

Toward a Theology of the State*

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There has been much discussion recently among evangelical Christians about the biblical view of civil government. Several events have encouraged us to pursue this topic: (1) the remarkable recent change in American fundamentalism from an apolitical stance to strong political involvement, (2) evidence from elections and polls that evangelicals do have the power to influence government policy, (3) the advancement and vigorous promulgation within evangelicalism of various incompatible views of the role of government: traditional Anabaptism,¹ traditional Lutheranism,² the "intrusion ethic" of Meredith G. Kline,³ "theonomy" or "Christian reconstruction,"⁴ and "principled pluralism."⁵ Clearly this is a time of political opportunity for Christians, but also a time of challenge. We need to determine from the word of God what we should seek to achieve in the political arena, and we need the grace of God to obtain the courage and the love to do what is right.

I will not be able in this paper to discuss all the pros and cons of the various views. I shall, rather, first tell you some of the conclusions I have reached from past studies, so that you will know "where I am coming from." To save time, I shall present these conclusions with little or no argument. Then I shall seek to build upon the conclusions in hope of making some progress toward a biblical view of the state.

I. Hermeneutical Prolegomena

First, then, my starting points: (1) God's word in Scripture is the supreme authority for all areas of human life, and therefore must be confessed as infallible and inerrant.

(2) Everything God says in Scripture applies to us today (Rom. 15:4, I Cor. 9:10, II Tim. 3:16f).

(3) Scripture is *sufficient* as a transcript of God's will for all areas of human life (II Tim. 3:16f, Isa. 29:13, Matt. 15:1-10).

(4) Old Testament law, specifically, continues to exercise authority over the New Testament believer (Matt. 5:17-20, Rom. 13:8-11, I Cor. 9:8ff, 21, James 4:11f).

¹ See, for instance, John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

² E. g. Albert G. Huegli, ed., *Church and State Under God* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 3 vols., esp. Vols. 1 and 2, ed. William H. Lazareth (Phila.: Fortress, 1966).

³ Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

⁴ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (n.p.: Craig Press, 1973), reviewed by me in *Westminster Theological Journal* 38:2 (Winter, 1976), 195-217, Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), many other titles.

⁵ E. g. Rockne McCarthy et al., *Society, State and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

(5) The New Testament does, however, indicate some discontinuities between the law and the believer in Christ. The law is not our ground of acceptance with God (Rom. 3:19ff Gal. 2:21, 3:1-25), and in Christ we are set free from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10-14). We are also freed from the burdensome legal tutelage, even bondage, imposed on the Old Covenant people of God because of their immaturity (Gal. 3:23-25, 4:1-7, 21-31). Therefore, many of the Old Testament ordinances are "shadows," no longer to be observed because fulfilled in Christ (Mark 7:19, Gal. 4:8-11, Col. 2:16-23, I Tim. 4:1-5, Heb. 8-10).

(6) In order to understand God's laws, it is necessary to know something about the situations to which those laws were addressed.

(7) In order to understand how God's laws apply to us today, it is necessary to compare our situation with the situations originally addressed. Only insofar as our situation is the same as the original will the law apply literally.

(8) Therefore a change in situation always leads to some change in the *application* of a law. This principle bears not only upon the application of Old Testament laws to New Testament believers. It is a general principle of language. For instance, in Matt. 21:2, Jesus tells two disciples to find him a donkey and colt to ride into Jerusalem. Imagine a Christian sect which took this "law" as a command for today: each year, perhaps, around Palm Sunday, every church member would buy, beg or steal a donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. Now Matt. 21:2 is not an Old Testament "law," but a New Testament one. But the same hermeneutical considerations apply to both Testaments. Our knowledge of the situation to which Jesus addressed the command shows us that this command was of local and temporary application and is not to be literally followed today. It does apply to us today by telling us of Jesus' determination to fulfill prophecy and to accomplish his redemption. It also motivates us to imitate our Lord's purposefulness and willingness to bear his cross. But it is not *literally* applicable. But if that is true even of New Testament texts, how much more likely it is to be true of legal material from the Mosaic Covenant which Heb. 8:13 represents as "obsolete" and "aging?"

