The Relationship Between Church and State

‘The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish;’ (Isa 60:12)

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1 Introduction
The creation of all galaxies, our planet, its geophysical boundaries and every social system is but the bringing into being in time, of what Almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, determined from eternity. ‘By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth’ (Col 1:16). Flowing from God’s sovereign will, all creation has its being and purpose, and moves to the ultimate Glory of God.

God’s mighty intention also creates, through over-ruling Providence, the nations and governments of men.

The state’s capability to exert leadership comes from God. The authority of the officers of state comes directly from God, as does the consent of the governed. people. Similarly the authority of the officers of the Church comes directly from God, as does the consent of their governed people. As the possession of government is superior to anarchy, even kingdoms obtained by wrongful revolution, or by covetous expansionism exist for the Glory of God and the good of the elect.

Following the cruel governments of Emperors Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius, the Emperor of Paul’s day was the equally evil Nero. To the Church located in the Roman capital Paul could write: ‘The powers that be are ordained of God...(The Ruler) is the minister of God to thee for good’ (Rom 13:1-4).

The state is more than a conveniently named collection of individuals. Nations are moral and responsible creatures, accountable to God in their corporate capacity. So ‘Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. This is seen practically when God rebukes a nation collectively. ‘When he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only’ (Job 34:29). Consequently a nation has collective responsibility, and is a proper subject of rewards and punishments:

(Jer 46:25) I will punish...Egypt.
(Jer 49:17) Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof.
(Jer 48:42) Moab shall be destroyed from being a people.

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1 ‘Empires kingdoms dominions and cities...be distinguished and ordained by God’, Scot. Conf 1560, Artic xxiv
2 (Prov 8:15) By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.
   (Prov 8:16) By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.
3 1 Sam 10:1; 1 Sam 11:15
4 ‘The government of the Church and state are...both ordained of God’ Robert Baylie ‘An Historical Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland’ Lon 1646, p73
So, for the fornication and homosexuality of many\(^5\) of its citizens, national punishment fell collectively upon Sodom Gomorrah Admah and Zeboam\(^6\).

State and Church are therefore two distinct but equally direct expressions of the Divine Dominion functioning through Providence.\(^7\)

The office of a magistrate\(^8\) is an honourable one. Calvin speaks of the high dignity with which God invests the magistrate, even permitting him the use of the name ‘god’ because he has been invested with His authority and is acting on God’s behalf.\(^9\) Magistrates must therefore labour to assert and protect the honour of God who has given them power to govern, and who makes a people subject to their rule.\(^10\) Both tables of the Law are given to instruct the state, it being necessary to establish not only justice and peace throughout the nation, but also piety.\(^11\) Coercion alone may produce a grudging obedience, but only true religion can invest justice and peace with their moral authority among a people.

A state will function properly only if it understands its role and executes its responsibilities correctly. God no more leaves state officials in ignorance concerning their duties and responsibilities than He leaves Church officers ignorant of their duties and responsibilities. Both officials find their respective instruction in the Word of God—both OT and NT. Other theories concerning the state are forced to deny that the OT Scriptures are a source of instruction provided by God for the use of the modern state.\(^12\) The different administration of the covenant of Grace from old time, in no sense changes that unity and harmony of the Old and New Testament scriptures, \(\textit{all which are given...to be the rule of faith and life}\).\(^13\) Nor does it affect the unity and harmony of God’s continuing providence toward the Church and the state.\(^14\) The Old testament histories, record over 10,000 years of civilisation, and document the rise and fall of many civil governments both Jewish and Gentile, good and evil. They are an invaluable source of instruction. The Prophets also supply material as does the Jewish civil law. Paul declares that the OT Civil Law was preserved for ‘our sakes’ (1 Cor 9:9,10), the OT Histories, for ‘our admonition’ (1 Cor 10:10,11) and the OT Prophets, for ‘our instruction’. And the new Testament, even though it occupies a minuscule time period in comparison to the OT, carries the same principles along with

