

# BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE WESTERN POLITICAL TRADITION

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## ABSTRACT

*Religion in ancient Greece and Rome served as an accessory to statecraft. The compassing of Judaism by these empires and subsequent advent of Christianity set new forces into motion that freed religious energies from a preoccupation with merely parochial loyalties. Yet over time the church came to be regarded as a tenacious “imperium in impero” [empire within the empire] with both empires asserting universal obligations. So a question arose that helped give birth to a new civilization: How can two distinct institutions, similar or overlapping in composition, make authoritative yet independent claims to the adherence and loyalty of their members? This article explores the biblical roots of western civilization while continuing the narrative of ‘Faustian Bargains: Entanglements Between Church and State in America’ (Western Australian Jurist, Vol.2, 2011, 61-92). The historical rivalry of church and state in matters of jurisdiction subsequently prompted accommodations which served as prototypes for new political forms and the idea of constitutionally limited government. The everchanging coexistence of church and state may be regarded as a crucial catalyst in the development of western political traditions.*

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## I. FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

The political character of the church cannot be understood apart from the story of Israel as it is recorded in the Bible. Indeed, the Bible is central to the identity of Jews and Christians alike. It is an encyclopaedia of history, law, wisdom, poetry, and prophecy that contains the national covenants of Israel and the founding commission of the church. The Bible is permeated by a strength of design and purpose that helps keep Jews and Christians on a tether no matter how far afield they may stray from their roots generation after generation. The certainty of judgment for sin no less than the certainty of a final victory stamps biblical faith with confident energy, durability, and compassion. Even though the Bible is written largely as historical narrative, its repeated themes and motifs form a built-in interpretative framework. What follows is an account and synthesis of the biblical principles relating to civil and religious government. Pertinent doctrines and events that illustrate the political and religious calling of Israel and the Christian Church are summarized.

## II. ORIGINS

The Book of Genesis introduces the major themes of biblical history. It opens with God creating heaven and earth in a series of 53 separate commands. As the parts of creation successively made their appearance, God saw that each was good and further expressed his sovereignty by naming some of them. At last, God created mankind in his own image, gave them dominion or authority over every living thing, and then rested on the seventh day of the creation week. The first man, Adam, was assigned to cultivate the garden and protect it, but was forbidden on pain of death to eat the fruit of one of its trees. Like God, Adam exercised his authority by giving names to the creatures in his charge. Afterwards, God gave him a wife; Adam later called her Eve.

The turnabout, when it came, was swift. Adam and Eve succumbed to the blandishments of a serpent and ate fruit from the forbidden tree in the belief they would become "as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). Disobedience gave rise to fear, guilt, and recrimination. Sin and death entered the world and spoiled creation. In judgment and mercy, God cursed the ground which had been entrusted to Adam and Eve, multiplied the hardships they would suffer in fulfilling their original commission, and exiled them from the garden.

Thus the cycle of sin, punishment and redemption was set into motion as part of the ebb and flow of history. The steady deterioration of mankind into corruption finally culminated in two judgments: the flood and the scattering of the nations at Babel.

### III. ISRAEL

Many generations later, God—who was known as Yahweh or Jehovah—called Abram out of Mesopotamia into a new land with a twofold promise:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him who curseth thee: and in thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).<sup>1</sup>

Abram faithfully complied, left his country and kin, and journeyed to the land of Canaan. There God expressed his good pleasure in the form of a royal land grant bestowed on Abram and his heirs in perpetuity (Gen. 13:15-16; 22:16-18). This act of divine grace was consummated by the cutting of a covenant, symbolized first by an animal sacrifice and later memorialized by circumcision, which signified separation from previous bonds into citizenship in the covenant community.<sup>2</sup> God likewise gave Abram a new name, hence a new identity: Abraham, meaning "father of many nations."

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations (Gen. 17:7-9).

Many generations passed. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel were now living in bondage in Egypt, as had been prophesied earlier (Gen. 15:13-14). This time God called Moses, who had been raised in the royal household of Egypt, to lead the people of Israel out of the house of bondage into the Promised Land. Moses faithfully complied. Afterwards, a new covenant was cut, followed by another because of the people's disobedience.

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<sup>1</sup> The creation account is one of unadulterated blessing (Gen 1:28, cf. 9:7). Curses are introduced with the temptation and fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:14-19), followed by the murder of Abel (Gen 4:11)—and culminating in the flood (Gen. 7-8), followed by the confusion of tongues and the scattering of humanity at Babel (Gen. 11). By contrast, Gen. 12:1-3 marks a new beginning and a new blessing.

<sup>2</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (The Craig Press, 1973), 755-57.

The Sinaitic (Exod. 24) covenant and the Deuteronomic (Deut. 27-30) covenant renewal resemble the international vassal or suzerainty treaties of the day.<sup>3</sup> It was the custom in the ancient Near East that a king who had been conquered by another might be permitted to keep his kingdom if—to use the terminology of a later era—he swore fealty to his new liege. Great empires were thus held together by paper. The vassal treaty took the form of a personal contract, detailing the mercies already shown by the greater king, specifying the vassal's obligations, and invoking blessings on those who kept the covenant and curses on those who broke it. In this case, the covenants were between God and the entire congregation of Israel, which had been separated from all the people of the earth to be God's inheritance (Exod. 19:5-6; Deut. 9:26-29; I Kings 8:53). The people were addressed in the singular as one person or corporation (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). The Mosaic legal code spelled out their obligations to the God who had redeemed them as the owner or father of Israel.<sup>4</sup> These obligations included teaching the law to each generation and rejecting idolatry (Deut. 4:8-9, 23).<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. THE COVENANT LAW

The laws of Moses derived their main features from the covenant context. They are "more than an abstract system of morality. They are the personal demands of the sovereign, personal God on his subject people."<sup>6</sup> Exhortations and motive clauses are laced throughout the law, confirming its personal quality. The sacral purpose of the law is evidenced by the rich symbolism that brings God's mercies and judgments equally to remembrance. The people were instructed to meditate on the law day and night (Josh. 1:8). Levites and priests were specially commissioned and supported for the purpose of preserving, teaching, and celebrating the law (Num. 18:20-32). After the covenant was ratified by the assembled people, the tables of the law were placed inside the Ark of the Covenant beneath the mercy seat, which was the throne of God (Exod. 25:21-22; Deut. 10:5).

