

Society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product . . . that yet acts back upon its producer. Society is a product of man. There can be no social reality apart from man. Yet it may also be stated that man is a product of society. Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it. Society was there before the individual was born and it will be there after he has died. What is more, it is within society, and as a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto an identity, and that he carries out the various projects that constitute his life. Man cannot exist apart from society. The two statements that society is the product of man and that man is the product of society are not contradictory.

(Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, p.3)

1. The above quote by Peter Berger illustrates the inter-relatedness of institutions and individuality, out of which emerges a "culture." What, in general, does Berger suggest about socialization such as to understand the relation of "institutions, culture, and individuality?" How might this all play out in the so called "church and state" discussion? Is "church and state" the same as "Christ and culture?" Can a Christian advocate for the separation of "church and state" and the integration of "Christ and culture?" We will want to carefully consider how all this plays out in an understanding of the church role in society vs. the individual Christian role in society, and especially how the popular phrase "separation of church and state" has led to some confusion.

2. The classic New Testament passage of civil institution is found in Romans 13:1-7. What, in general, can we observe about the extent and limits of the state according to Romans 13?

3. Moreover, Meredith Kline has argued that the *institutional* separation of church from state from out of their original context of both being expressed within the family, was in the institution of *common grace* given to Cain in Genesis 4:11-17. Kline summarized it this way:

Common grace was introduced to act as a rein to hold in check the curse on mankind and to make possible an interim historical environment as the theater for a program of redemption.

Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*.

Likewise, the 18th century Presbyterian, Samuel Davies, described the Biblical institution of church and state from out of the family this way:

The great Author of our nature, who has made us sociable creatures, has instituted various societies among mankind, both civil and religious, and joined them together by the various bonds of relation. The first and radical society is that of a family, which is the nursery of the church and state. This was the society instituted in Paradise in the state of innocence, when the indulgent Creator, finding that it was not good for a man, a sociable creature, to be alone, formed a help meet for him and united them in the endearing bonds of the conjugal relations. From thence, the human race was propagated; and when multiplied, it was formed into civil governments and ecclesiastical assemblies...

4. How does WCF 23 compare to Romans 13? Notice section 3. What especially is the civil institution of "state" supposed to do and not supposed to do? (see further sections 1 and 3) One of the important documents of the reformed tradition is George Gillespie's famous *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* presented before the Westminster General Assembly of 1647. As influenced by this document, Thomas Peck, also provides a good summary of the relation of "church" to "state" from his *Notes on Ecclesiology*:

1. In relation to God: *the state is an ordinance of God considered as the creator, and, therefore, the moral governor of mankind, while the church is an ordinance of God considered as the saviour and restorer of mankind. The state is ordained for man as man; the church for man as a sinner in a condition of inchoate restoration and salvation. The state is for the whole race of man; the church consists of that portion of the race which is really, or by credible profession, the mediatorial body of Christ. (275)*

2. In relation to constitution: *The next point of difference between church and state is in the rules by which they are to be respectively regulated in the exercise of their functions. The rule of the church is the word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and*

New Testaments. This is the statute book of the visible kingdom of Christ. The rule for the state is the "light of nature," or the human reason.

3. In relation to power: *The power of the church is, strictly and only, "ministerial and declarative"; the power of the state is magisterial and imperative. The church has no power to make laws, but only to declare the law of God. All her acts of government are acts of obedience to her head and king. The state has the power to make laws as well as to declare them; it has a legislative as well as a judicial power.*

4. In relation to form: *Hence, the form of government for the church, the regulative and the constitutive principles of her organization, are not matters to be determined by human reason, but to be derived from the Bible as the constitution and statute-book, while, in the state, these are matters to be settled by the history and condition of political communities. The life of the state is natural, and it is left to assume an organization for itself. The life of the church is supernatural, and God prescribes an organization for it. (281)*

5. In relation to sanctions: *Church and the state differ in their sanctions, as well as in their authority and their rule. The sanction of ecclesiastical government is moral, appealing to the faith and the conscience, a parental discipline, designed for the good of the offender. Its symbol is "the keys." The sanction of civil government is force, appealing to the bodily sensibilities of the subject or the citizen; a penal administration, designed to vindicate the majesty of justice and the supremacy of law, with a very incidental, if any, reference to the good of the transgressor. Its symbol is "the sword." (287)*

