



Church and State: Ten For Life Reflections

by
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Church and State – Reflection One

Jesus is Lord. He rules everything. Government cannot serve as Savior. Church and state do not have separation but distinction. In a sense, only an illusion divides or dichotomizes sacred and secular (or religion and science). As only one King has ultimate and unified dominion, He has more a twofold kingship than two detached or isolated territories.

“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation” (Psalm 146:3).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6).

“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’” (Matthew 28:18).



Church and State – Reflection Two

Generally, the Lord God Almighty orders the civil realm according to His Law. This encompasses a morality that corresponds to the natural created order perceived by science and reason. He has made this knowledge available to all humankind as an appropriate and effective framework for public interest and the common good.



Church and State – Reflection Three

Government comes as God's gift and His agent. Whatever its structure, it exercises His authority for the good of all humankind. Whatever its corruption, it participates in His protecting and providing in order to impede evil and preserve existence. So it evidences His Gospel grace and goodness, as our sinful race does not deserve even this degree of protection and providence.

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed" (Romans 13:1-7).

"For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Church and State – Reflection Four

Thus, law and government in the divine economy subordinate to and serve Church. They secure a safe, fair, and free environment conducive to the propagation of the Gospel. God leads with His left-handed (alien) work so that He may land His right-handed (proper) work. He labors in the former but lives in the latter. In the first He governs bodies and deeds with commands and consequences, while in the final He serves hearts and lives with Scriptures, sacraments, forgiveness, and fellowship.

“Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15).

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’ Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice’” (John 18:36-37).



Church and State – Reflection Five

Both His spheres intersect and overlap in the Christian life.

Christians have activity and vocation and even citizenship in the one realm as well as the other. Christians enjoy privileges and responsibilities to God and neighbor in the Church and in the world. Civic action honors God and loves neighbors. As Adam's descendants and Eve's heirs we subdue, rule, and use the earth. As those who have seen God's will, received His Word, and know His heart, we have particular aptitude for managing nature and nations. Christians make the best citizens.

"When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the tax?' He said, 'Yes.' And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?' And when he said, 'From others,' Jesus said to him, 'Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself'" (Matthew 17:24-27).

"And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-7).

"You may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30).

"If we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).



“Educate yourself, your children, and the people you know ... Support leaders who embrace these words, ‘All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness’ ...



"We have the most hopeful message the world has ever heard. You know it. God does big things with small stuff. How can we be so sure? Shiphrah and Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and Moses ... and especially Jesus. Amen."

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Church and State – Reflection Six

The nature and degree of the individual Christian's engagement especially in state politics, especially representative government, will differ from that of the collective Church. Gospel freedom, Christian conscience, and Scriptural silence or latitude mean that Christians will often disagree about applications even when they concur about principles.



Church and State – Reflection Seven

Neither Christians nor Church may legislate faith. Even God Himself does not and cannot impose belief but invites it. Government has no right to require any religious disposition, and doing so will ruin both.

“‘Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, ‘Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.’ And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’” (Matthew 22:17-21).



Church and State – Reflection Eight

Similarly, government has no business infringing upon religious conviction. When the law of the land forbids or demands contrary to the express Word and will of God, Christian citizens may and must resist.

“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29).

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me’” (Matthew 4:8-9).



Church and State – Reflection Nine

Politics and ecclesiologies that entirely divide Christians from one of the realms (such as the Anabaptist tradition) or combine and confuse both in defining the Church (such as the Roman Catholic or Reformed Geneva traditions) obscure both the Law and the Gospel.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword’” (Matthew 26:52).

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19).

Church and State – Reflection Ten

This makes social and even political matters not only appropriate but obligatory for intraecclesial conversation. Homiletic exploration and catechetical education ought regularly to consider such situations and issues both illustrative and determinative arenas for experiencing God and encountering neighbors.



Church and State – Six Questions for Your Consideration and Discussion

1. May our sanctuaries display the American flag in their chancels?
2. What difficulties come with the concept of “Christendom” or a “Christian nation” or even “manifest destiny”?
3. Should Christian sermons or Bible classes address elections and legislation?
4. Why might a conscientious Christian support capital punishment? Why might another conscientious Christian oppose it?
5. How might the twofold kingdom framework assess the presence of a Ten Commandments monument on public property or crosses at federal cemeteries?
6. Can a Christian endorse abortion access without violating the faith?

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