangelical theology which unfortunately often dilutes the distinctive Christian nature of it and seems to move towards more liberal social and ethical positions. In a sense, dominion theology was a positive reaction to the dissatisfaction with evangelicalism by broadening the scope of evangelicalism back to its socially conscious roots; post-evangelicalism was similarly a reaction to the same dissatisfaction with evangelicalism but seemed unable to retain the positive commitments of evangelicalism.

“fundamentalist”⁴⁴. Thus, though they are still more likely to be in their own institutions they are not necessarily fully isolated from the broader culture or scholarly world.

Nevertheless, and this is our main point in this section, is that the legacy of the movement in the 20th century evangelical mindset has been to maintain a strong separation between the “spiritual” and the “secular” – people “go into fulltime ministry” when they leave their “secular” job. There is just something “less spiritual” about a marketplace vocation, none more so than a life in politics. Thus, passionate Christians will always feel “called” out of the secular life into the spiritual life of the “ministry”. This distinction between the secular and sacred is examined further below but it is a false dichotomy that has been imported from Enlightenment philosophy (particularly Kant) and wants to relegate “religion” to some private sphere of the personal, semi-rational realm and establish the marketplace of culture on some secular, rational and “scientific” basis. For the clear-thinking Christian, this must be rejected – rationality and science presuppose a Christian view of reality and the modern scientific revolution grew out of the Reformation; there are even modern atheists that acknowledge this. The place of the Christian is in the world but not of it and that is what dominion theology helps us recover.

3.3 Our Civic Responsibility – Recovering It Through Dominion Theology

For those of us who are children of the Reformers, the sacred-secular is an untenable dichotomy that we should not accept, and it is certainly not a biblical one – there is *no* secular for the believer. If we do not argue on such a basis, we have already surrendered the ground to the secular-humanist enemies of the Gospel. Our position should be rather at

⁴⁴ A positive statement of this relabelling is given in McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, pp9-23 and a negative one in Barr, *Fundamentalism*, pp1-10.

its foundation a distinctively *Christian* one perhaps captured perfectly by Abraham Kuyper in an 1880 speech as he opened the university which he had founded:

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”⁴⁵

For Kuyper, there was no sacred or secular; *all* was sacred:

“Whatever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand - in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science - he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of God. He is employed in the service of his God. He has strictly to obey his God. And above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.”⁴⁶

This emphasis is also found in J Gresham Machen who like Kuyper, was concerned with the whole of culture and the transformational power of the gospel. Machen was the founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929 after the split caused by the removal of the commitment to orthodox Christian theology as a requirement for future ministers at the premier Christian university of Princeton and was a passionate believer in the reformation of *all* culture by ensuring there could be Christian education at all levels rather than a centralised, State-controlled education. This was his first-hand response to the noted anti-intellectualism, obscurantism and narrow evangelistic focus of the emerging fundamentalist movement of the time.

So, although Machen was active during the first wave of the fundamentalist movement and this is at the heart of Fulwell’s (1981) claim that he was a key personality within that movement asserting ‘*[he] contributed academic and intellectual credibility to the*

⁴⁵ Kuyper, A., 1998. Sphere Sovereignty. In: *Abraham Kuyper - A Centennial Reader*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, pp. 460-490. This quote is found on p.488.

⁴⁶ Kuyper, A., *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kindle edition (Amazon Media EU S.à r.l., n.d. (1898)),p.45

*Fundamentalist Movement*⁴⁷, it was an anachronism and a mis-categorisation. He was pointedly **not** a premillennialist which was almost a rite of passage for a fundamentalist, even leading to charges by some fundamentalists against him, doubting his orthodoxy. However, his apologetic approach and non-compromising stand for the Bible did mean he exerted significant influence⁴⁸ on parts of the movement. The Fundamentalist movement was, theologically, primarily concerned with defending the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture and so had this in common with Machen in his stand against Liberalism.

However, Machen's theological vision and positions were far more sophisticated and culturally inclusive. Machen had not just defended scripture, but the *entire* Christian worldview, against Liberalism⁴⁹ and was concerned with the regeneration of *all* of culture⁵⁰. So, despite his contacts with the Fundamentalists, Machen was really the precursor of the modern Dominion Theology movement⁵¹ whose central theological distinctive was to

⁴⁷ Fulwell, *The Fundamentalist Phenomena*, pp96-97.

⁴⁸ James Barr in his *Fundamentalism* (1984 (1977)), perhaps one of the most influential polemics directed against the movement and conservative evangelicalism generally, indiscriminately lumps Machen with the Fundamentalists paying little attention to the important theological and methodological differences. As moderate evangelical and academic Alister McGrath was to write in a retrospect on his journey from evangelicalism to liberalism and then back again (a journey in which Barr's book had predominantly featured) it was not so much the *content* of the book which was so distasteful but the condescending tone of it.

⁴⁹ Machen, J.G., *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 2009(1923)), pp1-13. This introductory section is invaluable reading as a restatement of a Christian conception of culture and immediately engages with the necessity of warfare in the cultural realm and specifically with socialistic political philosophies. It must be remembered Machen had witnessed the Russian revolution a mere five years to publishing this work and the greatest intellectuals of America like John Dewey were laying the foundations of the "Progressive" movement which was to incubate American socialism. It is arguable that the baby has just been born, it is only in the Trump era that American politicians in the *mainstream* Democratic Party and in the mainstream media, were happy to campaign under the banner of "socialism".

⁵⁰ Machen, J.G., *Christianity, Culture and Liberalism* (GLH Publishing, Louisville: 2018(1913/1922)). Machen's 'Christianity and Culture' address, which is the first part of this collection, was originally entitled '*The Scientific Preparation of the Minister*' and was delivered on Sep.20, 1912 at the opening of the 101st session of Princeton Theological Seminary. This at once shows how basic in his thinking was his concern to engage and transform *all* of culture and how this eventually motivated him to break with Princeton and found Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

⁵¹ When Machen founded WTS, his first professor of Apologetics (who was to remain over 40 years in that post) was Cornelius Van Til. He provided the philosophical inspiration for the first generation of dominion

become the entire reformation of culture. It is a theological position that has no reticence in taking political positions based on his understanding of the implications of scripture.

Specifically, Machen defended a range of political positions and took his arguments to the American Congress. This correlated with founding WTS in 1929, that there should be no compromise on the status of scripture, the evangelical mission and what he believed to be the transformative role of the church in culture. It might be said, *“it is the task of the church to teach the state that it is its duty to bring into being the lordship of Christ over the whole of life.”*⁵² Machen was aggressive in his statement of the need to battle in the realm of intellectual ideas, believing correctly, that it was ideas which would come to dominate the political direction of a nation:

“We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”⁵³

This is such a key insight. We have already noted that the 20th century “revivalism”, with a couple of minor and localised exceptions, has spectacularly failed to affect the wider culture. Revivals seem to disappear without trace a few years after they finish⁵⁴. Thus,

theologians by his reconciliation of the conflicting Kuyperian and Warfieldian apologetic positions by profound philosophic insight, correcting the fallacious inferences of both men whilst accepting their basic positions. The resulting Christian epistemology was picked up and given sociological application by Rousas Rushdoony (who had written the earliest summary of Van Til (Rushdoony (1958))) and was the man most responsible for developing the perspective known as “dominion theology” or “Christian Reconstructionism”, see Macneil (2016) especially section 4.5ff. Greg Bahnsen, a student of Van Til during the 1970s, who Van Til considered the authority on his own position and who he had wanted to succeed him at WTS, was one of the principal figures in working out the position in the most philosophically rigorous fashion.

⁵² DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.142.

⁵³ Machen, *Christianity, Culture, and Liberalism*, p.6.

⁵⁴ A case in point is the world-famous “Welsh” revival of 1904-6. Within two or three years of the end of the revival, church attendance had returned to what it was prior to the revival and red-blooded socialism was to capture the hearts of the industrial workers.

through some noted professors of WTS such as Cornelius Van Til and a second generation of students such as Greg Bahnsen, his cultural philosophy became foundational for the Presbyterian Dominion Theology movement that emerged into public view in the early 1970s when Rousas Rushdoony published his *Institutes of Biblical Law*⁵⁵. Within five years, by the time Rushdoony sponsored the publication of Bahnsen's *Theonomy*⁵⁶, it had begun to assert itself strongly as a controversial school of Reformed theology.

Historically, it was the 1973 *Rowe vs Wade* court decision that marked the moment in which the movement began to influence the wider evangelical movement, most directly because of Francis' Schaeffer's⁵⁷ broad influence within the evangelical movement. Schaeffer's influence extended dominion theology's reach, positioning artistic, scientific, social and political responsibility as a principal, rather than subsidiary concern for the Christian. By the mid-1980s, even influential Anglican theologians such as John Stott⁵⁸ were arguing vigorously for *political* involvement which went beyond "apolitical" social service and social action.

Stott's discussion of the very issues that this essay is dealing with in reaction to our new prophetic position on politics, sound very much like we are in a recapitulation of the

⁵⁵ Rushdoony, R.J., *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg: 1973)

⁵⁶ Bahnsen, G.L., *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, extended edition with response to critics (Phillipsburg: PRC, 1984(1977))

⁵⁷ Francis Schaeffer had studied under Van Til at WTS and though seldom crediting Van Til or publicly associating himself with the Dominion Theology movement, did much to popularise Van Tillian ethics and worked closely with several other prominent members of the movement. Post *Roe vs Wade* (1973), his activism and influence more than any other, provoked many previously quietistic evangelicals to social action.

⁵⁸ In two volumes, *Involvement* (1984 and 1985). I wrote about this at length in my Master's Thesis, *Dominion Theology – Its Origin, Development and Place in Christian Thinking*. You can find a PDF of the thesis here: <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/dominion-theology-its-origin-development-and-place-in-christian-thinking/>

argument he was having with Dr Edward Norman who six years previously had given the Reith lectures warning about the dangers of the politicisation of the church's mission. This perfectly captures, I feel, the modern, "prophetic" Christian attitude to political engagement and action. All who go there will become so warped in their perspective, they will lose their ability to prophesy clearly.

3.4 The Nature and Limits of Involvement

Now, this does not mean we are arguing for so much involvement that we are in effect believing for a theocracy, as has been the frequent criticism from both within and apart from Christianity of "dominion theology". Lloyd-Jones clearly believes there is a limit to what we expect the state to accomplish and believes scripture clearly asserts a faithless world before Christ's return:

"The teaching of Scripture is that the end will come suddenly and unexpectedly; it will be crisis and judgment; it will be apocalypse. The two kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil – are eternally different...nothing will bring it to an end except the second coming and the glorious appearing of our great Lord and Saviour...this...is abundantly confirmed by history itself."⁵⁹

This is very much the premillennial view, as Roger Price had put it "*the changes required are so great that only the personal intervention of the Lord Jesus is able to make them happen.*"⁶⁰ However, Lloyd-Jones, being strongly influenced by the Puritans who had a distinctively operationally post-millennial emphasis⁶¹, is prepared to concede that the

⁵⁹ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.145-6.

⁶⁰ Price, R., "*Premillennialism*" [audio recording], 1979. Available from Chichester Christian Fellowship. His 'Special Studies' series entitled "The Three Different Views" are an excellent expansion of the position DMLJ sketches here.

⁶¹ Most dominion theologians are "post-millennial" because post-millennialism most naturally adapts to the belief of cultural progress through the course of history and believes in the full manifestation of the Kingdom on Earth (i.e., including political salvation) before the return of the Lord. However, it is not a requirement to be a post-millennialist and many dominionists outside of presbyterian Reconstructionism, e.g. Word of Faith and some Fundamentalists such as the Moral Majority of Jerry Fulwell, formally retain a belief in a rapture

results of revival and evangelical awakening up until the 20th century was social and political improvements in the wake of those revivals. The population generally, even the unregenerate were affected. Yet, he is quick to add, "*The brighter, greater, better periods are followed by periods of degradation, degeneration, and often even vileness...There is no greater fallacy than the fallacy of thinking that you can permeate the whole life of society by Christian teaching.*"^{62,63} However, that is not to say that you cannot permeate *some* or even a *majority* its institutions; that individual believers are to be nothing more than evangelists and the church a bomb-shelter where you get relief from the wicked world for a couple of hours on Sunday. He equally wants to avoid this historical error of the fundamentalists of rejecting involvement and social responsibility and otherwise preparing just for the Rapture.

Thus, most significantly, he objects to "Christian Unions" (taken here as part of any profession or student organisation) who concentrate on evangelism, "*doing the work of the church...instead of applying Christian teaching in the various walks of life to which they belong.*"⁶⁴ The professional association or Christian union should be working out the applying of the Word to the professional context. The Church, rather, must "*lay down principles...so plainly taught here in the Scriptures*"⁶⁵. Similarly, in education, it is not the business of the state to put pressure on people to become Christians, but it is equally not the case the State should promote atheism. To *not* teach Christianity does not mean you

distinct from the Second Coming (or as a part of the Second Coming) whilst believing in kingdom building on Earth, a position sometimes called "operational postmillennialism".

⁶² DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.147.

⁶³ So, for Lloyd-Jones, when the prophet Habakkuk speaks of "*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord*" or the Apostle speaks of "*enemies being made His footstool*" (Heb. 10:13) these are post the Second Coming. Post-millennial or amillennial views would consider this prior to the Second Coming.

⁶⁴ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.152.

⁶⁵ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.155.

are being neutral, especially if you ground your teaching of origins in evolution. He rightly identifies the problem that there is *no neutral ground* on which we can stand. Similarly, through Art “*you can glorify or deny God*”⁶⁶, there is actually no “neutral” conception of Art; we are not just un-Christian but in the last analysis anti-Christian in the sense of replacing Christ or against Christ⁶⁷.

He wants to make a clear distinction between what an individual Christian as a member of the state can do and what the church *as an institution* can do. He believes the *individual* Christian can be a politician but denies that the church should take a particular position or side with a particular programme but rather be clear in its statement of principles over a matter:

“[T]he church keeps to the realm of principles and not detailed programmes. She does not, as it were, enter into the arena either through preaching politics, or by sitting in the House of Lords.”⁶⁸

Thus, in principle, he objects to the senior bishops sitting in the House of Lords as an institutional feature. Now he is equally as adamant that:

“[T]he business of the individual members of the church to work out these principles, *in detail*, for every aspect of life. Christians must not confine their Christianity to their own personal lives and piety and their own acts of worship. Christianity takes up the whole person. If men and women really believe the gospel, it must govern the whole of their outlook and thinking.”⁶⁹ (emphasis added)

There are thus some principles of involvement emerging here:

⁶⁶ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.157.

⁶⁷ See the entry in BDAG for anti- (ἀντι). The Gingrich lexicon (the same ‘G’ as in BDAG) offers this summary: ἀντί prep. w. gen., orig. mng. local, *opposite*—**1.** *instead of, in place of* Mt 2:22; Lk 11:11; Js 4:15.—**2.** *for, as, in place of* Mt 5:38; Ro 12:17; 1 Cor 11:15; *after or upon* J 1:16.—**3** *for, in behalf of* Mt 17:27; 20:28. ἀνθ’ ὧν *because* Lk 1:20; 2 Th 2:10; *therefore* Lk 12:3; cf. Eph 5:31. (*In exchange*) for [Hb 12:16](#). [*anti-*, combining form in numerous words] [pg 17]

⁶⁸ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.159.

⁶⁹ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.159.

1. The *Church* is not to be involved in the details of a political programme but is to teach principles.
2. The *individual* Christian is at liberty to be involved to whatever depth is necessary to ensure that the “*powers that be*” are “*influenced in the right direction. It is their duty to do this and they must not abdicate from their responsibility.*”⁷⁰

In light of his objection to the term “Christianising” and any type of gradualism with the kingdom coming, it seems at first look, paradoxical to insist on active social and political involvement. We must assume that “influencing” the powers that be is not to be confused with “Christianising” or advancing the kingdom. It might be that the best we can do is to be “salty” before the coming of the Lord. Yet, let us not get too involved in a linguistic argument at this point about what we mean by “the kingdom coming”. Some of us might see that “the kingdom coming on Earth as it is in heaven” is going to be a cultural contest after the mould of 2Cor 10, 3-6 and so the “kingdom coming” is necessarily gradual as those strongholds are confronted and destroyed. It is also clear that a Coming of the Lord in person, will be as the “*lightning flashing from East to the West*” and this is also another sense of the “Kingdom” coming.

Let us follow his argument out and assume these bodies can adapt to this task as it would also seem that the only way that individual Christians are ever going to develop any kind of political sense is if their leaders can model a Christian analysis and application from a statement of principles. Lloyd-Jones does not view the latter as a church activity but rather the activity of those professional associations. There does seem to be some merit in this as

⁷⁰ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.159.

the specialisations within any profession would be expected to be in a better position to deal with the specific ethical challenges. However, it does assume that the intellectual acumen and Christian critical thinking has been sufficiently present in that profession. It might require input from “church” to inform those professional trainers. As Lloyd-Jones himself has pointed out, these professional bodies frequently become para-church or pseudo-church evangelistic bodies, much like an “evangelical” Christian union in a university. They see their role as evangelising their fellow professionals.

He thus asks more of these professional associations:

“it would be a good thing if all these various associations could get together at times and express a common opinion with regard to certain urgent questions of the moment.”⁷¹

This would seem to be getting very close to suggesting there is *a* Christian position on political issues, but this should be expressed by bodies other than the church. He suggests this *Christian* viewpoint transcends party loyalties and that they do indeed express “*the Christian point of view*”. Then, indeed, he suggests the logic of this position admits the possibility of a Christian political party. Yet, he does still assert this is not the business of the practising preacher.

We can understand the practical problems with a preacher as a politician dealing with congregants of different political views on political subjects. The challenge of this position is that *if* there is a Christian position, it is difficult to not expect a church leader or teacher to expound it as such to educate believers. It would also seem problematic if a Christian political party would assert a position contrary to the view held by an individual

⁷¹ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.160.

Christian. Can we reasonably assume the Christian can do these things without the direct assistance of their church? We are at risk of fundamentally divergent views both claiming the “Christian” label. Thus, in a closely related manner, Lloyd-Jones does support Christian schools and universities with a pluralist perspective but with ‘pluralism’ understood in the Christian way. The pluralism transcends church or dogmatic teaching; they do indeed deal with conflicting worldviews, he mentions presenting evolution and the answers to evolution.

Further, we might reflect that with our present cultural milieu, influenced as it is by post-modernism, we are far more likely to represent the Christian view as encompassing a wide range of views. The possible “Christian” perspectives on politics are particularly within this educational role, outside the church. Thus, we see he forcefully champions the activity of historical figures within the Christian polity for the improvement of the wider society and yet “*You will never create a Christian state – it cannot be done.*”⁷² The “Christian” society is an impossible goal, only individuals rather than nations become Christian. In summary, he denies one of the basic tenets of socialism, we are not to assign a salvific role to the state. This is not a straightforward position, but we see that it is the “lay” people are to work and persuade, it is *their* role.