(9) In determining the present-day applications of Old Testament law, we must always reckon with both continuity and discontinuity. That is to say, there is always a sameness and a difference between the way a law applied in its original setting and the way it applies today. That is true, for instance, in the trivial sense that today each law applies to a different group of hearers than those to whom it was originally addressed. Even the creation ordinances, whose applications are paradigms of constancy, show that level of discontinuity. The ordinance of labor, for instance, will require one person to be a carpenter, another a secretary, depending on his or her gifts and opportunities. Consider also the decalogue, another group of ordinances accepted by Christians as largely applicable today: Even here there is discontinuity as well. We no longer honor our parents that we may prosper in Palestine, as Ex. 20:12 commanded Israel under Moses (cf. Paul's re-application in Eph. 6:1ff). However much continuity there is, there is always some discontinuity. If this is true even of the creation ordinances and the decalogue, how much more likely is it to be true of case laws given to the Mosaic theocracy?

(10) God established Old Testament Israel as a holy nation, distinct from all the nations of the earth (Ex. 19:5f, Deut. 7:6). A holy nation is ruled differently from other nations. Most all of us recognize that the laws given to Israel concerning animal sacrifices, dietary laws, clothing and grooming were not literally applicable to nations outside Israel, nor do they literally bind nations today. The New Testament speaks to some of those issues directly (Heb. 10, Mark 7:19, I Tim. 4:3-5). We should not, however, require explicit statements from the New Testament in order to reach such judgments. Sometimes there are indications in the Old Testament itself as to the limited applicability of divine commands (see (11) below). And sometimes no explicit indication of limitation is really needed. Consider Matt. 21:2, our previous example of a command which is not literally applicable today. There is no explicit *statement* in Scripture that this "law" has lost its

literal applicability. God expects us to use our exegetical skill: in this case, just plain common sense.⁶

(11) It is likely that the special holiness of Israel influences to some extent the penalties required for transgressions under the Mosaic law. For instance, Deut. 14:21 bases a prohibition of eating creatures already dead upon the fact that "you are a people holy to the Lord your God." Indeed, Israel is permitted to give or sell such food to aliens and foreigners, an odd qualification if eating such things were *morally* wrong. Most likely, then, eating such food is not wrong for everybody, but only for God's holy people, for whom he has provided a great bounty of food in the land flowing with milk and honey. Another example: Vern Poythress has argued persuasively from the language of the passages that the penalties for false worship in Deut. 13 and 17 are also based on the special holiness of Israel.⁷ Note that the infractions take place "in the land" (17:2, 4) by covenant members (17:2), and these are executed by the people of God (17:7) by the *herem* destruction by which the wicked, pagan cities of Canaan were totally wiped out (13:16).

(12) It is unlikely, however, that the special holiness of Israel invalidates *all* literal application of Mosaic laws and penalties today. The penalty of double restitution for theft, for example (Exod. 22:4, 7) is a matter of simple justice: the thief restores what was taken, and as a penalty he loses an equivalent amount. He loses, then, what he had hoped to gain. There is no good reason to apply this penalty only to Israel as a holy nation. Indeed, there are many good arguments for adopting such penalties today in place of our failed prison system.⁸ Of course, all crime is related to the holiness of Israel. Bloodshed "pollutes the land," and that is forbidden, "for I, the Lord, dwell among the Israelites" (Num. 35:33f). But the death penalty for murder is not based upon the holiness of Israel. It was given to Noah many years before Israel became a nation (Gen. 9:6). The holiness of Israel merely adds an additional reason for the use of the death penalty, much as Deut. 5:15 adds to Exod. 20:8-11 an additional reason for Sabbath observance. That additional reason no longer applies literally to modern civil law, but the original reason does. Therefore, even when Israel's special holiness is mentioned in connection with a penalty of the law, that fact does not necessarily rule out the literal applicability of the penalty.

(13) We ought, therefore, in our efforts to apply biblical laws and penalties, to be open to various possibilities: (a) the law in question is based on the special holiness of Israel and is not literally applicable, though it will always teach us something important for our faith and life, (b) the law in question is literally applicable to us, (c) the law may be somewhere in between (a) and (b): more or less literally applicable, with some modifications or adjustments from changed circumstances. ("Literal" and "non-literal" are matters of degree, of course.) Poythress argues that the penalties for sexual sins are in category (c), for they are concerned with protecting inheritances, a matter which had a special importance under the Old Covenant, but which still concerns us in some measure.⁹

(14) The traditional distinction between moral, civil and ceremonial law is still useful as a catechetical device, but not helpful in resolving concrete problems of application. In asking how a particular law applies to us, we do not assign it first to one of those three categories and then deduce from that its applicability. Rather we ask first concerning its applicability, and on the basis of that conclusion we then assign it to one (or more) of the three categories. The law does not, of course, come to us with the labels "moral," "ceremonial" and "civil" attached to its provisions. What we call "moral" laws are mixed together in the texts (almost randomly, it seems) with "civil" and "ceremonial" laws, and we must sort them out by determining their meaning and current

⁶ Common sense is not the final rule of exegesis, and it is not infallible. But it would certainly be a shame if we dispensed with it altogether.