6. In relation to scope of power: *"The scope and aim of civil power are only things temporal; of the ecclesiastical power, only things spiritual. Religious is a term not predicable of acts of the state; political and civil, terms not predicable of acts of the church."*

5. With respect to the Christian's relation to the state, notice carefully section 2. The Confession advocates a position often described as "just war theory," and related to this, the recognition that Christians together with people of other faiths and none, can be called by God to work within the state toward the execution of civil ends (e.g. police, soldiers, magistrates, etc). This position is different from the classic Ana-Baptist position, sometimes referred to as "Christian pacifism." What is at the heart of the issue? I.e. Is there a "separation of church and state?" And is this different from a separation of Christian and State? (Thus the importance of having a clear "institutional" theology, not to be confused with a theology of individuals.)

6. What is the duty of the Christian to the state? (section 4) Notice especially that our duty to the state is irrespective of the persons themselves, and especially their spirituality vis-à-vis those who hold office in the state. Where do we see an example of this in scripture (Lk. 20:25)? Notice also Larger Catechism questions #127-128. See WCF 20.4 (Discuss some possible issues: tax? revolution, and if so, under what conditions? blue laws? passive resistance? (see addendum by T. David Gordon)

7. Notice then chapter 31, section 4 and what has been described as the spirituality of the church. As we have discussed in the relation of *state* to church, what is the relation of *church* to state? e.g. What constraints ought the church demonstrate given its institutional charter from Christ? What are the dangers of the church that doesn't regulate itself in its scope and aim in terms of proclamations and actions?

"History establishes no truth more clearly than this, that when the Church has engaged in any manner in political difficulties, its best interests, its influence for good, and its religious character have suffered. Individual members of the Church have their responsibilities as citizens and as politicians and their duties are of a totally different sort from those of the Church collectively. Their religion should, indeed make them better citizens; but their citizenship in this world is one thing, and the citizenship of the great Church is another thing. The Church, as such, has absolutely no concern with those works in which it is the highest worldly duty of the man to engage. The Church owes no allegiance to any earthly power; it owes no fealty to any monarch or government. For there is no divided loyalty in the church, and no part of the Church, in Jerusalem or Antioch, in England or America, on earth or in heaven, that owes any allegiance which all the other parts do not equally owe. The mistake of confounding the duty of the individual citizen and church-member, with the duties of the church, has led to the most fatal errors.

Stuart Robinson, May 22, 1862

8. Regarding the so called "spirituality" doctrine of the church, it could be shown that a non-pacifist, albeit "sectarian" doctrine of the church (by this I mean sectarian in relation to state) has its Reformed roots in Augustine, Calvin, Scottish Reformation, 18th century Virginia Presbyterians, 19th Century Border State

Presbyterians, the German Barmen Movement, and even Reformed aspects of the post-liberal movement today. But this is for another day perhaps. But given this emphasis—wherein the actions of individuals is distinguished from the actions of the church acting corporately in its declarations and activities—how would this impact the meaning of “Christian ethics?” E.g. How should the church relate to poverty, politics, war, etc.? When has the church said/done too little, too much? What would it mean for the “church to be the church” and for this to be its ethical contribution to society? What does it mean that Christian ethics is necessarily ecclesial ethics?

Consider for instance, the perspective of John Howard Yoder, who many would affirm as the father of post-liberal ethical theory. In his influential work, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), Yoder re-examined the slogan of the 1948 Amsterdam Assembly “let the church be the church.” More specifically, Yoder was arguing for the “centrality of the church” as a “social strategy.” According to Yoder, to the degree that the church becomes a “restored society,” it does so as an authentic witness in the greater society.

The church must be a sample of the kind of humanity which, for example, economic and racial differences are surmounted. Only then will it have anything to say to the society that surrounds it about how those difference must be dealt with.¹

¹ Yoder, John Howard, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd Edition (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, (1972), p. 150-152.

