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ABSTRACT

THE ETHICAL VIABILITY OF CHURCH SUPPORT OF  
MORAL LEGISLATION

by

Jason Alexander Hines

Adviser: Darius Jankiewicz

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE ETHICAL VIABILITY OF CHURCH SUPPORT OF MORAL  
LEGISLATION

Name of researcher: Jason Alexander Hines

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Date completed: June 2014

When a political question comes to the forefront about which Christians would have an opinion, the religio-political discussion of the issue often turns to the debatable issues within the political question at hand. However, the thesis posits that instead of addressing the particulars of a political question as a rationale for action, Christians should instead be asking questions about the best way to represent our beliefs in secular society, and whether the use of the coercive tool of secular legislation is the ethically proper way to go in light of our beliefs as Christians.

This thesis attempts to address this question both historically and biblically by citing the lineage of Luther's and Calvin's thoughts on church-state relations as a window into modern thought on the issue. It seems that Calvin is the ideological progenitor of

those who would argue that churches should be heavily involved in establishing their particular form of morality in secular society. Luther, on the other hand, seems to be the progenitor of those who would argue that the use of coercive power is not for the church.

This thesis examines Luther's and Calvin's theories, as well as those in the modern age who would likely align themselves with each of their theories. Going further, the thesis then examines relevant biblical evidence in order to determine which course of action is more ethically proper. Based on the relevant verses on the freedom of conscience, the negative consequences of church-state integration, and the non-imposition of morality, this thesis takes the stance that churches should not be involved in using legislation in order to create a more Christian society.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE ETHICAL VIABILITY OF CHURCH SUPPORT OF  
MORAL LEGISLATION

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Jason Alexander Hines

2014

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Jason A. Hines

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

In “Letter From a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. implored fellow clergy to support African-Americans in their struggle for equal rights in America.<sup>1</sup> While most conservative Christian pastors did not join Dr. King in his struggle for African-Americans, they have used King as an example for their own Christian crusades.<sup>2</sup> Christian religious figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson used King’s example to politically debate and protest against things like abortion, their own rights to make political statements, and, more recently, the issue of gay marriage. The rise of the Religious Right as a political force over the last forty years has made religion, and Christianity in particular, an important player on the political landscape as it relates to social legislation.

Many Christian churches and Christian groups have recently become more involved in the political realm. In addition to being a voice in society, many Christian organizations have lobbied for legislation to reflect their particular Christian beliefs. Some groups have begun advocating for legislation that makes it easier for Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 86.

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 3-15.

ministries to receive government funds. Some, such as Falwell's Moral Majority, advocate for legislation to outlaw, or at least curb, abortion.<sup>3</sup>

A more recent example of the ethical dilemmas present in church-state relations and the political involvement of associations affiliated with the church is the debate over gay marriage. In 2008 a proposition was placed on the ballot in the state of California that sought to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman.<sup>4</sup> Called Proposition 8, it was proposed in response to judicial opinions that stated that civil marriage in California was a right that should be enjoyed by all regardless of sexual orientation.<sup>5</sup> Heavy debate on the proposition ensued prior to the election in November of 2008. Several Christian groups raised funds and supported its passage.<sup>6</sup> Their argument was that marriage is a Christian institution and homosexuality is prohibited in the Christian faith, and therefore allowing homosexuals to marry would be a violation of the Christian principles upon which marriage is based.<sup>7</sup> Included in the organizations that

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jessica Garrison and Dan Morain, "Backers Focused Prop 8 Battle Beyond Marriage," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/nov/06/local/me-gaymarriage6> (accessed May 8, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. The mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, also conducted several gay weddings in the town hall of that city. Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Riccardi, "Mormon Church Feels the Heat Over Proposition 8," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/nov/17/nation/namormons17> (accessed March 15, 2010); Tony Barboza and Michael Rothfield, "Schwarzenegger Tells Backers of Gay Marriage: Don't Give Up," *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/nov/10/local/me-protest10> (accessed March 15, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Riccardi, "Mormon Church Feels the Heat Over Proposition 8"; Barboza and Rothfield, "Schwarzenegger Tells Backers of Gay Marriage: Don't Give Up."

publicly supported Proposition 8 was the Church State Council, a group affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>8</sup> The Church State Council made its support for Proposition 8 front and center on its website and posted several articles in support of the proposition.<sup>9</sup> This led to the establishment of Adventists Against Prop 8, a group created to counteract the influence of the Church State Council on this issue.<sup>10</sup> While Proposition 8 passed by a slim margin in California,<sup>11</sup> the actions of the Church State Council brought to light the larger ethical question of the church's involvement in the proposal and support of such legislation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing presence of Christian religions as a political force in America is almost without question. However, this recent rise in Christian political activity raises the question of whether it is ethically proper for denominations and denomination-affiliated organizations to support legislation that codifies their religious beliefs.

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<sup>8</sup> For example the Church State Council publicized a brief written by Ken Starr in support of traditional marriage in their online newsletter in 2009. <http://www.churchstate.org/assets/files/newsletterArchive/2009-January.html> (accessed July 21, 2014). A copy of Judge Starr's brief can be found at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/hollingsworthresponse.pdf> (accessed July 21, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> This was true during the 2008 election season on their website, [www.churchstate.org](http://www.churchstate.org).

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Carpenter, "Adventists Against Prop. 8—Religious Liberty," *Spectrum*, September 23, 2008, <http://www.spectrummagazine.org/node/992> (accessed May 8, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Garrison and Morain, "Backers Focused Prop 8 Battle Beyond Marriage," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2008.

### **The Purpose of This Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the arguments for and against religious support for moral legislation and to test those arguments against the principles of the Bible in order to determine the more proper ethical action.

### **Justification of This Study**

As previously stated, the intersection between religious groups and the political process has increased since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. During the gay marriage debate in California in 2008, certain elements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church supported the defense of marriage, inserting the church as an institution into the political process. The actions of the Church State Council, and the response, exposed differing streams of thought in the Adventist church regarding the church's role in the political process and the support of moral legislation that codifies Adventist religious beliefs. Despite this fact, there appears to be little if any scholarly debate about this issue of moral legislation. It seems that this question has not received its due attention. Therefore, a study addressing the question of whether supporting moral legislation is an ethically proper action is a worthwhile and important endeavor.

### **Methodology of This Study**

This thesis will examine the arguments for religious support of moral legislation and the arguments against moral legislation. After researching several works in the field, I found that the beliefs of Martin Luther and John Calvin on the relationship of the church to the state establish the broad parameters of thought on this issue. Their ideas have been expanded and recapitulated recently by various authors who represent different ideological positions. These authors and their ideas are examined in addition to the ideas

of Luther and Calvin specifically. Furthermore, this thesis will examine relevant biblical statements in regard to church-state separation, freedom of conscience, the imposition of morality, and the relationship between the church and the state.

### **Limitations of This Study**

The church-state relations is an incredibly complex issue, and so there are several limitations to this study. First, this thesis will not discuss the question about whether governments can or cannot legislate morality.<sup>12</sup> This thesis is written from the perspective of the church addressing one aspect of the question of whether or not it should support the government in its attempts to legislate morality, not whether the government can or should legislate morality.

Second, this study is an attempt to ethically answer a political question based on principles drawn from the Bible. However, questions pertaining to the relationship of the church to the state cover a broad range of subjects. Therefore, it is important to narrowly define both the question being addressed and the scope of the potential answers as well. This thesis is not attempting to address the question of the amount of control the state should have in the church. Furthermore, this study will not advocate for total separation of church and state. Moreover, this thesis is not attempting to prove that the church should not be involved in the political process to protect itself. This thesis is only addressing the question of how the church should relate to the state in terms of advocating for and supporting moral legislation that codifies its religious beliefs.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore, eds., *Citizen Christians: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 8.

Third, separation of church and state is an issue that affects every nation. However, each nation is different and so the particular issues that come to bear in each situation are different. While transfer of the biblical principles discussed from one society to another may be possible, there may be legal or political realities in other countries that would affect an ethical analysis of this question.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, this thesis is not willing to extend the relevance of its ethical conclusions beyond the United States of America.

Finally, this study does not attempt to argue that churches and religions should not attempt to change their societies. This thesis does not address the question of whether churches should influence society, but the question of how best to influence society.

### **The Structure of This Study**

Chapter 2 of this thesis will examine the ethical arguments in support of the idea that religions should be seeking to support legislation that codifies their religious beliefs.

Chapter 3 will examine the ethical arguments in support of the idea that religions should not seek to support legislation that codifies their religious beliefs.

Chapter 4 will examine the biblical texts that discuss church-state separation, how the church should relate to the state, freedom of conscience, and the imposition of morality. This chapter will explore these texts in order to discover relevant principles to help answer the question of whether it is ethically proper to advocate for and support legislation that codifies a denomination's religious beliefs.

Chapter 5 will critique the arguments presented both for and against religious support of particular moral legislation in light of the principles from the Bible.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the constitutional protections for religion found in the United States Constitution have an effect on this question, and provisions such as the Free Exercise and Establishment Clause do not exist in other countries.



Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis by summarizing the main findings.

## CHAPTER 2

### ARGUMENTS FOR CHRISTIAN CHURCHES SUPPORTING MORAL LEGISLATION

Prior to the Reformation, the traditional Western Christian view of church-state relations was that the authorities of the church had moral authority over political institutions.<sup>1</sup> This gradually changed during the late medieval times when growing nationalistic tendencies propelled the emerging European nation-states to gradually assert their independence from the authority of the church in political matters.<sup>2</sup> By challenging the authorities of the church on doctrinal issues, the sixteenth-century Reformation became part of the movement that would eventually redefine the church-state relationship. Martin Luther and John Calvin, the two most recognizable figures of the Reformation, had different views on the question of church-state separation. Luther believed that the church should not use the state to coerce citizens to live like Christians. Calvin supported an idea of church-state relations that tended to perpetuate the prevailing wisdom and practice of medieval Christianity. Those who believe that modern Christian

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Redekop, *Politics Under God* (Scottsdale, PA: Word Publishing, 2007), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Foster, *The Contested Public Square: The Crisis of Christianity and Politics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 110; Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 29, 201-03; Ross William Collins, *A History of Medieval Civilization in Europe* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1936), 758-60.

denominations should be involved in political activity can trace their ideological roots in the Reformation to John Calvin.

This chapter begins with a summary of Calvin's views on church-state relations. His ideas will serve as a starting point to review contemporary ethical ideas which support church involvement in politics on all moral issues. Following this, two major ideologies that support church involvement, the theonomist position and the Christian America position, will be examined as well as other concepts that fall within Calvin's ideological lineage.

### **John Calvin's Views on Church-State Relations**

Calvin believed that there were two kingdoms—the realm of Christ, and civil government, which was a human system of governance.<sup>3</sup> He believed that while these two kingdoms were far removed from each other, there was a possibility of a relationship between them.<sup>4</sup> This relationship, however, could only go one way. While civil government's intervention into the matters of the church, such as church activities and worship practices, was unacceptable, the church could, and indeed had the duty to, influence government.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Calvin probably would reject any notion of the separation of church and state as it is understood in modern times. While church and state are distinct institutions, Calvin believed they functioned as a unified whole with the state

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas F. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on Five Governments from the 16<sup>th</sup> Through 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 15.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, quoted in Harro Höpfl, ed., *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

working in the service of the church.<sup>6</sup> Unless the church played a central role in the affairs of civic government, its success was far from guaranteed.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Calvin stated that “no polity can be well constituted, unless it makes duties owed to God its first concern, and that for laws to attend only to the well-being of men, while disregarding what is owed to God, is an absurdity.”<sup>8</sup>

While having no authority to intervene in church affairs, the state was called by God to protect and support religious establishment. According to Calvin, the government could assist the church through two complementary means. First, government should concern itself with the spiritual condition of the citizenry. Calvin considered civil government to be a necessary aid for man’s “pilgrimage on earth” and that no one was to deprive man of the godly benefits of civil government.<sup>9</sup> In his discussion on Calvinism, Thomas G. Sanders described Calvin’s beliefs on the role of government: “The civil government . . . should act in terms of the will of God, seeking God’s Word how best the political order could contribute to the salvation of its citizens, as well as providing an orderly and beneficial temporal setting for their daily life.”<sup>10</sup> Second, the government should be a defender of the church. Calvin believed that “the end of secular government, however, while we remain in this world, is to foster and protect the external worship of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas G. Sanders, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 227.