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham (eds.), *Law, Morality and the Bible: A Symposium* (Intervarsity Press, 1978), 7-9.

<sup>4</sup> David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Ktav Publishing House, 1969), 46-49. The father/son, owner/servant themes figure prominently in the New Testament, as well.

<sup>5</sup> The primary responsibility for teaching belonged to the family (Deut. 6:4-9).

<sup>6</sup> Kaye and Wenham, above n 2, 9.

The Mosaic code is territorial and temporal in delineation but eternal in duration (Deut. 12:1). Following the conquest of Canaan, the promised land was apportioned among the tribes and families as the people earlier had been instructed (Num. 33:52-54; Josh. 14-21). All residents were protected under the law of the land. Levites, priests, widows, orphans, and strangers, all of whom were without property in land, received special attention and protection through the tithe and other forms of assistance (Deut. 26:12-15). This served as a reminder to the people that they were once strangers in a strange land (Deut. 10:19) and would be again if they fell into disobedience (Deut. 4:25-27).

The primary locus of God's blessings and curses was the land itself.<sup>7</sup> So long as the people observed the covenant, God promised to send rain in due season and plentiful harvests (Lev. 26:3-4; Deut. 14-15). If the people polluted or defiled the land through sin, they would be cut off as the Canaanites had been (Lev. 20:23) and the land would become barren (Lev. 18:24-28; Num. 35:33-34; Deut. 11:16-17). This contrast evokes a recurring motif: exile from the garden into the wilderness. Similarly, the setting aside of sacred land, such as the temple, served as a visible reminder of God's title to the land. The character of the relationship between God, the people, and "the good land" essentially was moral and personal (Num. 14:6-24; Deut. 8; Ps. 37:3).

The purpose of the law, then, was clearly religious, even where it bore on civil affairs. It was designed to ensure that the covenant people, being prone to disobedience, reflected the character of God through personal as well as corporate righteousness and justice (Lev. 19:2; Deut. 6:25). Israel had been chosen by God to be "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). Its primary object was "to eradicate idolatry and obliterate the memory of it ... ," as E C Wines suggested.<sup>8</sup> The word "holy," in fact, means "to be clean." Holiness required separation from whatever would pollute the land, defile the sanctuary, or profane the holy name of God (Lev. 20:2-3; 22:2). It was for the sake of holiness that God periodically sent prophets to call the people back to righteousness (II Chron. 26:15). This

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<sup>7</sup> The following two studies of land imagery in the Bible are helpful: W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (University of California Press, 1974); and Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> E. C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic* (Uxbridge, Mass.: American Presbyterian Press, n.d.), 67. Originally published as Book 2 of *Commentary on the Laws of the Ancient Hebrews* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Co., 1853).

principle of separation was manifested in numerous ways: the sabbath, circumcision, the system of sacrifices for the atonement of sin, sanctuaries, tithes, vows, marriage, ritual cleansings, excommunication, cities of refuge, the ministry of the Levites, even the covenant itself. Many of these practices, particularly circumcision and sacrifices, are common even to the most isolated of cultural traditions.

The temporal aspect of the law is apparent in the prominence given to sabbaths, ceremonies, and feast days, which served as reminders of the covenant and its promises. Cultivation, land sales, debts, and slavery were regulated by the sabbatical and jubilee years (Lev. 25). Since the land was, in effect, held in fee, it could not be permanently alienated (Lev. 25:23). This principle applied with similar force to personal liberties (Lev. 25:39-40). The rule of law covered every condition and relationship by right of God's eternal title of ownership (Lev. 24:22; Ps. 24:1). The liberating political effect of this concept of law is strikingly evident in the relationship between the people and their rulers.

## V. CIVIL MINISTERS

The people, elders, officers, and judges of Israel were alike subject to God's higher authority and holy purpose (Deut. 28:9; Josh. 8:30-35; I Sam. 12:14-15). Consequently, political authority was treated as derivative rather than originative: either with a particular individual or a class, as in other nations of the day. Power was segmented and limited, befitting man's creaturely status. The separation principle governed as much here in the civil sphere as in the moral.

Delegated powers were kept accountable through a separation of offices and responsibilities (Deut. 16:18-22; 17:1-20; 18:1-22). The story of the unfortunate king Uzziah is illustrative of the principle. By usurping a priestly prerogative, king Uzziah defiled the holy sanctuary and spent the remainder of his life cast out as a leper (II Chron. 26:16-23). The maintenance of such a separation of powers—here between "church" and "state"—indicates that man must not unite what God has put asunder. Each power derives its identity from God. As an expression of holiness in the political realm, this separation seems to point to the incomparably greater distance that separates God and humanity: indeed, that separates God and all creation (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 102:25-26).