Cope also asserts that a perfect society is not possible until the Lord returns but does speak of “disciplining nations” and we might envisage this convincing of the powers that be of the excellence of our ideas as simply a Christianisation of the culture of a nation. In this way

⁷² DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.161.

we can see that “Christianisation” is not a legislative act by the state that Lloyd-George objected to but a reformative act of the working of the spirit of God in all spheres. This operation in the various spheres would be the work of the professional associations. It is not first a political act, but it will eventually be supported by political action. Thus, we can accept with Lloyd-Jones and with Cope that a “perfect” society is not possible on Earth but that does not mean we cannot have the expectation of a better one more in line with the principles of the kingdom this side of any return; we can accept that a complete reformation is only possible with the personal presence of Jesus, yet it *is* possible for us to be His government now because that is what *He* tells us in the ‘Great Commission’:

Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The imperative verb here is the *making disciples* rather than the teaching or the baptizing⁷³; it would seem that the discipling or *Christianising* of our society, or our reformation, salting, whatever word we want to use, is what is commanded and expected.

So, whilst we can nominally agree with Lloyd-Jones regarding the role of the church and the distinction between church and state, we understand he is forcibly advocating a

⁷³ The NET Bible exegetical note is informative here: "Go...baptize...teach" are participles modifying the imperative verb "make disciples." According to *ExSyn** 645 the first participle (πορευθέντες, *poreuthentes*, "Go") fits the typical structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle (aorist participle preceding aorist main verb, with the mood of the main verb usually imperative or indicative) and thus picks up the mood (imperative in this case) from the main verb (μαθητεύσατε, *matheúteusate*, "make disciples"). This means that semantically the action of "going" is commanded, just as "making disciples" is. As for the two participles that follow the main verb (βαπτίζοντες, *baptizontes*, "baptizing"; and διδάσκοντες, *didaskontes*, "teaching"), these do not fit the normal pattern for attendant circumstance participles, since they are present participles and follow the aorist main verb. However, some interpreters do see them as carrying additional imperative force in context. Others regard them as means, manner, or even result. *Here they are referring to Wallace (1996), *Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, listed in the bibliography.

political role for the lay believers and Christian professional organisations in the reformation of society. Whilst I express reservation as to just how much we need to ascribe to a “Second Coming” for the reformation of the world and how much the “Parousia” is already manifest by the Holy Spirit⁷⁴, it is a matter of degree and differences in terminology rather than a fundamental disagreement with Lloyd-Jones’s position here.

3.5 Christ Transforming Culture – Our Obligation to Him

However, what is of supreme importance for us to understand at this juncture, is that the concept of “Christ transforming culture” did not begin with the modern dominion theology movement and might thus be dismissed or tempered down into a post-Trump political agnosticism where we “reorientate” our theology and pull back from our mission to be influencers of and inspirations of our own culture.

It was rather the position, arguably of Augustine and given its systematic expression by Calvin. It was developed by his successor Beza, by Bullinger, our own John Knox and then the Puritan movement of the 1640s, from which modern Reformed theology owes its most. All held the position that Christians should transform culture. Now, contrary to the position of Aquinas who shaped medieval Catholic thinking such that the church was the umbrella under which all of culture was shaped and which *directly* controlled culture, Reformed

⁷⁴ **2 Thessalonians 2:8** καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος [Ἰησοῦς] ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσει τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, This verse talks of the “spirit of His mouth” destroying the lawless one. Whilst this verse and those around it are “proof texts” for the manifestation of the Antichrist destroyed by the manifestation of Jesus, the “spirit of His mouth” must surely also mean the authority of the spirit in *our* mouths destroying the working of the antichrist spirit in *our* society. This is especially the case when we understand the last clause can be translated “destroyed by the manifestation of his presence”, i.e. when we invoke our delegated authority; the Greek word *parousia* (παρουσίας) primary meaning is *presence*, just being there. However, it is undeniable it also has a specialised meaning referring to what happens when one arrives, a sense we also have in English when we talk about someone’s “special presence”.

theology recognised the legitimacy and autonomy of each sphere but advocated that the Church must be the ethical force in society, holding the culture to the standards of scripture.

The magistrate for the Reformer had a *moral* obligation to ensure God's law was honoured but he was not, unlike the Catholic position, subject to the Pontiff's authority. This means we cannot just have a politically withdrawn church prophesying to the North, the South, the East and the West on hills overlooking our cities (yes, we have all done it!) but one directly involved in government through the wider political process at all levels within our society, local and national. It is incumbent on the church to support those called to *minister*; after-all, that is the force of Romans 13's use of the "religious" term, to support those from within our own community *ministering* in the political realm. We have no problem "sending out" from among us, doctors, nurses, engineers and such like but seem to have a real problem with "politicians". Politics is not the realm of compromise and the retreat from evangelicalism into liberalism in a few short months by all who dare to tread there.

Whilst accepting we need to consider the suffering, hardship and sacrifice in the lives of many biblical heroes in the political realm, it is perfectly legitimate for us to draw inspiration from the stories of Daniel, of Deborah, of Esther, and of Nehemiah as those who model "influencing" for us. The relationship within scripture of Ezra and Nehemiah is also a case study *par excellence* in the relationship between church and state. Ezra the spiritual man ministered, supporting and supported by Nehemiah the political man who dealt with whatever political threat was directed against the spiritual project. Religion and politics are separate spheres, but they are not independent of each other. In the background of that

period, we understand there were other prophets (such as Haggai and Zechariah) provoking the people to build but it required as a prerequisite, sufficient social stability, because of strong political influence (authority and the means to back it up, i.e., power), to ensure the mission of building the temple would continue.

The Temple was not just rebuilt on the back of prophecies alone but needed the Nehemiah's who understood the project in a spiritual sense but could wield the sword in the natural sense. This too is the force of Paul's injunction in 1Tim 2, 1:

"First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people,² even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior, since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

The phrase "peaceful and quiet", mean just that, i.e., complete social stability and the "life" spoken of here is the natural, physical life on this planet. God considers it "good and acceptable" because such conditions allow the gospel to be preached with maximum effectiveness.

We may rejoice in a negative theology of the suffering of a political powerless church that promotes the suffering church as the power-filled church, but we *never* have an account in scripture that commands us to pray for an increase in social instability and persecution that the pure bride may reign with maximum efficacy. That is the backward theology of surrender and powerlessness which is distinctive of late 19th and 20th century obscurantist theology and escapist premillennialism that just wants us to be loading the ark of the church as the final rain begins to fall.

Where there is no salt in the world, the world rots and we perish or “slowly rot”, as Hosea stated, because “of our lack of knowledge” – I would argue, because of our lack of political engagement. It is certainly not legitimate to somehow relegate the “figure of political influence” as somehow belonging to the old dispensation and the church in this new dispensation must operate in some parallel society keeping its garments and theology pure by never supporting one political party over another, or one candidate over another.

Scripture in terms of salvation, has a clear dispensation – we minister in the new covenant because it was the fulfilment of the types of the old. However, there is no such dispensation in the moral law and its application in the case laws, or for us to dismiss the social organisation and governmental foundations laid for us, as Landa Cope has so ably outlined for us in her discussion of discipling nations. Her cogent account of her own personal journey from mission driven evangelicalism⁷⁵ as one of the founders of YWAM to understanding that the Law of God in the Old Testament gives us eternal principles built on the foundation of God’s character and love of justice for discipling nations, demonstrates how inadequate and insipid is the theology that refuses to take and defend political positions.

In every one of the biblical models of influence, it was the solid theological underpinnings that allowed each individual to function effectively within the political realm. In the 20th century our withdrawal from culture and our failure of be influencers created the

⁷⁵ Cope, L., *An Introduction to the Old Testament template – rediscovering God’s Principles for discipling nations*, 2nd edition (Seattle, YWAM Publishing: 2011(2006))

tyrants of that century. Cope describes how the evangelical church refused to participate in government when invited to do so in Africa⁷⁶, it was a theology that surrendered whole countries of Sub-Saharan Africa to communism and corruption. The vast Christian presence within those same nations has had virtually no effect on the moral temper of the nation simply because there is no theology of active engagement in the political process in the name of righteousness. The church is content with its offerings and evangelism to live in a para-society with its numerical significance ensuring that it can remain tolerated within the society.

It was perfectly legitimate our presentation highlighted the personal price paid by individuals as they were prepared for “influence”, but such is the price that is normally paid by those who really achieve. The extreme personal price paid by many of the great leaders within the church sphere should not cause us to modify our support of a theology which encourages people to become spiritual leaders. Scripture encourages us to spiritual leaders (1 Tim 3:1) despite the challenges associated with it. Similarly, the challenges of being political ministers is equally as demanding, but it is also a noble call. I recognise that whatever our vocation, the rottenness of our culture ensures that any who assert in their sphere original or independent thought are getting to the place where they need to understand they may lose all, including their livelihood, to make their stand. This would not be the case if the church had remained influential and engaged in the culture.

⁷⁶ Cope (2011), p.59.

3.6 The Consequences of Disengagement – the Tyranny of the Minority

That there is even an argument over Christians needing to be in places of government and influence seems to demonstrate the utter ignorance and shallowness of our thinking. To use a negative example, the Homosexual Rights movement that began to take real shape in the late 1970s show how a principled, committed, uncompromising minority can change a culture. To all intents and purposes, particularly in Scotland⁷⁷, they have won the intellectual argument. The leader of the Scottish Greens has said as much, “*the time for debate is over*” and orthodox Christianity is days away from being classified as “Hate Speech” in our country and European Hate Speech legislation could criminalise Christianity throughout the entire continent. They organised, lobbied and offered support to parties that would represent them. They are now succeeding in setting so much of the agenda that Christians are in danger of being criminalised by default, despite never representing more than 10% in any community. Their commitment to their “cause” has been the reason for the on-going success and power of the gay liberation movement.

Could this have happened if there was clear-thinking believers at each level of the political process and in key positions within the Art, Sciences and the Media? The answer is a self-evident “No”. It is just a plain historical fact, that the failure of evangelical believers in those realms has meant culture has been surrendered to the humanist and the pervert. We offer up our children to Molech in State schools that now teach perversion in the name of diversity to primary school children. If there was a strong influence and voice in education and an organising cohort within our local communities, could such material get into the

⁷⁷ The reason I pick Scotland is because it is my nation; but the same is true in most Western nations.

classroom? The answer *is* “No”. I witnessed first-hand parents at a local school organising against the teaching of homosexuality to their primary school children (4-11 years old) by being addressed by a homosexual, regardless of all the protests of the school that “they had to, because it was National Curriculum requirements”.

It is a reality that many abstain and do not participate in elections at all, often it is only 10-20% of a population that decides on the government of their nation. To guarantee a “bloc” of votes, gives a committed minority far more power than you would expect by their representation in the *polis*.

3.7 Our Moral Imperative to Vote and Campaign for Righteousness

Now, in summary, I am in broad agreement with the position advocated by Lloyd-George, nowhere am I arguing that politics and statecraft is somehow our “saviour”, and we can create a perfect society because of involvement in it. However, I am arguing that our involvement can arrest the influence of evil. We support those candidates or parties who position themselves on the side of moral righteousness. It is unlikely we will encounter a party with an entire programme that commands complete agreement with scripture, but parties and politicians will listen to a voting block where the position has been thought out and taught to believers in their churches. If a denomination or network speaks to a party and says, “*we have instructed none of our members to vote for you because of your position on this issue...*”, you will see them change their position to get your vote.

It is one of the greatest reproaches to the church that we often just defer to “personal conscience” in the matter of our vote and leave the decision about who to vote

for with the individual. Our consciences need to be informed by reasons as well as by revelation, we are not mystics. Conscience of the individual is important, but it does not override Christian principle. It may also be the case that a “voter guide” might oversimplify the choice but it is certainly a reasonable starting point to evaluate a party or platform. There may be occasions when your personal knowledge about a candidate makes it difficult to justify a vote for them, but we always need to remember we vote for a party *platform* in most instances, rather than an individual. An individual politician who attempts to stand against their party on important moral issues on the ground of “conscience” will soon find that they will be given an ultimatum to conform, especially if they are a deciding vote.

It may be that our only choices are between sinners of various degrees of depravity but the church, at least, should have evaluated the party platforms and made clear to each party why they will not recommend a vote for them if they take the public position of supporting issue X. At a local level, the church should be aware of who is standing and their voting records on issues of importance to Christians. This is also why Christians should be involved in hustings, debates, local political parties and in setting the agenda for the campaigning platform that we are not just left with a choice of moral criminals.

It is also worthwhile considering the issue of “tactical voting”. I personally have been in the situation because of my local demographic, that the only party that represented anything close to my views was a fringe party that had no chance of winning. My pastor at the time recommended we vote tactically for the least bad of the group that had a realistic chance of challenging the incumbent who was part of a party that was morally defective on all sorts of issues, but I chose to vote on principle because it was an option. If there had

been no choice of principle, there is perhaps an argument for a tactical vote but there is perhaps a much stronger case for there being a local candidate from within the Christian community who should also stand. If a politician or party loses important votes to Christians, they take notice.

4 Biblical Theology II – Demythologising Romans 13

4.1 Introduction

In this section, we deal specifically with understanding the issues and controversy surrounding the principal passages that have been deferred to by believers, often in a non-critical fashion, whenever there is a risk of conflict with the authorities. This is a partly exegetical extension to the previous section for it is still primarily concerned with the relationship between the individual Christian and the State, but we do start to get into the congregational and the institutional church's relationship with politics and the state. However, I am not going to be doing a verse-by-verse exegesis, but rather a thematic amplification using the text as a starting point. Lloyd-Jones does an excellent job of a verse-by-verse exegesis and I refer you to him if you are interested in more detail about the specific verses.

The early Christians needed the apostolic input of Romans 13, 1 Tim 2 and in 1 Peter 2 because the believers needed to know how to respond to pagan rulers. However, these verses have a wider literary and cultural context, and it is necessary for us to consider very carefully how we interpret these passages as it is too easy to use the bare language of Romans 13 and 1 Pe 2 to establish what I consider the controversial and ultimately incomplete or incorrect conclusions that were listed in our introductory summary of the arguments I am objecting to.

We will only consider Romans 13 extensively in this section because it is the locus of most discussion amongst believers regarding the relationship of the individual Christian to the state and of the institution of the church to the state. 1 Peter 2 is very much a

recapitulation of the Pauline teaching, we know Peter clearly took direction from Paul and considered his works scriptural⁷⁸ and we only mention it in passing when there is a good reason to highlight a specific feature of Peter's view. Similarly, 1 Tim 2 has the primary subject of intercession for those in authority that the social conditions of effective evangelism might be possible. We have already explored this extensively in the previous section. It immediately establishes the prerogative of social peace as a principal aim of the government of God in the Earth rather than persecution and social instability.

4.2 The Context of Romans 13

It must be remembered that this section does not exist in isolation from the sections around it. This is important because some commentators seem to think it is an intrusion or clumsy insertion of thought. Yet this is a new subsection in the section that began with chapter 12 – the application of the doctrine laid down in the first eight chapters⁷⁹. The great emphasis of chapter 12 is that of *“living peaceably with other people”*. Chapter 13 is thus perfectly in position, *“[Government enables us] to live peaceably with one another, to maintain order, to avoid disorder”*⁸⁰.

The *“vengeance of God”* mentioned in 12 would then arguably be part of the function of the State and its laws. So, the first great conclusion we can draw from Romans

⁷⁸ 2 Pe 3:15. It would be a very large and a very interesting diversion to talk about pseudonymity and whether it was Peter who wrote this letter. Most argument centres around the radically different style of the Greek to 1 Peter but this ignores the obvious in that Peter would not have been an expert in Greek and would have, as was the common practice of the day, used a scribe to write for him. Whilst much ink has been spilt over this issue, it is impossible for us to conclude one way or another, but the orthodox and intense theological content packed into this letter surely warrants its canonicity.

⁷⁹ Chapters 9, 10 and 11 form a self-contained pericope on the problem of the Jews and their relationship to the gospel. There are still important principles in these passages but the chapters are strongly focussed on the Jews.

⁸⁰ Lloyd-Jones, p.2

13 is the legitimacy of the State *in principle* as against those who reject all the institutions of men as fallen and illegitimate. God has instituted it that the conditions of social peace might exist for the benefit of all, as also stated in 1 Tim 2,1:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Saviour.”

However, and I believe this is where many formulations regarding our rights, relationships and responsibilities are at their weakest, is that based on this foundational principle, it then becomes much too easy to give the State much *too much* authority over the church and the individual believer, to the degree that all the believer is entitled to is a weak, passive resistance or martyrdom. As you might recollect, this was the position I highlighted in the introductory section as most unsatisfactory. As we work through the study, we will find out why because we will see that in agreement with Lloyd-Jones who I again rely heavily on in this chapter, there is even a justification for a Christian taking part in a revolution to overthrow a corrupt government.

4.3 The Separation of Church and State

However, he *also* asserts that it is never the business of the institution of the church to agitate for a revolution from the pulpit, though the early American puritans on which he was an expert authority, would surely disagree with him there. We have already seen that he is correct in asserting that much of the Christian understanding of “religion and politics” flounders on the failure to discriminate there are two important and distinct components – our *individual* relationship to the State and the relationship of the *institution* of the Church to the State. We might also argue that individual local fellowships once they have an established presence in the community, will have a distinct relationship with the state local

authorities. However, I believe this is actually a special case of the latter and the main division is between the individual and the Church relations to the State. We will be justifying this position in more detail from the scriptures as it is critical for any political theology. The excesses and failures of the past were all connected with the confusion of the distinction between the individual believer and their imperative of involvement, with the scriptural prohibition of the merging at an institutional level of the state and the church. State and church are separate institutions because they have different purposes and callings, to confuse the two leads to religious tyranny.

So, we can immediately see these principles need careful exposition and qualification for us to have anything but a superficial understanding of them. The superficial understanding of it is what has allowed the tyranny of our governments in the COVID era, the tyranny of political correctness and what I believe is the pitiful non-resistance of the churches in these arenas as our freedoms were and are being removed.

4.4 [Forgetting the Lessons of our Recent Past](#)

I consider that one of the reasons believers in the post-war era are remarkably naïve regarding their options for resistance against tyranny is because they have lived in an era of relative peace because of the battles fought by their forebears during the World Wars. At that time, they had looked tyranny right between the eyes such that the relationship of the Christian to the State had arisen in a very acute form. It arose in Italy; it arose still more in Germany in the time of Hitler and in the communist hegemony. Working class citizens of the West who had formed the major part of the fighting forces in the aftermath of WWII

were not prepared to go back to the status quo and enormous social change and freedoms were granted by an elite to prevent their own extinction at the hands of a militant populus.

It is only now in the soft totalitarianism of a dying West that rights are being lost and returning to this elite which has a rather different profile than before being the new-moneyed, technocratic and privileged. It is rather ironic that former dissidents from the communist countries are warning the West that they are slipping into soft totalitarianism in these days⁸¹. As our governments threaten us with vaccine passports to travel or to access services and facilities, we perhaps are beginning to understand what type of “mark” we will need in order to buy and sell (Rev 13:17). We see in Revelation that modern states characterised as harlots and beasts, rather than as in Romans 13 “ministers of God”, thus it becomes more and more important for us to understand the teaching of this section of scripture.

4.5 Obedience and Submission are Different Concepts

So, let us consider the first verse:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.”