⁷ See his excellent book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

applicability. Those that apply most literally today we call "moral," those which apply least literally we call "ceremonial." "Civil" is a different kind of category, based not on applicability but upon function, and these would be divided between "ceremonial" and "moral" depending on their applicability. Remember too, that literal and non-literal applicability is a matter of degree, so we may expect some "gray areas," some laws that do not fit neatly into either "ceremonial" or "moral" categories.¹⁰

(15) It is therefore necessary for us to do careful exegetical study in the law itself in order to determine its applications, rather than simply trying to make deductions from broad theological principles (see (21) below).¹¹

The above convictions and other considerations have led me to some conclusions about the various schools of thought mentioned earlier:

(16) I have not been persuaded by the Anabaptists that the state is necessarily Satanic and that therefore Christians are faced with the choice either of meek submission or of peaceful opposition. Certainly there have been Satanic states, but I don't see the state as necessarily being under Satan's domain. However, the Anabaptist exegesis of Rom. 13, in which God "orders" the state without giving it any normative authority, is unpersuasive to me, and the Anabaptists do not, in my view, rightly assess the continuities between the Old and New Testaments.

(17) In my view, the Lutheran distinction between the kingdoms of God's right and left hands is insufficiently anchored in Scripture.

(18) Meredith Kline's "intrusion ethic," while containing much biblical insight, argues for a religiously neutral state based on inadequate biblical premises and a too sharp dichotomy between the Mosaic and the New Covenants.¹²

(19) Principled pluralism, while presenting eloquently the case against religious neutrality in politics and the importance of government's becoming sensitive to different religious communities within the nation, fails adequately to ground its pluralism itself in the biblical text. In fact I find a contradiction between the emphasis here on the unavoidability of religious commitment and the simultaneous insistence that the state should not be biased in favor of a particular religion.

¹⁰ It is misleading to define "ceremonial" etymologically as "laws pertaining to ceremonies." Many of the laws commonly grouped under the "ceremonial" category, such as dietary laws clothing laws, have nothing to do with "ceremonies." And some laws having to do with ceremonies, such as the "regulative principle" and other doctrines concerning public worship, are commonly described as moral rather than ceremonial laws.

¹¹ A number of writers have made good beginnings in this direction. See James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), Gary North, *Economic Commentary on the Bible*, so far in three volumes: *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis; Moses and Pharaoh*; and *The Sinai Strategy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982, 1985, 1986). Poythress, op. cit., Rousas J. Rushdoony, op. cit., Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). The conclusions of these books are not always consistent with one another, and the authors' exegesis is of uneven quality. But they are attempting to do what most needs to be done in this area.

¹² See Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1977), also published as a pamphlet. Here he advocates civil punishment for abortion based on his exegesis of Ex. 21:22-25.

(20) That leaves theonomy, to which I have a strong initial attraction, because of its earnest adherence to *sola Scriptura* and its willingness to wrestle seriously with the details of biblical law in formulating its positions. However, I believe that theonomists sometimes underestimate the complexity of the continuities and discontinuities between Old and New Testaments and thus often jump to wrong conclusions about the present-day applications of Old Testament laws. Also, I find their actual view of the state inadequate, for reasons I shall mention later.

(21) There is no broad theological scheme or principle which is capable of resolving all, or even a great number of, our specific application problems at the same time. This is the case, first, because exegesis of the actual laws reveals a wide diversity in the kinds of application and in the degrees of continuity and discontinuity between them and our present situation ((13), (15) above). Second, because of the inadequacies of the various available schemes, summarized above. Third, however, all the available schemes allow for both continuity and discontinuity. Let me refer in this connection to two of the proposed schemes which may be regarded as extreme on the sides of discontinuity and continuity respectively: the intrusionism of Meredith Kline and the theonomy of Greg Bahnsen. Meredith Kline, whose rhetoric sometimes suggests an almost total discontinuity, nevertheless finds within the Mosaic law elements carried over from earlier biblical covenants, together with "faith norms" and "individual life norms" which continue to be normative for us today. In trying to exempt "community life norms," including the state penalty structure, from this continuity, Kline is in my judgment utterly unpersuasive. But even here he seems willing to allow for continuities between the Mosaic penalties and our time, as long as those penalties are not derived exclusively or distinctively from the Mosaic covenant. On the other hand, theonomists, whose rhetoric sometimes suggests total continuity between the Mosaic law and our present situation, do recognize both redemptive-historical and cultural changes that prevent literal application of many such laws today.¹³ Therefore, whether we are Klineans or theonomists, whether we focus on discontinuity or continuity, we have not thereby settled *any* exegetical issue. Both continuity and discontinuity are allowed in either scheme, and therefore, in one sense, neither scheme settles anything.