Thus the chief political fact about Israel is the utter transcendence yet gracious providence of its divine sovereign (Gen. 14:22-23; Ps. 97). Henri Frankfort drew a sharp contrast with other faiths:

The transcendentalism of Hebrew religion prevented kingship from assuming the profound significance which it possesses in Egypt and Mesopotamia. It excluded, in particular, the king's being instrumental in the integration of society and nature. It denied the possibility of such an integration. It protested vehemently—in the persons of the great prophets—that attempts by king and people to experience that integration were incompatible with their avowed faithfulness to Yahweh.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of a union of cosmic forces, either in the person of the king, as in Egypt, or, as in Mesopotamia, through the king's mediation with the gods, the fundamental principle of unity in the commonwealth of Israel was seen in the earthly reign of the one God, "the Holy One of Israel," as lord and king (Ps. 89:18). God was viewed as the vital centre of all relationships, which helps account for the operation of representative political institutions in Israel at a time when monarchies were prevalent. E. C. Wines particularly emphasized this:

By the free choice of the people, Jehovah was made the civil head of the Hebrew state. Thus the law-making power and the sovereignty of the state were, by popular suffrage, vested in him. It is on this account, that Josephus, and others after him, have called the Hebrew government a theocracy.<sup>10</sup>

All civil officers were subordinate to God and served at his pleasure (I Sam. 15:35; I Kings 11:9-12). Although the people had a voice in selecting and acknowledging their leaders (I Sam. 11:15; I Kings 12:20), it was God who anointed and established them (I Sam. 9:16; 10:1; I Kings 11:31-37). This meant that officers of the state were twice accountable: first to God, as his deputies or representatives, and then to the congregation.

A study by Greg Bahnsen argues that the standards by which God judged civil ministers, or magistrates, were the same for all nations and all times. Bahnsen summarizes them under several headings as follows, verbatim: 1) God sovereignly appoints and removes rulers; 2) rulers, as God's appointees, are not to be resisted; 3) rulers bear religious titles; 4) hence rulers are God's vicegerents, avengers of his wrath; 5) the magistrate must deter evil but honor the good; 6) the magistrate must rule, then, according to God's law; 7) therefore, the magistrate is subject to criticism and judgment for lawlessness.<sup>11</sup> These are the standards by

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<sup>9</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), 343.

<sup>10</sup> Wines, above n 8, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (The Craig Press, 1979), 321-338.

which the prophets repeatedly called the state and people to account.<sup>12</sup> Together, these prophetic witnesses remain in our secular age a generally unspoken, unacknowledged, but quite salient conditioning factor in relations between church, state, and people today.

## VI. THE MONARCHY

The covenant laws were followed for a time and at various times afterwards, but the portrait of Israel drawn in scripture is a history of deepening apostasy relieved by periods of renewal and rescue. The generation that Moses and Joshua led out of the wilderness into the promised land passed away and old habits were revived (Judg. 2:10-12). The cycle of sin, punishment, and redemption began anew. Strange gods and religious customs, forbidden by the law, were borrowed from other nations in syncretistic fashion. There followed successive periods of conquest by foreign powers and deliverance by judges raised up by God. Each time, after the death of the judge, the people lapsed into disobedience and were once again oppressed (Judg. 2:16-19).

Finally, a monarchy was instituted at the time of Samuel in imitation of Israel's neighbors. This event is not treated favorably in Scripture, being seen as a rejection of God's reign (I Sam. 8:4-7). Samuel, the last of the judges, warned the people to expect oppression from a king, but acceded to their demand for one (I Sam. 8:11-22). Saul was chosen and anointed to be the captain over God's inheritance (I Sam. 10:1). Although Saul fought a successful military campaign against the Ammonites, he proved to be an unsatisfactory leader and eventually was rejected for rashly performing a religious ceremony (I Sam. 13:8-14). David was chosen to take his place as king. Later, God made a separate covenant with David, establishing his house and kingdom forever, in terms similar to the covenant with Abraham (II Sam. 7:12-16).

Two generations after David, the kingdom was divided into two parts: Israel and Judah. The line of David was preserved on the throne of Judah but was abruptly ended in Israel, as was the Levitical priesthood. Israel suffered under a series of bad kings from 975 B. C. until its capture by the Assyrians and the dispersion of its people around 721 B. C. Israel was then resettled by captive people from other nations. These people became the Samaritans (II Kings 17). Judah experienced periods of religious renewal but was continually warned of

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Amos 8:4-8, Ezek. 22:13-31, and the word of counsel in Jer. 29:4-7.

impending judgment for the injustices of its prophets, priests, and princes (Ezek. 22; Zeph. 3:1-7). It held out until 587 B. C., when its people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians (II Kings 24-25). Following the conquest of Babylon by Persia fifty years later, the captives were allowed to return to their homelands. While many Jews had already assimilated, nearly fifty thousand returned to rebuild the Temple and restore the city of Jerusalem. Later, the Persian king, Artaxerxes, allowed all the people of Israel who remained, including priests and Levites, to return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. By the king's decree, the theocracy was restored, magistrates and judges were appointed, and all those who ministered in the temple were exempted from taxes (Ezra 7:23-26). No further effort was made to revive the old monarchy.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its generally bad reputation, the monarchy was not simply an afterthought or improvisation. Helen Silving contends that it was a constitutional monarchy designed to ensure the freedom of the people.<sup>14</sup> Under the Deuteronomic covenant, the king was, first of all, required to be an Israelite chosen by God (Deut. 17:15). The king was also forbidden to imitate the royal courts of other lands by raising horses for a cavalry, forging political alliances through multiple marriages, or amassing a large personal fortune (Deut. 17:16-17). By the time of Solomon, these rules were honored mainly in the breach (I Kings 10:14-29; 11:1-8). The king, however, was always directly accountable to God, expressed symbolically in the construction of his throne, which was modeled after the Ark of the Covenant. Like the ark, the king's throne contained a copy of the law, which was supposed to be read by the king daily (Deut. 17:18-20).

## VII. RIVAL THEOLOGIES

The uniqueness of the biblical conception of religion and government may be seen in contrast with the practices of Israel's neighbors. What distinguishes Israel from Mesopotamia and Egypt is a difference of basic philosophy or theology. R. J. Rushdoony describes it as a difference of ontology:

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<sup>13</sup> The later Asmonean rulers of the first and second century B.C. combined the offices of priest and king.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Silving, 'The Jurisprudence of the Old Testament' (1953) 28 *New York University Law Review* 1129, 1143.

Apart from biblically governed thought, the prevailing concept of being has been that being is one and continuous. God, or the gods, man, and the universe are all aspects of one continuous being; degrees of being may exist, so that a hierarchy of gods as well as a hierarchy of men can be described, but all consist of one, undivided and continuous being.<sup>15</sup>

According to Thorkild Jacobsen, the Mesopotamians perceived the cosmos as a state whose member entities were differentiated on the basis of their power.