God, defend pure doctrine, and the good condition of the Church.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, while he did not believe in passing laws pertaining to particular worship styles, Calvin did believe that public denigration of Christianity should be outlawed to prevent it from being besmirched.<sup>12</sup>

Calvin found support for his views on the relationship between church and state in the New Testament. In Rom 13:1-7, for example, Paul suggests that Christians should submit themselves to secular authorities.<sup>13</sup> If governments exist by divine ordinance and are endowed with the power to coerce, Calvin believed then the powers of such institutions could be used to support God’s work.<sup>14</sup> As such, Calvin’s teachings on the relationship between church and state only slightly depart from the medieval Roman Catholic approach and could be viewed as endorsing a theocratic

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 50; R. H. Murray, *The Political Consequences of the Reformation: Studies in Sixteenth Century Political Thought* (London: Ernest Benn, 1926), 97-98; Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> In his work, *Of Civil Government*, Calvin mistakenly referenced this text as being from Rom 13:14. Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 52.

Romans 13:1-7 states, “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (NASB).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 52; G. Joseph Gatis, “The Political Theory of John Calvin,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (October-December 1996): 460, 466.

form of government.<sup>15</sup> In such a system, the church is provided with significant influence over the affairs of the state.

### **John Calvin's Lineage in Modern Times**

Calvin's ideas on the relationship between church and state manifest themselves currently in different forms, all of which postulate in some way that the state is subservient to the church. Two of these, the theonomic and the Christian America positions, seem to be especially prominent and deserve special attention.

#### **The Theonomic Position**

Those who support the theonomic position believe that the role of the civil government is to enforce the precepts of God's law in American law.<sup>16</sup> Very close to the concept of theocracy, it is based on two fundamental presuppositions. First, theologians believe that the Bible is infallible, that the Word of God is the sole moral standard for human beings in every facet of life, and that the obligation to keep God's law cannot be judged by any standard outside of the Bible.<sup>17</sup> Second, theologians also presume that the laws of the Old Testament are binding in the New Testament, unless they have been

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<sup>15</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 50. Calvin's views are considered theocratic because of Calvin's emphasis on God's transformative work in all elements of creation, His sovereignty in both the church and the state, and the need for a Christian state. Murray, *The Political Consequences of the Reformation*, 89, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Greg L. Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government, Theonomy, Principled Pluralism, Christian America, National Confessionalism*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 46. Despite the referenced statement, Bahsen does recognize that "the law of God is not a textbook," and that "much homework remains to be done in interpreting and applying God's laws to our modern world." Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 23.

rescinded or superseded by further revelation.<sup>18</sup> These two biblical presuppositions form a foundation which becomes the basis for four other principles that are particularly important to the question of Christians' political involvement. First, the theonomist position argues that before Christians can be involved in politics, there must be recognition by believers that all social codes must be judged by God's revealed moral code.<sup>19</sup> Second, those involved in civil government are obligated to conduct their jobs as ministers of God, and should realize that they will have to give an account to God for their actions in office.<sup>20</sup> Third, it is believed that the civil codes of the Old Testament are the perfect form of social justice for everyone, regardless of culture.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the appropriate way to effect social change in areas outside of the law's jurisdiction is through "regeneration, re-education, and gradual legal reform."<sup>22</sup> In conjunction with these presuppositions, theonomists ask the question of whether the Bible creates an exception from God's law for modern governments.<sup>23</sup> Believing that the Bible does not make such an exception, theonomists conclude that it is the duty of the Christian to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 24; William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1990), 125.

<sup>19</sup> Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," 24; Bruce K. Waltke, "Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies," in *Theonomy, A Reformed Critique*, ed. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1990), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," 24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; Randy Frame, "The Theonomic Urge," *Christianity Today*, April 21, 1989, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," 25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 47; Waltke, "Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies," 78.

ensure that God's moral law is codified in society.<sup>24</sup> The Christian America position also has the same ultimate goal, but takes a different path to arrive there.

### The Christian America Position

Those who believe in the Christian America position maintain that the United States has a Christian heritage that it needs to return to in order to restore itself as a great nation.<sup>25</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, one of the main proponents of this position, boldly states that "America's future will be Christian or it will not happen."<sup>26</sup> Those who accept this position make three arguments. First, the history of Christian influence in America should lead to an integration of Christian principles into modern American society. Brown states that "in the past, the majority of America's population was composed of Christians, largely Calvinistic Protestants. Christianity inspired personal and family morality."<sup>27</sup> Critics could argue that the country's current acceptance of the separation of church and state as a constitutional principle precludes the Christian church from having its doctrines codified into law.<sup>28</sup> In response to this objection, proponents of the Christian America position argue that those who cite this precept as a justification for the removal of

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<sup>24</sup> Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," 47.

<sup>25</sup> Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government, Theonomy, Principled Pluralism, Christian America, National Confessionalism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 123; Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America"* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Harold O.J. Brown, "The Christian America Position," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government, Theonomy, Principled Pluralism, Christian America, National Confessionalism*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1989), 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>28</sup> R. Brown, *For a "Christian America,"* 17.



Christianity from the public square are simply incorrect.<sup>29</sup> They maintain that the tenet of the separation of church and state is not “constitutional nor a necessary implication of the establishment clause of the First Amendment.”<sup>30</sup> Instead, the “wall of separation” that has been created between the church and the state has caused “schizophrenia” for Christian politicians who are forced to abandon in public life the positions in which they personally believe.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, those who accept the Christian America position maintain that the insistence on the separation of church and state has kept America from utilizing the principles of the Christian worldview, which appears to be the most congenial form of reasoning for most Americans.<sup>32</sup> People who subscribe to the Christian America position believe that because so many Americans are still, at the very least, sentimentally rooted in the principles of Christianity, the attempts to suppress Christianity have created “widespread rootlessness and disorientation.”<sup>33</sup> “The minimal amount of religious culture that we still have is a last bulwark against modern barbarism,” and the

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<sup>29</sup> H. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” 239-40; Mark Wheldon Whitten, *The Myth of Christian America: What You Need to Know About the Separation of Church and State* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 1999), 34.

<sup>30</sup> H. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” 128; Roy S. Moore, “The Separation of Church and State Harms American Culture,” in *Culture Wars, Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Mary E. Williams (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2003), 193. The establishment clause can be found in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. It reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” *U.S. Constitution*, amend. 1, sec. 1.

<sup>31</sup> H. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 135; Robert E. Webber, *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 27.

growth of that minimal culture is the only solution to the moral problems that face American society.<sup>34</sup>

Second, the Christian America position claims to have a biblical basis. According to those who support this position, the Bible commands the creation of a society where the morality contained therein is codified.<sup>35</sup> Richard D. Land, Executive Director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and another proponent of the Christian America position, bases his beliefs on Jesus' command to be salt and light in this world.<sup>36</sup> Land explains that "this means that Christians as citizens are to be in active engagement with the world, preserving as salt and illuminating as light."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Brown believes that Rom 8:22 and 2:15<sup>38</sup> establish the principle that all human beings know that God's rules are right and also extend to people who do not consciously recognize God's

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<sup>34</sup> H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 135; Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>35</sup> G. Smith, *God and Politics*, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus' command is found in Matt 5:13-16: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

<sup>37</sup> Richard Land, "Christian Citizens Have Rights Too," in *Citizen Christians: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 8:22 states, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." Romans 2:15 states, "In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, if it is the government's mandate to do what is right, then Christians should seek to codify God's law. Thus Brown states: "Inasmuch as it is the purpose of civil government to establish and promote justice in society, Christians have no real alternative other than to try to promote biblical standards and principles in legislation and law enforcement."<sup>40</sup> First Corinthians 5:11 is another verse that is used to support the idea that Christians should seek to advocate moral legislation. The passage states, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord . . . we persuade men." Based on this text, those who accept the Christian America position believe that while they should not seek to impose their principles on an unwilling majority through legislation, they should try to persuade people to "implement God's justice in our society."<sup>41</sup> If Christians can persuade others that biblical morality is best for society, then those who do not necessarily believe in Christianity will impose that morality on themselves.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Brown feels that believers should not apologize for seeking to inculcate their morals through the democratic process because it is entirely natural for them to harmonize God's law with the laws of the society in which they live.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, those who support the Christian America position use Rom 13 as the biblical basis for their belief in the legitimacy of civil government.<sup>44</sup> However, when God

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<sup>39</sup> H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 138.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>44</sup> Webber, *The Moral Majority*, 26.

and civil government come into conflict, the believer must obey God before men.<sup>45</sup> Because Christians know what true justice is, “promoting biblical values through the democratic process” is the way Christians should persuade people that they know the truth.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Land argues that because God has ordained the government to reward good and punish evil, then the church has a responsibility to inform the government of what is good and evil.<sup>47</sup> It follows that Christians who know the truth have a responsibility to be involved in legislation in order to assist the government in fulfilling its role.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, those who argue for separation of church and state do not truly understand the rights and responsibilities of Christians to advocate for change in society.<sup>49</sup>

Third, Brown believes that Christian principles can be successfully integrated into American public life. To prove his point he cites two examples. First, he points to the modern state of Switzerland, which he calls the democratic parallel. He sees this nation as a democratically successful state that is explicitly undergirded by Christian principles.<sup>50</sup> Brown admits that there is a problem with using Switzerland as an example. Although Switzerland is a successful democracy, it has the form but not the function of

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<sup>45</sup> H. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” 139.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Land, “Christian Citizens Have Rights Too,” 8.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>50</sup> H. Brown, “The Christian America Position,” 139.

Christianity, which does not play a large part in the day-to-day lives of the Swiss.<sup>51</sup> Despite this criticism, Brown believes Switzerland is proof that a democracy can be a Christian nation. The second example is the Roman Empire, referred to by Brown as “the imperial parallel.”<sup>52</sup> The Roman Empire serves as an analog for America because it resembled the latter in its greatness and cultural diversity, as well as the fact that Rome was a society that successfully integrated Christianity into its framework in the process of becoming a Christian empire.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Rome’s example should give Christians in America confidence to be bolder in fusing Christianity with society.<sup>54</sup> The theonomist and the Christian America positions are at the forefront of the effort towards legislating morality. On the fringes of these systems, however, there are other theories advocating similar ideas.