Thus, it is straightforward to understand why many teach an unconditional obedience to the State. This is reinforced by some commentators who note that the term was originally a military term meaning “to rank under” but this is one of those occasions where we need to understand the semantics of the word have moved far beyond its original meaning as

⁸¹ See Dreher (2020).

witnessed in the Greek literature of that era of what the Bible is an integral part. By overstressing the etymology, extremely severe interpretations of this passage that would admit no conditions for disobedience arose and are criticised by Lloyd-Jones. As he explains, there are three other Greek words in common use during that period would convey far more strongly the concept of “obedience” if that was what Paul had wanted to communicate. We must understand that “be subject to” does *not* simply mean “be obedient to” though the Greek verb in the middle voice was sometimes used with this meaning⁸².

Subjection implies a reasoned choice. For example, Eph 5:21 states “*submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God*” and it should also be clear that there must be a difference between subjection and obedience. Both parties cannot simultaneously obey one another if a difference arises but they can respectfully resolve their differences by having a mental posture or attitude of *submission*. To not recognise this is to make this and other examples⁸³ of the usage of the word logically contradictory. Thus, Lloyd-Jones argues the context demands “making room for”, “preferring out of *respect*” as appropriate renderings.

We recognise the position itself for a minister of the state demands respect, “*He means the powers that are governing [well] and maintaining law and order*”⁸⁴ but pointedly

⁸² Interestingly though, BDAG (the “standard” reference work for the Greek language of this period) does not offer the meaning “obey” listing only the passive and active voice. Vine’s Expository lists “obey” as a possible but minor inflection in the passive or middle voice and notes the military origin of the word. The Strong’s number is 5293 and Strong lists “obey” as a possibility for the middle voice. The “middle” voice (often reflexive) was dying out during this period of the Greek language.

⁸³ Col 3:18, 1Pe 3:1,5.

⁸⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.23

it is *not* proven that every occupant of the office “*has been ordained by God*” and thus we are not morally obligated to immediately obey them if they are *not* governing well.

Particularly, we need to ask what we are to do with rulers who abuse their position or are tyrannical. We need only think of Nero using burning Christians to light his feasts or of a Hitler and the Holocaust.

4.6 The Boundaries of Christian Resistance

The solution offered in our presentation was to prophesy, passively resist and be prepared to die for our faith. Of course, we have good biblical warrant for passive resistance and, if necessary, to die for our faith - we can readily take stories from Daniel and Acts as confirmation for this. The use of prophesying as a weapon is rather more difficult to see directly other than in the great prophetic oracles themselves but plenty is said in the Christian scriptures about confession and the power of our words, so let us grant that inference is also valid. However, is that really the *entirety* of our scriptural options?

If our nation was attacked or was in imminent danger of being attacked, most of us would consider it perfectly just to sign-up to fight if we were asked to, in addition to our prayers, supplication and prophesyings. We might even end up fighting for our nation and killing people of another nation to preserve our freedom. We would consider this “self-defence” and it seems a concept well-founded in the Hebrew scripture. There was no scriptural mandate for a standing Army in Israel but there were certainly borders and there were arrangements made for tribes to join with one another for national defence and settling disputes militarily if diplomacy failed⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Deut. 20:10ff.; Josh 4:12 (Num 32:6 – 25)

Thus, we should at least be able to ask the question, if those that attack us just happen to be members of our own nation and those in authority over us, should we not too have a right to self-defence? The logic of the Second Amendment of the American Constitution was based on just that type of reasoning. The colonists and settlers had come from nations all over the Old World where the monarchs and priests systematically oppressed the people and, in some eras, the people were systematically tortured and killed in the most brutal and public fashion. They came in search of religious freedom and political liberty. This is why Lloyd-Jones who was something of an expert on the Puritanism of the early colonists⁸⁶ was able to write:

“Surely, as Christians, we are entitled to argue that if a state, a king, an emperor, a governor, a dictator or anybody else becomes tyrannical, then this state is violating the law of its own being and constitution as laid down in Romans 13:2”⁸⁷

That is, the State was instituted, as 1Tim 2:2 states, to ensure “*we may lead a peaceful (tranquil) and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*” (NET). Thus, he continues:

“The moment...the State turns itself into a master and into a tyrant, it is disobeying the Law of God that brought it into being and it must itself be punished; and the form the punishment takes is that the government is thrown out and replaced by one that is prepared to abide by the teaching of Romans 13:1-7”⁸⁸.

So far, so good in that we have already seen the inadequacy of the unconditional submission position and we can see that our options are much greater than simply a passive resistance, but this statement begs the question, “*what does ‘thrown out’ mean?*” Are we permitted to fight, with arms (as the American founders felt it necessary to mandate) to evict a tyrannical government? The thesis that was presented to us in the presentation rejected that, for in

⁸⁶ Lloyd-Jones, D., 1996 (1987). *The Puritans - Their Origins and Successors*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

⁸⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.46

⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.46

the wake of the persecutions and purging of the Jews from Rome *'Paul had shocked the believers of Rome and the expelled Jews with the command they were to submit to those wicked and unreasonable rulers'*, we are told they were being told by Paul in this passage *"do not dare to rebel"*.

Of course, the problem here is that the presenter has pushed an interpretation into the passage here that is not warranted. The apostle could have been explicit and referred to the historical contexts referenced by our presenter to frame his argument explicitly, but he chose not to. The scriptural testimony of his own frequent conflicts with "authorities" and his own insistence on his political rights, show he is asserting something very different to unqualified submission. He establishes the Christian principle of good citizenship but simultaneously prescribes the limits which help us to understand when it is legitimate to resist our governments.

4.7 Christians can be Revolutionaries

The *"just war"* is defined as an extension of the duty of a magistrate to *"restrain evil"* but it is exactly this moral imperative to *"restrain evil"* that allows *"[a Christian] to take part in a rebellion to change your government"*⁸⁹. Whether that evil is internal or external to a nation, it is not an option for us to ignore it. As Lloyd-Jones also states, such an action is the *"last resort"* as is going to war but as it was necessary to go to war against Hitler, Mussolini and a Stalin, to restrain their evil so it is necessary to resist the evil of our own leaders.

⁸⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.69.

This is not unusual in the history of the protestant church and was a feature of the movement around puritan Oliver Cromwell (the English Civil War) that spawned egalitarian groups such as the Levellers and the Diggers⁹⁰ who prefigured many of the policies which became associated with the later labour and trade union movements. Christians were very active in these movements and the Workers Educational Association (WEA), a Christian wing of the Working Men's Club movement, that was founded to promote literacy amongst working people, still exists in the UK today in accord with its original mission whilst the WMC are rather tatty social clubs.

Now, it is also important to recognise that there are degrees of resistance between non-resistance and a full-blown rebellion that we can exercise. We start with dialogue and our elected representatives, but we cannot allow ourselves to be neutered when our representatives cease to represent us. We can protest, we can boycott, and we can take collective action both as individuals and as collections of congregations to try and ensure social or political change; though with congregational action there are specific issues which we do need to consider if we are not to confuse the individual and church institutional positions in relation to government. However, in cases where oppressive government tyranny is directed at the congregation as a whole, e.g., banning public worship (as happened during COVD), the congregation should be able to respond collectively.

I am not trying to definitively prove too much here as the history of rebellions and the relationship of our faith to it is far more nuanced, but I am simply demonstrating that

⁹⁰ The history around these groups and their relationship to Cromwell is contested history and all did not go well, but there was a strong element of Christian political thinking in all these groups.

there is a long Christian history of thoughtful Christian resistance that even extended into the revolutionary arena. The eventual compromise of the British Presbyterian movement with the royalists, which led to the Restoration (of the Monarchy) in 1660, proved one of the greatest setbacks to Protestantism in Europe and was one of the drivers for the exodus to the New World and the eventual founding of the US.

The historical lesson for most European nations is that when we refuse to resist the moral evil of our leaders and maintain a complete deference to them, it destroys our witness, our cultural authority, and our societies. We have succumbed to an *aristocratic* view, a particular feature of European history, which implies a Christianity where the church was the friend of kings, dukes, princes, earls and nobles. It defends the status quo, and it is presented as the moral duty of the Christian society to submit to this hierarchical order, as the old hymn puts it, "*the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate; God made them high or lowly and ordered their estate*"⁹¹. If we retreat into a passive Christianity of obeisance to the state based on Romans 13, we too, like the Presbyterians, will compromise and be complicit in our own destruction.

Now, I hope it is understood that I am not asserting we are immediately revolutionaries, it is just we need to understand we *can* be in the extreme. We can agree as Lloyd-Jones puts it "*Christians should always be the best citizens in the country*" and "*good and peaceable*"⁹² in their basic attitudes. We have an ethical obligation to be the best citizens we can be and to be the most cooperative with the authorities over us as we can

⁹¹ Quite remarkably, DMLJ quotes this on p.50, I was aware of this hymn from my left-wing radical past!

⁹² Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.51

morally be. Lloyd-Jones tells the story of how Stalin began to lessen the persecution of Christians because of the reputation for them being the best workers⁹³. Christians, by default, *are* on the side of law and order because they understand that sin has produced lawlessness among men and that lawlessness needs the sword of the State to restrain it; this is also why Paul makes the statement it is an “*issue of conscience*” (v5) that we submit and even to pay taxes to ensure the smooth operation of the State.

So, as a matter of principle, I too agree that the Christian’s duty is to be the best of citizens.

However, Lloyd-Jones then strongly and immediately qualifies this position after establishing it as a basic principle⁹⁴ with this statement:

“[T]here is a limit beyond which it [the submission to the State and its enactments] is not true. It is quite clear in the scriptures that *if the State should ever come between me and my relationship to God*, then I must not obey it.”⁹⁵ (emphasis added)

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have just suffered, this limit was undeniably violated throughout Europe and our almost universal failure to resist has cost us enormous space in the public sphere. Where there was or is substantive resistance, as was the case with the River Church in Tampa, Florida and in some of the other US states where governors rejected federal mandates, the contrast could not be greater – they have full liberty to meet for worship, and citizens can trade freely with one another. This is also why the book of Acts

⁹³ This is a well-known paradox even in today’s Russia where specific Christian ministries have access to and favour with the highest levels of the Russian government (I personally know of two) because of their reputation for honour and ethical conduct. Similarly, in some Islamic countries, Christians have access to TV-stations because they are honourable and pay their bills on time.

⁹⁴ See also, Macneil, M., “*Should I obey my government? Civil Disobedience in the COVID-Era*” [Available Online], <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/should-i-obey-my-government-civil-disobedience-in-the-covid-era/>

⁹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.52

provides the narratives for us of the conflict between the early church and the “authorities”⁹⁶ that we might know there is no unconditional moral mandate to obey our governing authorities.

4.8 Not Just a Matter of Individual Conscience

When there are tensions between citizens and the state, the pluralist mythology of our time often tries to resolve issues of conflict by devolving the decision to the individual, rather than recommending anything as a “Christian” approach. Yet, when Paul addresses “conscience” in his writing it is nearly always conscience with respect to God, so in Romans 13 to justify the paying of taxes, he is arguing for a wider Christian consciousness, to which the individual Christian’s conscience has submitted to because it has been persuaded by the argument. This is what Lloyd-Jones has in mind when he talks about the limits of the state:

“The State must never tyrannize over my conscience, and when my conscience tells me that I am being asked to do something that contravenes my relationship to God, I listen to my conscience.”⁹⁷

He has in mind a believer of informed conscience whose commitment is to know the word of God rather than get their thinking from sentimental Christian ‘pop-culture’. He immediately recognises there are limits to our liberty of conscience, “*when a man says that he is going to obey his conscience, always, without any exception, he is not so much a believer in liberty as in licence*”⁹⁸. Lloyd-Jones circumscribes liberty of conscience with our relationship to God.

⁹⁶ Some might object that it was the religious authorities they came into conflict with, but Roman history does tell us that the Romans were shrewd enough to allow a degree of autonomy to their colonies in the sense they could keep their own civil law as long as they recognised the supreme jurisdiction of Rome. We can glean this from the gospels and Acts where the governors would rather, they “*judge according to their law*” than get involved in such civil disputes. It was why Pilate was just plain reluctant to get involved in the trial of Jesus.

⁹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.53

⁹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.54

For example, it was even as basic in the early church that if you were prepared, once a year, to throw some incense on the fire, implicitly declaring '*Caesar as Lord*', you would be left in relative peace by the Roman authorities. The Donatist controversy in the early church arose because some considered that unwarranted compromise, not an issue of individual conscience, whereas others objected '*it was just a bit of incense*'⁹⁹. The failure to argue for and establish a scriptural perspective led to the first persecution of believers by believers by what we might call the proto-papacy (the Roman bishops), for indeed it destabilised the comfortable relationship that had emerged between the church and the authorities. This was correctly insisted as not a minor issue of conscience because the first persecutions of Nero, once considered an enlightened leader, were precipitated because of the perceived threat to social harmony posed by Christians committed to *Jesus as Lord*, rather than *Caesar as Lord*.

Further, the concept of leaving decisions of this type to the individual conscience has far greater semantic problems. A conscience of an Adolf Hitler or a Barack Obama are very different, and the concept of "civil neutrality" is difficult as it seems to rest on the idea that the "majority" somehow distils a reasonable outcome. Granted, in matters of 'neutral' civil mandates (perhaps the prosecution and provision of services), we might personally feel them unreasonable (speed limits of 20 mph on trunk roads through city streets for example), but we abide by them if there is no moral conflict with the standards of scripture. However, that "neutral" civil arena is growing thin in our time as government overreach seeks to even threaten us with "vaccine passports"¹⁰⁰ and it is becoming more normal that

⁹⁹ Put this in our context, "it is just a vaccine"; rather more pointed as to what is at stake – our freedom and liberty.

¹⁰⁰ <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Access-Denied-Big-Brother-Watch.pdf>

the unchristian prejudices and religious non-neutrality of the representative and the corrupt operations of lobbyists are skewing the political process and the resulting decisions.

In those cases, we really do need to understand what the Word says about the different spheres of human activity and we have some test to apply to these 'neutral' issues to decide if the presuppositions that are driving them are really religiously 'neutral'. Our Christian leaders, especially within the relevant professional associations, really do a great disservice to us if they are not prepared to dissect political issues and to inform their congregations rather than just making them issues of individual conscience and taking a "neutral" posture towards them.

4.9 Our Rights and Obligations as Earthly Citizens of a State

I have often listened to messages spoken with passion about our true citizenship is in heaven and not on Earth (Phi 3:20) and therefore we should be concerned exclusively with building the alternative kingdom of God. To be involved with politics and social reconstruction is to be distracted. This is one of those examples of a much-abused scripture, where scant attention has been paid to the context of the argument Paul was making as well as the record of his life that we have. It was not an argument for non-involvement but rather to have your involvement in a proper perspective and we see that on other occasions Paul was able to rebuke a State which did not regard his citizenship seriously as a thing that should be respected (Acts 16:19-40).

Those magistrates were reprimanded by him *because* he was prepared to make a stand against the tyranny, be it even a tyranny that was populist in nature, executed by

morally weak magistrates in response to the violent demands of a mob. We can learn from this that our constitutional rights, outweigh any majority conventional opinion. Another example is the occasion of his trial at the Sanhedrin, Paul was compelled to appeal to the political authority of the Caesar against the religious authority of the Jewish leaders based on his statehood. The failure of the Roman authorities to manage the process correctly because of their corruption, even when King Agrippa made it clear to Festus that Paul had no case to answer (Acts 26:32), makes our point that judgment on the Roman empire was arguably set into motion as the result of that faulty and corrupt trial process.

Only when earthly states are those that respect and defend the citizen are those to whom it is required that are to be considered as deserving of first submission and then obedience in the Romans 13 sense. We can maintain a submission of our mind even when we are not in bodily obedience when we are resisting tyranny. We are seeking the reform, rather than the overthrow of the state of which we are a member *if that is at all possible*. Citizenship is a privilege, a right and a responsibility and we should be prepared to stand as it is required, *“We are not always to suffer grievous injustices. We are entitled to invoke the law and to insist that it be carried out”*.¹⁰¹ Some of the greatest victories in recent US history since the early 1970s for Christians were achieved when people stood and demanded their constitutional rights.

We are “not of this world” in a spiritual sense but we are in the physical sense, the social sense, the legal and civic sense. Our marriages do not dissolve, and we do not

¹⁰¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.56

become “genderless” (or sexless) despite there being apparently no marriage in the eternal state¹⁰² and there being “*neither male nor female*”¹⁰³ in the Kingdom of God. We are expected to continue to work and to provide for social necessities; not, as some of the Thessalonians were apparently doing, quitting their jobs and waiting for the Rapture (or Second Coming)¹⁰⁴. The response of Paul there was curt and direct, “*those who do not work shall not eat*”¹⁰⁵. These attributes, roles and responsibilities remain so similarly, our civic responsibilities must also remain. As Lloyd-Jones again reminds us:

“[T]his is God’s world...the fact that it fell did not stop it being God’s world...we must be *very* careful that we *never* say that God has abandoned the world because of sin. Indeed, we must be positive: it is God’s purpose to restore the world, not only to its original condition, but to something which will be even more glorious.”¹⁰⁶ (emphasis added)

4.10 Guarding against the State as Messiah

However, Lloyd-Jones is very careful to qualify that we not expecting *too much* from the State in its ordinance. He has just established that we must and should be involved, for only when believers are involved and participating, are they the “salt” that can savour (Mat 5:13) or the “yeast” that can work its way through the dough (Luk 13:21) of our political systems. However, government and State overreach is very much the “*problem of our time*”

¹⁰² Mark 12:25.

¹⁰³ Gal. 3:28.

¹⁰⁴ The Greek verb περιεργάζομαι (periergazomai) can mean “being unduly concerned over the unimportant” (BDAG), i.e., in the context of the theme of the letter, I would suggest the “End of the World”. It is translated in various versions “busybody” or “meddling in the affairs of others”; the sense is of interfering in the work of others by insistent posturing and intrusive actions. There is a play of words in the Greek suggesting much busyness or the expenditure of (mental) energy but no real work (see the NET Bible note for this chapter which are insightful and informative, online at <https://netbible.org/bible/2+Thessalonians+3>). Admittedly though, there is some controversy over my inference here as it is not possible to be completely certain or precise over its usage and intended meaning because it only occurs in this one place in scripture, but it is well attested in the Greek of the period and I feel the eschatological emphasis within the book makes this perfectly plausible.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Th 3:6ff

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.33

as socialism, the dominant ideology in the political philosophies of most of the world since the French revolution, looks to the State in a messianic way.

The socialists of the world have always believed that the State holds the key to the emancipation of humanity and are actively involved in attempting to dominate the political conversation between nations with their internationalism (globalism) and to dominate the political parties within the nations. Protestant Christian thought has not been immune from this influence and this ideology, and through its influence on classical Liberalism found its way to 19th century non-conformity and the social gospel movement of the 20th:

“Christian people really believed that by Acts of Parliament you could make a new world...We were going to legislate in the Kingdom of God.”¹⁰⁷

Christians cannot champion a “Christian” form of socialism when we consider the scriptural functions and thus the limitations of the state. The principal function of the biblical state is a negative, reactive one, *the restraint on moral evil*. Thus, the primary thrust of what Romans 13 is saying, “*the sword is not borne in vain*”.