The commonwealth of the Mesopotamian cosmos encompassed the whole existing world—in fact, anything that could be thought of as an entity: humans, animals, inanimate objects, natural phenomena, as well as notions such as justice, righteousness, the form of a circle, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Despite a continuity of being, government was arranged in a hierarchical or bureaucratic chain of command encompassing both religion and the state. Karl Wittfogel's study of ancient and modern totalitarianism indicates that ancient "hydraulic regimes," such as those of Egypt, Sumer, and Babylon, were frequently "theocratic" in the sense that the rulers were considered divine. Few were "hierocratic," or governed by priests. Babylonian kings, for example, performed priestly duties, but religion itself was subordinated to the interests of the state.<sup>17</sup> Concerning the absence of a separation of powers, Wittfogel concluded: 'It was this formidable concentration of vital functions which gave the hydraulic government its genuinely despotic (total) power.'<sup>18</sup>

The politics and religion of Mesopotamia betray the instability of their concept of man and the universe. For the Babylonians especially, man was simply a slave of cosmic forces that were at once wilful, violent, inscrutable, and bent on conquest. The biblical account of the tower of Babel expresses the ideal of a world order (Gen. 11 :1-9) that gave rise to wars of conquest as one empire succeeded another: Assyrian, Babylonian, Medean, Hellenistic, and Roman. Israel and Judah fell separately to two of these conquering titans, then came under the hegemony of the others.

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<sup>15</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Thoburn Press, 1978), 36.

<sup>16</sup> H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (University of Chicago Press, 1946; Pelican Books, 1967) 148.

<sup>17</sup> Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (Yale University Press, 1957), 87-96.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

The politics and religion of the Egyptians, however, reflected the vision of a carefully regulated, stable universe. Change was understood in the context of total order. Ultimate political and religious authority was vested in the person of Egypt's god-king, the pharaoh. One consequence, as Barbara Mertz has written, was a consolidation of offices and responsibilities.

At some periods a single man might hold both the vizierate and the high priesthood of Amon, the supreme civil and sacerdotal positions. This concept explains, to some extent, the apparent overlapping of functions we find in so many official careers.<sup>19</sup>

Henri Frankfort characterised the pharaoh both as a god and as an agent of the gods.

The king of Egypt was himself both one of the gods and the land's representative among the gods. Furthermore, he was the one official intermediary between the people and the gods, the one recognized priest of all the gods. Endowed with divinity, the pharaoh had the protean character of divinity; he could merge with his fellow-gods and could become any one of them.<sup>20</sup>

This fluidity in the offices and identities of the king extended to the state bureaucracy. Just as the king could act as a substitute for individual gods, so could lower officials and priests serve as their king's deputies in his absence. Their personal status derived from being able to share in the divine glory of the pharaoh by belonging to him and even becoming consubstantial with him. Since no firm line separated god and man, men could aspire to be gods and mingle with them. 'With relation to gods and men the Egyptians were monophysites: many men and many gods, but all ultimately of one nature.'<sup>21</sup> This notion is by no means anachronistic.<sup>22</sup>

## VIII. THE BIBLICAL UNIVERSE

The biblical perception of the cosmos stands in sharp contrast with the Egyptian and Babylonian beliefs. It begins with a creative God who remains separate from his creation (Ps. 113:4; 148:13). Frankfort regarded God's transcendence as the key distinction that emancipated thought from myth.

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Mertz, *Red Land, Black Land: The World of the Ancient Egyptians* (Coward-McCann Inc., 1966), 145.

<sup>20</sup> Frankfort et al, above n 16, 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> For an illustration of the deification of the state, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (trans. Robert S. Hartman, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), pp. 52-53. See also Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World* (University of Michigan Press, 1935; 1969), 65-66.

When we read in Psalm xix that 'the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork', we hear a voice which mocks the beliefs of Egyptians and Babylonians. The heavens, which were to the psalmist but a witness of God's greatness, were to the Mesopotamians the very majesty of godhead, the highest ruler, Anu. To the Egyptians the heavens signified the mystery of the divine mother through whom man was reborn. In Egypt and Mesopotamia the divine was comprehended as immanent: the gods were in nature.<sup>23</sup>

The radical ontological separation—or discontinuity of being—that marks the story of creation (Gen. 1) is continually recapitulated throughout Scripture. The stories, ceremonies, and laws of the people of Israel describe and record a unique national experience with a universal, sovereign God. As the Books of Ruth and Jonah intimate, it was a relationship through which all nations of the earth were to be blessed as God had promised Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). And as the books of Isaiah and Daniel indicate, this relationship was being drawn inexorably toward a historical denouement. Cosmic unity was to be sought only within the embrace of God's government.

The persistence of the biblical faith through historic Judaism and Christianity has preserved a theological perspective, dramatized first in the history of Israel, that carries significant implications for church and state today. Many aspects of the current religious and political situation are best understood in light of Scripture.

First, the God of the Bible is a jealous God who brooks no rivals (Exod. 34:14-16). This is clear from the opening statements of the Ten Commandments:

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:1-4).

A persistent theme of Scripture is the falling away of Israel because of the introduction of foreign cults and idol worship, which is repeatedly condemned as prostitution or adultery (Deut. 31:16; Ezek. 23:37). Sometimes this led to dramatic confrontations, as when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal, the fertility god of the Canaanites (I Kings 18). Even before the law was given to Moses, God visited plagues on the land of Egypt in a manner designed

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

to discredit the popular nature deities of the Egyptian pantheon (Exod. 7-11).<sup>24</sup> Worship was always reserved to God alone, even where rulers demanded it for themselves (Exod. 5:1-2; Esther 3:2-6; Dan. 3). Those rulers and officers who exalted themselves were usually humbled by God himself (Exod. 14:23-31; Esther 7-8; Dan. 5:18-29). Obedience to God and his law was to be honored over all other obligations, whether at home or abroad, even in exile (Dan. 1:8-16; 6:4-28).