#### Other Concepts in Calvin’s Ideological Lineage

Lynn R. Buzzard, director of the Church-State Resource Center at Campbell University School of Law and another advocate for Christian support of moral legislation, presents an argument similar to the Christian America position. He argues that the language of separation of church and state creates a false reality. Life cannot be separated into different spheres such as sacred and secular.<sup>55</sup> Misrepresenting the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>55</sup> Lynn Buzzard, “Separation of Church, State, and Religious Liberty,” in *Citizen Christians: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 38.

principles of the separation of church and state to keep the Christian church from influencing legislation separates public life from its roots and such separation is “impossible and undesirable.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Buzzard argues that there is no way to really separate Christian morality from discussions of civil morality. Societal debates regarding contemporary moral issues need the moral perspective that religions, and particularly Christianity, provide, and American society should not engage in these debates without the religious perspectives of its citizenry.<sup>57</sup>

Robert Benne, director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College, presents four different models of church-state interaction in his book *Reasonable Ethics*. Although he is not a personal proponent of these ideas like the other authors described in this chapter, two of the models he describes are of interest here: “The Church as a Corporate Conscience” and “The Church with Power.”<sup>58</sup> According to the former, the church advocates a form of interaction with the political sphere that is direct and intentional with the goal of influencing public policy.<sup>59</sup> Benne sees theological and ecclesiological justifications for a more direct role for the church in the political realm.<sup>60</sup> Theologically, the church as a body of believers should not just act through indirect means, but it should also act corporately and directly, using such means as official

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Benne, *Reasonable Ethics: A Christian Approach to Social, Economic, and Political Concerns* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 138, 140. The other two models, “the Ethics of Character” and “the Ethics of Conscience,” will be presented in Chapter 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

statements on various political issues and publically objecting to participation in certain activities despite their legality.<sup>61</sup> Ecclesiologically, it is the church's responsibility, as an institution, to act as the conscience of the state, and part of fulfilling that responsibility is having direct interaction with the political realm.<sup>62</sup>

Under the model "The Church with Power," Benne describes an ideology where the church uses more coercive forms of political involvement, seeking to employ its institutional power to turn public policy to its position.<sup>63</sup> There are several ways that the church can accomplish this task. It can utilize its money, staff, and members to become directly involved in the legislative process. Churches also attempt to directly influence public policy by having advocacy offices for state and local legislatures, or using their money to influence business policies.<sup>64</sup> Churches that use this mode of church-state interaction commit themselves to particular public policy positions, and seek to advance those policy positions in whatever way they can.

### **Conclusion**

All the theories examined in this chapter seem to have a common denominator: Christian believers, as God's representatives on Earth, believe that they have a distinct knowledge of God and His moral laws. Based on this belief, they assume that it is best for everyone to live according to God's law. This clearly leads to the position that the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 140-41. As examples, Benne cites the Confessing Church's denouncement of Nazism or the Catholic Church's pronouncements against abortion. Ibid., 141.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 141, 142.

church should support moral legislation. Such recognition of God's sovereignty also leads to the idea that church and state should not be separated. Those who support the church's promotion of moral legislation believe that Christians must not be asked to separate their thought process into sacred and secular. Instead, because of God's sovereignty, the Christian church should bring its sacred mind-set to bear on issues that relate to secular questions. This would allow the church to become the conscience of the state and give it moral guidance according to what is perceived as God's will for society.

Romans 13:1-7 is most often used as the biblical support for the idea that the church should support and promote moral legislation. It is cited explicitly by Calvin, Brown, and Land. This passage seems to undergird their arguments, though they use it in different ways. Calvin uses the passage to prove that the government's power comes from God and therefore the government should be subservient to Him. Brown and Land use it to argue that the church should be the conscience of the state. Each position surmises that if the government is to be a minister for the good (as Rom 13 appears to require), then it must know what the good is. The government cannot know this without the influence of the church. Therefore, the church has a responsibility to inform the government of proper morality and work towards making sure that biblical morality exists in society. In the minds of Calvin, Brown, and Land, the counsel Paul gives in Rom 13:1-7 brings the church and the state together. Those who disagree with this position, however, believe that the Bible supports the separation of the church and the state. To this view we now turn.



## CHAPTER 3

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRISTIAN CHURCHES SUPPORTING MORAL LEGISLATION

As stated above, the problem of the church-state relationship was not on the agenda of medieval Christianity. Both Calvin and Luther addressed the relationship between the church and the state during the Reformation, but it would not be accurate to assert that either argued for the separation of church and state in the modern understanding of the concept. Such thinking would be foreign to their medieval minds. Their views on the matter, however, had lasting ramifications. While in the wake of their protest both attempted to define the church-state relationship; they differed however in the ways in which this was to be accomplished. The last chapter focused on Calvin's position as well as some of those who trace their lineage to his ideas. In this chapter I will discuss Luther's position as well as a select group of thinkers who followed in his footsteps. This chapter will conclude by returning to Benne's models of church-state interaction introduced in chapter 2 to discuss those who appear to follow in Luther's ideological lineage.

#### **Luther's Position on Church-State Relations**

John Calvin and Martin Luther shared many ideas on church-state relations. First, their ideas on church-state relations stem from one central idea: God's sovereignty over

all realms of human existence.<sup>1</sup> Because God controls all realms, He has the ability to use both Christians and non-Christians to accomplish His will.<sup>2</sup> Second, both Luther and Calvin believed that God established two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.<sup>3</sup> Luther's biblical support for this position came from the fact that Jesus made a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.<sup>4</sup> Third, Calvin and Luther believed that God ordained the church and the state to govern these two kingdoms.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, they agreed that the state should support the church and the church should support the state.

Although Luther and Calvin agreed on certain aspects of the relationship between the church and the state, they also had crucial differences. For example, Luther, in contrast to Calvin, believed that the kingdom of God consisted of all true believers in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45; Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 318.

<sup>2</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed," in *Lectures on Galatians in Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American ed., 56 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press/Fortress Press, 1955-1976), 26:115-116, 45:88-91, quoted in Ernest K. Pasiciel, "Martin Luther's Theology of Civil Authority," *Didaskalia* 11, no. 2 (1999): 26.

<sup>4</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45. In John 18:36, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

<sup>5</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45; Luther Hess Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1910), 73.

<sup>6</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45; Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 73; Martin Luther, "On Governmental Authority," in *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 46, quoted in Eugene P.

Such people did not need secular law, because they were living by God's law.<sup>7</sup> Everyone else belonged to the kingdom of the world.<sup>8</sup> Although these kingdoms were mostly separate, there were two ways in which they overlapped and interacted with one another.<sup>9</sup> First, Luther conceded that sin was present in both kingdoms.<sup>10</sup> The fact that sin existed in both kingdoms justified the need for separate institutions to address the issue of sin. Second, the kingdom of the world included all people, in a functional sense, even those who would consider themselves members of the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> The role of the state was to use the secular law to guide the actions of the unbelievers, keep sin within certain limits, and promote civic goodness.<sup>12</sup> In order to accomplish this end, God granted the state coercive authority.<sup>13</sup> The church, by contrast, had no coercive power and instead

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Heideman, "Theocracy in the Reformation," *Reformed Review* 34, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 81.

Calvin would agree that the kingdom of God consists of all true believers, but Luther and Calvin would disagree on what a "true believer" was. While Luther would base his answer on faith, Calvin would base his answer on his belief in God's sovereignty and the principle of predestination. Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 59-60, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45; Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45; Luther, "On Governmental Authority," 46.

<sup>9</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Luther, "On Governmental Authority," 45:90.

<sup>11</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 46; Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 318.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Primary Works, vol. 6, An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Bessrung* quoted in Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 96; Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 318.

was to rely on the Bible, love, humility, and persuasion.<sup>14</sup> The goal of the church was to convince people of sin, teach the doctrine of justification by faith, assist in the process of Christian growth, and help people gain eternal life.<sup>15</sup>

Another difference between Calvin and Luther was that Luther believed that God operated in the church and the state in different ways. Both maintained that the two institutions could and should help each other, but Luther differed from Calvin in how this assistance should take place. Luther held that the state helped the church by providing an orderly polity in which the church could operate effectively, not by enacting Christian morality, as Calvin believed.<sup>16</sup> The church in return engendered in its citizens respect for the government, which would lead them to be orderly citizens.<sup>17</sup> While both kingdoms were ordained by God, they were not to use the same methods nor interfere in each other's activities.<sup>18</sup> Despite different methods, God used both institutions to combat evil. Luther was cognizant of the idea that God established and ordained these different

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<sup>14</sup> Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 96; Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 318; Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.; Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 58; Erwin R. Gane, "Luther's Views on Church and State," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 8, no. 2 (1970): 138.

<sup>17</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 46; Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 58; Gane, "Luther's Views on Church and State," 138.

<sup>18</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 46; Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 58; Gane, "Luther's Views on Church and State," 138; Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 79; Luther, "On Governmental Authority," 45:102; Manfred Hoffman, "Martin Luther: Resistance to Secular Authority," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 12, no. 1-2 (1984-1985): 38.

Luther did believe that the Christian prince did have the power to coerce and should use it on behalf of the church. However, that power was not absolute and did not extend to the realm of the conscience or to doctrinal matters. Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 169.

methods, and it seems that his ideas on church-state relations were based on concepts that allowed both institutions to fulfill their God-given purpose in their own way.<sup>19</sup>

### **Luther's Lineage in Modern Times**

Many different scholars and thinkers have expanded on the notion of church-state separation that stems from Luther's ideas. For example, John Haas, once the president of Muhlenberg College, espoused the theory that the state has its own realm that benefits the church and the church has its own realm that assists the state. Despite the fact that Haas supported church involvement on moral questions like abolition and prohibition, he warned against the church seeking to exercise power through legislation.<sup>20</sup> Haas wrote,

Much social progress is demanded through legislation. The church will never oppose any law that makes for a better society through restraint of the forces of evil. But law cannot produce righteousness. Men must have a new conscience to do good, and not an increase in legislation. Therefore the church, working upon the conscience of man, ought never to deceive itself that it is helping society by entering the field of legislation. To make a law to produce good is the process of impatience and shortsightedness. It contradicts the facts involved in the betterment of society. A law that does not come out of moral enlightenment only produces transgression. Life that is good comes out of a new motive.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gane, "Luther's Views on Church and State," 138.

<sup>20</sup> Abolition and prohibition were two very important social issues in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, abolition being the freeing of slaves, and prohibition being the outlaw of the consumption of alcohol. Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings* (New York: Random House, 1984), 355-58; Susan F. Harding, "American Moral Protestantism and the Secular Imagination: From Temperance to the Moral Majority," *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 1283.

<sup>21</sup> John A. W. Haas, *Freedom and Christian Conduct: An Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 276.

Furthermore, Haas explained that although churches should not pursue legislation of morality, they still have a duty to influence society.<sup>22</sup> For Haas, this involved churches speaking out on the moral issues of the day.<sup>23</sup> Haas cited both Chrysostom and Martin Luther as Christian leaders who were willing to bring a moral perspective to the societies in which they lived.<sup>24</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the noted German pastor and theologian, also sought to address the role of Christian morality in society and the role of the church in relation to the state. He argued that the worldliness of human government, or its lack of religious influence, actually helps religion have its proper place in society. Bonhoeffer wrote,

The primary implication for secular institutions of the dominion of Christ and of the Decalogue is not, therefore, the conversion of the statesman or the economist. . . . It is precisely the dispensation of strict justice and in the administration of the office of the sword, in maintaining the unmerciful character of the institutions of the state, that is to say, their genuine worldliness, that the dominion of Christ, i.e. the rule of mercy, is given its due.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer noted that God's authority over the state did not translate to the church's authority over it.<sup>26</sup> The church did not have the authority to exert control over the systems of the state; in fact, God admonished the church to obey them.<sup>27</sup> Bonhoeffer

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Ethics," in *Political Christianity: A Reader*, ed. David McLellan (London: SPCK, 1997), 82.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. One example of the admonition to obey government can be found in Rom 13:1-7.

goes as far as to say that the church “has no right” to address the state in its political actions.<sup>28</sup> “Her [The Church’s] aim is not that the government should pursue a Christian policy, enact Christian laws, etc., but that it should be a true government in accordance with its own special task.”<sup>29</sup> In return, the state should not be involved in religion either. While members of government could be Christian, the government’s duty was to protect believers in their modes of worship. Therefore, the state should not be making religious decisions. Bonhoeffer does see a political responsibility for the church, however, despite arguing that there is no cause for seeking religious legislation or Christian policies. The church still has a responsibility to speak out against sinful behavior and condemn it, and that is a benefit to the state.<sup>30</sup>

Paul Henry, former political science professor and U.S. Congressman, goes beyond the ideas of Luther, Haas, and Bonhoeffer, focusing on the issues and problems that come from attempting to exert religious influence in the kingdom of the world. First, he points out that Christians themselves tend to disagree on many issues. They disagree not only on doctrinal issues relating to such concepts as the atonement, grace, and law, but also on the practical application of these teachings as they relate to matters such as

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<sup>28</sup> Rene de Visme Williamson, *Politics and Protestant Theology: An Interpretation of Tillich, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Brunner* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 85.