\(^5\) Not necessarily each and every individual. (e.g. Babies?)
\(^6\) Jude 1:7
\(^7\) John 10:35; Eph 4:11,12
\(^8\) ‘Magistrate’ ‘King’ ‘state’ ‘Prince’ are used in this paper as synonyms of Civil government.
\(^10\) (Psa 2:10-12) Ye kings...Serve the LORD...Kiss the Son
\(^11\) WCF 23:2
\(^12\) So Charles Hodge; ‘We are not authorised to argue (the establishment principle) from the Old Testament economy, because that was avowedly temporary, and has been abolished’ The Church and its Polity, 1879, p117
\(^13\) John 5:39; Luke 16:29; Eph 2:15
\(^14\) WCF 1:2
\(^15\) ‘The (organised) Church in the days of Moses and the Prophets, was one and the same with the Church of our days...The difference of the true Church in any age is at most but in accidental circumstances, and not in any essentials’ Robert Baylie, ‘Dissuasive from the errors of our time’ Lon 1646, p157.
\(^16\) Exo 20:12; Rom 13:1
it, requiring saints to pray for their governments, that they might enjoy from them, both civil and religious prosperity\textsuperscript{17}.

\section*{2. The Establishment Principle Established}

The scripture declares that it is God Himself who provides nations with government; ‘The powers that be are \textit{ordained of God},’ (Rom 13:1) even describing the ruler as the ‘\textit{minister of God}’ (Rom 13:4). This ordination is equally true of wicked Kings, Cyrus being called God’s ‘\textit{anointed}’\textsuperscript{18} and Nebuchadnezzar God’s ‘\textit{servant}’\textsuperscript{19}. The magistracy, states the Second Helvetic Confession, ‘\textbf{of what sort soever it be}, is ordained of God himself, for the peace and quietness of mankind’\textsuperscript{20}

This civil government is not free to rule in wickedness but must legislate according to the Law of God\textsuperscript{21}. When Israel receives her first a king, God required that he ‘write him a copy of \textit{this law} in a book out of \textit{that which is} before the priests the Levites’ (Deu 17:18), and legislate civil law in light of trespass against Him, ‘what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even \textbf{warn them that they trespass not against the LORD}’ (2 Chr 19:10). The state and religion, though separate, were not to be isolated. There was, in civil matters, connection with the church.

Further, it was the duty of the state then, and in gospel times, to protect and nourish the Church; ‘\textbf{Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers},’ ( Isa 49:23).\textsuperscript{22} That God requires a connection of mutual responsibility between state and Church has been the uniform conviction of Christendom until recent times\textsuperscript{23}. This mutual responsibility requires amongst other things, financial support for the Church out of the Treasury. In the wilderness, God required that the whole nation be taxed for the maintenance of the Church:

‘This they shall give...an half shekel \textit{shall be} the offering of the LORD...for the service of the tabernacle’ (Exo 30:11-16).

This tax was neither temporary nor voluntary. With the Church settled in Canaan, King Hezekiah,

‘\textbf{Commanded} the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites...And as soon as the \textbf{commandment} came abroad...the tithe of all \textit{things} brought they in abundantly. And...the children of Israel and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] I Tim 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, \textit{and} giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and \textit{for all} that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
\item[18] Isa 45:1
\item[19] Jer 27:6
\item[20] Chapter 30
\item[21] ‘Kings then have not an absolute power…but their power is limited by God’s word: so that if they strike where God commandeth not, they are but murderers; and if they spare when God commandeth to strike, they and their throne are criminal and guilty of the wickedness that aboundeth apon the face of the earth, for lack of punishment.’ Knox Works Vol 6:p238
\item[22] Also Isaiah 60:16
\item[23] ‘In no country (before the advent) was religion disconnected with the state. It was unknown to the Jews. Since the time of Constantine, in no part of Christendom, and by no Denomination, has the ground been assumed, until a recent period, that the state and Church should be separate and independent bodies’, Hodge C. The Church and its Polity, Edin 1879, p116
\end{footnotes}
Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe’. (2 Chr 31:4-6)

Any state, no matter how benign, that refuses to take responsibility for the spiritual needs of its citizens fails in the most vital component of its administration.

Q. ‘Does the care of the Religion pertain to (the civil magistrate)?
A. No doubt, seeing he is raised up chiefly for this cause’. Craig’s Catechism 1581, p159

Q. ‘What do we pray for in the second petition.? 
A. In the second petition...we pray, that...the Church (be)...maintained by the civil magistrate’, Westminster Larger Catechism Question 191

‘We teach that the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate’, Second Helvetic Confession Chap XXX

As temporal provision for the Church is the natural duty of the state, it was therefore to be expected that the Australian colonial Government would financially support Presbyterianism. In the early years of settlement the state did so.24 25