Second, God demanded holiness of his covenant people. The law militated against moral pluralism at home and cultural assimilation abroad when faithfully observed. Its binding nature is shown by its lack of a provision for an occasional suspension of the rules, contrary to the custom in nations that adopted chaos cults.<sup>25</sup> The biblical emphasis was not even on the rules themselves if considered simply as an external means of social regulation. More importantly, the law embodied principles of self-government, which may be seen from repeated commands to diligently study and teach the law (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-19). Some of its provisions promoted holiness through personal as well as public health and safety (Lev. 11-15; Deut. 23:9-14). Many of its prohibitions aimed at eliminating slavish foreign religious practices, such as ritual prostitution, infant sacrifice, divination, and self-mutilation (Deut. 14:1; 18:9-12; 23:17-18). Moral exclusiveness, however, did not mean xenophobia. Strangers were extended hospitality and even were permitted to join the covenant community as long as they met the requirements of the law (Deut. 23:7-8). At all times, the object of the law was to be a rule of life that would distinguish Israel above all nations in wisdom and greatness (Deut. 4:6-8).

Finally, the government of Israel was designed to reinforce accountability in its leaders and general respect for the rule of law. The people and their rulers were equally placed under God's authority. Magistrates were granted only limited powers and prerogatives as a precaution against usurpation (II Kings 11:17). Families, the priesthood, and the state were constituted as self-governing spheres of authority. The covenant law contained detailed constitutional protections applying to each sphere. It upheld the sanctity of the home and private property (Lev. 25:23; Num. 36; I Kings 21). It protected the sanctuary of the tabernacle and the place of refuge (Exod. 21:13-14; Num. 19:20; 35:11). It further required

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<sup>24</sup> John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus* (Baker Book House, 1998), 86-88.

<sup>25</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and The Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Ross House Books, 2007), 67-70, 95, 99-105, 112-15.

that justice be administered even-handedly without respect of persons (Exod. 23:1-9; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 24:17-18), due process be observed (Deut. 17:6-13), and punishment be proportionate to guilt (Deut. 25:1-3).<sup>26</sup>

What set Israel apart from other nations, then, was its singular identification with the law and purposes of a universal, transcendent, sovereign God. It was this same identification with God, in the person of Jesus Christ, that later set the Christian Church apart with its claim to be ‘a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people’. (I Pet. 2:9). The Great Commission of the Christian Church makes this clear:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

## IX. THE CHURCH

The Bible has long exercised a profound influence in shaping the legal traditions of the Christian West, as Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis* and the Magna Carta testify. For centuries afterwards, both church and state were able to appeal to a cultural consensus they had jointly salvaged out of the moribund syncretism of a declining empire. While they chafed at the yoke that bound them together, they nevertheless grew in their mutual dependency. Their quarrels were of a domestic nature. Each conceded the lawful authority of the other and each periodically sought dominion over its partner.

The chafing has never ceased, though the political influence of the church has waxed and waned. Like the early Christians, the Puritans and Separatists who settled the shores of New England planted a vigorous church that flourished and came to dominate the surrounding culture. But today, the distinctive witness of the American church has grown slack, being diluted in an ongoing quest for respectability and seeking to offend no one. Simultaneously, a new secular public philosophy is seeking to dismantle the old accommodation between church and state. To the degree this new secularism appears compatible with a superficially Christian ethos, it is fairly assured of public acceptance for a time. The problem arises when the laws and policies of the state contradict—either apparently or manifestly—the express law of God. It is then that the dissenting tradition of an earlier era is most apt to revive, once

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<sup>26</sup> Silving, above n 14, 1140-41.

again allowing the latent conflict between church and state to surface as it first did under the Roman Empire.

## X. THE NEW COVENANT

The Christian Church was born at a time when the imperial dream of peace through political unification had reached its zenith. The Roman Empire, like the empires before and after it, represented a hope that springs eternal in the human breast: the hope of salvation.<sup>27</sup> The imperial hope faded quickly as one political saviour after another—each the beloved favourite of the gods—fell to assassination or military defeat; but it was at its moment of visible triumph—when a census for a tax was decreed—that the advent of a very different saviour was announced to some shepherds in the distant province of Judea:

And, lo, the angel of the lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:9-11).

Christianity thus began with a new revelation of God in history and a new covenant with his chosen people, some of whom expectantly awaited the promised salvation of God (Isa. 52:10; Luke 2:25-32; 23:50-51). This hope and expectation of reconciliation with God is a central motif that quickens biblical history (II Chron. 7:14; Isa. 45:17; 59:20-21; Acts 28:28). It comes into focus in the person of the promised Messiah (John 1:41; 4:25-26).

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:1-4).

The new revelation and its new covenant are built on the foundation of the old (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:15-16; I Pet. 2:5-6), just as its newer members are grafted like branches onto an older vine or tree (John 15:5; Rom. 11:17-24). The Old Testament of the Bible contains all the books of the Hebrew canon, divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The books of the New Testament are organized in a similar fashion. Individually and collectively, they recapitulate the themes of Testament history—institutions, personalities, events, prophecies,

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<sup>27</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (trans. by K. and R. Gregor Smith, The Westminster Press, 1955), 22-30.

ceremonies, and motifs—which are then integrated and interpreted as types or signs pointing toward a final revelation of God that brings them to completion. Everything is shown retrospectively as it prefigures the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 16:27-28; Luke 24:44-47). The very God who in times past had revealed himself in various theophanies—the angel of the Lord (Gen. 16:7-14; Zech. 3:1-10), the burning bush (Exod. 3:2), the cloud (Exod. 14:19-22; Lev. 16:2), fire and smoke (Exod. 19:18-20; Deut. 33:2), a still small voice (I Kings 19:11-12), and works of wonder (Hab. 3:3-16)—at last took the form of a bondservant (Mark 10:45; Phil 2:7-8) in order to restore his fallen creation by personally removing the curse (Isa. 65:17-25; Rom. 8:19-24; Gal. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:1-5).