Despite Bonhoeffer’s personal political activity, he was adamant about the role of the church specifically in petitioning secular government, even so far as to state that the Jewish church could not address the German state directly, even as they were being subjected to discriminatory policies during WWII. Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>29</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Ethics,” 85.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 86.

marriage or the observance of a day of rest.<sup>31</sup> Second, he insists that the issue of fairness to other voices must be considered. Christians do not live in this society by themselves. The views of non-Christians and the irreligious must also be considered.<sup>32</sup> Third, Henry objects to any use of coercion to compel good behavior, stating that “the means of the state which are always rooted in force and involuntarism cannot be used to secure Christian standards of love in society.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the very use of force to attempt to compel righteousness is itself unjust.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Christian churches would not only be unsuccessful in compelling right behavior by seeking to use government power, they would actually be engaging in inequitable behavior.<sup>35</sup>

Like Henry, Tony Campolo, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Eastern University, believes that churches should not attempt to compel righteousness, but he focuses on the principles of means, ends, and freedom. Campolo makes an important distinction between the goals of the Christian America position and the path to be taken to that goal, and then emphasizes freedom as an important principle that must be respected. Campolo does not think that Christians are wrong in seeking to create a Christian America. That end, in itself, is positive. However, the means by which some Christians attempt to accomplish this objective are problematic. Campolo states, “I do not

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Henry, “Christian Perspectives in Power Politics,” in *Christian Social Ethics*, ed. Perry C. Cotham (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 72.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 74. Henry asserts that it would be unjust to compel righteousness because, in order to do so, the state would have to violate its own principles of liberty to compel a certain type of morality.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



think the way to make a society Christian is to gain political power and impose specifically Christian values and rules on the rest of the nation.”<sup>36</sup> Instead, Campolo believes that Christians should use sacrificial love and noncoercive methods to help create a Christian society.<sup>37</sup> Campolo cites the ministry of Christ as his primary example. Christ came to establish a kingdom that was not of this world and Campolo believes this meant that God’s kingdom “did not come into existence through the means by which kingdoms usually are established—power.”<sup>38</sup> Following the example of Christ, Christians must reject the coercive power of legislation and instead introduce unbelievers to Christ as the way to change behavior.<sup>39</sup> Instead of using coercion, Campolo believes Christians should focus on the principle of freedom.

We must allow people the freedom to live out life as they see fit, as long as their behavior does not violate the rights of others around them. If we all lived like that, our communities would be places of decency and mutual respect. . . . Insofar as it is possible, we must seek the right to preserve for others the right to live out their convictions, even as we expect them not to flaunt practices or behaviors that will encroach upon what we as a holistic society deem to be the norms of common decency. We should seek to win people to Jesus and the Christian lifestyle rather than coercing them into our way of life.<sup>40</sup>

In agreement with Bonhoeffer, Campolo does not say that Christians should totally separate themselves from the state. While Christians can vote and hold political office,

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Campolo, *Is Jesus a Republican or a Democrat? And 14 Other Polarizing Issues* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 142.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. Campolo cites as examples the noncoercive methods of Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, and Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-44.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Campolo does not believe that these interactions with the state give Christians the license to use coercive means to engender Christian behavior.<sup>41</sup>

### **Models of Church-State Interaction**

Robert Benne describes two models of church-state interaction that are comparable to Luther's ideas and similar to Campolo's ideas in that these models illustrate Christian political activity without directly attempting to use the coercive power of legislation. In the first model, "The Ethics of Character," the church would be involved in an indirect and unintentional form of connecting the church with politics.<sup>42</sup> Through its preaching, teaching, worship, and discipline, the church informs the orientation of its members and affects the way its members view the world.<sup>43</sup> These members have an impact on society because of their changed perspective. Benne cites the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod as an example of "The Ethics of Character." This church has had an indirect effect on politics through their members. Many of their laity, who have been "shaped by [the church's] ethos . . . have entered formal political or associational life."<sup>44</sup>

In the second model Benne outlines, "The Ethics of Conscience," the church as a social institution does not become a direct actor on the political stage, but intentionally attempts to connect the gospel with public life.<sup>45</sup> Under this model, the church seeks to awaken the consciences of its members by bringing them into "lively conversation with

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Benne, *Reasonable Ethics*, 136.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 140.

the social teachings of the church.”<sup>46</sup> While churches that follow this model may do a good job of engaging their members, Benne believes that Christian churches could use a more disciplined approach.<sup>47</sup> For example, he suggests the church could use para-church institutions or encourage members to join voluntary associations that are in line with the church’s social agenda.<sup>48</sup> Through such organizations the believers could powerfully influence public opinion without standing out as a church.<sup>49</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to outline the arguments of those who do not support Christian churches advocating for moral legislation. Those who accept this position make two major arguments. First, the state does not work specifically for the benefit of the church. There is an understanding that the government should protect the right of churches and denominations to worship in their own distinct manner, and that the church from time to time will have to be politically active in order to protect those freedoms for itself and others. However, there is only a very limited scope where the church should be politically active in supporting moral legislation, that is, when they protect their right to worship, or protect the rights of others to worship. Likewise, there is a very small space where the government should be involved in religious matters as well, that is, protecting

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 139. Benne cites associations such as Bread for the World, Right to Life, Lutheran Peace Fellowship, Cry for Renewal, and Catholic Worker as voluntary associations and church-related institutions that churches could encourage their members to join.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

the freedom of religion. Second, it is wrong for the church to use the coercive power of the state in order to compel members of society to live by their moral code. Christians should be using love and other noncoercive methods to present their system of morality to unbelievers. Therefore, the use of the state's power seems to be in conflict with the principles of Christianity.

Those who support this position also realize that while churches should not be politically active in supporting legislation, this does not mean that churches should not be socially active. Churches should be involved in the public square, and should be making concerted efforts to introduce citizens to Christian morality and a different way of living. However, those who are against churches that support moral legislation believe that biblical principles do not allow for them to use legislation in order to coerce people into living a Christian lifestyle. These biblical principles need to be addressed in order to begin to determine whether the weight of the biblical evidence is in favor of those who believe in supporting moral legislation or with those who are against supporting moral legislation.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIBLE VERSES RELATED TO CHURCH AND STATE, FREEDOM, AND MORALITY

Because the principles of Christianity are based on ideas found in the Bible, it is important to examine the Bible to find principles that can answer the question of whether the church should be involved in supporting and promoting moral legislation. There do not seem to be any explicit passages in the Bible that address this concept. However, an answer to the question can be formulated from what the Bible does say about ideas related to the issue at hand. The previous two chapters examined the ideas of Luther and Calvin as well as modern thinkers on this question. These theorists proposed different theories pertaining to the separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, and the imposition of Christian morality on non-Christians. This chapter explores whether these concepts are present in the Bible in an attempt to answer the question of whether the Bible supports the promotion of moral legislation by churches.

#### **The Bible and the Separation of Church and State**

##### Separation of Church and State in a Theocracy

It would be easy to assume that there should be a separation of church and state in the modern American democracy. The First Amendment, which forbids Congress from establishing a religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion, helps greatly in the

creation and promotion of that assumption.<sup>1</sup> Biblically, Old Testament Israel provides a unique example with which to test the principles of church-state separation. Old Testament Israel was a theocracy—a nation-state that was explicitly established by God (Exod 19:3-6). An examination of the biblical data appears to support the idea of the separation of church and state even in theocratic Israel. Similar to the idea of separation of church and state during the Reformation, it is clear that this concept in theocratic Israel did not look exactly the same way then as it looks to us today. However, there seems to be at least two examples where it can be argued that the principle of separation of church and state between the state of Israel (the king) and the church of Israel (the priests and prophets) existed in the Old Testament era.

In 1 Sam 10, Samuel gives his first instructions to Saul after anointing him king over Israel. Samuel says to Saul, "And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do" (1 Sam 10:8). Samuel, as the priest and prophet of Israel, establishes that it is his job and responsibility to offer sacrifices, not Saul. Although Saul fought and was successful against the Philistines, he was not as successful in following Samuel's directions regarding post-battle protocol. Saul was impatient, and when they waited for seven days and Samuel had not arrived, Saul gave the order for the sacrifices to be brought and offered the sacrifices himself (1 Sam 13:9). Saul breached the duty of the king and took upon himself the responsibilities of the prophet in this case. It is Samuel who pronounced his punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution, Am. 1, Secs. 1-2.

You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you. (1 Sam 13:13, 14)

God punished Saul, in part, because he did not follow His command and conducted the task that was assigned to the prophet as opposed to the role of the king.

While the story of Saul and the sacrifices at Gilgal point to a circumstantial example of the separation of church and state in theocratic Israel, 2 Chronicles records what seems to be a direct example of the separation of church and state in Israel's theocracy. In 2 Chr 26, King Uzziah is lauded as a king who sought God, was successful in war against the Philistines, and started building projects in Israel (2 Chr 26:4-15). However, the Bible then records that Uzziah's pride caused him to act "corruptly" (2 Chr 26:16.). Uzziah, in his pride, attempted to burn incense in the temple (2 Chr 26:16). Uzziah was opposed by the priests of the temple, who made it clear how Uzziah violated the principle of the separation of church and state: "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God" (2 Chr 26:18). Uzziah's prideful crime was that he, as king, engaged in an activity that was only meant for the spiritual leaders of Israel, the priests.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Uzziah received punishment for his crimes. Because he dared to burn incense, a responsibility that belonged to the priests, Uzziah was smitten with leprosy (2

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<sup>2</sup> Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 470-71; John Jarick, *2 Chronicles* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 154-55.

Chr 26:19). The severity of the punishment appears to suggest that God was displeased with Uzziah's pride and his encroachment upon the duties of the priests. Uzziah's leprosy was not a temporary punishment. Instead, "King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death." (2 Chr. 26:21)<sup>3</sup> These events lend credence to the idea that in certain circumstances God recognized a separation of church and state in Israel.

### The Negative Results of Church-State Integration

While the Bible gives some affirmative evidence that separation of church and state is a divine principle, corroborating evidence of this principle can be found in the negative consequences that occurred when religion and politics came together in the Bible. This section will examine these instances.

Daniel 3 relates the well-known Bible story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar had an image of gold erected in the plain of Dura (Dan 3:1). He called for a dedication service for the image and invited every political figure in the kingdom. The list of the political figures is important to note for its extensiveness and because of the event that these dignitaries were attending. Nebuchadnezzar invited "the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces" (Dan 3:2). Nebuchadnezzar then issued the command that all the dignitaries worship the image when the music played (Dan 3:4b-5). This was a government-sponsored worship service. In this situation, there was no freedom of conscience that would allow objectors to refrain from worship. Instead, those who refused to worship were to be punished by death in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:7).

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that King Saul's violation also had lasting ramifications. Because of Saul's sin, his rule over Israel was cut short (1 Sam 13:13, 14).



Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego challenged the king and were spared by God's supernatural intervention (Dan 3:12, 25). Nebuchadnezzar thus created a union between religion and government by attempting to encroach upon the consciences of those dignitaries in the area of religious worship. Here, the union between religion and government established at the time by King Nebuchadnezzar led to the persecution of God's people.<sup>4</sup>

Daniel 6 presents us with another example regarding the combination of religion and government. The commissioners who despised Daniel presented a law to King Darius. The law was essentially a religious law that was intended to trap Daniel for his peculiar religious beliefs. For thirty days, no one was to "petition" any being other than the king himself (Dan 6:7). As with the narrative in Dan 3, there was no freedom of choice in relation to this law. Those who violated this law were to be thrown into a den of lions (Dan 6:7). Daniel remained true to his God, was thrown into the den of lions, and was protected (Dan 6:10-11, 16, 22). The events of Dan 6 end similarly to those of Dan 3, with a pagan king acknowledging the one true God (Dan 6:26).<sup>5</sup> Once again the effect of a church-state union is negative.<sup>6</sup> Similar to Dan 3, the state infringes on the realm of the church, which is worship. In Dan 6 the form of intrusion was not a politically instigated

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<sup>4</sup> One could argue that the ultimate result, proof of God's authority, was positive. However, the positive nature of this ultimate outcome does not excuse the negative aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to force worship.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, there is another similarity between the circumstances of Dan 3 and Dan 6. Both kings proceed to encroach upon the consciences of their subjects by requiring worship to the Israelite God as well (Dan 3:29 and 6:26).

<sup>6</sup> As with the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the argument can be made that the ultimate lessons of the events described are positive. However, any ultimately positive outcome cannot absolve or justify the negative actions resulting from the church-state union.

worship service, but a law that determined an element of morality in an area that belonged to the consciences of each individual. The persecution of God's people is once again a result of the state encroaching on the bounds of religion.

There is an example of a church-state union in the New Testament as well. Matthew 27:1-2 describes the circumstances by which Jesus was condemned to death.<sup>7</sup> Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus was condemned first by the chief priests and elders of the people, a religious decree (Matt 27:1). However, the religious leaders did not have sufficient power to condemn Jesus to death. Therefore, the chief priests and elders sent Jesus to Pilate, a representative of the state, to have their pronouncement ratified (Matt 27:2, 26). This is also an example of a church-state union although it is different from the church-state unions examined in Daniel. Instead of the state attempting to control religious belief and worship activities, it is now the church that is seeking a union with the state in order to ratify a religious proclamation. In this instance, a church-state union resulted in the death of the Son of God. Whether the issue is the government forcing a particular type of worship, or restricting the worship of its citizens, or the church seeking to use the power of the state to accomplish its ends, there are biblical examples of the negative consequences that come from church-state unions.

### **The Relationship Between the Church and the State in the New Testament**

Related to the principle of the separation of church and state is the question of how the Christian church should relate to the state in society. There are several texts that

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<sup>7</sup> A similar situation occurred in the life of Paul as well (Acts 24:1).

give counsel on how Christians and the church should relate to the state. We turn to those texts now.

The first example is found in Matt 22:15-22. In this pericope, the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus by forcing Him to make a political statement by asking Him if it is right to pay taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:17). This question places Jesus in a philosophical and political quandary. If He said yes, He would upset those Jews who wanted a messiah who would free them from the oppression of the Romans.<sup>8</sup> If He said no, then He would be advocating for Jews to violate the laws of the ruling power.<sup>9</sup> Jesus responded to their question with three questions of His own. With the first question He made it clear that He understood the true intent of their query: "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?" (Matt 22:18). After asking for a coin, He asked, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" (Matt 22:19). They gave the obvious answer that Caesar's face was on the coin. Christ's response then split the difference, and provided an important principle on how to relate to the state. He says in response, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matt 22:21). This statement undergirds many principles that Christians and the church can use today. First, the statement implies that there are rights and responsibilities that legitimately belong to the state. Christians should not be revolutionaries very often, if at all.<sup>10</sup> If something, like taxes, rightfully belongs under the

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<sup>8</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 234-35; Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 431.

<sup>9</sup> Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 234-35; Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary*, 431.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, (London: James Clarke, 1956), 305.

purview of the state, then Christians should be submissive to the state in that area.<sup>11</sup>

Second, Christ is also implying that the things that belong to God should not be given to the state.<sup>12</sup> By making this statement Jesus implies that while Caesar does deserve some things, the conscience and the Christian's primary allegiance belong to God.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, an implied separation of church and state is also in this pericope.<sup>14</sup> Jesus does not imply that there is an overlap between the things that belong to the state and the things that belong to God. Instead, there seems to be a demarcation between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God, and that separation is to be respected.<sup>15</sup>

While the pericope in Matt 22 seems straightforward, Rom 13:1-7 is a controversial text on the issue of how the church should relate to the state. Some scholars use this text to justify political action for the church.<sup>16</sup> A closer examination of this passage is necessary to answer the question of how the church should relate to the state. This pericope can be divided into two smaller sets of verses. Romans 13:1 states, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Paul's counsel is to be submissive to the government, not to attempt to have the government work in conjunction with the church. It is important to remember that Paul's audience is the church, not the

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<sup>11</sup> Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary*, 432; Frederick Dale Brunner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 783.

<sup>12</sup> Brunner, *Matthew*, 784.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> W.A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 126.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Examples include Harold O. J. Brown and Richard Land, discussed in chapter 2.

government. The ethic that Paul is expressing in these verses is for the Christian community, not for the non-Christian state.<sup>17</sup> These verses were about the responsibility the Christian has towards the state, not about the role the government had in God's work. Therefore, when Paul says that the government is a "minister of God to you for good," or that the government is "an avenger who brings wrath on the one who does evil," he did not appear to place any responsibility on the church to inform the government of good and evil (Rom 13:4).<sup>18</sup> Rather, Paul is counseling the church on its behavior by admonishing church members to refrain from evil because they may find themselves in trouble with the earthly government as well as with God.<sup>19</sup> Paul's main point is this: Christians should subject themselves to the government because Christians will be living by God's standard regardless of the laws of the state.<sup>20</sup> In the first set of verses in this periscope (Rom 13:1-5), Paul did not speak of the church attempting to exert influence on the state, but actually the church being in submission to the state. The second section of the periscope (Rom 13: 6, 7) deals with the rendering of taxes. Paul advises that Christians should pay taxes and then makes a statement reminiscent of Christ's statement

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<sup>17</sup> Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 308.

<sup>18</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 459.

<sup>19</sup> Oscar Cullman, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> Based on other statements in the New Testament, Paul is most likely not making this statement as an absolute principle. Paul would probably not suggest that Christians submit to government in instances where the government is advocating anti-Christian behavior (Acts 5:29). William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 433.

in Matthew: “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (Rom 13:7). By making this statement, Paul continues to assert respect for government.<sup>21</sup> This statement puts civil government in its proper place as worthy of respect, but under the auspices of God Himself.

In 1 Timothy, Paul gave Timothy guidance that took a very positive stance toward government. He wrote, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim 2:1, 2). Paul connected praying for those in authority with living a peaceful and quiet life and with being able to do so with godliness and holiness.<sup>22</sup> In giving this counsel, Paul most likely was being realistic and pragmatic. He may have felt that praying for those in authority would be of benefit to the church in protecting their ability to worship.<sup>23</sup> It is also possible that Paul was speaking from a spiritual perspective. He probably felt that there was an actual spiritual component to praying for political leaders. Regardless of what Paul believed, this much is clear: He did not want the Christian church to have an antagonistic relationship to those in political power.<sup>24</sup> Instead, Paul desired for the Christian church to live at peace with those around it, that godliness and holiness would

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<sup>21</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 466-67.

<sup>22</sup> Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Timothy* (Dallas: SIL International, 2009), 98.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 65-66.

<sup>24</sup> Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Timothy*, 97; MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*, 65-66.

be the principles by which Christians lived, and that Christians should pray for everyone, even leaders who may not support the church and its message.

In 1 Pet 2, Peter made a statement that is similar to Paul's statement in Rom 13, but also different and more direct. Peter counseled Christians to "submit . . . to every authority instituted among men. . . . For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Pet 2:13, 15).<sup>25</sup> Peter counseled the Christian to submit to the state so that the church would not be brought into disrepute.<sup>26</sup> As with Rom 13, this does not appear to be a statement about the church exhibiting influence over the state, but rather how the church should behave in a world that is not theocratic. Peter also warns that Christians should not use their "freedom as a cover-up for evil" (1 Pet 2:16). Like Paul, he does not want Christians to lose their zeal for the gospel and for the moral precepts provided by God.<sup>27</sup> Peter's counsel does not stop the church from continuing to be a moral voice in society. This is the cause for which the church has been established and the church should continue to do that, even though Peter is advising that the church be submissive to all in authority.<sup>28</sup> Peter ends this particular section of his letter with an exhortation: "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of

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<sup>25</sup> "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:15,16). Peter may have been seeking to cover the same ground as Paul in order to clarify Paul's words, which Peter admits, may be "hard to understand."

<sup>26</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 127.

<sup>27</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 85.

<sup>28</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 128-29.

believers, fear God, honor the king” (1 Pet 2:17). Peter expects these new Christians to respect everyone, including their secular leaders. However, the Christian’s primary duty is to fear God above all.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Bible and Freedom of Conscience**

While the Christian’s first duty is to fear God, this duty should come from a free mind and conscience. There are several biblical passages that highlight freedom of conscience, which implies how important the concept is to any biblical ethic. Each of the biblical stories examined in this section emphasizes the right of people to choose their morality for themselves without coercion.

The first example where free choice is an important element is the Fall of Lucifer.<sup>30</sup> Lucifer decided in his heart that he would be “like the Most High” (Isa 14:14). God could have forced Lucifer to believe differently. If He had done so, the Earth would have avoided all of the negative ramifications that came from Lucifer’s choice, including the death of Christ Himself. Intimately connected with the Fall of Lucifer is the story of the Fall of Man. Like the Fall of Lucifer, the Fall of Man is a narrative that centers on moral choice. Although God previously told Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Eve chose to do otherwise (Gen 2:16, 17). Genesis 3:6 states, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” Adam, who had explicitly been

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>30</sup> The story of the Fall of Lucifer can be found in two places in the Bible—Isa 14:12-14 and Rev 12:7-9.



told the command, also chose to do likewise (Gen 2:16, 17). They each made their decision with full knowledge of the consequences. God allowed them to make this decision with no interjection on His part. If anyone sinned, Christ would have to come and die for the sins of all humankind. Although the Son would have to sacrifice Himself, God still respected the right of human beings to choose.

Joshua 24 is another example of an affirmation of the God-given right to free choice. Joshua, in his final address to the children of Israel, presented them with a stark choice. He says, “But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:15). The Israelites, firmly established as the people of God, had the freedom to choose whether they would continue to serve Him. Joshua did not impose his choice on the others. He made his decision known, but also made it clear that the Israelites could choose a different path. Joshua, as the leader, was doing the same thing for the Israelites that God did for all mankind. While His moral code is clearly revealed in the Scriptures, He also allows each person to go their own way if they so choose.

The events of 1 Sam 8 are an example of God allowing the Israelites to decide their own direction. In this passage, the Israelites requested a king in order to be like other nations (1 Sam 8:5). This request displeased Samuel because he understood this to be an affront to God and a move away from theocracy. In response, God said to Samuel, “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king” (1 Sam 8:7). Although the people of Israel rejected God

as their ruler, God did not force them to keep Him as their ruler. Even when the choice being made was an explicit rejection of God, He was still willing to respect the freedom to choose.

First Kings 18:21, part of the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, brings another element to the issue of freedom of conscience. The Israelites assembled on Mt. Carmel to engage in a test of whether Baal or Jehovah was the true god (1 Kgs 18:19-20). Prior to this test, Elijah asked the question, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” At first glance, it seems that Elijah was advocating that the people of Israel follow Baal if the people decide that they believe in Baal as god. As the prophet of God, Elijah respected the right of the Israelites to choose whom they would follow. While God does not desire people to make wrong decisions, this verse implies that God is more interested in having people make a decision than in whether it is the correct decision. God respects the right to choose so much that He would prefer a wrong decision to no decision at all.<sup>31</sup> Elijah’s primary concern was that the Israelites were wavering between two opinions, not that they had the wrong opinion.<sup>32</sup> God requests the same thing for each person that He did for the Israelites on Mt. Carmel. God provides humanity with evidence of His sovereignty and then allows each person to make the decision about which way they will go.