II. The Nature of the State

So much for my "starting points." Now I would like to try to build upon these basic convictions in order to seek a better understanding of the biblical teaching concerning the state and the applications of that teaching to our present situations.

"State" is not a biblical category in the sense that "family," "people of God," "Israel," and "church," are biblical categories. God established the family at creation (Gen. 2:24). In Ex. 19ff, God established Israel as a nation, as the people of God. The church is, in one sense, the whole people of God from Adam to the present, in another sense a fresh historical expression of that community based specifically upon the apostolic confession of Christ (Matt. 16:18f). But in what passage did God establish the state?

Some have found divine warrant for the state in Gen. 9:6, where God commands Noah's family to return bloodshed for bloodshed. But this is a command given to a *family*. There is no indication here of any new institution being established. And in the law of Moses, the execution of murderers was carried out, not by the state as such, but by the "avenger of blood," kin of the murder victim, Num. 35:19, 21, Deut. 19:12. The *family*, here, is the instrument of justice. We have no reason to believe, therefore, that any special institution beyond the family for the establishment of justice was created in Gen. 9:6.

¹³ For my general comparison and assessment of Kline and Bahnsen, see my "The One, the Many, and Theonomy," forthcoming in a volume of essays on theonomy by Westminster Theological Seminary professors, edited by William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey.

What we see in Scripture, rather, is a kind of gradual development from family authority to something which we would tend to call a state. The borderline between family and state is not sharp or clear.

From the beginning there was authority within the family. Adam exercised authority over his wife by virtue of his "prior" ("pre-eminent"?) existence (I Tim. 2:13). We see that authority in his acts of giving common and proper names to her, Gen. 2:23, 3:20. Though Eve sinned before Adam, Romans 5:12-19 traces human sin back to Adam, giving to him the ultimate responsibility for the fall. Sarah called Abraham her "lord," Gen. 18:12, a respectful address urged by Peter (I Pet. 3:6) as a good example to godly women. The authority of parents over children is evident in the patriarchal narratives and enshrined in the fifth commandment of the decalogue (Ex. 20:12). That authority includes the use of physical punishment, as is indicated in the frequent references to the "rod" in Proverbs (13:24, 22:15, 23:13, 29:15).

Adam, Eve and their children formed what we would call today a "nuclear" family. But when Cain and Seth married and formed households, the human race became an "extended" family. God had mandated that when a man marries he shall "leave" his father and mother and begin a new household (Gen. 2:24), but this change did not relieve adult children of all relationships to, or responsibilities toward, their parents, or vice versa. The patriarchs evidently maintained close relationships with their grown sons and their families, even nephews, as witnessed by Abraham's concern for Lot (both military and priestly: Gen. 14:1-24, 18:16-33). Note especially the story of Jacob's family from Gen. 34 to 50. Jacob, in fact, was in a position to prevail upon his sons to go to Egypt for provisions (Gen. 42:1f). At the end of his life, like Noah and Isaac before him, he pronounced prophetic blessings on each of his sons (Gen. 48 and 49:1-28). Job, who many believe to have lived in the patriarchal period, also maintained close relationships with his grown children and carried on a priestly ministry on their behalf (1:1-5). Leviticus 19:32 urges respect for the aged. The responsibility of grown children to provide for their aged parents is presented in very strong terms in the New Testament (Matt. 15:3-9, I Tim. 5:8), as an implication of the fifth commandment of the decalogue. In Scripture, then, one is responsible, not only to himself, or to his "nuclear" family, but to his extended family as well. He owes respect and service to his parents and grandparents. He is not under their authority as when he was a child (cf. Gal. 4:1f), but he continues to honor them in various ways.¹⁴