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1 :10-14).

The Gospel—good news—of Jesus Christ is this proclamation that a final reconciliation with God is offered to all mankind as a free gift that must be appropriated in faith through Christ's faithfulness (Gal. 2:16; 3). Jesus began his public ministry by announcing "the acceptable year of the Lord," the long awaited year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-13; Isa. 49:7-13; 61:1-2a) which proclaimed liberty and restoration:

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:17-21).

The salvation Jesus preached was the forgiveness of sins: placing God and man under a new covenant or testament (Jer. 31 :31-34; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:11-28) that fulfilled the conditions of all the older covenants (Gal. 3:13-29). Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18; Gal. 4:4-5), came into the world as a descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David in order to free his people from bondage to sin, first by paying its penalty of death (John 8:31-36; Rom. 5:12-21; 8:1-4; II Cor. 15:21; Eph. 2:4-8; Heb. 7:25-28) and then by triumphing over the grave through his bodily resurrection (Luke 24:46-47; I Cor. 15:3-25). By keeping the terms of the older covenants, Jesus cancelled the debt of sin which had accumulated and established his claim as the rightful heir to all the covenant promises,

making him the firstborn among many brethren chosen and adopted by God (Rom. 8:12-30).

And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (Heb. 9: 15-16).

This "promise of eternal inheritance" is in the kingdom of God (Col. 1:12-15; II Pet. 1:11). Jesus is revealed in the New Testament to be the promised seed of Abraham, in whom "all nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18; Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:8-29); the promised seed of Eve, who would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15, Rom. 16:20); and the promised seed of David, whose kingdom would be established forever (I Sam. 7:12-16; Amos 9:11; Matt. 21:9; 22:41-45; Luke 1:31-33). All those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour—who take up the cross and follow him (Matt. 10:38)—are redeemed, consecrated, and reborn into the family of God as joint heirs with him (John 3:16; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:1-8). They are converted and made holy (Rom 12:1).

The legal significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, by which he sealed the new covenant (Matt. 26:28; John 6:27) and settled the old accounts, is best understood in light of the old sacrificial system, which dramatized the cycle of sin and redemption.<sup>28</sup>

First, the old covenants were sealed with a blood sacrifice. The dividing of the sacrificial animal signified the penalty for breaching the covenant (Gen. 15:8-11; Jer. 34:8-22). A second purpose for the sacrifices was to remove sin. Under the law of Moses, atonement for sin was provided through the substitutionary sacrifice of a clean, unblemished animal, such as a lamb (Lev. 5:1-7). The sin offering was presided over by a member of the hereditary priesthood. The priest was required to be ceremonially clean in the presence of God, lest he defile the holy sanctuary of the tabernacle or, later, the temple (Exod. 29; 30:17-21; Heb. 7:27-28). A thick veil separated all but the high priest from God's presence upon the mercy seat inside the holy place (Lev. 16:2-4). Yet there was something futile about sacrifices that had to be offered time and again because they were insufficient either to prevent sin or cancel the blood debt of Adam once for all (Heb. 10:1-10). As with the dominion assignment, now placed under the curse, the sacrificial system served as a reminder that even the best efforts of fallen men avail them nothing without an intercessor and a redeemer. The people and

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<sup>28</sup> A good discussion of the meaning of sacrifice is found in Rushdoony's *Institutes*, above n 2, 78-83.

priests grew weary of their duty, even to the point of profaning the table of the Lord by offering polluted bread and torn animals (Mal. 1:6-14). Because of their hypocrisy, God took no pleasure in their sacrifices (Isa. 1:10-15; Ezek. 47:5-9; Amos 5:21-24), desiring instead heartfelt obedience to his law (Deut. 10:12-16; Ps. 51:16-17; Jer. 6:19-20; Hos. 6:6). But God promised a new covenant in which the law would be written upon the hearts of his people. Then their sins would be forgiven and remembered no more (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:16-18).

A third interpretative key may be found in the story of the redemption of Israel from servitude in Egypt. It not only illustrates the problem of competing jurisdictions but also reaffirms God's sovereignty above all other authorities and loyalties. Many years earlier, the family of Jacob—known also as Israel—moved into Egypt during a great famine, where they "were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty ... (Exod. 1:7). After many generations, a new king arose that saw the people of Israel as a threat to the political order, so he placed them into hard bondage. God raised up Moses as a leader and sent him to Pharaoh with a message: "Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Exod. 4:22-23). But Pharaoh refused to permit the people to remove into the wilderness to worship God, replying: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go (Exod. 5:2). So God cursed the land of Egypt with a series of plagues.

Afterwards, God instructed each family of Israel to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and apply its blood to the lintel and doorposts of their houses. Then the Lord passed through the land during the night and slew the firstborn of Egypt, while passing over the houses sealed with the blood of the lamb, exempting them from this last judgment. Finally, God destroyed the army of Pharaoh as it went in pursuit of the people of Israel after they left. The annual Passover feast, which featured the sacrificial lamb as its centerpiece, was instituted to forever commemorate God's salvation of Israel from bondage and death (Exod. 11-12).