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<sup>31</sup> Simon, J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 228.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. An example of this idea in the New Testament can be found in Rev 3:15, 16. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”

The events of Dan 3 and 6, previously discussed, allude to God's displeasure for the integration of church and state and indicate God's approval for those who choose to make their own decision despite the punishment. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego exercised their God-given freedom to object to the worship service they were forced to attend. Daniel exercised his God-given freedom to continue to worship despite the fact that a law had been passed prohibiting his right to do so. God honored their faith and their decisions to exercise the freedom He gave them by sparing their lives. God gives the same freedom to each human being.

### **The Imposition of Morality**

Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 3 and the king's advisors in Dan 6 attempt to impose their religious beliefs on society. Their actions raise the broader question of whether churches should follow their example by seeking to impose their morality on society as well. While the Bible does not explicitly address this question, there are examples of Israelites in the Bible who were politically active in societies that had different religious structures. It is possible to learn from their example about how Christians should relate to their government.

Joseph is the first example of a God-fearing man who was politically active in an empire that worshipped other gods. After being sold into slavery and spending time in an Egyptian prison, Joseph found himself a ruler in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh (Gen 41:40, 44). Pharaoh gave all this power to a man who was ready and willing to acknowledge his God in the presence of these Egyptians (Gen 41:16, 25, 32). Joseph, who was granted this much power, had the ability to turn Egypt into a nation that honored the Hebrew God. However, the Bible records no such action on the part of Joseph. So far

as the biblical record shows, he went about his work in helping Egypt survive the famine, and brought his family to live with him while he ruled there. Joseph never forgot his God, giving his children names that honored the Old Testament deity (Gen 41:51, 52). Joseph seemed to be content to worship the Hebrew God without imposing that belief on others.

Daniel had the most prolonged term of service in ungodly governments. Daniel served in at least three kingdoms that spanned two empires. There are several instances when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to protect their right to live as their consciences dictated. In Dan 1, Daniel and his friends sought what amounts to a religious exemption. They did not want to pollute themselves and their minds by eating the king's food (Dan 1:8). As mentioned previously, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wanted an exemption to worship God according to their conscience in Dan 3. In Dan 6, Daniel needed a religious exemption to avoid the legislation proposed by the commissioners in Darius's court. In each of these cases, Daniel and his friends sought or needed religious accommodations for themselves, but they did not attempt to impose their morality or their religious dictates on anyone else. At the same time, it is important to note that Daniel and his friends were not shy about speaking religious truth to secular powers. In Dan 2, Daniel makes it clear to Nebuchadnezzar how he was able to interpret the King's dream: "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days" (Dan 2:27, 28). In their defense, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the

furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. (Dan 3:16-18)

After spending the night in the lions' den, Daniel explained how he was spared, giving credit to his God for keeping him safe (Dan 6:22). If these men did not attempt to impose their morality, it was not because they were afraid to witness to God's sovereignty. Furthermore, in two of these instances, the kings decreed that the God of Heaven should be worshipped. In Dan 3:29 Nebuchadnezzar promises death and destruction to anyone "that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." In Dan 6:26, King Darius makes a decree that "men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel." The example of these men was a tremendous witness to these men in power. However, at no time in the biblical record does either Daniel or his friends request any such laws to be passed. In fact, it is the antagonists of these events, King Nebuchadnezzar and the commissioners of King Darius, who seek to pass laws to align with their moral beliefs, their pride, and their political aspirations. The Hebrews mentioned in these examples sought only to worship their God according to the dictates of their own consciences and had no apparent desire to impose their beliefs on others.

The story of Esther is slightly different from the examples previously cited because she was a queen in a pagan empire. As a queen, she may not have had much power, but she did exercise what influence she had in order to save her people. Esther was certainly a woman of courage, which is evidenced by her willingness to risk her life in approaching the king unannounced (Esth 4:16). Her actions saved her people and eventually elevated Mordecai, a fellow Jew and her cousin, to second in command under King Ahasuerus. Mordecai was given a tremendous amount of power, and at times was in

possession of the king's ring, which allowed him to make laws and decrees (Esth 8:2). Although Esther and Mordecai had the ability to pass laws, there is no evidence in the biblical record that they used their power to transform the Medo-Persian empire into a nation that worshipped the Hebrew God. Furthermore, while they sent out decrees to the ends of the empire regarding Jews and the celebration of Purim, the Bible does not record the imposition of this Jewish holiday on those who were not Jewish (Esth 9:20-22). Here, as in the other examples cited, people of God who were blessed to be in positions of power never took advantage of the earthly authority that God gave them. Rather, they were able to be a positive force for good in the empires in which they lived, and at the same time were determined to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

### **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, the Bible is not explicit on the subject of whether the church should lobby the state to legislate or enforce particularly Christian morals. Despite this, the weight of the biblical evidence supports the idea that Christians should be very careful in terms of how they relate to their government. More importantly, there is sufficient evidence to support a biblical principle that Christians should not force their ideas on others and that human beings have the freedom to make their own decisions about morality.

While the Bible does not expressly state that there is separation between the church and the state, the weight of the evidence seems to bear this point out. Even in the theocratic nation of Israel there seemed to be a separation of church and state. Saul lost his kingdom because he performed sacrifices when Samuel told him to refrain until he

arrived. Uzziah was stricken with leprosy because he burned incense in the temple, which was the sole responsibility of the priests. In addition to these direct examples, the Bible also shows that the results of religious laws of the state and other church-state unions are negative. In Dan 3, a religious worship service results in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace. In Dan 6, a law curtailing religious expression results in Daniel being thrown into the lions' den. The most damning evidence is the fact that the crucifixion of Jesus was the result of a conjunction between the Jewish leaders and the Roman state to enact a religious decree.

The Bible also gives counsel on how the church should relate to the state. This counsel is largely found in the New Testament. The narrative of Christ's counsel (to "render unto Caesar") and the counsels of Peter and Paul support the idea that the church and its members are to be submissive to the government, while realizing that their first duty and commitment is to the God whom they serve. Some have used these texts to justify religious intrusion into the realm of politics and support for moral legislation. However, the texts do not seem to support the weight of that particular argument. Instead, the texts seem to support the idea that Christians answer to a higher power and should submit to government up to the point where the government comes in conflict with the Christian's duty to God.

Furthermore, God has given each human being the freedom to choose their own morality. While people must live with the consequences of their actions, God does not remove the ability to choose. This is particularly amazing because God Himself suffered because of His defense of each individual's right to choose. God did not force Lucifer to believe differently, although He knew the damage it would cause. God did not force

Adam and Eve, even though He knew that Jesus would have to sacrifice Himself in order to redeem humanity. God did not force Israel, although they were rejecting Him as their king. These Bible stories provide evidence for the idea that God supports the right of every individual to make the wrong decision.

There is also evidence that even when people of God find themselves in positions of power in ungodly societies, they should not use their power to transform society through compulsion. Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai were all in positions of power in societies that did not acknowledge the Hebrew God. They gave advice to their kings and leaders, and in some cases saved their societies from social upheaval and ruin. Each of these people was also willing to testify to their belief in God, even on pain of death. However, at no time did any of these people seek to have others in the society live as they did, and especially not through ordering people to worship God.

While the Bible may not be explicit in its counsel on this issue, there are principles that can be deduced from the passages examined in this chapter. The biblical evidence supports the idea that the church and state should be separate. The church should also be submissive to the state unless the state asks it to do something contrary to the law of God. The church should protect the ability of each person to choose their morality, even if it is not in line with God's moral code. The church should not impose its morality on others. All of these concepts are biblically based. The arguments that have been set forth previously in this thesis must now be judged according to these biblical principles in order to determine which course of action is biblically and ethically proper.



## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF MORAL LEGISLATION THEORIES

This study so far has described theories and ideas that support religious involvement in moral legislation and those that do not. After having presented the relevant biblical principles, these theories must be compared to the principles found in the Bible. This chapter will analyze and critique these theories based on their compatibility with the biblical principles outlined in the previous chapter. In addition to an analysis based on the principles found in Scripture, there also will be a general critique of these theories as well, where appropriate. The chapter will begin with a critique of the theories that are pro-involvement, which include the Calvinist, theonomist, and Christian America positions. The critique will then move to the anti-involvement theories, beginning with Luther and then examining more current ideas in Luther's lineage. While valid criticisms can be raised against anti-involvement theories, these objections can be addressed sufficiently.

#### **Critique of Pro-Involvement Theories**

##### Critique of Calvin

Calvin used Rom 13:1-7 to support his argument regarding the influence of the church on the state. His analysis, however, seems misguided because the idea Calvin draws from the text is not expressed therein. Instead, in Rom 13:1-7 Paul seems to talk

about submission to governmental authorities, not the idea that the church should control or influence government. Furthermore, Calvin's role in the Reformation provides a critique against his use of Rom 13:1-7. If Calvin's argument is correct, then he should have committed his will to the Catholic Church because, as Paul wrote, "there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."<sup>1</sup> Because Calvin did not submit to the religious and political authority of the Catholic Church despite Paul's statement in Rom 13, then it is most likely that Calvin would not support the idea that all power should be submitted to without question.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it seems that he is arguing that when the government is correct it should be supported and when it is not, people have the right to break away, as he did. However, Calvin gives very little guidance on how to decide whether the government is correct or not. His argument is based on a foundation that cannot be supported after a more thorough analysis.

### Critique of the Theonomist Position

Like Calvin, those who subscribe to the theonomist position believe that the church can and should exert influence on government. As discussed above, theonomy is based on several agreeable biblical presuppositions, such as the infallibility of the Bible and the Bible as the sole moral standard.<sup>3</sup> However, the conclusions that theonomists develop from those presuppositions are not necessarily correct. They believe that, in

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 13:1b-2.

<sup>2</sup> It is also doubtful whether Paul meant that either.

<sup>3</sup> Bahsen, "The Theonomic Position," 23.

order for Christians to be involved in government, there must be recognition that all social codes should be judged by God's code. This presupposition raises two questions. First, does the recognition theologians require come from Christians, churches, or from society as a whole, including the government? This question opens a Pandora's box of further problems. There would be a significant question of how America would decide that Judeo-Christian principles have supremacy. Is this a supremacy that is just stated and accepted or is it democratically enacted? In either case, the nation would then have to determine the effect of this supremacy for those whose religious beliefs and values are different from Christianity. To solve this problem, America would have to either forsake the principle of religious liberty, or allow exemptions for groups or individuals to follow their own consciences on certain issues.<sup>4</sup>

The second question is whether the Judeo-Christian moral code actually allows for the type of activity theologians propose, which is the question of this thesis. While the biblical moral code includes specific statements about what people should and should not do, it appears that biblical principles also support the freedom of every human being to define their own moral code. It seems that if someone wanted to legislate by the biblical standard, then they would not necessarily codify God's specific moral commandments, but they instead would protect the right of every person to fashion their moral code.

Moreover, based on Rom 13, theologians also believe that government officials are ministers of God. However, the theologian position seems to assume too much. Paul's

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<sup>4</sup> It would be incredibly shocking if America explicitly rejected the principles of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, and an exemption system is essentially the system we have now.

statement in Romans also can be interpreted as simply a statement of fact; not as creating an affirmative obligation on the part of the government official. The context of the statement is incredibly important to an analysis of this text. The Roman government at this time had no knowledge of God. However, Paul does not counsel the Roman church to inform the government of its supposed duty. His statement is addressed to the Roman church, outlining how to interact with the government. It seems that theologians interpret this statement as a statement to the government about its duties to God, but that does not have to be the case. Furthermore, while the Old Testament civil code may be the best form of social justice for everyone, there is a significant question about what makes it so. The Old Testament code is best when dealing with a society that is under God's leadership, and at that particular time in history. The theologian position works only if it can be argued that America is under God's leadership, and that is a debatable presumption. There has to be some regard for culture, considering the fact that the societal rules were given in a cultural context. American society is based on the principle of religious freedom, and for that reason theonomy is a difficult proposition for such a society.