It is not essential,26 (though it is desirable), that the King himself be a regenerate man.27 It is no more essential that a King be regenerate for his ecclesiastical efforts to be blessed, than piety in a Minister should be held as essential for the sacraments to be efficacious. Obedience to the will of God in both administrators is what is blessed for the good of the elect. This is admirably demonstrated in Jonah. The word of God coming to a the Gentile monarch of a pagan nation28, caused him to command compulsory prayer, fasting, and repentance, for all of his subjects. The fruit of this act was a national work of Grace in which all the citizens of Ninevah were regenerated29, ‘believed God’ (v5)30, and truly ‘turned from their evil way’(v10).
It is the duty of the magistrate to provide for the promotion and protection of the Church through Civil legislation. Though no state can legislate grace, it is extraordinary that any state which derives its power to govern from God31, should not require the Honouring of His name and the Worship of Him32 from

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24 In 1843 the NSW Colonial Legislature was providing 3,500 pounds annually to the Presbyterian church—slightly more than 1% of the Government’s total revenue. see Balfour J. O. ‘A Sketch of New South Wales’ Lon 1845, p 114, 116.
25 Church funding in NSW was pluralist with ‘voluntary’ aspects respecting property. The Establishment of religion had been undermined with the passing of Sir Richard Bourke’s Church Act in 1836.
26 essentia as opposed to accido
27 ‘And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind.’ (1 Chr 28:9)
28 Jonah 3:4-10
29 ‘They had become renewed’ Calvin, Comm. Twelve Minor Prophets, Eerdmans, nd, Vol iii, p113 : ‘None but saints inhabited the city’ Luther, quoted by Sasson J. M., Comm Jonah 1990, p244
30 ‘Faith...entered into their heart’ Abbot, Expos Prophet Jonah, Lon 1613, p473
31 ‘The government of the Church and state are...both ordained of God’ Baylie, R. ‘An Historical Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland’ Lon 1646, p73
32 ‘All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord’ Psalm 100:1 (Metrical, C of S, OUP/TBS)
its governed citizens. For God Himself requires this of all men without exception. The state must make unlawful, Blasphemy, Idolatry, Atheism, Perjury and Sabbath Desecration.33.

It is sometimes asserted that such legislation is inconsistent with the doctrine of liberty of conscience34. It is further argued that no man has the right to tell others what Church they should attend35, and that ‘Christ alone is Lord of the Conscience’. This objection confuses liberty of conscience with personal freedom. With respect to liberty of conscience, in matters of faith or worship, man’s conscience has been given liberty only from those doctrines and commands of men which are in any thing contrary to God’s Word; or beside it36 Man’s conscience has never been given the liberty to believe anything it wishes. The other implicit objection, that such legislation could interfere with personal freedom, will be addressed in the closing sections of this paper.

3. The Establishment Principle the norm of Christendom

Dr Hodge has already been quoted concerning this uniformity (footnote 23). It is also evident in the creeds of the Churches.

**English Congregation in Geneva**

‘As Moses, Ezechias, Josias, and other godly rulers, purged the church of God from superstition and idolatry, so the defence of Christ’s Church appertaineth to the Christian Magistrate’

**Second Helvetic Confession**

‘We teach that the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate’ Chap XXX

**Confession of Bohemia (Waldensian)**

‘The Christian Magistrate ought also to be a partaker, and, as it were, a minister of the power of the lamb...and is peculiarly taught by this authority of his to promote the truth of the holy gospel’

**Confession of Saxony**

‘Well has it been said of old, the magistrate is a keeper of the law, ie of the first and second table, as concerning discipline and good order’

**Dutch Confession**

33 ‘Magistrates are protectors of the church, in that they enforce both tablets of the law’, Wollebius: Compendium Theologiae Christianae 1626, Beardslee iii edn. 1977, p148)
34 ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...’, First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. The Supreme Court has described the first of these concepts to be absolute, but the second, not so in Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398 (1963)
35 Some modern Christians have refused to contribute tax toward a Church whose government or doctrine was not agreeable to their own convictions. This practice is not supported by the conduct of Christ who paid tax to Caesar, (performing a miracle to achieve it)—even though some portion of this contribution would almost certainly be used to support idolatry.
36 Westminster Confession of Faith 20:2
‘(It) is the duty of magistrates not only to be careful to preserve the civil
government, but also to endeavour that the ministry be preserved, that all
idolatry and counterfeit worship be abolished,
the kingdom of antichrist brought down, and that the kingdom of Christ be
enlarged’

Scots Confession
‘To Kings princes rulers and magistrates, we affirm, that chiefly
and most principally the conservation and purgation of the
religion doth appertain’

4. The Quality of the Relationship existing between
Church and State

With the exception of the Anabaptists and their later descendants, the Churches of
Christendom functioned under the Establishment Principle. There was among the
churches a variety of opinion as to how the relationship between Church and state
should operate. This variety continues to exist today.