For Christians, the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament are only "a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). In retrospect, they may be seen as passion plays that prefigure what is finally performed on the cross. Thus Jesus recapitulated and brought to a climax the drama of redemption history in heaven itself (Heb. 9:24-28): personally assuming the roles of all the *dramatis personae*, then reconciling the principal characters by interceding

with God the Father on behalf of man through his vicarious atonement for the sin that alienated them. Jesus was at once the offended God (Phil. 2:5-7), the representative Adam (I Cor. 15:45), the high priest (Heb. 7-9), the king of Israel (Jer. 23:5; Zech. 9:9; Matt. 2:2; 27:11), the firstborn son (Col. 1:15), the suffering servant (Isa. 53; Luke 18:31-33), the sacrificial lamb (Gen. 22:1-13; John 1:29; Heb. 11:17-19; Heb. 13:11-14), and even the tabernacle or temple (John 2:19-21). By suffering and dying on the cross in fulfilment of scripture (Luke 24:44-47), Jesus Christ took "the sins of many" upon himself (Isa. 53:12; Heb. 9:28) and removed them forever (II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13), for "without the shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). In rising from the dead, Christ became the first fruits of the promised kingdom of God (I Cor. 15:20-25). With this final sacrifice—"once for all" (Heb. 10:10)—the old sacrificial system was terminated and the veil of the temple was torn in two (Matt. 27:51). The faithful in Christ—by carrying on the drama in their personal lives (Matt. 10:38)—were now free to enter into direct communion with God (I Cor. 3: 16-17; II Cor. 6: 16). The work of the church was about to begin.

## XI. CHURCH AND STATE

The Christian Church began its life seven weeks after the Passover feast during the harvest feast of Pentecost (Acts 2) to continue the work of Jesus in gathering the harvest of the faithful (John 4:34-35). The miracle of tongues, which accompanied the sending of the Holy Spirit, hearkened back to the original confounding of language at the tower of Babel, but with a reverse flow of effect. Pentecost underscored the spiritual—as opposed to political—nature of salvation, giving evidence that Christ's work of reconciliation and restoration was now the primary task of the church. Upon completion of the harvest, Christ was expected to return in bodily form to inherit the kingdoms of the earth and reign forever (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 11:15).

The church, in its universal sense, may be defined as the collective body of Christian communicants whose head is Jesus Christ himself (I Cor. 12; Col. 1:18). The Greek word that designates the New Testament church, *ecclesia*, is the same word used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament for the congregation of Israel.<sup>29</sup> This suggests a real continuity of purpose and function. Norman F. Cantor discerns a deliberate parallel: "By calling

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<sup>29</sup> The English word "church," like the Scottish "kirk" and the German "kirche," derives from the Greek word *kyriake*, meaning "the Lord's." See: Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future: or the Modern Mind Outrun* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946; Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 164.

themselves the ecclesia, the early Christians expressed their conviction that they were the new Israel, the new chosen of God."<sup>30</sup> Like Israel, the church is "an holy nation" (I Pet. 2:9), but it is also a truly international body drawn "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

It is the cosmopolitan character of the church that invites comparison with imperial Rome. Each began in a city and grew to fill an empire. In a few years, the small Judean sect known as Christians (Acts 11:26) spread into the major cities of the Roman Empire with its gospel of God's perfect love (John 3:16; I John 4:7-21). While Romans saw their destiny expressed in what Ethelbert Stauffer called "the myth of the Empire,"<sup>31</sup> or the ideal of Romanitas described by Charles Norris Cochrane,<sup>32</sup> the church understood its mission in terms of a spiritual and not a political unification of mankind (Matt. 28:19-20). Each required a high degree of devotion from its people. This often put the church at cross-purposes with the Roman state. The very existence of a separate and authoritative governmental body that claimed sovereign powers subtly threatened the combined religious and political authority of the Roman emperor: an issue that was already intimated at the trial of Jesus (John 18:33-37; 19:12-15). The problem faced by the Romans has been well stated by J. Marcellus Kik: "A strange and powerful empire was growing up in their midst and one thing that Rome neither desired nor would tolerate was an *imperium in imperio*."<sup>33</sup>

While the church does exhibit many attributes of a nation or other political entity, its founder never constituted it as a civil body politic. The Old Testament separation principle, though modified, remained in effect. Jesus directed his followers to pay their taxes to whom they were due without at the same time failing in their higher obligations to God (Matt. 17:24-27; 22:15-22; Rom. 13:6-8).<sup>34</sup> Thus, while Christians profess "another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7) as their Lord (John 13:13), Jesus is a king whose "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Still, the church claims the sovereign prerogative to regulate itself in the admission, rejection, discipline, and excommunication of members (I Cor. 5; 6:1-8; II Cor. 2:5-11), embracing those who repent of their sins and confess faith in Jesus (Mark 1:15) and denying

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<sup>30</sup> Norman F. Cantor, *Medieval History: The Life and Death of a Civilization* (The Macmillan Company, 1963), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Stauffer, above n 27, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Clarendon Press, 1940; Oxford University Press, 1957), 72-73.

<sup>33</sup> J. Marcellus Kik, *Church and State: The Story of Two Kingdoms* (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Stauffer, above n 25, 112-37. Stauffer comments on the irony with which Jesus laid bare the hypocrisy of those who sought to entrap him when he remarked, "Render unto Caesar ...." *Ibid.*, p. 127.

membership to unbelievers (Heb. 3:7-19; 4:11). Church members are also said to hold citizenship—*politeuma* or *politeia*—in heaven (Phil. 1:27; 3:20), even being called "ambassadors for Christ" (II Cor. 5:20), but they are still required to show respect and pray for their rulers as ministers of God (Rom. 13:1-4). As Christ's representatives, Christians are expected to abide by the ordinances of men for their Lord's sake (I Pet. 2:13-17), though they are at all events supposed to obey God when a conflict of authority arises (Dan. 6:4-11; Acts 5:28-29).