Addendum: Duties of the Fifth Commandment: State T. David Gordon

I. The institution of civil government

A. The Scripture

1. Genesis 9: 6 “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.”

2. Romans 13:1 “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing.”

B. The Westminster Confession, 23:1

1. “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.”

II. The mandate of civil government—to mediate the common grace of God for the common good.

A. The maintenance of justice: punishing the wicked and exonerating the righteous.

B. The well-being of its citizens

III. The authority of civil government

A. To punish: Gen. 9:5-6; Rom. 13:1-7

B. To tax: Matt. 22:21

C. To wage just war: (Gen.9:5-6, Rom.13:1-7)

Acts 10:1 “In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. 2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.”

Lk. 3:9-14: “‘Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’”

IV. The limits of civil government

A. May not intrude upon other institutions ordained by God.

Mt. 22:21 “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

B. May not bind the conscience (Nebuchadnezzar had no proper authority over the conscience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego).

C. May not destroy those rights which are inherent and natural, namely, the right to obey God (the only right which, by nature, as made in God’s image, we have).

V. The citizen's responsibility to civil government

A. Scripture

1. To obey all laws that do not require sin *per se*.
2. To suffer the penalty of passive resistance to unjust government.
Acts 4:19 "But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;"
Acts 5:29 "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."
3. To labor, insofar as one is capable under the state's authority to see the state fulfill its purpose.
4. To revolt only when the government persistently fails to execute justice and to promote the well-being of its citizens, and when the revolution will probably promote a government more likely to execute justice and promote the citizens' well-being. (Note the difference between "passive resistance" and what amounts to "private revolt.")
 - a. Justification of revolution. Note that the duty to obey the magistrate in Rom. 13:2-4 is based upon three realities: that the magistrate is "what God has appointed" that the magistrate is "not a terror to good conduct, but to bad", and "is God's servant for your good." Thus, when the civil magistrate does not function as God has appointed it to function; or is a terror *not* to bad conduct, but to good; or when the civil magistrate is *not* a servant of God for the good of the people, the biblical *ground* for submission is gone.
 - b. Whether revolution is a private right. The orthodox tradition has always held that the right of revolution is not individual, but corporate. An individual act of revolt is in fact treasonous. The magistrate's duty to serve "for good" is a corporate duty; the magistrate must serve the people as a whole for good. What is good for the whole may often be troublesome to individuals, yet this does not justify revolt. E.g., imminent domain laws are essential to the establishing of efficient transportation routes and emergency routes, even though they may be inconvenient to those most directly effected by them. Similarly, the power to conscript into military service is more inconvenient for those subject to such conscription than to others; yet it is for the common "good" that such is done.

In almost all circumstances, revolt is wicked if done merely for ideological reasons (the preference of one *form* of government over another), since any *form* of government is *capable* of serving the people for their good, and any *form* of government is capable of disserving the people. Example: We prize democracy, and some are apparently zealous enough about it to consider revolt solely on the ground of establishing a democracy. Yet, what is a democracy, but the right to choose governors? And what have we a right to *require* of our governors, other than what God requires of them (to execute justice, and serve our good)? Thus, if a dictator executed justice and served the good of the people, it would be wicked to revolt, in order to *choose* someone to do what is already done. That is, the scripture defines the *purpose* of government, not the *method* of government. Thus, while we may properly debate the question of the relative merits of various methods of government, we may not revolt merely on that ground. Churchill's comment in the House of Commons (11/11/47) may be apropos: "Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." More cynical, while containing an element of truth, was Dr. Samuel Johnson's observation: "I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual."
 - c. When, if ever, revolution is prudent. If, in overthrowing a government, evil conduct is increased (because there is no governor to suppress it), then the *result* of revolt is worse than the *ground* of revolt. If revolt does not result in "your good," corporately considered, then the result was worse than the cause. Here it would be well to consider Bosnia-Herzegovina, and R. L. Dabney's wise comment that: "a harsh and unjust government is a far less evil than the absence of all government".

B. The Westminster Standards

1. WCF. 23:4 "It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience' sake. Infidelity,

or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less hath the pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretense whatsoever."

2. WCF 20:4 "And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God."