1. The Erastian View is that the Church is the spiritual arm of the state. The Church
has ‘spiritual power’ but organisationally is subject to the state, in the closest form of
relationship and has no truly independent government of its own. The practical effect
of this doctrine is to bring the Church into subjection to the state.

2. The Roman Catholic view is that the state and the Church are autonomous in their
own spheres, and have their own government. The state, being led by ‘Natural Law’,
functions in those things secular and political. The Church, being led by Supernatural,
law functions in those things sacred. Because of sin the state has an imperfect
understanding of ‘Natural Law’. It must obtain foundational principles of ‘Natural
Law’ from the Church in order to understand its duty in detail. The practical effect of
this dependence is to give the Church influence and ultimately authority over the
state.
At times in history, the Roman Church has brought the state almost totally under its
power.

3. The Lutheran view holds that the state and Church are autonomous and
independent in their own spheres. The state is needed only because of the fall37, and
functions using the methods of this fallen world. Its purpose is to restrain the non-
Christian and avert chaos. Church and state are lightly related, mainly by means of
Christian individuals affecting the state by the influence of their Christian lives.
The Lutheran church did not do a great deal to actively oppose the government of
Hitler, and what they did was largely defensive, whereas the Reformed in Germany,

37 ‘If The temporal government restrains the un-Christian and the wicked...if all the world were
composed of real Christians, that is true believers, there would be no need for or benefits from king,
lord, sword or law’, Luther M., Temporal Authority, Works Vol 45, 1962, pp90,91
because of their different view of the Church state relationship, were much more active and energetic in directly opposing him\textsuperscript{38}.

4. The Reformed view holds that the Church and state are distinct and independent in their own spheres. The two are directly related to each other by God their almighty Sovereign. Robert Baylie could write, ‘The government of the **Church and state** are...both ordained of God’\textsuperscript{39} The Church, like the state has its officials called to office by God, and acquiesced in by those governed\textsuperscript{40}. In addition to the higher relationship based on Divine origins, there exists a material relationship between Church and state. The state is responsible to recognise and protect the Church, and the Church is responsible recognise and advise the state. Many consider it desirable that this material relationship between Church and state should be clearly engrossed in the state’s articles of Constitution.

Christ is alone and supremely\textsuperscript{41} the Head of the Church, and as her Monarch provides office bearers for its government to function\textsuperscript{42}.

(\textit{Mat 16:19}) I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

There are then two governments and two kings, each having there own sphere of responsibility

(2 \textsuperscript{Chr} 19:11) Amariah the chief priest \textit{is} over you in all matters of the \textit{LORD}; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king’s matters:

Although the Civil Magistrate has authority to call synods of the Church,\textsuperscript{43} the Civil magistrate may not determine doctrinal content or take upon himself duties which are spiritual.

(2 \textsuperscript{Chr} 26:18) They withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, \textit{It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests} the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither \textit{shall it be} for thine honour from the LORD God.

\textsuperscript{38} Thielicke H, Theological Ethics, Vol 2, p565.
\textsuperscript{39} Robert Baylie ‘An Historical Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland’ Lon 1646, p73
\textsuperscript{40} (1 \textsuperscript{Cor} 12:28) \textit{God hath set...in the Church...apostles...prophets...teachers...}
(Heb 5:4) No man taketh this honour unto himself, but \textit{he that is called of God}
(\textit{Isa} 33:5) \textit{The LORD...hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness}.
\textsuperscript{41} ‘The Lord Jesus...hath...appointed a government in the hands of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate’, Westminster Confession of Faith 31:1
\textsuperscript{42} ‘The power and authority of the Pastors and rulers of the Church...come(s) directly from Christ the Head;’ Andrew Grey Catechism on the Principles and Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland, p31, Edin 1845
\textsuperscript{43} ‘When he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born
‘The civil magistrate...hath power to call synods’ Westminster Confession of Faith 23:3 so too Dort.
Just as the magistrate must not meddle in spiritual government, neither may the church interfere in secular government. Wrote Robert Baylie, ‘The government of the Church and state are two really distinct policies, both ordained of God, which without his displeasure may not be confounded, nor ought not to encroach one upon another.’