Jacob's family multiplied and became a nation. From nuclear family, it became an extended family, and then a "clan," or indeed a group of clans. Exod. 6:14-25 lists the "heads" of various Israelite clans; cf. references to the "elders" of Israel in Exod. 3:16ff, 4:29, 12:21, 17:5f, 18:12. The descendants of Reuben formed four clans, each descended from one of Reuben's sons. Similarly, six clans of Simeon. Seven clans of Levi are mentioned, each related to one of Levi's grandsons.¹⁵ After Israel left Egypt, Moses evidently played a role in selecting "leaders" of the tribes, Exod. 18:21-26. 16. I am not clear on the relation between the "officers" of Exod. 18:21-26 and the "elders" mentioned earlier in Exodus. Was Moses merely creating a new judicial role for the already existing elders? Or was this a new level of government, corresponding to the first, perhaps, as the American judiciary corresponds to the executive? Or was Moses taking control of the traditional processes by which tribal elders were chosen? I am inclined to think both the first and the third suggestions were actually the case. Note that Num. 1 and 2 list names of leaders, appointed by God through Moses, of each of the twelve tribes. That these are called "leaders of their ancestral tribes" and "heads of the clans of Israel" (Num. 1:16) suggests that Moses' appointees were also the more-or-less hereditary elders

¹⁴ I realize this is a vague statement, but I don't think the following argument requires any additional precision.

¹⁵ The listing in Exod. 6 ends there, since its purpose is to give the genealogy of Moses; a more complete account is found in Num. 26.

of the tribes.¹⁶ The leaders of "tens" might be the heads of the nuclear families themselves, those of "hundreds" the heads of more extended families and so on up to the thousands. I would expect, however, that in making his choices Moses may have had the right on occasion to reject a hereditary leader in favor of someone more gifted or more faithful.

However one sorts out that data, it is clear that beyond the authority of the nuclear and extended families there was government associated with the tribes and with the clans of those tribes, at various levels. And, as a fourth type of government, we should notice Moses himself, chosen by God to lead the whole nation to the edge of the promised land. Moses' authority, of course, was unique. It came not by heredity, nor by the appointment of another man, but by God himself. Moses was, first of all, God's prophet. A prophet may be defined as one who has God's words in his mouth; and God gave his words to Moses (Ex. 4:10-17) through a relationship of unique intimacy (Ex. 33:7-34:35, Num. 12:1-15). Moses, then, became the chief of the prophets, the paradigm of the prophetic office (Deut. 18:14-22). But Moses was more than a prophet. Unlike later prophets such as Elijah and Isaiah, Moses was @UN(the) leader of Israel. He was commander-in-chief of the army (Ex. 17:8-16, Num. 21:32-35, 31:1-24). He was the final judicial recourse (Ex. 18:22, 26). He received from God the law and the divine direction of the wilderness journey. Much of his activity seems to us kingly rather than merely prophetic. Certainly no human king with the exception of Solomon ever had such complete control over the nation.

Moses was not high priest; his brother Aaron fulfilled that role. But Moses did come from the priestly tribe of Levi, and Exod. 4:14-17 suggests that Aaron's authority, originally at least, was derived from that of Moses. And Moses' intercessions for Israel (as Exod. 32:7-14) suggest a sense of priestly responsibility.

The picture to this point, then, is that as Israel developed from nuclear family to extended family to clan to nation, family authority became more elaborate and complicated. In time, God introduced new institutions. The heads of extended families were no longer exclusively responsible for prophetic and priestly ministries as were the patriarchs. Rather, God relieved them by assigning many religious duties exclusively to the priests, Levites, and prophets.

Was there, at this point in history, also a divinely appointed "state?" I would say no if, again, "state" refers to something above and beyond the natural authority of the family. As far back as Gen. 9, as we have seen, God called the family to execute vengeance for bloodshed, and so no new order was needed to administer capital punishment.¹⁷ There was, of course, in Moses' time, a national army to be commanded, but even that has its precedents in tradition (Gen. 14).¹⁸ New machinery, of course, was put in place (by some combination of tribal tradition and Mosaic appointment) to resolve disputes, but that too was essentially a family function.

¹⁶ I say "more or less," because sometimes an elder brother may have lost to a younger one his natural hereditary claim to family headship, as may have been the case with Ishmael and Esau.