This latter point is essential to understand to distinguish what was and is being argued from the social-gospel movement which argues for the power of the state to be used to create “*institutional righteousness*”. Socialism and its Christianised form in the “social-gospel” movement gives the State a “positive” role of creating righteousness rather than its scriptural, negative role of restraining unrighteousness. This positive role elevates the State to be the modern messiah and thus it appropriates more and more taxation to itself to fulfil this mandate and becomes more and more coercive in carrying it out, often considered the

¹⁰⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, pp.57-58.

only government of society. This was why Renaissance philosophers Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau anticipated a modern state that was a “Leviathan” and attempted to find some rational basis to limit or justify its power. Both Hobbes and Rousseau failed for they had no external referent for resisting the authority of the state, Locke called for “inalienable rights” of the citizen granted to them on the basis of divine grant whilst arguing elsewhere in his philosophy against abstract absolutes. This is the problem that remains for modern political philosophy, if the state is its own final authority, there is no moral mandate for us in resisting it. This is why Peter qualifies his support for the state, putting it second to the fear of God, “*Honor all people, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the king*”¹⁰⁸ that we can indeed resist it for it is subject to God’s authority.

In contrast, we recognise that our salvation is through the preaching of the gospel to our society, the primary governmental institution is that of the family and the governmental grace that is given the different spheres of culture, granted autonomy to each in their own spheres. It is the moral oversight of these different governments and not the domination of these governments which is the special dimension of the Church’s institutional calling, which we consider in detail in the next major part, in contrast to that of the role of the individual believer in society.

4.11 Should Christians divide over politics?

Lloyd-Jones as he progresses his argument for involvement makes a remarkably strong point:

“If your interest in the State or your view of it, or your reaction to it, comes between you and other Christians, you are in a wrong and a false

¹⁰⁸ 1 Pe 2:17 (NET)

position...the disagreement is caused by a false view of what the State can achieve"¹⁰⁹.

He then asserts, much as Paul argues in Phil. 3, by considering ourselves "*strangers and pilgrims, travellers and sojourners*" we guard against over-emphasising the importance of a political party or a political system. His position as a whole is thus a nuanced one, emphasising both the responsibility and practicalities of involvement but recognising only the kingdom of God coming will usher in a complete political reform, "[*our*] relationship to the State is, in a sense, detached"¹¹⁰.

However, we must again observe that Lloyd-Jones can maintain this delicate balance because there was still a large area of shared Judeo-Christian cultural assumptions when he was writing. The question is still an open one for us when the political climate is such that anti-Christian policies are being promoted and implemented threatening our basic freedom to assemble and preach the gospel. In this sense, our separation on the basis of political views is necessary if for no other reason than to come to some sort of scriptural understanding about it. Divisions are *sometimes* necessary that the truth be manifest (1 Co 11:19). This is why the presenter made their case and I am making mine. When we realise that it is often one political leader who can exert an enormous influence over a nation or who can implement policies or create conditions that promote our freedom in line with 1 Tim 2, we should have an exceptionally strong reason to stand against them. Nevertheless, a strong political presence and representation of Christians across the political parties, if at all possible, should be actively promoted.

¹⁰⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, pp.58.

¹¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, pp.59.

Similarly, I most certainly agree that if our political or cultural views cause us to withdraw from fellowship, where what we share in common seems to be eclipsed by strong views on political or social matters, we must carefully consider whether such a division is warranted. For example, I strongly disagreed with a close friend of mine starting a petition for the removal of statues where there was some connection with slave-trading¹¹¹. We can and should have a robust exchange of views about what I consider to be one of the signs of fascism where we rewrite cultural history through the lens of the present, but we remain friends.

However, on more basic social issues such as abortion, euthanasia or a general welfare state, we should be able to demonstrate and insist that to support these are unscriptural and we have no warrant to support those who do promote them, irrespective of other policies they hold that we may endorse that could be advantageous for us. This is because the scriptures repeatedly place life and the responsibility of people to work as primary ethical and social responsibilities. That is, we might agree that there are a variety of “Christian” views on many political minors, but we should at least be able to agree regarding “majors” such as the sanctity of life both at the beginning and at the end. Augustine, Luther and Calvin all recognised there were “major” issues fundamental to Christian belief which should not be compromised but that there should be “freedom” in a variety of other issues. For Luther and Calvin, this was especially true because of the intellectual and social tyranny that had characterised the Catholic hegemony.

¹¹¹ This is not because I agree with slave-trading but because in most cases, slave-trading was something that was done by a person but was not what was being commemorated by the statue. Similarly, Shakespeare used racial stereotypes in the *Merchant of Venice* but in the mouth of his Jewish stereotype, he put some of the finest words that were ever written confronting the prejudice of his time.

That the sanctity of life is a “major”¹¹² should be evident from the Law in that a recurring principle was the emphasis on the preservation of life in all sorts of cultural positions where the Israelite culture would probably not have valued it; pagan culture certainly did not. People were to be protected by the community from hasty vengeance, only the State could execute, and life was only to be taken in specific well documented cases. It was a capital crime for parents to offer a child in sacrifice and a moral “abomination”. A pregnant woman who suffered a miscarriage because of accidental violence would see the death of the one that caused the miscarriage, and the State was to not show mercy when such life was taken, even accidentally. Likewise, the community were to respect and support the elderly.

I am not trying to prove the positions beyond reasonable doubt on these individual issues here, as these are worthy of essays in their own right, but merely to make it clear that we really do need to understand the arc of scripture on these issues. The arc of scripture is certainly not in favour of parties that champion a welfare state or “reproductive choice”, promoting euthanasia, medical or otherwise. These are not just minor personal choices, but issues with moral imperatives clearly described in scripture.

4.12 The Power of Unity

The argument above is admittedly a difficult one to accept but reminding ourselves of a negative example we used earlier can help to clarify. The Christian constituency should be

¹¹² DMLJ applies this principle in support of capital punishment, Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, pp.60ff. Life is taken in the case of murder because the value of someone else’s life has not been respected. In the case of murder, the State has a moral imperative to ensure justice is executed and the value of life upheld.

organised and prepared to exert social and economic pressure as we have seen modelled by the LGB(T, Q-Z) ¹¹³ community. Over the years their influence has grown to the place now that a tiny minority have set the political conversation simply because they have spoken with a strong, unified voice. Extremist groups have organised “boycotts” of particular brands and chains have run scared of being labelled “homophobic”. They have learnt how to exert an enormous influence because they have been able to represent a “bloc” which though never greater than 10% of the population is enough to swing an election when barely 40% will vote. Politicians have courted their vote and they have managed to set the tenor of the debate on matters of sexuality and marriage.

Thus, similarly, Christians, with any kind of consciousness of their threatened cultural position, should be prepared to articulate a “Christian” view on a subject, to boycott and to exercise their economic power. If a politician is concerned about getting their vote, then let them court our vote – they are not our saviours, but we can certainly get those to represent us who will support the maintenance of our basic freedoms of speech and the right of conscientious objection in civil matters, e.g., a marriage counsellor who will not counsel gay couples or a registrar who will not conduct same sex ceremonies.

¹¹³ The unity has been strained somewhat on the ‘T’ issue (why I bracket it) and the failure to maintain an objective view of a “woman” is uncomfortable for some feminists. To allow biological men who now identify as women into women only areas or to compete in female sport shows the absurdity and danger of this kind of subjective identity politics. The enormous gap between male and female performance is plain which is why even long-term lesbian advocates within the sports have objected to biological males being allowed to compete in female sports. In the case of one famous lesbian tennis player, they were promptly removed from their advocacy role for objecting to trans-men from competing as women.

4.13 Summary

We began this section by considering the context of Romans 13 and have proceeded to unpack its different themes so that we could move beyond the naïve interpretation that simply asserts we unconditionally obey our civil rulers whenever we have a conflict with them. We saw obedience and submission are different concepts and that a Christian can be a revolutionary when they are faced with tyrannical governments; passive resistance and martyrdom are not the only options for a believer. We see authority is only legitimate when the rulers are just and it is the just ruler we submit to, they make illegitimate and invalidate their rule when they are morally corrupt. We then looked at the role of conscience towards God and find that we must emphasise the “towards God” element if we are not to fall into supporting license rather than individual conscience in controversial matters. We then looked at the unscriptural nature of the deified modern socialist state and how what joins us together as Christians should not be unreasonably cast aside because of the range of political views. We finished with a negative example of the power of unity over political issues.

5 Biblical Political Theology III - The Relationship of Church and State

5.1 Introduction

So far, we have majored on the relationship of the individual Christian and the state because that is where political responsibility for Christians primarily lies. We are obligated as responsible citizens to be involved in restraining the evil within our nations. However, the other primary plank of a biblical political theology is that we must have a clear understanding of the relationship between the *institution* of the church and of the state (or religion and politics) for the primary calling of the church is to resist evil at the institutional level, mostly beyond the reach of the individual believer. However, individual believers are joined together in a church and the actions and responsibilities of a community in supporting our political representation are important. In our response to our “crisis” we do not want to lapse into the political agnosticism and cultural ghettoism that characterised the vast majority of the evangelical Churches of the first seven decades of the 20th century and be passive observers of the decay of our national life. We really *do* need to understand what scripture and history tell us about these relationships.

5.2 Conceptions of the Relationship between Church and State

It is necessary for us to spend time on this issue as necessary groundwork for framing the context of this part of our political theology because nothing is really said in the Christian scriptures about the unity between church and state because the New Testament passages (Romans 13,1-7; 1 Timothy 2; 1 Peter 2) are all addressed to Christian communities living under pagan rule. There was no question of a political union because no Christian, at least until the time of Constantine, would ever accept the political creed, ‘Caesar is Lord’. We give to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God’s:

“all our Lord’s teaching about His kingdom...establishes this essential difference; His kingdom could no longer be identified with the national state.”¹¹⁴

1Tim 2 deals with the officers of the state, 1Tim 3 with the officers of the church. It is not logically incongruent that an individual cannot be both, but it is incongruent that they are not distinct. Thus, much of our following argument is understanding how this distinction came to be recognised and eventually formalised in modern Reformed theology.

We will be arguing that the institution and rules for one are not the institution and rules for the other. The realm of the kingdom is distinct from the realm of the state. The Corinthians are rebuked for personal disputes amongst them getting into the state courts, *“how much less are we to take matters like...doctrine?”*¹¹⁵. In the apocalypse of Revelation, Rev.13 refers to the beast and the ‘image of the beast’ where the secular power gives its power to a spiritual power and they exercise the same authority:

“That is surely a perfect description of what we have been seeing in the case of the church of Rome and, at times of degeneracy, even in Protestantism.”¹¹⁶

We will see that a state church, even after the model of the Reformation and the Puritan canopy in the New World, inevitably prejudices and favours one denomination over another. This issue has played a major part in the history of the church and shaped the character of the churches perception within the wider arc of culture. For Europe, the struggles of the Renaissance, Reformation and the transition from the late medieval to the modern period for culture generally were in many ways defined by the relationship between Church and State. There are two main poles of the argument:

¹¹⁴ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.124.

¹¹⁵ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.125.

¹¹⁶ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.126.

1. Those that see the church and state as aspects of the same “*powers that be*” (Roms 13,1). That is, church and state are essentially the same entity.
2. Those that see the church and state as completely distinct, not only functionally but conceptually also. This is because they deal with different realms of human experience and existence.

Position 1 is known as *Erastianism* after Erastus, a 16th century reformer who first fully expressed this view as a protestant, but it has roots that go all the way back to Constantine’s ‘conversion’ and the Christianising of the Roman Empire. Position 2 is known as “separatism” and has a variety of expressions from a partial separation (characteristic of one sect of the Puritans who emigrated to the US) to those advocating a full separation (a view associated with some sects of Cromwell’s New Model Army and another group of Puritans). After the Restoration of the Monarchy in Britain following Cromwell’s death, most protestants became full separatists after the betrayal of the protestants who supported the returning monarch.

5.3 Constantine and the Origin of the Papacy

Constantine after his conversion, had granted the Roman bishops special authority when he moved his court to Constantinople and that event marked the *de facto* foundation of the Papacy. The original garb of a bishop was actually the garb of a Roman magistrate. Thus, the immediate institutional effect of Constantine was to make the emperor supreme ruler of both the church and the state. The state dictated to the church and was an extension of its jurisdiction. As we have noted previously, the first persecution of Christians by Christians was the Donatist controversy that arose because of compromise on the part of the Roman bishops with the political programme of the Empire. As the Roman empire dissolved, the

position reversed, and the church began to claim supremacy over the individual states that emerged and taught that all the sovereigns of the individual nations were subject to the Pope's authority. This is stated formally in the fourth Lateran Council of 1215:

“...if any temporal lord being required and admonished by the Church shall neglect to cleanse his hands of this heretical filth...let this be signified to the supreme pontiff the Pope, that he may declare [the temporal Lord's] vassals absolved from their allegiance to [the temporal Lord] and may expose his land to be occupied by the Catholics who, having exterminated the heretics, may without contradiction possess it and preserve it in the purity of faith.”¹¹⁷

Thus, the history of Europe in the Middle Ages was dominated by the political intrigue and warring of the individual monarchs with or against the papal families. Of course, some modern Catholics assert we have moved on from this period, which of course, in some respects we have but that is not because catholic dogma has particularly changed¹¹⁸, but rather that the Roman Catholic Church lost its influence and ability to raise a military force as previous Popes had done. In places where the Church has maintained its influence, demonstrated in some of the intrigues of the 20th century¹¹⁹, the often opaque but sometimes obvious involvement of the catholic hierarchy in matters of state demonstrates the persistence of this dogma¹²⁰.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in DMLJ, p.79; expansions mine.

¹¹⁸ This was demonstrated during the 'reign' of Pope Benedict (2005 - 2013) when he asserted "protestants are incomplete Christians" (or something similar).

¹¹⁹ Particularly in Central and South America, the influence of the Catholic Church in the political realm was a battle many reforming leaders had to fight. Often this was because they were on the side of dictatorial rulers but the later emergence of 'liberation theology' within South American Catholicism on the side of rebel movements complicated things somewhat and there was an eventual schism with Rome over its use of Marxism.

¹²⁰ See for example this account of the facilitation of the escape of Nazis after the Second World War, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-ratlines-what-did-the-vatican-know-about-nazi-escape-routes/a-52555068>. Popes had 'concordats' with both Hitler and Mussolini which were designed to preserve their role and influence in the emerging fascist world order.

The great struggles of the Middle Ages for freedom from the church hegemony in the different arenas of culture are well known to us with the struggles of Descartes the philosopher and Galileo the scientific pioneer. It was not that these men were particularly atheistic or deistic¹²¹ in their views but rather that they were escaping from the Aristotelianism that had dominated the scholastic mode of thought.

5.4 The Reformation Position

The classic Reformed position was a moderation between Erastianism and Separatism, a functional separation but a moral relationship between the two – the state could not dictate to the church and the church could not dictate to the state. This is captured nicely in a classic study by Verduin:

“In the New Testament vision, that which we today call the State and that which we now call the Church are agencies that cater to differentiable loyalties. The State demands a loyalty that all men can give, irrespective of their religious orientation; the Church demands a loyalty which only he can give who believes in the Christ. The State has a sword with which it constrains men, coerces them if need be; the Church has a sword also, but it is the sword of the Word of God, a sword that goes no farther than moral suasion.”¹²²

This was quickly strained even during the time of Luther and Calvin because of the extreme separatism of groups like the Anabaptists and other radical reformers. Lloyd-Jones makes the case that Luther and Calvin reacted so strongly against these groups, to the point of

¹²¹ It might be argued that Descartes moved at certain periods of his life in a circle of radicals and intellectuals that included deists, atheists and Romantics but he was on very good terms with the scientist and priest Marsenne. Marsenne often had the unenviable task of communicating to the scientific community of which he was part the papal bulls that were censuring scientific research. It is even arguable that the papal bulls did not represent the consensus of thought of the lower regions of the catholic church which was paradoxically the largest supporter of scientific study during the middle ages, both through patronage of universities and the work of scientists like Marsenne. Throughout his career Descartes trod with great caution and circumspection a path that showed a deference for the Catholic church whilst asserting revolutionary systems of thought. He is rightly called the first modern philosopher. Historians of some distinction such as Hannan (2009) even make the case that the perceived hostility between science and religion in the Middle Ages is massively overstated, based erroneously on two 19th century “amateur” apologetic studies for humanism.

¹²² L. Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1964), Kindle ed., loc.183.

violence against them, because they rejected the authority of the state generally, including the right to levy taxes and it threatened to give the authorities excuse to attack the Protestant church generally. The Lutheran church in Northern Europe especially began to institute the incorporation of the civil magistrate into the church organisation that it could wield coercive, political power. Therefore, even today, in the Lutheran churches there are civil offices that can be (and often are) filled with non-Christians.

5.5 The Institutional and Functional Separation of Church and State in Neo-Calvinism

It is in the institutional separation of church and state that the influence of the Reformation was initially so greatly felt. This was because the Reformation had initially challenged the *authority* of the Catholic church to dictate to the different spheres of culture and asserted both an institutional and functional separation between them. However, this position, even during the first generation of reformers, gave way somewhat to the idea of a reformed state church that was a mirror image of the catholic hegemony that it had replaced, attempting to impose a corrected Christianity by wielding the sword of the state.

As noted above, Lloyd-Jones asserts it was more the practical pressures on the early reformers because of the activity of extremists that led to the overreaction against certain groups rather than a fundamental shift in theology towards a catholic view. This seems a reasonable position as in the centuries following the reformation which fed into one stream of the Renaissance, their influence precipitated the movement for intellectual freedom that

eventually gave rise to the modern scientific practice and view of the world, even if modern Western naturalism has often proved hostile to any Christian view, catholic or protestant¹²³.

Although this great innovation was lost in Lutheranism that moved towards an Erastian view, it was maintained within *some* Calvinistic denominations and was given a modern expression in the magisterial writings and practice of neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper¹²⁴ at the beginning of the last century. Kuyper was adamant in asserting a functional and institutional separation between church and state but equally as adamant in asserting the authority and necessity of the church to speak to the whole of culture, to be its ethical and moral basis. This was to say that it is legitimate for the church to assert itself strongly in the political domain in defence of the Christian position, indeed it had a duty before God to do so, but it could not dictate to it.

5.6 The Formal Argument for an Institutional and Functional Separation of Church and State

The necessity of a functional and institutional separation is thus a relatively late development in Christian thought, but I believe it is confirmed in the following argument.

The church came into existence as the direct result of the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary purpose is a spiritual one, the salvation of men. The State exists as

¹²³ Why this should be the case is a philosophical matter of great importance but not the primary concern of this work. In brief, though, the view of reality that the reformers championed asserted God as the sovereign and ruling power of the universe had placed in nature “laws” that men could discover and harness as a means of taking dominion over the Earth. This idea of a fixed reality, an objective reality that exists independently of the human mind but discoverable by it, is the basis of all science. We see in this, as in the words of many of the great scientists, the concept “we are thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” Ironically, some in the atheist camp acknowledge this for it is notable in cultures that do not view reality as fixed but rather arbitrary and subject to change by God’s will (a square might be a circle tomorrow), and in some sceptical modern philosophy that reverts to relativism and subjectivity, that science struggles for its validity and existence.

¹²⁴ See Kuyper (1898) for a readable and engaging summary of his views on the relationship of Christianity and culture. For a study of Kuyper and his remarkable cultural philosophy, see Macneil (2017) and a full-length biography in Bratt (2013).