The relationship between Church and state is further expanded in Craig’s Catechism and in the Second Book of Discipline

Q 85 ‘What is the office of the Christian Magistrate in the Kirk?
a. He should defend the true religion and discipline, and punish all who disturb and despise them’

‘It pertains to the Office of a Christian Magistrate, to assist and fortify the godly proceedings of the Kirk in all behalves; and, namely (especially), to see that the public Estate and Ministry thereof be maintained and sustained, as it appertains, according to Gods Word...To assist and maintain the Discipline of the Kirk, and punish them civilly that will not obey the censure of the same, without confounding always the one Jurisdiction with the other...Not to suffer the patrimony of the Kirk to be applied to profane and unlawful uses...To make Laws and Constitutions, agreeable to the God’s Word, for advancement of the Kirk, and policy thereof, without usurping anything that pertains not to the civil Sword, but belongs to the Offices that are merely Ecclesiastical, as is the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, using Ecclesiastical discipline, and the Spiritual Execution thereof, or any part of the Power of the spiritual keys, which our Master gave to the Apostles, and to their true Successors.’

5. The Establishment of Religion and Personal Freedom

Both state and Church benefit from the establishment of religion. It was the Anabaptists who taught that the Church and state were separate and autonomous with no relationship existing between them. They emphasised human liberty, the doctrine of freedom of conscience, and focused largely on NT texts in isolation to support their views. They argued their case a posteriori (and commonly do still). This approach effectively ignores the sovereign Providence of God, and much of the scriptural revelation. From a practical viewpoint this commonly has two serious consequences. It permits a state to regard error and truth as possessing equal validity. Further, this view also removes from the state the power of moral authority in society, leaving it with only the power of coercion alone.

Dr. Hastie relates that the emergence of this particular doctrine so filled Luther with alarm that he left his safe concealment in the Wartburg castle and rushed to suppress, by force of arms if needed, the commotions and devastation it was causing. Zwingli and Calvin discussed the doctrine earnestly, and firmly rejected it as incompatible with the true freedom, safety and prosperity of the Reformed Church.

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44 Robert Baylie ‘An Historical Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland’ Lon 1646, p73
45 Craigs’s Short Catechism 1592, in T. F. Torrance’s ‘The School of Faith’, Lon 1959, p252
46 Second Book of Discipline, Chap 10, David Calderwood True Hist. pp 110, 111, folio, Holland, 1678
47 The Theology of the Reformed Church, Edin 1904, p108,9
Many modern advocates of ‘personal liberty’ ‘tolerance’, ‘free speech’, ‘non-discrimination’ and ‘broad-mindedness’ have at the foundation the assumption that because there is no empirical ‘theological reality’, mankind has the right to hold as true whatever religion it chooses. Some would argue that truth triumphs best in an environment of perfect personal freedom.

It is true that freedom is a precious possession. Yet increasing degrees of freedom may be purchased at too high a cost. In disarming the state to prevent it persecuting the Truth, we have disarmed the state from defending the truth. The resulting theological anarchy throughout much western society is one consequence.

The dangers associated with the Establishment Principle are that godless governments would at times arise, the Church be persecuted, and injustices committed. Persecution of individuals may occur, and refugees from religious tyranny again be forced to seek asylum. But this persecution would be for the truth of God’s Word, and the love of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Comfort, civil liberty and plenty, though desirable, are not indefectibly promised to the Church Militant. Such material ‘comfort levels’ were not the continuing experience of the Church in the Old Testament era nor the in the New. Jesus insists not of the benefits of a tolerant state, but that individual Christians must take up their cross and follow Him.

It is not personal liberty and freedom, but defence of the Truth of God that is the highest good of any nation.

On the other hand, a scriptural state effects the protection of the Sabbath, the conservation & purity of the scriptures, the sacredness of the law of marriage, the solemn taking of oaths in courts of Justice, the promotion of Christian education in schools, and the just protection of its citizens from Ministerial malpractice. Only by enjoying a biblical establishment can a national church can be lastingly reformed. It is in this beautiful way, Calvin insisted, ‘Magistrates...are the ministers of the grace of God unto us’.

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48 (1 Cor 7:21) If thou mayest be made free (from slavery), use it rather.
49 Separation of Church and state makes it exceptionally difficult to obtain civil convictions against ministers guilty of certain kinds of sexual misconduct. Particularly those arising from boundary violations.
50 The national churches of the reformation were state established churches.
51 Sermon on 1 Tim 2:2, Banner of Truth, 1983 edn. p133,134