Finally, the theologian position asks whether the Bible exempts modern governments from following biblical principles on the ordering of society. Finding that there is no exception, theologians reassert the obligation for Christians to ensure that God's moral commands are instituted in their societies. The problem with this analysis is that it is misguided. The only government in the Bible that was required to live by God's precepts was Israel, and that requirement was based in the free choice of Israelites. While there are examples of God's desire to punish nations that did not live by moral standards,

there is no evidence that God ever removed their ability to choose their own moral codes.<sup>5</sup> Neither is there any biblical mandate for Christians to attempt to use government in order to promulgate their particular form of morality. Because there are no such standards present in the Bible, there is no duty for Christians to impose their morality on others.

### Critique of the Christian America Position

The Christian America position is similar to the theonomist position in that both theories allow for Christians to assert their morality on government. First, Harold O. J. Brown posits the goal as creating a Christian democracy. To support the point, he cites two examples, Switzerland and the Roman Empire. The problem with these examples is, as Brown admits, that they are examples of Christian nation-states that are filled with problems. Regarding Christianity in Switzerland he states:

The forms are there; unfortunately the daily life of the Swiss people reveals that the faith is not there. Some will argue that government support for the forms has eroded the people's support for the faith, and indeed this is an argument which contenders for a Christian America must face. To establish Christian forms while losing Christian faith is not something that any Christian can support.<sup>6</sup>

Brown identifies the critique, but he does not provide a response. He does not give a reason why America would not end up with the same results if it were to follow Switzerland's example.<sup>7</sup> Brown's example of the Roman Empire also has problems. He acknowledges this by saying that "Christian Rome, though hardly perfect, was far better

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<sup>5</sup> God did not remove the element of choice from Israel either. Examples of the ability of Israel to choose can be found in Josh 24:15 and 1 Kgs 18:21.

<sup>6</sup> H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 128.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

than pagan Rome.”<sup>8</sup> Brown curiously avoids any mention of the widespread persecution that took place under the Holy Roman Empire. Moreover, he does not address the issues of the misuse of power that have plagued the Catholic Church over its history. These glaring omissions weaken the argument that a Christian America is possible without the potential problems that come with the attempt.

Brown further argues that the Bible mandates that Christians attempt to establish Christianity in government and through legislation, using verses such as Rom 8:22 and 1 Cor 5:11 to find support for this idea. His biblical analysis, however, fails to account for the freedom of conscience that God gives to every human being. Furthermore, he does not consider that the right thing may be to grant everyone the freedom to choose to live by God’s precepts, and not forcing them to do so through legislation. This is also the response to Brown’s assertion that government legislation should be considered as persuasion, as all legislation by nature is coercive.<sup>9</sup> Brown fails to recognize this. Therefore, seeking legislation to codify Christian morality is not persuasion, even if Christians were able to persuade the majority that Christian precepts are correct.

Those of minority faiths (or no faith at all) should have the freedom to choose to live by their morality, and not have Christianity thrust upon them. Another supporter of this position, Richard Land, comes to the same conclusion but bases his argument on the biblical principle of Christians as salt and light. It is true that Christians are to be involved in society and that they should be actively engaged with the world. However, as

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>9</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 38; Donald E. Messer, *Christian Ethics and Political Action* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984), 61-62.

it has been shown in the previous chapter, these texts do not explicitly support being involved with the advocacy of moral legislation. Based on the principles of freedom of conscience, the weight of the biblical evidence seems to be against this type of involvement.

Finally, both Brown and Land also use Rom 13 to establish not only the legitimacy of civil government, but also the idea that Christians should promote biblical values through the political process. These ideas could hardly be supported by Rom 13. As has been shown, this passage does not advise Christians to attempt to have their beliefs codified through the political process. If anything, Rom 13 tells Christians to subject themselves to government, and it makes no qualification about whether that government follows Christianity or not.

#### Critique of Models of Church-State Interaction

Robert Benne describes “The Church as Corporate Conscience” and “The Church with Power” models as ways for the church to be involved in society. Using the church as a corporate conscience is complicated and dangerous. Benne states seemingly foundational presuppositions: The Word of God is for everyone, and the church should act corporately in society. However, these presuppositions do not extend to the idea that the church should attempt to influence legislation by making public political statements. There are other ways for the church to be influential in society without violating the freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state.<sup>10</sup> While outlining these models Benne also states that proponents of each believe the church should be the

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<sup>10</sup> Such ways would include witnessing and the creation of private programs to aid those in need, such as the poor or unwed mothers.

conscience of the state, but does not present any biblical support for this argument. These same critiques apply even more strongly to the model of “The Church with Power,” because, under this model, churches are more actively seeking to impose their will through coercive means.

## **Critique of Anti-Involvement Theories**

### Critique of Luther

There are several criticisms to Luther’s position on church-state relations.

Redekop rightly argues that the world Luther presents is too simple.<sup>11</sup> Society cannot be divided neatly into the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God, or into church and state.<sup>12</sup> The church has “temporal” aspects that need to be addressed.<sup>13</sup> Second, Luther’s dichotomous way of thinking could lead to tension within a person as the Christian would be expected to operate under two possibly contradictory ethical systems.<sup>14</sup> Living under these two ethical rubrics could be confusing for any person, and there would be significant questions about which system the person would operate under at any particular time.<sup>15</sup> Luther also claims that both kingdoms combat evil. However, this element of Luther’s thinking may not have a modern application because it does not seem

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<sup>11</sup> Redekop, *Politics Under God*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



to be an accurate portrayal of the current reality.<sup>16</sup> If the church is in league with God, it should have an understanding of the difference between good and evil. The kingdom of the world, not in league with God, would not have a correct understanding of the difference between good and evil. How could the kingdom of the world (the state) combat evil if the church was not allowed to “interfere” in order to inform them and be the conscience of the state? It seems that under Luther’s system, the state is ill-equipped to do the job for which God established it.

While these criticisms have some merit, there are rebuttals to each. First, the simplicity of Luther’s dual structure does not disallow a more nuanced view of church-state relations that would allow the church to address the temporal aspects of its existence without seeking to impose its standards on others.<sup>17</sup> Second, while Luther’s dichotomy could lead to tension within a particular person, that tension is not an inevitable conclusion. Furthermore, there are verses in the Bible that can be applicable to the tension that a Christian may feel regarding whether to follow God’s law or man’s law. In Luke 20:25, Christ counseled the Jews to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When faced with the same tension over whether to follow God’s calling over the objection of the Jewish leadership, Peter and the apostles said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). These two verses support the idea that while Christians must show respect to the systems created by man, their ultimate loyalty is to God. Third, it is true that without the influence of the church, the state may

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<sup>16</sup> In Luther’s time, church and state were more closely aligned, and therefore this element of Luther’s thought would be correct for his time.

<sup>17</sup> Once again it is important to note that Luther’s system was created in a context that was much less complex as far as church-state relations are concerned.

come to different conclusions about what is good and what is evil. However, the church can influence the state and society at large through means other than the legislative process. Churches can certainly witness and share the gospel with everyone. They can also make their opinions known on the moral issues of the day without seeking to use the coercive force of legislation.<sup>18</sup> They can also provide services that relate to the issues that they care about, in order to make up for what the government cannot provide. All of these are examples of how churches can be the conscience of the state without resorting to legislation to accomplish their goals.

### Critique of Luther's Lineage

The criticisms of those who have followed in Luther's ideological lineage are, of course, similar to the criticisms of Luther's theories themselves. For example, John Haas argued against the use of legislation to better society because he believed that more laws would not make people more righteous. Haas felt that the church's attempt to produce good through legislation was the result of impatience and short-sightedness on the part of the church and that using this method was not actually making society better.<sup>19</sup> Paul Henry makes similar arguments, referring to the issue of fairness in a civil society and the injustice of using coercive legislation to compel righteousness.<sup>20</sup> Like Henry, Tony Campolo is concerned about the use of coercion to force people to follow Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For example, a church can make its position on an issue like abortion very clear without necessarily advocating for abortion to be outlawed.

<sup>19</sup> Haas, *Freedom and Christian Conduct*, 276.

<sup>20</sup> Henry, "Christian Perspectives in Power Politics," 72-74.

<sup>21</sup> Campolo, *Is Jesus a Republican or a Democrat?*, 142.

Someone like Harold O.J. Brown, who believes in Christians using law to improve society, would disagree. He would probably argue that without the church attempting to legislate morality, there is no way society can get better. Society cannot improve without Christian morality.<sup>22</sup> The moral code that God has established is the best way for human beings to live in community with one another. Therefore, if a society is not living by God's precepts, then it, by definition, will not be as good as it can be. According to Brown, because this is true, Christians should work to create a Christian society for the betterment of all people, including those who do not acknowledge God. This is also the response to Paul Henry's argument regarding being fair to other voices. Fairness should not always be held above creating a better society. Rather, we should not sacrifice doing what is best for the greater good in order to be fair. Furthermore, Brown believes that attempting to influence legislation is not compulsion, it is persuasion. Christians are using the political process to persuade people that the system of morality they present is the best and if they are able to persuade people, the laws they support will be passed and the people will impose their new sense of morality on themselves.<sup>23</sup>

This type of criticism seems to ignore the biblically supported principle of freedom of conscience and the implicit examples regarding the imposition of morality. The idea that it is up to the individual to choose to live by biblical precepts is asserted

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<sup>22</sup> While different people will have different definitions about what it means to better or improve society, I assume that Christians like Haas and Brown would agree that society would be better if people followed Judeo-Christian ethics. The method of accomplishing that task is where they would differ.

<sup>23</sup> H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 138-39.

several times in Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, there are several examples in the Bible of God-fearing people who held positions of power in foreign kingdoms and did not use that power to coerce or even persuade righteousness.<sup>25</sup> Those people should be examples to Christians today about the role of the Christian in society.

The criticism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer would pertain to the interpretation of Rom 13. Bonhoeffer references this passage to support the idea that Christians are supposed to submit to government. Others, like those who support the Christian America position, have cited Rom 13 for the idea that God has established government and the church is right to use government legislation to improve the morality of society.<sup>26</sup> They believe that because the government is a minister of good and a judge of evil, the church has the right and the duty to inform the government of what is good and what is evil.<sup>27</sup> Christians cannot and should not trust the government, as a secular entity, to do the right thing. Furthermore, the secularization of government does not assist Christians in helping to spread Christianity. Instead, the fact that the laws of government shun Christian morality may give those who live immoral lifestyles the license to continue their self-destructive ways because they have the sanction of the state. The legislation of the state replaces the morality of the individual and the question becomes not whether something is right, but

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Josh 24:15, 1 Kgs 18:19-20, and the other examples outlined in chap 4.

<sup>25</sup> See the stories of Joseph (Gen 41), Daniel (Dan 1, 3, and 6) and Esther outlined in chap 4.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 52; Land, "Christian Citizens Have Rights Too," 8.

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Of Civil Government*, 52; Land, "Christian Citizens Have Rights Too," 8; H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 138-39.

whether it is legal. Without Christians seeking to codify their morality, the general public will not have a sense of what is proper behavior.

While these criticisms are valid, they seem to be based in the misapplication of Rom 13. In Rom 13, Paul does not create a duty for Christians to have undue influence on government or inform the government of good and evil.<sup>28</sup> Rather, Paul's counsel is to be submissive and respectful to government regardless of whether the government is good or evil. Moreover, Christian influence in society is not limited to attempting to influence legislation. Churches can have an impact on society by using their spheres of influence to directly impact the lives of others, either through directly addressing people's needs or through the sharing of the gospel. While these types of activity may not have the broad reach of passing laws, they are ways that Christian churches can accomplish the gospel mission without violating the consciences of others.