“ordained of God” but for the restraint of evil and the promotion of civil order and justice. This can be framed in theological terms such that the State is of the order of “nature” or of “common grace” and the church is a minister of “special” or “particular grace”¹²⁵. It would seem to be a reasonable logical inference that the rules governing the common will differ from the particular, though being of the same *kind*, i.e., grace, they are not wholly independent of one another.

We understand that the Holy Spirit deals with us *specifically* through our personal relationship but also *generally* through the gifts and abilities given to *all* men as well as enjoying the protection of the State as citizens. The relationship is not merely one of temporal coexistence but existential in a much deeper way, we see that “*nothing [arises] out of nature apart from God*”¹²⁶. God ministers to men through both common and special grace. Therefore, Paul uses the term “*conscience*” in Romans 13 as regarding paying taxes. Paul always uses the term conscience with reference to God and so we understand that it is for our good that we pay taxes.

5.7 The Free Church Movement

Now that we have established the legitimacy of the separation, the issue that troubled the reformers was the *degree* of separation. Luther and Calvin, followed by the Puritans and the Presbyterians, all called on the civil magistrate not just to be governed by the standards of scripture when making the laws of the state but *also* for the magistrate to be called on by

¹²⁵ This is one of the most difficult conceptions in Reformed theology (see Van Til (2016), pp117-144) but is simple in essence, “*God makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust*”. There is an experience of common blessing of us as human beings just because we are God’s creation and there is a sense in which God deals with all of us, in love and grace, whether we are believers or non-believers.

¹²⁶ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p89.

the Church in issues of church discipline. By “church discipline” we do not just mean internal matters of a congregation but in the matters of heretics and unbelievers outside of the congregation, in the polis as a whole.

This, in retrospect, was the biggest mistake of the reformers. The failure to separate the spheres has always meant compromise on the part of the church as it sought to maintain political power rather than insisting on a scriptural standard:

1. Luther and Calvin began by emphasising the distinction and criticising the use of the civil sword in religious matters or in punishing heresy but, in practice, almost reverted to that position.
2. The British Presbyterians found themselves supporting the Restoration of the Monarchy in Britain after the innovations of Cromwell and his position of religious tolerance and were promptly betrayed by the Royalists.
3. The Pilgrim Fathers endured the hardship of an Atlantic crossing and colonial pioneering to escape ecclesiastical tyranny, yet “*they themselves became religious and ecclesiastical tyrants*”¹²⁷.

Now, we can give the Reformers grace and understand why they acted as they did. As we have mentioned previously, for Luther and Calvin this was in a big part a political response to some of the radical reformers such as the Anabaptists who became more and more radical in their separatism and in denying the legitimacy of the state. For the Puritans, they were trying to create a society centred on God’s Law but were utterly intolerant of

¹²⁷ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p105.

dissent; thus, they might be said to have had morally commendable goals but were prepared to use the immoral methods of the tyrant to implement them.

However, Puritan thinking was evolving beneath the pressure of trying to create the New World. One branch of the Puritan movement became known as “separatists” who as the name suggests, wanted to separate church and state. The position had its origin with Robert Browne and the *Mayflower* emigration to Plymouth Bay (1620), once known as the “*Brownist Emigration*”¹²⁸ and predated the far more successful Massachusetts Bay development (where Boston now stands). Brady describes why we seldom now hear the term “Brownist” when speaking of the emigration, but it is clear to both Brady and Lloyd-Jones that he had “sown the seed”¹²⁹ of the that movement and both describe how men were put to death as separatists for propagating his work. The Brownists were full separatists, in distinction to the semi-separatist Puritans of the later colony and became known as “Free Church”. This form of separatism held that the church cannot call on the state in the matters of discipline, i.e., in the controversies over heresy, and the state cannot demand of the church. They claimed complete freedom of worship and complete religious freedom. They were initially identified as Independents or Congregationalists but became leaders in the emerging Baptist movement by 1611.

5.8 The Beginning of Democracy in the West

The Independent mindset of Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War (1642-1651) did much to promote religious tolerance, he was the first to grant to the Jews freedom of

¹²⁸ Brady, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, p139.

¹²⁹ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p106

worship¹³⁰ and helped promote the separatist movements. Owing to the unrest and turmoil in English governance during this period, the Separatist viewpoint was developed in the US colony of Boston by Roger Williams, who, more than any man was to shape the distinctive American view on religious tolerance. He asserted that the civil magistrate had no right to punish a breach of the Sabbath or any other offence that was held to be a breach of the First Table of the Ten Commandments¹³¹. The American doctrine of the “separation of church and state” is attributed to his influence.

Similarly, Cromwell’s New Model Army gave rise to sects such as the Diggers and the Levellers who advocated complete separation of church and state. Their political views, particularly those of the Levellers who advocated the equality of all men, anticipated the reformist imperatives of modern politics and they are credited as “*the real beginning of democracy in [Anglo-Saxon countries]*”¹³². That so many humanists and socialists were interested in the *political* ideas of these men, should serve to arrest us that this is a part of Christian history and the social responsibility of equality and fairness is not an innovation of the so-called secular realm.

Conservative Christians are often averse to “social action” of this type and when orchestrated by a bloated state, that is a defensible position. However, when orchestrated by the Christian community by specialised ministries, it is fundamental to our social responsibility. Hospitals, schools and democratic political reform all belong to the Christian

¹³⁰ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.108.

¹³¹ The “First Table” are the first four of the Ten Commandments which deal with our relationship to God. The next six deal with our neighbours and were thus within the province of the magistrate.

¹³² DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.111.

reforming tradition of Roger Williams, John Lilburne and the Levellers. After the Restoration of Charles II in 1662 and his duplicity in dealing with the Presbyterian party that had assisted the restoration of the monarchy after Cromwell's death, Separatism became the position of the Puritans and other Nonconformists, regardless of their label.

5.9 Modern Evangelicals and Non-Separatism in the Established Churches

It is therefore somewhat ironic that modern evangelicals in the Church of England became resistant to disestablishment (as had already occurred in Scotland, Ireland and Wales) on pragmatic grounds. The ecumenical movement of the Church of England, which is a liberal pro-Rome movement, is in the majority amongst bishops and evangelicals know a disestablished church would move to reunification. The evangelicals are relying on the state's control of the church proceedings to prevent this change. This is an excellent case-study for the conflict between the compromise forced on a church because of political considerations rather than theological purity. We have already tracked how the pragmatic attitude rather than the principled one has historically been disastrous for the church. Protestants that sided with Henry VIII against Rome in his arrogation of powers, suffered mercilessly in the reign of Mary his daughter.

In the New Testament the issue of *regeneration* is central and so we should never have the *unregenerate* deciding on matters specific to church. God told Moses to select "able men" from among the people that the people might govern themselves but did not consult those leaders when He claimed the Levites for Himself. Similarly, the church is to make no distinction between the great statesman and the poor beggar on the merit of their standing in society or we become "*judges with evil motives*" (James 2:4). Thus, in the 19th

century, the mill owner was frequently also the chief deacon at the chapel, mistreating his employees in the congregation the same way they were mistreated in the mill during the week. The working classes came to identify church with the worst excesses of capitalism, a place that took their oppressors side against them and led to the subsequent exodus from the church of the worker¹³³ into the hands of the militant Left.

5.10 Summary

We have seen that there has been a variety of approaches to the problem of the Church-State/Religion-Politics relationship in the history of the church by committed and faithful believers. In particular, the Reformers often failed to recognise sufficiently the fundamentally different natures of the nation-agnostic church where the church members and state members are no longer coterminous. We can learn from history that when church and state become intertwined, they are culturally instruments of oppression. The principled pluralistic position of the freedom of religion within the Christian worldview is thus fundamental to a biblical view. However, as the neo-Calvinists have argued, their existential and temporal juxtaposition and their roles as “authorities from God” must mean the church speaks morally to the state with God’s authority for the mediation of the common good, i.e., the good in all facets of community life, the temporal and spiritual.

¹³³ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, p.129. This reference of DMLJ is particularly pertinent as he started as a minister in South Wales when the chapel was at the heart of the community.

6 Biblical Political Theology IV – The Constitution of the State, Its Limits, and Issues of Political Governance

6.1 Introduction

In previous sections we have talked about the “State” as an entity and the relationship of church and state, and also the relationship of the individual to the state but have not considered what scripture *actually* says about the constitution of the state itself or how it should function. I cannot remember hearing a single message on the state in my first 25 years as a believer and am pretty sure if I was to ask most believers what the Bible says about the state, I would not be hopeful of a detailed answer though perhaps Romans 13 would get mentioned and we are supposed to obey it whatever “it” is. Thus, here we analyse some of what scripture says about the state and the consequences for civil governance. We also consider the fundamental matter as to whether what the scripture tells us about the state is still relevant for us today. We examine whether God cares about what form our government takes and because of their pertinence today in the debate over conservative Christian politicians, look at the controversial subjects of the relationship of conservatism to Christianity and what the scripture says about immigration policy.

6.2 Preliminary Questions

6.2.1 The Continuity of the Testaments

There is a fundamental issue of where we stand on the continuity of the scriptures, and whether we think that what the Hebrew scriptures¹³⁴ tell us about the state and its relation

¹³⁴ This is the preferred theological nomenclature for what we have historically called the “Old” Testament and is sometimes called the “First Covenant”. This redesignation is helpful because it resists the thoroughgoing dispensationalism characteristic of premillennial evangelical and fundamentalist theology that tends to denigrate any continuity between the testaments. Similarly, for the term “Christian” scriptures rather than “New Testament”. A foundational plank of Reformed theology was to consider the scriptures as a “seamless garment”, recognising they had ethical significance as a whole (2 Tim 3:16).

to the church is applicable to the Christian now that we are in a different dispensation. Whilst the Christian scripture says little about political theology it also says little about other substantive ethical matters because it is *assuming* the authority of the Hebrew scriptures. For example, there is nothing said about bestiality in the Christian scriptures but that does not mean it is suddenly acceptable in this dispensation of grace.

Paul's repeated usage of the Hebrew scriptures throughout his writing, implies necessarily, he is assuming a basic continuity between the Testaments in the matters of social and civic justice. The hermeneutic principle must be that unless it is explicitly negated or superseded in the Christian scriptures¹³⁵ or the scripture is typological in nature, we should assume the Hebrew scriptures are still ethically binding on us. Thus, the Hebrew scriptures can tell us a lot and in a lot of detail all sorts of political and ethical matters and we should consider it normative for our nation building, as part of kingdom building today.

If there is no continuity (note, we are *not* saying there is never *any* dispensational or situational qualification), then there can be no objective standard of justice by which we can evaluate societal and personal righteousness and justice. This we must reject as anti-scriptural as almost every writer in the Christian scriptures makes reference to the Hebrew scriptures as authoritative, and we must assert that God has provided objective standards in His moral law that reflect His unchanging standards of righteousness and justice. This "theonomical" foundation is to be the cornerstone of our political theology¹³⁶. We take the

¹³⁵ One example here is with polygamy, where it is prohibited for those who wish to take leadership positions in the church. However, it is also arguable that polygamy was also prohibited in the Law, it was just the prohibition was ignored and it became socially acceptable.

¹³⁶ See Cope (2011, 2015) for a modern 'charismatic evangelical' interpretation of this position; see Bahnsen (1985, 1991, 2002) for the comprehensive statement of the position.

position that it is only the typological aspects of the Law that have passed away and we have an enormous resource of ethical and legal principles, with examples of their application that still apply to the ethical and political realm today. That is, the case laws of the Hebrew scriptures remain an example of how the principles of the Ten Commandments are worked out in practice, the moral perspicuity of His Law is given practical expression in the case laws of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.

Contrary to modern apologists for the social gospel with an evangelical twist, God not only tells us that stealing is wrong but *also* tells us precisely what stealing *is*. We accept dispensations but we are *not* dispensationalists who deny the continuing authority of the Hebrew scriptures. The hermeneutic principle must be to assume continuity unless the New Testament explicitly sets aside what was asserted in the Hebrew scriptures. The Lord Jesus Christ is exactly that, *Lord* – i.e., supreme owner and sovereign ruler. This is fundamentally a political title and Jesus is already crowned King and is reigning that all His enemies might be made his footstool. In His grace, he has provided the Law which we are to keep if we wish to prosper in all the spheres of human culture.

If we cannot establish these as guiding principles, then any political philosophy becomes as good as any other, it is simply a culturally conditioned choice and we are back in the cultural relativism that I criticised earlier, and we await a direct, mystical revelation of divine government. It is necessary to labour this principle because it is such a fundamental contrast with the self-centred subjectivity of the postmodern mindset so enthusiastically

embraced by Christian theologians post-Lyotard¹³⁷. Postmodern relativism seemed to make room for “faith” for many liberal and conservative protestants alike struggling with the tyranny of naturalism and science and was enthusiastically embraced after the mid-1980s when post-modernism arrived in full force into academic discourse. The subsequent subjective emphasis that emerged during this period of “charismatic renewal” on “experience” and “encounter” were such that:

“There is a grave danger that we may view our salvation in such subjective, personal terms that we exclude much of the greatness and the glory of the teaching of the New Testament and reduce God’s purpose to something that makes us happy...”¹³⁸

Experience and encounter are necessary to the spiritual life but are no substitute for an understanding of His Law as an objective standard for us to live by and to frame our political understanding. This rejection of arbitrary subjectivism or relativism is why we must also anchor our position firmly in Christian history. The orthodox Reformation produced the Puritans who were of the theonomical view and founded the nation which became the most influential nation on Earth with the longest enduring constitution¹³⁹. It has also propagated the gospel and defended the nation of Israel. It has clearly enjoyed the providential favour of God during its history. As we proceed in the discussion, it will become obvious how significant this question is on all else we have learnt about the relationship between the church and the state, and the individual Christian and the state.

¹³⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, famous for his seminal work first published in French in 1979, ‘La Condition Postmoderne’ (The Post-Modern Condition, subtitled ‘A Report on Knowledge’). This work when published in English in 1984 exerted an enormous multi-disciplinary influence and the movement that followed in its wake, not necessarily with Lyotard’s approval, is often associated with a denial of objective reality, there being no “facts” but just interpretations or “modes of discourse” that can never be taken as making truth claims about reality; often characterised as proposing extreme cultural relativism. See Gratton, Peter, "Jean François Lyotard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/lyotard/>>.

¹³⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.34

¹³⁹ Not all the children of the Reformation were orthodox and did not endure, many dying in conflict with the authorities, see Verduin (1964).

6.2.2 There is no Sacred-Secular Distinction

It also necessary to understand that although functionally separate, the spheres of “politics” (the State) and the “priesthood” (church) are not independent of one another. The sacred-secular distinction has an origin completely at odds with biblical teaching in Renaissance thought, particularly that of Kant who tried to make room for religious experience in a private realm beyond that of phenomenal experience which he considered the domain of science. Neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper comprehensively demolished this view and asserted the Lordship of God over all of art, science and culture:

“Whatever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand - in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science - he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of God. He is employed in the service of his God. He has strictly to obey his God. And above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, Moses gave the judges instruction according to the Law of God and in the basic principles of equality before the judgment seat because “*judgement belongs to God*”¹⁴¹. Christians really should know better than to accept there is a “secular” realm and that God has no place in the political, scientific, or artistic arenas.

The injunction of Paul in 1Tim 2 is the exclamation point on this argument – the *purpose* of praying for the leaders is to ensure the *result* of social order and peace that we might live peaceable lives that “*all men might be saved*”. That is, we are *politically* involved first through prayer, by our witness and stand, sometimes through a direct vocational call because we are to be a free to preach the gospel, free to worship, work and to be with one

¹⁴⁰ Kuyper, A., *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kindle edition (Amazon Media EU S.à r.l., n.d. (1898)),p.45

¹⁴¹ Deut 1:17 (NET)

another. We know that if God is absent, then the kingdom of Satan advances into the void left by the retreating church and freedom is replaced by repression and control.

6.3 The Basic Scriptural Functions of the State

The “*powers that be*” that Paul assigns as a title to the State is a concept found throughout the Hebrew scriptures and Paul clearly had this usage in mind when circumscribing the State. The assumption of Paul’s argument is that the rulers are worthy of respect for they “do good” and “praise” us who do good by ensuring security and justice. Thus, we pay taxes in the good conscience of Christians to support the ministry of the State just as we tithe to the Church to support the ministry. The “sword” that these “powers that be” wield is a symbol of *objective* justice, dispassionate and irrespective of persons, informed by God’s law.

That said, the requirements for a judiciary and for a national organisation to respond to violations of borders were the only two requirements for the national level of government instituted in scripture¹⁴². Consider this in contrast to the modern State now which believes taxation to support a bureaucracy, education, welfare, prisons, healthcare, a standing military, intervening in foreign lands and in the final stage of its self-deification, the

¹⁴² Again, we can consider how the American constitutionalists took a biblical example – they decentralised government, Congress was to meet *once a year* for a week to decide on issues of national significance (such as securing the borders or trade) and restitution informed much of the early civil code. It was not until 1930s America that the federal government massively increased its reach and power over the individual States. FDR during the 1930s adopted economic and social policies which had more than a passing similarity to the National Socialism of the Nazis where Hitler realised that many of the German people would give up their freedoms in exchange for prosperity, viz. ‘The New Deal’. It remains an uncomfortable and unspoken about fact that the great economist of the post-war era, John Maynard Keynes, “*believed the Nazis were right*” on some fundamental economic policies and adopted them.

“*general welfare of its citizens*” as within its province¹⁴³. The only crimes become crimes against the State¹⁴⁴, and the State imprisons, the State makes the highest claims on our loyalty and obedience for it is ‘God walking on Earth’¹⁴⁵.

We can understand this call to place our relationship to the State as primary as unscriptural by considering what is meant by the phrase “*Render...fear to whom fear*”. It does *not* mean we are to fear our governments and make our primary posture obedience to them by considering their utterances those of God. Almost exclusively in the NT “fear” has God as its object. It is also paired directly with Caesar in Mark 12:13-17 and illustrates the contrast; similarly, in 1Pe 2:17, “*Fear God, Honour the King*”. Peter’s explanation in this chapter almost runs parallel to Romans 13, suggesting he was familiar with Paul’s exposition here. “*Fear*” is to be reserved for God alone; honour is to be given for the institutions that rule as “*ministers of God*”. Those that minister *according to the Law of God*, are then those that “bear not the sword in vain” and our morally authorised to use coercive force in ensuring evil is restrained.

6.4 In the Beginning was Government

To suggest that the Hebrew scriptures have nothing to say about politics or that they are agnostic or neutral about the form of government we should strive for or adopt shows a remarkable ignorance or lack of understanding of the text of scripture. Our *first* lesson we

¹⁴³ This development was the foreseen by Renaissance philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes; Hobbes is famous for his characterisation of the emerging secular state as “Leviathan” after the biblical monster of the sea.

¹⁴⁴ A case in point was that many British people think capital punishment was abolished in the 1950s in the UK; it was not. It remained a punishment for treason *against the State* all the way into the 2000s until it was formally removed when the UK signed a European convention.