The separation principle also governs the internal operation of the church. The qualifications for church officers, for example, show the same concern for personal and corporate holiness that informs the Old Testament law. Elders, deacons, and teachers are required to be faithful husbands, proven leaders in their families, and conscientious stewards in the church (I Tim. 3; Tit. 1-2). Church leaders are contrasted with Gentile princes in being called not to dominate but to serve and minister to the needs of the church, just as Christ had come to serve (Matt. 10:24-25; 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-26; Phil. 2:7; Tit. 2:14) and even give his life for the church (John 15:13; Eph. 5:25-27). What applies to church leaders applies with similar force to lay members. Jesus told his disciples: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Love is, in fact, his operative instruction to the church (John 13:34-35; 15:12). Jesus summarized the law under two commandments in response to a Pharisee:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all they mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

The love that Jesus taught, however, is not the pleasant, indulgent sentiment that rewrites the rules to suit the occasion. Instead, it is firmly based upon obedience to God's law: it is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).<sup>35</sup> Jesus set a very high standard of obedience to the law in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and confirmed the continuity between the testaments:

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<sup>35</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, Vol. 1: *The Christian Doctrine of Life* (Macmillan, 1913; Chicago: Gateway, 1968), 79-83.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

Jesus here enunciated a principle for Christian living in the Sermon that was later taken up by James (Jas. 2:14-26) and Paul when they discussed the relationship of salvation and good works:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

The church is perhaps best regarded as a finishing school rather than a political institution. 'Now I say,' wrote the Apostle Paul, 'That the heir, as long as he is a child, differs in nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father'. (Gal. 4:1-2). Paul characterized the law as a schoolmaster or custodian who is entrusted with bringing his young charges to their teacher, Christ, so that they might be made righteous by faith (Gal. 3:24; II Tim. 3:16). Christ's lessons in faith, trust, humility, and obedience prepare the heirs for eternal life in the kingdom of God. Biblical history provides illustrations:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

The greatest model of godly faith and obedience is Jesus Christ, whose life exemplifies the recurrent biblical theme of dispossession as the condition for repossession.<sup>36</sup> Dependence on God precedes receipt of the promised reward. As Paul wrote to the church at Philippi:

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<sup>36</sup> Brueggemann, above n 7, 167-83.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil .. 2:5-8).

As the Lamb of God (John 1:29), Jesus was made to be sin in man's place (II Cor. 5:21). Thus he paid the price to redeem—to purchase—mankind out of bondage to sin by taking the punishment for sin upon himself and breaking the vicious cycle of sin through God's grace. Like Israel (Exod. 4:22-23; Deut. 5:15; Isa. 44:21) Jesus was empowered as God's son and his servant (Matt. 11:27; 12:18-21). He fulfilled the work God called Israel to perform so that all might be blessed (Rom. 11). He alone was accounted worthy to take the book of God's decrees and open it on behalf of the heirs who are to reign on earth with him as kings and priests (Rev. 5).

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

In the beginning, the church stood in the position of a stranger in a strange land, like Moses and Abraham: owning nothing but a promise, yet standing to inherit everything.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Old Testament Israel, the Christian Church has never enjoyed the protection of its own national state, although the Holy Roman Empire (962-1806) represented an unsuccessful attempt to weld Christendom into one civil body politic. Perhaps the transnational character of the church helps account for its considerable impact on domestic and international politics. The church must not speak on behalf of a particular national interest because its citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Even now, it expectantly awaits its promised land: the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem (Heb. 11:10-16; 12:22; Rev. 21). Its situation recalls an early period of history when no king reigned in Israel except God. In the New Testament, the vital centre of all relationships is still God: the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). All lesser authorities derive their just powers from God (Matt. 28:18; John 19:11; Rom. 13:1).

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<sup>37</sup> The Greek *paroikia*, from which the English "parochial" is derived, refers to a foreign residence. Its derivatives include words translated as "sojourn" and "stranger." See Acts 13:17; Heb. 11:9; I Pet. 2:11.

## XII. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the separation of civil and religious offices is held over from the old dispensation, even this arrangement is to be superseded when the heirs at last come into their own in the kingdom of God (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 5:10). The mission of the church meanwhile is not political but, rather, diplomatic and educational. It is called to teach all nations and baptize them: in effect, to read them the terms of surrender and bring them under the covenant.<sup>38</sup> When Jesus appeared to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and said, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18), he reaffirmed the dominion mandate (Gen. 1:28) that had been given to Adam and pointed to its fulfilment in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; Matt. 28:20; Rev. 21:1). Furthermore, he personally identified himself as the promised Messiah and king, of whom Isaiah wrote—"the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9:6)—and Daniel prophesied: "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14).

It is this Christian vision of a future Zion (Ps. 48:1; Isa. 28:16; Dan. 2:34-45; Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21-22)—a spiritual kingdom which is to overthrow the mighty and inherit the kingdoms of the earth (Exod. 15:17-18; Ps. 2; Matt. 5:3-5; Luke 1:52; Rev. 11:15)—that makes the church so potentially subversive to any political system built on a different moral and legal foundation.<sup>39</sup> Faithful members of the church, who are called to act upon their societies as salt and light<sup>40</sup> (Matt. 5:13-16), are encouraged to bear witness to their faith and lead fruitful lives on the promise they will overcome the world and receive a crown of victory (I Tim.

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<sup>38</sup> This metaphor is used in Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Geneva Press, 1981), 220.

<sup>39</sup> Compare Paul Tillich, *The World Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) p. 43: "Inevitably, the totalitarian attack on the system became an attack on the churches. Indeed, the totalitarian movements put themselves in the place of the church; they cannot be rightly understood apart from their semi-ecclesiastical pretensions. Since they offer an all-controlling idea, however demonic it may be, they are in fact serious competitors of the church. Their attacks on the Christian churches are thoroughly consistent. They can never tolerate a church with an absolute claim in competition with their own."

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of The Kingdom* (The Seabury Press, 1967), 9-10. Salt is a sign of the covenant (Lev. 2:13).

4:8; I John 5:4; Rev. 2:10). The assurance of victory, as Max Weber understood, can be a powerful motivator.<sup>41</sup>

Christianity is a faith for the moving of mountains and the pulling down of strongholds.<sup>42</sup> The devotion of the early saints was soon put to a test under the Roman system of religious law.

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<sup>41</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) 110-12. See: Gary North, 'The Long, Long Haul' (1981) 5 *Christian Reconstruction* 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> See: Rosenstock-Huessy, above n 29, 74-89, on progress as a Christian idea.