#### Critique of Models of Church-State Interaction

Robert Benne also presents models of church-state interaction that do not involve churches directly petitioning government to establish Christian morality. Under "The Ethics of Character," the church affects the way its members view the world and then those members influence government.<sup>29</sup> The problem with this mode of interaction is that there is no guarantee that the members will actually become involved. However, this method does allow the church to focus on what it does well, which is influence human beings to make changes in their lives and the way they view the world.

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<sup>28</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 459.

<sup>29</sup> Benne, *Reasonable Ethics*, 136-37.

Like “The Ethics of Character,” “The Ethics of Conscience” is an important and valuable way for churches to be involved in social issues. Under this system, churches intentionally connect the gospel with aspects of public life, but do not become directly involved in politics.<sup>30</sup> Benne also discusses the use of para-church institutions to influence politics.<sup>31</sup> Churches should encourage their members to be involved in the world around them and think about the social implications of the gospel they believe in. However, using intermediaries, such as Christian schools and church-affiliated social institutions, to influence the political process is more complicated. A church-related institution is still connected to the church. Using the institution to make legislative change is still the church involved in attempting to use legislation to coerce proper Christian behavior.

### **Conclusion**

Those who support a more active role for churches in advancing Christian morality make several arguments. These arguments are based on biblical analysis as well as political analysis of other countries. Both theonomists and those who support the idea of a Christian America cite Rom 13 as support for their case, and criticism of their ideas starts there as well. Those who seek to have the church involved in passing legislation read more into the passage than may actually be found there. Paul does not offer a justification for Christians lobbying government in Rom 13. Instead, Paul outlines a duty for Christians to submit to the government. The other problem that arises from these rationales is that passing legislation is seen as the most important way to have an impact

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 139.

on society. There are many institutions that make up the body politic. Churches can have influence without having to pass legislation. Furthermore, at the heart of a society are its people. The church can change society just by trying to reach people. While it is certainly more time consuming, it can be much more rewarding than seeking to coerce correct moral behavior through legislation.

Moreover, the arguments for the support of moral legislation do not seem to convincingly address the questions of separation of church and state and the imposition of morality. While Brown attempted to address the question of coercion, his argument was not convincing because he ignores the reality that those who do not agree with the law might be compelled or coerced into following it or be subject to legal penalties. The lack of attention to these topics makes these arguments unattractive for the church.

The critiques of the anti-involvement theories largely relate to their consequences. The consequence of Luther's theories was, supposedly, a tension within Christians where they would have to respond against their own moral impulses because they were operating in the kingdom of the world. As for Haas, Bonhoeffer, Henry, and Campolo, their ideas, which revolve around freedom of conscience and a negative view of the imposition of morality, could lead to a society that is morally substandard. If all Christians agree that their ethos is the best form of morality for everyone, then it seems that they should be willing to do what is necessary to ensure that this moral system is preferred in their societies. Those who support religious involvement would argue that the exaltation of freedom is not beneficial to society if it keeps people from living according to Christian precepts. Brown, Land, and others who support the use of legislation cite Rom 13 for the proposition that, as ministers of God, the government

should be looking to the institutions of God on earth (the church) for guidance in fulfilling their God-given duties.

Both arguments have their positive and negative elements and are subject to legitimate criticism. The outgrowth of the arguments against church involvement in moral legislation appears to create an unappealing society and confusion for Christians. However, the arguments for church involvement seem to misapply the biblical texts used to support the argument. Now that the arguments and their critiques have been outlined, we turn to the question of which theories are more ethically proper in light of biblical evidence.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

This thesis attempts to determine whether it is ethically correct for churches to support moral legislation. In order to accomplish this task, I have identified the major arguments both for and against churches advocating their morality through legislation, using Luther and Calvin as an ideological background. I have also examined the relevant biblical principles and compared them to these arguments. Based on this review, I conclude that the weight of biblical evidence supports Christian churches abstaining from the use of legislation to promote a moral agenda.

Those who would disagree with this conclusion, such as Harold O. J. Brown, Richard Land, and Lynn Buzzard, seem to focus on the mission of the church to share the gospel. Their arguments are undergirded by the presupposition that because there is no explicit biblical mandate against the use of government, then it is at least possible that government can be used. For biblical support, passages such as Jesus' command to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in Matt 5:13-16 are cited.<sup>1</sup> They also believe that Paul's statement in support of persuasion in 1 Cor 5:11 gives them cause to use the political process to sway people in favor of their morality.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, scholars who support this position use Paul's counsel in Rom 13 as a rationale for the ability of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Land, "Christian Citizens Have Rights Too." 7.

<sup>2</sup> H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 138.

Christians to use government.<sup>3</sup> If the government is empowered by God, then Christians should have the ability to use the government to spread the gospel.

Those who would agree with the conclusion of this thesis, such as Tony Campolo, Paul Henry, John Haas, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, focus on the principle of freedom as the primary principle to consider in answering this question.<sup>4</sup> They believe people must be free to choose their morality. This is not just an American principle; these scholars argue that it is a biblical principle as well. Therefore, legislation, which is described as inherently coercive, should not be used to help promote Christian morality.<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer cites Rom 13 as well, but refers to it to support the proposition that Christians are to submit to government.<sup>6</sup>

Romans 13:1-7 is one of the few places where the Bible deals with the subject of church-state relations specifically. In this passage, it seems that Paul is counseling the church to be submissive to government, and never addresses the church's use of the government. Peter echoes this sentiment in his epistle when he counsels us to "submit . . . to every authority instituted among men" (1 Pet 2:13). Christ's statement to give to Caesar in Matt 22 also implies submission to the government, at least in the areas where there is no conflict with the Christian's duty to God. Despite the Bible's lack of direct statements, there are many instances where individuals were either a part of government

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<sup>3</sup> Webber, 26; H. Brown, "The Christian America Position," 139; Land, "Christian Citizens Have Rights Too," 8.

<sup>4</sup> Campolo, *Is Jesus a Republican or a Democrat?*, 144; Henry, "Christian Perspectives in Power Politics," 72.

<sup>5</sup> Henry, "Christian Perspectives in Power Politics," 73.

<sup>6</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Ethics," 84.

or interacted with the government, and we can learn important information about how the church as an institution should deal with the state. There is some evidence that there was a separation of church and state in Israel, despite the fact that Israel was a theocracy.<sup>7</sup> There are also several examples of church-state integration causing the persecution of God's people, such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the question of how the church as an institution should deal with the state is more than just a question of church-state relations. Within this question is the deeper issue of the freedom of conscience juxtaposed with the imposition of morality. On this issue, the biblical evidence seems stronger. The biblical record supports the idea that human beings are free to make their own decisions about what moral compass to follow, regardless of whether that decision is right or wrong. One of the first events recorded in the Bible is of Adam and Eve using their freedom to make, ultimately, the wrong decision.<sup>9</sup> Israel's leaders and prophets allowed the people to decide for themselves whether to follow God.<sup>10</sup> This principle is further supported by the instances in the Bible where Jews refrained from imposing their morality on societies that did not believe in the Hebrew God. Joseph, Daniel, and Esther are examples of Jews who lived in foreign cultures. The Bible does not record any efforts on their part to coerce these cultures to follow the Hebrew God.<sup>11</sup> On the issue of freedom of conscience, the biblical evidence

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<sup>7</sup> See 1 Sam 13:9, 13-14 and 2 Chr 26:16-19.

<sup>8</sup> See Dan 3, Dan 6, and Matt 27:1-2.

<sup>9</sup> See Gen 2:16, 17; 3:6.

<sup>10</sup> See Josh 24:15; 1 Sam 8:7; and 1 Kgs 18:21.

<sup>11</sup> See Gen 41:16, 25, 32; Dan 6; and Esth 8.

points to the conclusion that people have the right to self-determination with regard to their moral choices, and that those following the biblical ethos should not seek to dictate the morality of others.

When we apply the biblical principles to the debate at hand, there seem to be four overarching principles, which can be viewed as pairs and support the conclusion that churches should not be involved in publicly advocating for moral legislation. First, freedom is an important principle in Christianity. God established freedom and allowed each human being to choose their own moral code. The entire biblical record is a story of people making choices, either to live in the way God prescribes or to be in rebellion to Him. Despite the fact that people often make wrong decisions, God does not remove the freedom to choose, nor does He attempt to coerce human beings into one choice over another. Therefore, because freedom of conscience is something that has been given by God, people should be allowed to live as they choose and should not have Christian morality imposed on them through legislation.

The principle of freedom is juxtaposed with the principle of non-imposition. Christ does not coerce people into a relationship with Him. He wants people to choose to live by His precepts because they have had an experience with Him, not because they are afraid of whatever punishment may result. Those who seek to use the power of legislation fail to realize that all legislation is coercive by nature. There is no persuasion when it comes to legislation. While persuasion is used to pass legislation in a democracy, once the legislation is passed, all must follow it or face whatever punishment the law deems just. When Christians attempt to use legislation in order to codify and inculcate their own particular views of morality, they violate the system of freedom that God has established.

The third principle highlighted is the separation of church and state. The separation of church and state is not just an American legal doctrine; there is also evidence for it in the Bible. While the Bible makes no explicit statements to this effect, the ramifications of church state unions in the Bible are never positive. Whether America's Founding Fathers knew it or not, they were echoing a biblical principle when they discussed the separation of church and state in their correspondence and when they established the religious tension of the First Amendment. The only biblical instance where church and state are positively connected is in a society controlled by God, and even then there is evidence that the roles of priest and king were separated.<sup>12</sup> The separation of church and state not only protects the state from religious influence, but also protects the church from state influence.

Finally, connected with the principle of the separation of church and state is the role of the church in relation to the state. While it is certainly true that the church answers first to God as its head, the Bible also gives counsel about how the church should relate to the state. Romans 13 seems to suggest that the church should submit to government because it has been established by God. As seen previously, some scholars have interpreted this to mean that the church then has a responsibility to make the government worthy of submission. However, this extrapolation is not based on the words of the text. Paul's words in Rom 13 do not create a duty on the part of the church to be the conscience of the government. Rather, the counsel of Paul seems to suggest a duty for the church to live according to God's laws within the domain of the state. Furthermore,

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<sup>12</sup> As seen previously in the story of King Saul in 1 Sam 10 and King Uzziah in 2 Chr 26.

Paul's counsel suggests that everything should be done in order and that Christians owe the state obedience in the matters where obedience does not violate God's law. However, deference in these matters does not suggest that Christians are therefore justified in using the power of the state to codify the law of God in society.

Despite the arguments to the contrary, the biblical record supports the idea that the church as an institution should not attempt to wield influence in society by supporting moral legislation. Living according to the precepts of the Bible is something that should be done by choice, not by force. Furthermore, punishment or lack thereof from the state should not be a factor in a person's decision to follow particular elements of God's law. The biblical record bears the idea that God is a god of freedom, choice, and love and that these principles should be the reasons why human beings who choose to become members of His kingdom follow His law. Human governments in general, on the other hand, are not kingdoms of freedom and choice. Human governments tend to use compulsion through the threat of punishment in order to force those who choose to become members of that society to follow their laws. God certainly wants His followers to be His advocates and witnesses in society, but Christians should be careful not to attempt to force people to follow God's law through legislation. The freedom granted by God and the inherent compulsion of legislation are antithetical to each other. The church using legislation to carry out its ends creates an interesting contradiction. In the process of protecting and projecting God's rules and regulations, Christians' use of legislation to do so seems to be a violation of God's principle of freedom. Therefore, members of the church should not be using the tactics of the state in order to create the behaviors in human beings that God would support.

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