¹⁴⁵ It is worthwhile to note that *nowhere* in scripture is the institution of a prison advocated. Justice was restitution where possible or capital in the cases of the loss of life. The phrase ‘God walking on Earth’ comes from the famous idealist philosopher Hegel.

should learn from Genesis is that God, though a King, does not concentrate all authority and power in Himself but delegates to humanity the rulership of the Earth. God expresses His creative nature and attributes through the gifts of human culture:

“Civil governance and the political process are not an unfortunate result of the fall. They are God’s revelation of himself as King, the one who has all authority and all power over all things, and yet who, without fear, delegates real authority and power to those he governs. In fact, giving authority and power away is part of how he governs. God conceived of autonomy, sovereignty, rights, and freedoms; he seeks to redeem them, not destroy them, in his kingdom.”¹⁴⁶

Cope emphasizes again and again that God gives power away to those he governs, the authority is distributed. It is not concentrated in a monarch. She rightly describes the view of God as absolute monarch as distinctive of the Islamic concept of God¹⁴⁷ – it is thus of no surprise that many Islamic countries are governed in a top-down fashion.

6.5 Prototypical Israelite Government

The progress of early Israelite civic society was from Moses himself personally, to power distributed down to judges of as little as ten people:

“you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge”¹⁴⁸

The essence of a *demo*-cratic form of governance is where the power (*kratos* in Greek) resides in the people (*demos* in Greek). It would seem that a model of civic governance that is *democratic* in its representative essence is immediately asserted in the earliest part of the development of the free nation of Israel. It is a basic misunderstanding that democracy

¹⁴⁶ Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 375

¹⁴⁷ Cope (2013), *Where Is Authority in the Kingdom of God?*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKesu0i0sFw>. This is about 4.5 minutes in.

¹⁴⁸ Exodus 18:21-22 (NAU)

means “everyone votes”, that is simply a modern version of it. The essence of democracy is that the governing has legitimacy to govern because the people have *agreed* that they should be governed by them and in some senses have chosen them as governors. Thus, although we should be clear that God has not ordained a particular form of democratic government or a particular governor, it *is* democratic in its essence; that is, we can be clear that a government only has legitimacy if it is a *servant* of the people, not their master¹⁴⁹.

Now this is a tough pill to swallow, particularly for the modern-day apostles and prophets who champion the top-down model of governance. They are the ones who want to be those communicating the purposes of God to the rest of the body and see the democracy implemented in the denominations following the Reformation as the origin of the deacon-possessed church and the unholy business meeting. I have sat in many a meeting where the stories of visions of snakes slithering around the committee room and the blocking of the purposes of God by the deacon board were the justification for the strong apostolic proclamation by the man or woman of God with the message that should be received, and any discussion of it or dissent would be a “Jezebel spirit”.

For such ministers, their own ministry or success is their own justification and there is little to be gained in attempting an argument with them. Such ministers, as with King David, can achieve an enormous amount provided they stay grounded in the truth; should they veer, as with Solomon, the enormous achievements of their ministries can be lost with

¹⁴⁹ I should note that DMLJ does not make the case for the scriptures showing that we have a proto-democratic model presented here as I have here, but he does make the point that the State is servant, not master repeatedly.

a few short weeks as when the nation of Israel was compromised by Solomon's son Rehoboam.

However, for those with just a little more intellectual sophistication, and a justified hostility to this proto-democratic model of governance because of their experience in their abominations, might object that it was the great apostle who was appointing the leaders and in fact it was the pagan Jethro who had advised Moses to institute this form of government. Well, again, we need to read the full text of scripture, Moses instructed the people and then validated the choices of the people – it is difficult to believe Moses would know everyone chosen as a judge so as to personally nominate them. We can settle this definitively in Moses' second account of the formation of the government in Deuteronomy:

“Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you”¹⁵⁰

Moses does not even mention Jethro but repeated Jethro's reasoning regarding the need for distributed governance to ensure justice for the people. He did not “appoint” without deference to the people in the matters of political and civic government. We can only resolve the tension by recognizing the distinct spheres of the Church and the Political realm, even in Moses. In political matters, he deferred to the people in the sense of working collaboratively with them in establishing trusted members of the community to be judges. In matters relating to the things of God, Moses did not defer to anyone except the Word of the Lord.

¹⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 1:13.

6.6 Governance is Representative and Accountable

This last point of separation of the spheres is important because it can then be argued that top-down governance as championed by the apostolic and prophetic movement is valid because God is speaking directly to people and it is not a civil matter, He is not asking for permission but as sovereign is commanding, our proper response is to obey. Now, formally, I would agree this has a *prima facie* claim to reasonableness, but it needs to be tempered by considering the testimony of scripture. Apostolic and prophetic leaders were still accountable to the councils of the church and we have records of both agreement and disagreement amongst leaders. Even Paul testifies that the revelation he personally received from God which was to become the gospel of the Christian church, was subject to assessment by the other apostles¹⁵¹.

The point remains, that a smart leader whether they are an apostle or not, should still be in a relationship with peers. It is correct and Paul testified to the fact that as an apostle, His boldness arose because He had received directly from God. He stood when no one but the Lord stood with him and he was not subject to a committee veto. However, to be in a place of isolation and in opposition to believing peers, should be the exception and not the rule. Thus, the principle that helps us to be both Christians and democrats is that we understand the separation of the different spheres of the church and the civil, God governs in a different manner in these spheres and they should not be confused.

This should be a temperance to the severe hostility I hear expressed by senior leaders regarding “demon-ocracy”. The Church in the sense of its inspirational direction might well

¹⁵¹ Gal 1:11 – 2:10.

seek the wisdom of those in God's counsel and the programme of the man or woman of God might well drive a powerful, nation-saving ministry. However, many a ministry has run aground and perpetrated abuse of the people because the leader was in an unaccountable position.

We have mentioned that even in Acts we see a "council of leaders" to which the apostles gave account and were to a greater or lesser degree accountable to. There was also an energetic debate and some strong disagreements. We do not see disfellowship of Paul in his disagreement with James and other pillars, but we do sense the tension between them at various times in Paul's argument in Galatians 2 and James' parallel use of the scriptures Paul uses but with a completely different, almost contrary, interpretation. This tells us there was not blind obedience to those perceived as leaders claiming to have the Word of the Lord, even those designated as apostles of the Lamb.

A wise leader makes themselves accountable. The church might not be run as a democracy in the sense of people voting on whether to accept the direction of the head of the body; but it certainly should not be run independent of those who the minister ministers to. This is a message for us of the danger, validated repeatedly in civic and church history, of the destructive nature of top-down governance. Power must be distributed, and it must derive its authority and legitimacy from the people. A church minister may have great vision which is their vision but if they invite people in to support their mission, they have an obligation to minister to those people and ensure their needs are not ignored. The decay of Israelite society was from a distributed form of self-government by the communities, through to the elevated Judge whose military achievements gave them legitimacy and

authority, to a monarchical period which ultimately destroyed the nation because of its corruption.

6.7 God does not Break His Own Law

It should thus arrest us that it is just incorrect that God is somehow indifferent to the *form* of government; that somehow a leader who gains power by corrupt means could be doing so because God is King of the whole Earth, Lord of All and He raises up and casts down as He sees fit. This does extreme violence to the standards He reveals in His objective Law. It essentially positions God as not subject to the standards of His own moral law that He has laid out for us. It says, “*you must be just in your dealings with one another and with me but do not expect me to always be just, it will only be if it suits me*”.

Now, I believe to consider God as minister of plagues also does violence to the testimony of scripture and would mean God was violating His own Law. Yet, people do believe in divine healing and God’s judgment, so we might want to argue that God can at once be our healer but also strike us down with plagues if it should suit His purposes. However, we do have another logical fallacy lurking in our thinking here which needs to be resolved with careful theology. God cannot be, logically at least, A and not A. If, as in Exodus 15:26 he declares himself as “*the one who is healing in himself*”¹⁵² then He cannot simultaneously be the minister of sickness. When we then read in Deuteronomy 28 that the Lord will “smite” and that there are lists of unpleasant sicknesses and diseases; when we read of plagues coming upon the Israelites because of their disobedience, we would seem to have a paradox, or we deny that God is logical.

¹⁵² The Greek Septuagint has a nominative, middle voice participle here – the translators clearly viewed this as a statement God was making about his essence, or very being.

Some do indeed prefer the latter and many of those are indeed prophets that speak of “trans-rationality” meaning, as charitably as I can gather, that the logic of God is so different from our logic (perhaps as His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, Isaiah 55:9), that God can make a circle square if it suits His purpose. However, we then have the problem of the impeccable logic of scripture itself that wants to prove to us that salvation in Jesus is a logical imperative. Why should we sustain this imperative if God can change logic as He sees fit?¹⁵³ We, again, are running the risk of adopting Islamic theology which has no problem with a square becoming a circle tomorrow, *if Allah should will it* – it is a distinctive of the Judeo-Christian view that there is a fixed, physical world with laws discoverable by the mind of humanity. That is why the Reformation provided fertile ground for the scientific revolution.

So, let us lay aside our temptation to trans-rationality aside and commit ourselves to some kind of logical picture of reality, shared by God and humanity. So, if we believe John 1:1-2 that the *logos* is indeed *logical* (yes, that is where the word logic comes from!), the way a paradox might be resolved is by adding in another condition, e.g., we might assert God’s justice demands punishment of the evil of His people in this way, sickness is seen as just punishment for our sins. We might also want to separate healing from the nature of God to something God simply does, healing one day, smiting in another as external conditions demand. However, we have a continued narrative throughout scripture that

¹⁵³ There is an entire perspective in postmodern theology that makes this point – the “classical” positions on atonement and the character of God originate in the “assumptions of philosophical modernism”; every doctrine and text is then up for reinterpretation, there is no “thus sayeth the Lord”, just “this what I feel the Lord sayeth and it might be different for you”.

reinforces the character of God as not just a healer but in being healing in himself, for we see him directing His priests on basic hygiene, how to stay plagues and keep the people well. We then have a picture of Jesus in the gospels and a gospel in John that seems to turn the whole of history on one verse:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”

This ascribes life and blessing to God, sickness, and death to Satan.

Thus, it is far more robust both logically and theologically to see God’s words in Deuteronomy 28 as consistent with His sovereignty over all that occurs in this world. He declares “He will smite” that we might know the smiting is within His power to stay or permit. Similarly, if He decides that “He will bless” there is nothing or no one that can subvert His declared will. This is reinforced with what we read in Isaiah 54, 16-17:

“Look, I create the craftsman, who fans the coals into a fire and forges a weapon. I create the destroyer so he might devastate. ¹⁷ No weapon forged to be used against you will succeed; you will refute everyone who tries to accuse you. This is what the LORD will do for his servants – I will vindicate them,” says the LORD.

Logically, *if* God is the one who creates the one who forged the weapon, *then* you can be sure that *no* weapon will succeed against you. We must look back on these chapters from John 10:10 and rather be those priests who stand between the living and the dead¹⁵⁴, that God exerts His sovereignty through us where the work of the enemy is seen. This helps us stay clear of the temptation to lay the plagues of the Earth as God’s work to bring the nations to himself. The nations will be brought to Him when Jesus is raised up before all humanity and He will draw them to himself.

¹⁵⁴ Num 16:46

Now, this is an example of a hermeneutic commitment on my part, and I fully accept many an expositor of the Book of Revelation might want to take issue with me and instead rejoice that plagues have come upon the world are expressions of God's justice. However, I feel such a view does violence to the character of God as revealed to us, and how the hermeneutic lens of John 10:10 should inform our view of reality.

6.8 Summary

We have seen that the State of scripture had just two responsibilities – to provide a ministry of justice and to secure the borders of the nation by ensuring a level of national coordination was present to raise an army. We have seen that government was legitimate and localised, based on a principle of its legitimacy being based in the agreement of those who are ruled. We also examined the practical importance of the theological principle that God does not violate His own Law. This helps us avoid the extreme position that God is indifferent to the form of government. Much more could have been included in this section, but the proper place for that is a collection of essays drilling down into the individual subjects rather than this statement of principles. Landa Cope (2015) does exactly that and I recommend that book as one of the most thorough expositions of the nature of governance.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary

The aim of this work was to build the case for an active and vocal involvement of Christians within the political process, rather than a strategic withdrawal because we believe the argument that we have been seduced by conservative policies or democratic ideals and can no longer prophesy God's Word to our world. I hope I have shown that civil governance and our spiritual and moral obligation to be involved with the political state is that the State might be effective at restraining evil in the Romans 13 sense rather than being allowed to become the messianic beasts of Revelation which modern states are becoming. We have also recognised the state and the church are distinct functionally and conceptually but that does not mean they are ethically independent of one another.

The study has necessarily been restricted in scope, circumscribed by a presentation of an elder in the faith that I honour and respect but feel the need to strongly disagree with at points as recorded here. Thus, there is much more that can and should be discussed under this subject area. That is why I have included an extensive bibliography that we might be educated and informed in our discourse about this manner. It has been and continues to be for me an enormous source of irritation that all too readily today Christians talk about *"submission to our rulers"* and *"Romans 13"*, forgetting the revolutionary struggles of our history when we had to stand and be prepared to die that we could be free to preach the gospel and build the kingdom of God on Earth without hindrance. I hope I have given enough depth and challenge to that viewpoint that a reader will be stimulated to follow the resources further and refuse to bow the knee to the tyranny that is becoming the *"new normal"* in the Western world.

7.2 Final Words

I hope that I am not in the early stages of a debate with those who believe "democracy" does not matter anymore and there is nothing "God-given" about the republican, as in the historical, constitutional American republic, system of government so there is no Christian reason to defend it. Ask your Central American and Cuban refugees in Florida, Eastern Europeans that migrated West as soon as the Berlin Wall fell, and you realise how privileged we were to be *free* and how jealously we should guard *our* democracy that we might have the social conditions to preach the gospel. As someone with German ancestry, one of the most intense experiences I had was in Berlin when I was explaining at the time to my future wife about the previous partition of the city (she was from a different part of the world and was not aware of the history). I was overcome from a very deep place in my spirit.

God does not build walls to keep people in or lock them up in their homes, Satan does that and it is utter ignorance and twisted thinking to assert otherwise. Some forms of government are ungodly and tyrannical and should not be submitted to but resisted, with our blood if necessary. We would not have enjoyed the freedom we have done if our forebears down the centuries had not paid with their blood. To that end, I also recommend the appendix at the end of this essay to see how we might apply some of the "theory" I have tracked through in evaluating Trump, who after all was held responsible for the crisis in the prophetic movement and how we as Christians should have responded to him (and perhaps how we can respond in the future). It is written in far more of a confrontational fashion for a different audience than the main body of this work, but I still feel it would be useful for you to read it if you are prepared to be forgiving of its tone and to not be terminally offended when (not if) I offend you.

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Appendix A - The Most Important (and most corrupt) Election in a Generation: The Trump Problem

Introduction

This appendix considers specifically the “Trump” problem and argues the case that Christian support for Trump was defensible and indeed necessary. It presents the “facts” surrounding the election, the malpractice, corruption, and censorship which were there for us to see. It also looks at Trump’s record and some of the prophetic backdrop that made him such an unusual, divisive and controversial figure. It argues that those Christians who are opposing Trump are allies with those who want to destroy the Constitution of the US by denying it has any legitimacy; those who believe there is nothing about historic America they think worthy of saving, they want to remake America in the internationalist image. This presents a sympathetic but critical appreciation of the importance of the Trump presidency.

A Modern Revolution

Let us apply what we have argued in the main body of this essay and address the practical political problems we witnessed. We know that the context of the session was just after the “defeat” of Donald Trump. As some gospel ministers have pointed out, there are 133 million registered voters in the US, Trump is estimated by independent conservatives to have got over 70 million votes and no less than 60 million. Turnout was 66% so simple maths lends a *prima facie* plausibility to a massive amount of fraud and conspiracy, which is strengthened into a probability when added to it is that some “swing states” had opted to use voting software and machines that had known security concerns, had been rejected by many other states and had been previously implicated in fraudulent activity during national votes by autocratic regimes in Central and South America. A report by a specialised security consultancy previously employed by various US intelligence services and various

government departments identified the concerns around these machines as “*national security issues*”¹⁵⁵.

We even have video evidence of illegal activity during counting, unexplained cessations of counting on election night when Trump seemed to be opening up a large lead in unexpected States which was then reversed after counting restarted¹⁵⁶ and legal affidavit’s sworn by election observers (some of whom you can watch on You-Tube¹⁵⁷), giving their compelling testimony in full to investigatory panels, even including those from the winning party, that were alarmed at what was going on during the counts. Trump’s support within the country was greater than any sitting president in living memory, despite years of campaigning by a mainstream American media which had no interest in remaining neutral but actively misrepresented the scale of his support and campaigned for his opponents. They were aided and abetted by social media that began to boldly censor dissenting opinion and has continued to do so since the election.

In the immediate aftermath of the election, there was blatant dysfunction in all the various institutions which were meant to safeguard the integrity of the election process:

1. At a State level, the Attorney Generals refused to investigate allegations of fraud
“because their choice won”.

¹⁵⁵ There is much more to this story, see my <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/systematic-fraud-with-dominion-voting-machines-in-michigan-for-starters/>. It has a reference to the actual forensic report of the auditing consultancy, which is particularly disturbing reading.

¹⁵⁶ One video from hidden surveillance cameras showed a so-called “rest-break” which was a permitted, official break period in which everyone had to leave the room and counting was suspended. Someone re-enters the room, pulls out boxes from underneath a covered table and proceeds to feed in ballots for the next 90 minutes into the machines. Counting then resumes.

¹⁵⁷ This is one of the most compelling testimonies, <https://youtu.be/zG2RkKBHXOM>

2. At Supreme Court level, there was a refusal to even hear the major case though as the Court's senior dissenting judge noted (in my paraphrase for the sake of brevity), *"we have no constitutional right to refuse to hear the case when a state alleges this type of malpractice in another state"*.
3. At executive level when the Vice President refused to exercise his constitutional authority¹⁵⁸ to void those results in the States where the certification of results was verifiably done under duress - certifiers were suffering National Socialist like intimidation with online publication of their names and addresses, including children's schools and the like. Some certified to immediately file affidavits to try and void their certification stating it was done under duress. Other choice examples were websites created with pins on maps that located "Trump" supporters as targets for retribution, and the *"Make Them Pay"* public campaign of two of the "new breed" of Democrat congresswomen – the "Them" being Trump supporters.

Now, if we were in any doubt that we were not witnessing a *de facto* coup against a sitting president, after the election the winning party have put forward a new Act of Congress which:

1. Fundamentally changes the way elections are run in the future, centralising control at a federal level which as some have noted makes manipulating the election much easier and the potential for fraud much greater.

¹⁵⁸ We can perhaps understand the dilemma VP Pence was in, one way or another there was going to be rioting in the streets - no election in recent history had so much corruption and no VP has been called to exercise this type of authority in living memory.

This is primarily designed to stop local challenges to election results and all the associated scrutiny regarding the overall fairness of the vote.

2. Changing donor confidentiality rules to ensure future supporters of conservatives in the marketplace will have to be public in their support of them. The abilities of “foundations” (a bit like Charities in the UK) to give anonymously is withdrawn.

This is clearly meant to allow media and economic marketplace pressure to be exerted on companies or foundations that are public in support of those that liberals and their fellow-travellers in the media consider a ‘threat’ and the full socio-economic ire of “cancel-culture” can be directed at them.

3. The election oversight board, whereas it is currently a neutral body, will now be politically appointed partisans.

This is to avoid, by making it impossible to hold, those embarrassing hearings that gain national syndication and viral status where opposition politicians and election observers publicly report their evidence of intimidation and malpractice.

4. Reducing the requirements for confirming your identity to vote in elections.

With around 50 million undocumented ‘illegals’ in the US and the promise of an amnesty from the governing party as well as the new “open border” policy, this is clearly designed to ensure a permanent shift in the balance of power.

The role of social-media companies has also substantially shifted in the post-election period:

1. They have now begun openly censoring anything that could be construed as being pro-conservative, with former Facebook executives publicly arguing for social media companies to actively deny their entire platform to “conservatives”.
2. By this they do not just mean so-called white nationalist “alt-right” Trump supporters but *Fox-News* watching Americans – a bit like the *Telegraph* reading British - they are all now banded together under the rubric of “racists” and “fascists” which of course has been the playbook of revolutionary communist fascists for generations.
3. Much more pertinently for Christians, gospel ministers who express “*unacceptable*” views, i.e., biblical views about sexuality, are now suffering real-time interruptions to their feeds, removal/blocking of content and active censorship.

These platforms are ceasing to be diverse and open forums of free speech they were marketed to a generation as, but are now becoming vehicles by which, a “correct” view can be disseminated and all other views marginalised and, if necessary, demonised. The Bible is now openly labelled “Hate Speech”. We see a coalition developing where social media is becoming an unofficial propaganda arm of a party which is claiming an absolute moral right to rule.

Now, unless we have completely lost our Christian minds, the precursors to the satanic antichrist world order described to us with exquisite clarity in the scriptures are all present above. That is why I objected to this abuse of process and principle being repeatedly asserted as an expression of God’s sovereignty of getting His chosen leader in place by any means necessary.

If we choose now to cede this cultural ground and withdraw from the political processes of our nation to some kind of parallel, relational, organic 'kingdom of God', we are not ushering in the kingdom of God but are assisting the creation of the satanic kingdom. The option that we once had of being tolerated on the fringe of society in our fundamentalist ghettos is being withdrawn by liberals that rightly see us as a threat to the creation of what is seen as a fairer, more diverse, equal world that privileges none but the secular religion of autonomous man.

Trump the Wrecking-Ball

Having been in utter panic and disarray because of the Trump victory in 2016, the internationalist political establishment, aided by the leaders of both major American political parties and leaders of transnational blocs around the world, after the shortest period of self-reflection and a "how did we miss the story around the greatest political upset in recent history", regrouped and with the help of media and social media companies did everything they possibly could to shape the narrative to ensure a second Trump term was avoided.

The liberal chorus around the world was deafening, Trump was considered to be *"the greatest threat to international peace post-WWII"*. I remember listening to those reports on PrimeTime news driving home from work and what can only be described as a hysterical commentator predicting a worldwide meltdown of law and order if he got elected – ironically the report was interrupted with news of his victory! This prediction just proved to be utter nonsense, for as far as the Middle East was concerned, which was where many

believed a global conflict would emerge from, Trump had more success than any other post-War American president and Arab nations began normalising relations with Israel. His uncompromising negotiation positions on Israeli sovereignty created the biggest shift in a generation of the attitude of Arab nations to Israel. His success was totally contrary to the decades of appeasement¹⁵⁹. He also pushed the issue of the hypocrisy of the UN with regard to religious persecution and its policy against Israel unlike any of his predecessors.

Trump had caused absolute panic by refusing to be complicit in the *status quo* of Western nations in their appeasement of Iran, in International Climate and Trade Treaties, in immigration and asylum policies, in withdrawing funding from the WHO, banning federal funds to be invested in abortion provision, highlighted the persecution of religious minorities in the UN and refusing to promote any UN-mandated policy that he considered prejudicial to the interests of not just America but of Israel also.

Thus, as part of the fightback internally, impeachment was attempted and all kinds of accusations of sexual impropriety were marketed by a willing media, putting implausible ‘victims’ on show just because they could accuse even if they were shown to be unreliable with the least bit of due diligence. Yet, Trump seemed to be Teflon coated and the strong resurgence of the American economy with his business-friendly policies and ‘America First’ policy, gave him a commanding and seemingly unassailable position.

¹⁵⁹ One of the worst examples of appeasement was a previous administration dropping pallet loads of foreign currency for Iranian revolutionary leaders as “incentives” for cooperation.

If Trump was to be undermined it would be on the back of an economic collapse and more than any one single event, the orchestration of a planet-wide pandemic created conditions to undermine a sitting American president with enormous support. The pandemic was an unprecedented and contrived crisis¹⁶⁰ that provided an excellent opportunity to undermine that support. It required international and strategic coordination to ensure that the emerging world order which Trump had refused to cooperate with, could re-assert itself. The alligators in the swamp that he wanted to drain extended far beyond America's own GOP and Democrat party, bit back and were prepared to do absolutely *anything* to deny him a second term; including getting virtually every nation of the world to imprison their citizens on false charges of a public health emergency.

Perhaps what the complicit Republicans are now realising is just how much they have bit off as also are the "feeling betrayed" '*Evangelicals for Biden*'. There has not been an evangelical within 10 miles of the Whitehouse, but it has been lit up with rainbow colours, the Whitehouse website is "Glad to be Gay" and over 40 executive orders have been busily undermining religious freedom and clauses of conscience established under Trump. *Do we really want to try and swallow a theology that this is somehow within the plan of God for the world?* It just seems to put the exclamation mark on our utter stupidity on our failure to recognise that. Janet Boynes, a former lesbian herself who now runs a ministry reaching out to the LGBTX community, put it this way:

"As we all know we have a new Commander-in-Chief, and it appears that what most people have feared has come upon us. I like what my good

¹⁶⁰ See Macneil (2020b) for a justification of this view. The virus is real, but the pandemic was fake, it was a pandemic of fear, not a medical emergency: for the healthy under 70s, post-infection survival rate varies between 99.5% for 50-69s to 99.997% for U20s (official CDC figures – widely accepted as exaggerated as much as they could be).

friend Dr. Michael Brown¹⁶¹ has said, “Now, the tables are turned, and that same question must be asked of those who identify as committed followers of Jesus and who voted for Joe Biden. How could you do it? Did you not see the radical, destructive, anti-Christian policy decisions he would make?”

[Michael Brown's post](#)

In spite of what you thought about President Donald J. Trump, you never saw him turn the White House rainbow colors; you would have not found anything on the White House website regarding homosexuality. If it was there, you would have had to dig deep to find it. President Trump did not support transgenders in the military and the list goes on and on.

As we can all see, President Biden has given much support to the LGBTX community. (X stands for ex-gay, I refuse to give them any more letters of the alphabet.) Those of you that voted for Biden because you didn't like President Trump's tweets, thank you very much. You have made our jobs much harder. How is that working for you?”¹⁶²

The subversion at the heart of the election is also much more subtle. Joe Biden is being spoken of as a placeholder president, who will make way for the real candidate of the radicals after a respectable period. The radicals could not get their candidate elected directly but they can do it by offering conditional support. Even the American Communist Party lent support to Biden because their candidate would be Vice President and Biden's age and questionable cognitive fitness has already meant that the VP is introduced on some speaking circuits as “*the next President of the United States*”. Be clear, she has no other credentials other than being a radical socialist reformer with a history of aggressive legal action against conservatives. She spectacularly failed to get even 1% of her Party's nomination during the elections to become the Democratic challenger to Trump, she has no appeal to the mainstream but is the icon for the radical Left. Biden was shrewd enough to

¹⁶¹ Michael Brown was a leader during the Pensacola revival at the AOG church there and created an independent bible school when AOG central attempted to take it over. He is a well-respected scholar who has written extensively on Trump-Evangelical relationship and in Brown (2020) presents a thought-provoking, clear and respectful assessment of the range of views which I highly recommend, see the bibliography.

¹⁶² Boynes, (n.d.)

take her as running mate to prevent an all-out schism much as Trump precipitated one in the Republican party.

Conspiracy - The “New Normal” courtesy of *Time Magazine*

Now, you may have already assumed this has just demonstrated typical conservative prejudice and that the description of rigged elections in the largest, longest established republican democracy in the world is a re-hash of “Deep State” conspiracy theories. However, this is no longer “conspiracy theory” but rather “conspiracy – the new normal” as influential spokespersons for this new movement are rapidly giving themselves enough rope to hang themselves with. Consider this *mainstream* post-mortem on the election process in *Time* magazine reviewed recently by a gospel ministry:

“Liberal journalist Molly Ball documents that in the 16 months leading up to the 2020 election:

[A] well-funded cabal of powerful people, ranging across industries and ideologies, working together behind the scenes to influence perceptions, change rules and laws, steer media coverage and control the flow of information.

Throughout her article, Ball claims the cabal was “defending” and “protecting” the election. Evidently, Ball believes that censorship is an acceptable method for “fortifying” an election, as she also admits, “[The cabal] successfully pressured social media companies to take a harder line against misinformation and used data-driven strategies to fight viral smears.”¹⁶³

To ensure there is no ambiguity here, those who are being “fortified” against are those who do not share their ideological agenda which includes:

1. Christians who accept the bible as authoritative in matters of ethics.

¹⁶³ Quoted in ‘**Speak Now or Forever . . . Be Forced to Hold Your Peace**’, Truth and Liberty Coalition blog.

2. Any other group that might advocate some kind of objective standards for self-perception, e.g., there is such a thing as a woman and a man, they are distinct categories.
3. Peer-reviewed works on gender identity are being withdrawn simply because they no longer represent “correct” views or are considered “hate speech”.
4. Amazon is now placing under-review “conspiracy-theory” publications¹⁶⁴ whilst happily continuing to stock Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, the *Communist Manifesto*, Mao’s “*Thoughts*” and a host of other unpleasant works which have never pretended to produce anything other than perfect manifestos for ideologies of hatred.
5. There are now active calls for a “Ministry of Truth”¹⁶⁵ where a government department “fact-checks” what information or reports are acceptable for the public domain. This proposal presented as a response to “fake news” is especially subtle, as it makes the idea of government censorship as somehow morally virtuous.

So, be under no illusion, the “new normal” for those who such a spokesperson for this “liberal cabal” represents is that the corruption, intimidation and the propagandisation of

¹⁶⁴ One notable publication is a work on the Rockefeller’s from the Nixon era in the early 1970s which has sold millions of copies but is *old* – it has not even been in print for over a decade, there were only secondhand copies available.

¹⁶⁵ This motif is probably lost on many young readers but refers to George Orwell’s *1984*, perhaps the most famous novel where Orwell, once a committed socialist, reflected on what had happened in the Soviet Union and the progress of Marxist revolutions around the world. He was showing how the socialist state deifies itself and becomes the final arbiter of truth and indeed, of history itself. His timing for *1984* might have been off but he showed remarkable foresight in charting the progress of the secular state of the post-WWII era, considering he wrote it in the closing years of the 1940s.

the media was “acceptable conduct”, indeed virtuous and necessary for the greater international good. What we are witnessing, aided and abetted by the Communists¹⁶⁶ that architected the response to the COVID pandemic, is a soft-totalitarian takeover of the West¹⁶⁷. This is the communist ideology’s second coming, a far more slick and friendly totalitarianism, but communist, nevertheless.

That type of corruption should not be celebrated as somehow a sovereign God ensuring that his choice at this time, presumably Joe Biden, was put into office, even in the face of their never being a sitting president who had received such a large vote.

God has bound himself to His own laws as He reveals them to us. The foundation of His throne *is* justice and righteousness. To assert that God contravenes these standards when it suits Him or His purposes, is more akin to the Islamic concept of God than the Christian one.

Trump’s Political Policies in the Light of Scripture

Both the original presentation and my response to it have argued that what the arc of scripture says should be the lens that we use to evaluate political programmes and policies. It is just, if we are not careful, we are just going to substitute sentimental policy formulations that owe more to socialism than Christianity, for the “conservative” policies we are busy criticising. As the late Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen said in a presentation,

¹⁶⁶ The current head of the WHO (Dr Tedros) has a history as the leader of a particularly extreme sect of the Ethiopian Communists. If you ever wondered why there was such warmth between himself and the premier of China reflected in their iconic photograph together and how he so effusively praised and embraced the lockdown strategy as the way to deal with a mild flu-like virus (for the healthy under 70s, post-infection survival rate varies between 99.5% for 50-69s to 99.997% for U20s, official CDC figures – widely accepted as exaggerated as much as they could be), now you know! For my extensive research on this subject visit, <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/covid-19-thesis/>

¹⁶⁷ Dreher, R., 2020. *Live Not By Lies - A Manual For Christian Dissidents*. New York City: Sentinel., pp3-46.

the *Christian* position can cut right across the political spectrum and he would not have done his job unless both the “*hawks and the doves*” were upset with him¹⁶⁸.

Thus, we need to consider carefully the Trump record and program itself for the presenter drew direct attention to various elements of his policies as “not in line” with Kingdom principles and the inference is that the Christian support for him was misplaced because of our misunderstanding of kingdom principles. However, if it can be shown that Trump in fact had many policies by which he was attempting to re-establish some manner of biblical principles in an apostate nation and to also withdraw from Luciferian coercive world bodies or treaties, it is incoherent to try and using this mode of argumentation to dismiss political support for him by Christians as fundamentally misguided. If anything, stripping away the lies told about him by a corrupt international media and rather judging him on what he did, I believed he *deserved* the support of Christians. Further, what I want to assert is that it was because of a lack of understanding of the political process and the muddled thinking of Christians, that the failure of Christians to recognise him as God’s choice and to argue for him as God’s choice allowed the corruption and destruction of the election process to succeed. A solid block of Christian support could not have been overturned and it was division in the Christian ranks that allowed corruption of the process to succeed.

Was Trump a racist who made an idol out of America with his MAGA policy?

Now granted, I am being rather colourful in my sub-heading here, but the implication of the presenter was clear at points in the presentation by drawing attention to these policies as anti-Kingdom policies. MAGA and immigration policy were explicitly mentioned as contrary

¹⁶⁸ Bahnsen, G., 1995. *GB1770 Reconstructing All Areas of Life-The State (Audio Recording)*, Nagodoches: Covenant Media Foundation.

to the testimony of scripture. Brown (2020) makes an interesting comment about 'MAGA' in that for some native and black Americans, where was the 'Great' the first time but that seems to be more of a rhetorical flourish than a substantive argument against Donald Trump. When we understand what Trump meant by MAGA, the bottom tends to fall out of most of these criticisms or like Brown's proposition, is no longer pertinent to the question.

However, we should address the direct criticism of Trump regarding the "Make America Great Again" as an example of one nation elevating its greatness above all others and in being in contradiction to God's political manifesto for nations. Now let me agree with the speaker, *if* that was what Trump meant by "Make America Great Again", *then* let the fire fall and may the United States of America be humbled by the King of Kings. However, that was not what Trump meant at *all* by his statement "Make America Great Again". Rather, and you can read it in His farewell address, the "greatness" that he wanted America to recover was an America in which *the government existed to serve its citizens*.

He did not merely ascribe this as a moral imperative for America but for *all* nations of the world – that is, the governments of all nations would be "great" if they too governed on behalf of their citizens rather than giving up the sovereignty of their nation to transnational organisations established on an internationalist and socialist basis. This was why he *also* said that other nations "*should put themselves first*". All we have done by using this "MAGA" meme as an example of a nation elevating itself and now it is time for it to be humbled and for the prophetic mantle to pass to us British because those dumb US prophets cannot see past their patriotic noses, is to swallow the partisan media lie and give the narrative respectability when it was always misreported and false.

Moving on to Trump being called a “racist” by his own media for shining a spotlight on Chinese imperialism and state-sponsored assassination, as well as its suspect role as the COVID crisis emerged. These actions were not the actions of a racist but rather one who refused to be part of a corrupt world order and was happy to show why to anyone prepared to listen. It is bizarre that we cannot be more discriminating when he is married to an immigrant and has promoted the highest ever level of employment amongst blacks and Hispanics. He also enjoyed vigorous support from faith leaders some of whom were indeed “people of colour”.

Trump was not about making people comfortable in their ghettos or reservations through government support, but in empowering them so that they can work for themselves and create wealth through business themselves. These are scriptural principles of sound governance and we should not be ashamed to support those who support the values we hold with them, especially when the opposition are publicly standing against those values. A tactic of fascists be it of the Left or Right version – and America’s problem is not particularly with right-wing white nationalist extremists at the moment, it is with the takeover of the extreme Left – is to misrepresent their opponents and label *them* as *fascists* to lend legitimacy to their *own* fascist programme of stripping people of their freedoms.

The antics of impeachment were to try and disbar from office a man permanently for they know he cannot be beat honestly. Over 60 million Americans could see through their own media, we seem to have a problem recognising their agenda, both sides of the Atlantic. Similarly, for some of us, this is why we still believe in Scottish Independence and believe that Brexit is a prerequisite of us reclaiming some kind of sovereignty from what was a

rigged market designed to exclude the rest of the world from trading on equal terms with the EU. I know many of my fellow Scots want to break with a British identity and champion becoming an independent nation, but also want to jump back into bed with the EU and immediately give up their independence again, but this is not the place to argue about that. I agree with our speaker that our “greatness” might not be what was envisaged in the mind of the colonel with the bristling moustache noted for the saying the British Empire will endure for 1000 years but let us celebrate the greatness of a nation that wants to promote a model government that serves its citizens and trades freely with other nations, rather than being hijacked by vetoes and majority voting blocs in transnational cliques.

What I really want to point out here too is that our speaker seems to have slipped on the same banana skin of the impossibility of zero-objectivity they were warning us against. The narrative regarding Trump, ‘MAGA’, the ‘border wall’, immigration, Brexit and independence owe much more to socialism and the fellow-travellers in a corrupt media, than they do to scripture. For those close to Trump, they know a man who was profoundly disturbed by what was occurring in his nation and that motivated him to run for President. One of his personal advisors relates the total shock and horror on his face she witnessed when he found out that partial birth abortions were legitimate, *‘how could this happen here?’*. Similarly, those close to him do not recognise the caricature of an angry, impulsive man, famous for his rude tweets, rather they recount how in the midst of the first impeachment they entered the office of a relaxed and happy man. In all honesty, you do not manage to do what Trump has done in business if you are not smart and know how to

handle pressure¹⁶⁹. Someone has also wryly observed that we probably would have been extremely uncomfortable as conservative Christians if Jesus had tweeted what He said against the Pharisees, for after all, the Pharisees were the “conservative” religious sect of the day.

“Trump Is Not My Saviour”

Thus spake, not Zarathustra, but Michael Brown, who has formulated a series of “Trump Tests” which like our presenter wants us to intelligently reassess our political theology and get some of the basics right. Brown is an excellent educator and writes extremely lucidly. He explains how it *is* possible for you as a believer to reason your way to vote for a party with explicitly anti-Christian stances:

“Some tell me they hate abortion and oppose homosexual “marriage,” but they don’t see these issues being solved politically, so they vote for the other issues that concern them, issues they feel political leaders can address. Then they work to change hearts and minds on these other issues. Again, I do not agree with their voting decisions, but I understand their heart, and they often bring to my attention issues of systemic unfairness in our society that we, as followers of Jesus, must address.”¹⁷⁰

That is, people maintain some kind of duality in their thinking which separates the social and the political. However, the statement “*I understand their heart*” illustrates the real problem perfectly. We think it is a “heart” or a “preference” matter when really it is an *objective* matter of respect for God’s law. Brown does an excellent job of diagnosing the sickness of the patient and himself makes an interesting if lengthy and circumspect case for why he voted for Trump despite his so-called character defects.

¹⁶⁹ I think it was also an amusing observation by a particular minister with a worldwide ministry that if Jesus was on Twitter, we too might have been shocked about what he was tweeting about the Pharisees!

¹⁷⁰ Brown PhD, Michael L., “*Evangelicals at the Crossroads: Will We Pass the Trump Test?*” (p. 224), Equal Time Books. Kindle Edition (2020).

It is an age-old problem of theodicy as to why God permits evil or uses an evil person, but the problem is not really a theological or philosophical one, God permits evil because He has sufficient reason to allow it within His justice and righteousness. The problem is a *psychological* one, it just does not seem right to us that He could do that. Brown's reasoning basically is from the text of scripture we find plenty of men anointed and appointed of God for political office who were anointed and appointed not for their moral character but because they would do the job for which God assigned them. Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus are examples of good pagans who within the providence of God, to a greater or lesser degree fulfilled His purposes. The same can be said for morally defective members of Israel like Samson and Gideon.

Thus, I heard Kenneth Copeland talk about meeting Donald Trump for the first time as a Cruz supporter but being asked to pray over him, he said he proceeded to prophesy over him as if he was already president. Kenneth went on to discuss why he saw Trump as being better equipped than Cruz for what he needed to do as President. He was faced with a ruthless opposition, and he could not afford to be stumbling over Christian conscience towards your enemy:

“as the wrecking ball, Trump has exposed the radical agenda of the left, the deep biases of the media, the evil intent of countries like China, and, some would claim, the clandestine goals of the “Deep State” and the One World Order.”¹⁷¹

I believe he was God's choice for the world at this time as a stand against a de-facto global takeover of a rebranded, benevolent but equally as deadly, form of communism.

¹⁷¹ Brown (2020), p.86.

If you think lockdowns are necessary, furlough is fun and in this digital age why not a digital church, you might disagree. Let me briefly remind us that the Jews were first put into ghettos before they were exterminated – if church goes online, it is only a matter of time (and judging by the censorship that is already happening via the providers of the channels we stream our Church through) before the network cable is pulled permanently out of our Church routers and you will be judged guilty of hate-speech by default for being a believer. We are days away in Scotland for a revision to a statute that will do just that – if anyone is offended by anything you say, even if *you did not intend it* maliciously, it will be “hate speech” and a criminal offence.

Trump as the Friend of the Evangelical

It is beyond question that it was the solid evangelical and charismatic support for Donald Trump that is credited with him winning the 2016 race and it is also beyond question that he opened up the Whitehouse and his administration to Christians as no president has done so since Washington and Lincoln. Though every president since Jimmy Carter in 1976 had made faith an election issue, none of them had made it a determinative force in policy direction. Even presidents like Reagan and Bush who courted evangelical support, actually engaged very little after their election, sometimes as a matter of personal choice but at other times kept isolated by their team (in the case of the younger Bush) from faith leaders.

Trump changed all that. He established an evangelical “reference” council, hosted the first ever state dinner for evangelicals at the Whitehouse and elevated a senior “prophetic” figure to be his faith advisor, creating a special position to prevent her from being excluded by bureaucrats that surrounded him and ensuring she would travel on Air

Force One with him. Other senior leaders had been given his personal mobile number and he actually answered it when they rang. He is also, undeniably, the most pro-life, pro-faith president in recent American history.

Now there is certainly a distinction between God using a leader and approving of everything they do. Just as personally God being with us as believers and yet certainly not approving of some things we choose to do. I certainly believe it would have been far wiser to be in the intercessory prayer meeting than to be on CBN prophesying a Trump victory, a lesson that was learnt by Terri Copeland in 2012 when she led a prayer team against Obama's second election campaign. Terri learnt that sometimes '*we get our country back*' (a prophecy that came during the meeting and understood to be meaning Obama was going to lose) was four years later than we thought.

Of course, keeping it has been the challenge and we lost this battle because believers were not on the ball spiritually, preferring feelings over facts. Trump's record as a whole, his standing for life and for Israel, his opening of the Whitehouse to evangelicals and his personal intervention to ensure it stayed open, are signs of the grace of God on a leader for whom any recommendation to support from any church leader, would have been a well-thought out and supported position.

I have no doubt that Trump was let down by a lack of Christian support because of confused and sentimental Christian thinking. People allowed themselves to be influenced by subjectivity and what they personally felt about him rather than on his record and the space he made for believers. A political leader is not in the same class as a religious leader. Thus, to object to Trump on the grounds of his alleged immorality, his great wealth, his coarseness

of speech, his alleged racism and lack of a Christian lifestyle is really a non-sequitur. It seems just a matter of foolishness on the behalf of Christian “Never Trumpers” such as notable seminary professors within the Reformed world and modern “social gospel” Christians (such as Ron Sider) who see in Biden a devout catholic man who is obviously God’s choice because of his concern for “social justice”. The social justice that is being mandated by executive decree excludes conservative Christians, including orthodox Catholics.

The spheres of church and state are separately instituted, functionally independent but not ethically isolated from one another. A religious leader *may* be a political leader also, but the ethical variables are very different in the political domain of men than the religious domain of God. A religious figure represents God directly and God sets the rules. A civil leader is held accountable to God but indirectly through the wider influence of Christian ethics modelled by the church for society. If we understand this, we can understand Trump can be a political leader and fall beneath Christian ethics in a way that a minister could not – the political leader is not representing God to people but represents the platform, defects and all, that he is standing on.

[Vote on the Platform](#)

In the run up to the election there were conferences, intercessory prayer chains, major ministries actively and openly campaigning for Trump; proclamations that “*this is the most important election in a generation*” and “*vote to maintain our way of life*”. It was evident that never before were the main platforms of the parties so divergent:

- a. One party has publicly rejected God, is proud it is the party of “atheism” and has embraced “democratic socialism”. It indeed marks a watershed for American political life.
- b. They have publicly embraced policies and embrace a suite of liberal social and ethical positions that are anti-Christian.

For example, “Complete reproductive freedom” means absolutely no restrictions on abortion and even the legalisation of post-birth “abortions” where a child is born with some kind of unexpected disability – you “make the child comfortable, have a discussion with the health professional then dispose of if required”. Thus, it would seem plain to all but those prepared to do the most impressive of separating the man Biden from his political platform (“he is pro-life personally but believes in pro-choice politically”).

The platform publicly supports the following measures within States:

The NJ *“Reproductive Freedom Act”* (S3030/A4848)...It was introduced in the Senate and Assembly last October, in an effort to increase women’s rights to abortion and allow non-physicians to perform the procedure.

The measure indicates that *“a fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus may not be understood to have independent rights under any of the laws of this State.”*

- c. Want to “redefine free speech”, with the result that it will class Christian preaching, along with a lot else such as dissent from whatever is someone’s chosen self-identification, as “hate speech”.

It would seem that the moral duty of the Christian would be to vote for Trump to restrain this evil that he had committed to do. The question then becomes how did he still lose – he lost because believers still did not comprehend what was at stake and because the opposition also understood what was at stake and did a much better job at unifying around a candidate. Even the American Communist Party publicly campaigned for Biden. They understood how devastating a second Trump presidency would have been for their programme. How a Christian was then able to be part of ‘evangelicals for Biden’ thinking their rights were going to be preserved is the depth of stupidity.

I maintain this even when we have seen in analysing Lloyd-Jones that we must never violate another’s right to vote with their conscience, but it must then be an informed conscience. We can certainly take apart piece by piece those platforms of the standing parties, not just in theory but in practice, and come to an objective conclusion as to which platform and intent of the campaign will ensure the best social and cultural conditions for the gospel to be preached.

There is nothing wrong with Christian leaders making their recommendations for a candidate and then being examined as to why they make those recommendations. If there are those among us who have chosen politics as a profession or are involved in the political philosophy, we may as experts lend insight to what is happening. Christians are happy to receive input from other ‘experts’ in all sorts of areas from home improvements and gardening to nutrition and what car to drive. How much more should we be interested in listening to political experts and allowing them to cross examine one another. I can remember hearing of a debate in a previous era in the US where people spent three days

listening to debates and discussing the political direction they should take. *That* level of commitment and engagement with the backdrop of Christian ethics helps us understand why the US made such great progress as a nation.

So, if I am currently in the early stages of a debate with those who believe "democracy" does not matter anymore and there is nothing "God-given" about the republican, as in the historical, constitutional American republic, system of government so there is no Christian reason to defend it, so be it. *To me, that is utterly socially irresponsible and a fundamentally ignorant political position to support.* Ask your Central American and Cuban refugees in Florida, Eastern Europeans that migrated West as soon as the Berlin Wall fell and you realise how privileged we were to be *free* and how jealously we should guard *our* democracy.

Appendix B – Some thoughts on controversial policies

I want to briefly address two issues because they were raised within the original presentation and added a great rhetorical flurry to it because they were explicated with great emotion and passion. We were left in no doubt that ‘MAGA’ was from the pit and judgment had come upon Christians yoked to political conservatism – sorry, I am exaggerating slightly, but not much (see, we can both play at emotional rhetoric). If we are not to be misinformed by our psychological sympathy to such flurries, we need to be cool in our assessment of them.

Is God a Conservative?

It is crass to assert ‘God is a conservative’ and plenty of conservative Christians as well as just conservatives objected to Trump during his ‘reign’. Similarly, there is a long and noble history of a Christian Socialist Movement, at least in Europe and we cannot *a priori* assert that political conservatism is God’s choice for our governments. However, choosing who to vote for is not just an issue of personal preference or a matter of conscience though, it needs to be a personal preference or conscience that is informed by the wider implications of our choice¹⁷².

Now, we do have a conceptual problem when we want to argue that Christians might have a duty to decide to vote for a party because their political views are considered to be more “Christian” than the opposition. As Lloyd-Jones states, historically at least:

“You can have equally good Christians in the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Labour Party. What is it that divides them? Not their Christianity, not their spiritual point of view, but their opinions with regard

¹⁷² I recommend the Appendix to this study to see how this might work in practice.

to specific problems in the realm...of these [neutral] questions that law and government have to consider.”¹⁷³

However, he does concede that one’s Christianity might certainly inform your view and we have already seen that “neutrality” is becoming an increasingly difficult, if not impossible position to maintain.

For example, in the case of a party that *celebrates* its atheism and rejection of Judeo-Christian values regarding sexuality, euthanasia, abortion and marriage, it is certainly no longer a matter of a “neutral” politics and we cannot be as magnanimous in our political positioning¹⁷⁴. Lloyd-Jones was living in an era where it was much easier to assert there was still some kind of respect, even if it was an unwilling one, amongst all the major political parties for Judeo-Christian values as normative ones. The uncomfortable reality of our time for Christian socialists is that it is becoming impossible to coexist with non-Christian socialists because of the ‘liberal’ positions taken on issues which have clear scriptural positions. Unless we resist the world, we will be judged with it.

Immigration Policy

As a prefatory note, I recognise this is an incendiary subject and some of what I say here could easily be misinterpreted or be found offensive even if interpreted correctly. I have had family members shouting “racist” in my face (I am married to a non-European) but then later apologising for misjudging. As I like to remind some people, I was doing my racism awareness courses in 1989 and out on the anti-racism demos when we were faced with a

¹⁷³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, p.41

¹⁷⁴ This article is a fascinating story of Lord Alton, that illustrates how your party platform on key moral issues must eventually influence your political decision making with regard to where you can stand politically, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21358323>. It is also noteworthy that such a balanced article (published in 2013) would be hard to find on the BBC today.

wall of riot police before they were born! I hope what I write here makes people think about an issue that is too often framed in emotive and sectarian language, rather than considering what scripture says as a whole about this issue. I did not feel adequate or fair attention was given to this issue during the presentation.

We know that as a matter of theological principle, God makes no distinction between different ethnic groups, we are all of equal value before God and salvation is for all without distinction. The resources of the Earth were created for all and people should be able to move to places where they can access those resources. For many, immigration is thus considered as a human right and borders should be open. Immigration is to be celebrated as the way God has populated and populates the Earth. If one group of people does not use the land they are on or chooses population or border control to maintain their way of life, God raises an unstoppable wave of those who will develop the land and have babies¹⁷⁵.

Now in the presentation that began this study, our speaker rightly mentions immigration and border policies as important policy issues where perhaps traditional conservative views are contra-scriptural and have made us ripe for judgment and humiliation at the polls if we have partnered with them. However, I believe we can show that wholly open borders are not scriptural, and we are to maintain the integrity of our

¹⁷⁵ Landa Cope, to whom I owe an enormous intellectual debt, argues in this vein. As you can see, I respectfully disagree with her here on the immigration issue but believe she has a powerful case regarding the population issue. Many European nations will face a population crisis because of their low birth-rates and will cease to be predominantly white in less than 30 years in some cases. See the bibliography for Landa's important, clear and readable studies.

nation whilst remaining open to legal immigration or to shelter the refugee, subject to conditions which are also specified for us in scripture.

Firstly, we should be able to understand that immigration policy is not just about “welcoming the stranger for you were strangers in Egypt”¹⁷⁶ or the honouring of the fine legal principle that there should be “no difference in the law for the stranger and the native born”¹⁷⁷. This chimes well in isolation with the pluralist mythology of our age and what seems to be implied in much of the polemic, Christian or otherwise, directed against a Trump’s wall, economic migration or handling a refugee crisis from Syria. However, that is not *all* the scripture tells us about immigration and the treatment of the foreigner, it also talks of the requirements and responsibilities placed on the foreigner who wants to join the nation:

“But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. ⁴⁹ The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.” (Ex 12:48-49)

No one was forced to convert to the Jewish religion, but neither were they permitted to promote idolatry in Israel or to insult the Jewish religion, it was a capital offence, for native or foreigner alike:

¹³Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁴ “Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him. ¹⁵ You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ¹⁶ ‘If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin’. ¹⁶ Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as

¹⁷⁶ Ex 23:9 – my paraphrase. The text in the NAU reads: “You shall not oppress a stranger [foreigner], since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Similar phrases are used at various other points when case laws are given.

¹⁷⁷ Ex 12:48 – my paraphrase. The text in the NAU reads: “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.” Similar phrases are used at various other points when case laws are given.

well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”
(Lev 24:13-16)

The foreigner was obligated to obey the civil Law of God as a native was to receive its protection and to honour the religious cult of the native if they were to partake in its blessings. For us today, there should be no restriction on personal religious freedom but no right to build mosques if there was a crisis that required us to shelter millions of Muslims as the case during the Syria conflict. A condition of residence is that they respect the customs of those among whom they dwell.

The State, for Israel the senior leaders of each of the tribes, had an obligation to protect their citizens. It must be remembered that Jesus on more than one occasion distinguished between “Jews” and other nations, not in the sense of denigrating another nation at the Jew’s expense, but nevertheless recognising the difference (e.g. Luk 17:18; Joh 4:20-30). In our modern parlance an “*Israel first*” policy was implemented to secure the borders of the nation but *also* to respect the borders of other nations. Where there was a mutual treaty, they were to respect the terms of it. Similarly, for the Jews, the ruler of the Jews was always to be a Jew (Deut 17:15), as a native-born citizen should value their homeland in a different way to an immigrant. This was the reason why there was a problem with submission to Gentile leaders during the time of Roman occupation. This also implies there needs to be some vetting of refugees for as we have seen in recent British history, some refugees become bombers of the country that sheltered them within 10 short years. The nation needs to be protected both spiritually, morally and culturally that social peace may be maintained.

There were also specific sanctions in Deuteronomy about admitting particular nations into full citizenship, even when they already dwelt among the Israelites. Sometimes their cultural philosophies were so radically different, that ten generations were specified before admission. A condition of their citizenship was that they had integrated fully, in the sense of adapting to the culture and ethics of the nation (Deut 23,1-7). There was no forced conversion but there was no equal status or rights granted to the foreign cultural practices, especially where they conflicted with Israel's standards. Thus, again, it should be self-evident that a multiculturalism that encourages religious pluralism in the sense of side-by-side autonomous communities is not a scriptural position and leads to eventual schism of a society on an ethnic basis.

This should be self-evident for us in the West because of our experience of large-scale Islamic immigration where Jihad is central to the orthodox religion even if it is only normally purveyed by extremists. Even when people have arrived as refugees seeking shelter, if they have not integrated by the second or third generation, there have been Jihadist attacks in those countries. As mentioned above, the Manchester bombing was carried out by the son of a refugee within 10 years of arrival¹⁷⁸. This might seem offensive and racist to some readers, but it is an evidence-based position, and the evidence is all around us with dead bodies in our European streets in the recent past because of "terror

¹⁷⁸ If I understand the facts around this case correctly, the parents had arrived as political refugees from Libya but had already returned to Libya when Ghaddafi fell a few years before the bombing, but their two sons had remained in the UK. However, on the news of the Manchester bombing they were arrested and executed by the Libyan authorities for the actions of their children. Whilst such a judicial course is scripturally questionable (parents should not be put to death for the sins of their children), it is somewhat ironic that the UK authorities let those directly responsible for the deaths of so many others live.

attacks”¹⁷⁹. However, uncomfortable such analysis makes us, it is empirically verifiable by simply checking our world today.

Of course, Islam is an extreme ideology in many respects and not all religious or cultural groups have ideologies of conquest. However, the point remains that scripturally, it is not racism to protect the integrity of the nation or to argue for controlled immigration and checks on who is being received as a refugee. This is why it is important to understand that Trump did not *just* say “Make America Great Again” but *also* said that *other* nations should look after their citizens first too *because* a government should exist for the well-being of its citizens. Trump was married to an immigrant and head of a multi-ethnic administration, some of his strongest supporters were “people of colour”; the pejorative labels of “white nationalist”, “racist” and “fascist” were just that, slurs. This also does not seek to deny the very real prejudice and discrimination suffered on the basis of ‘race’, we have seen this is reprehensible and is strongly prohibited in scripture but that same scripture counsels us against irresponsible multicultural pluralism. It is also important to say that there is no advocacy of retrospective widespread deportation of people who have emigrated or sought refuge from persecution here other than when people become involved in criminality by choice.

¹⁷⁹ To consider one very specific instance, the late Chuck Missler, a noted apologist who was also a West-Point graduate and had been chief executive of five publicly traded companies, i.e., he was an informed, articulate and intelligent person, quoted a detailed study in which Islamic immigration had been analysed. Beneath 5% of the host population, there was seldom any problem with a Muslim population. Between 5% and 10% there was agitation for the legal status of certain customs such as Halal provision or dress conventions. Above 10% there were occasional violent incidents and demands for recognition of schools and gender segregation. Above 25% (as in certain communities in many European countries) there were persistent Jihadist threats and the demand for Sharia law; there are now functioning Sharia courts in the UK. Above 40% there was active Jihad and in many “Muslim majority” countries, active violence and persecution of minorities.