¹⁷ In his *Institutes of Biblical Law* (n.p.: Craig Press, 1973), Rousas J. Rushdoony argues that God withholds the death penalty from the family and gives it exclusively to the state (pp. 358-362). He bases this argument on the mark of Cain, which he sees as a protection against vengeance from within the family, and upon Deut. 21:18-21, in which although the parents are required to bring complaints against incorrigible children, the "men of the city," not the parents, execute the death penalty, contrary to the usual order in which the accusers are the executioners. Rushdoony may be right about the *nuclear* family. Not only the natural ties of love, but the need to bring more objective witnesses into the process would militate against the use of the death penalty within the nuclear family. But in a broader sense, the "men of the city" were family too. And, again, there were no institutions other than the family when God prescribed the death penalty to Noah.

¹⁸ And note that even the nuclear family retains the use of force for self-defense, Exod. 22:2.

Moses himself should not be seen as the occupant of a new "perpetual office" in Israel. He was a "charismatic" official, one with a direct appointment from God. Joshua did succeed Moses and inherited Moses' powers; but Joshua, also, was directly appointed by God (Num. 27:18-23, Deut. 31:1-8, Josh. 1:1-9), and no one after him had such comprehensive authority over the nation. Apart from his prophetic and priestly functions, Moses was essentially the chief of the clan leaders, the head of the family of God. Had God not selected him directly, the people might well have selected him or someone else as a chief of chiefs, without violating the overall family structure. Such a choice would merely have been a natural continuation of the movement toward greater complexity as the nation increased in size. Indeed, there was popular ratification of Moses' rule. When Moses returned to Egypt from the desert, the elders "believed," indeed "bowed down and worshipped," Ex. 4:31. And after God, from Mount Sinai, appeared to the whole people, the people requested through their elders that God not again speak to them directly, but that Moses serve as mediator (Exod. 20:19, Deut. 5:5, 23-33, 18:16).

During the period of the judges, no new institutions were added. God raised up judges, new charismatic leaders, to deliver Israel from its enemies (Judges 2:16). These judges were not only military leaders, but they had broad authority to command obedience within Israel (Judges 2:17).¹⁹ One of them, Deborah, was also a prophet (Judges 4:4), as was, of course, Samuel (I Sam. 3:19-21). Samuel, though an Ephaimite rather than a Levite (at least on his father's side, I Sam. 1:1), exercised priestly functions (probably implied in I Sam. 2:35f; cf. 3:1, 7:9, 17, 10:8), recalling the unity of prophet, priest and king in the patriarchs and Moses, and foreshadowing Christ. Again, however, this charismatic leadership did not produce any new, continuing institution in Israel. Government by tribal elders continued as during the time of Moses. Indeed, in the case of Jephthah, the judge receives his authority, humanly speaking, by the appointment of the elders (Judges 11:1-11). Under Samuel, the elders continued to command armies (I Sam. 4:3) and to determine such courses of action as the recovery of the sacred ark (4:3).

The anointing of Saul as the first king of Israel (I Sam. 9:16-10:1) does mark the beginning of something new. For the first time, there is to be in Israel a continuing line of monarchs, normally linked by heredity (though of course God often disrupted that hereditary pattern for his own purposes). The institutional change, however, is not a radical one.

The kingship comes as God's response to a demand from the people. The people's motives in making their request were largely sinful (I Sam. 8; cf. Deut. 17:14, Judges 9), but God had planned to raise up kings for his people (Deut. 17:14-20) and had given them in the law a proper method of choosing one. It is important to note that in Deut. 17, the king is to be chosen by the people (verse 15). As with the appointment of Moses and that of at least some of the judges, there is a human choice to be made. This choice certainly does not prevent God from playing a direct role in the selection process, but it does necessitate a human choice in addition to whatever role God may himself choose to play.

Saul was chosen both by God and by the people. God revealed to Samuel that Saul was to be anointed (I Sam. 9:16ff), and only after the anointing did Israel recognize Saul as king. Samuel presented Israel to the Lord by all its tribes and clans (I Sam. 10:19), and they drew lots to determine the king. By God's appointment, the lot fell upon Saul, whereupon the people rejoiced (10:24). Later, they are said to have "confirmed Saul as king in the presence of

¹⁹ Again, I am being purposefully vague. I don't know precisely the scope of their jurisdiction, though certainly it included the military. In the case of Samuel it seems to have included a regular ministry of resolving disputes (I Sam. 7:15-17). Nor do I know the geographical or tribal extent of their authority; some judges may have had only local significance and/or may have ruled only certain tribes or clans. Samuel, last and greatest of the judges, ruled "from Dan to Beersheba," i.e. the full extent of the land (I Sam. 3:20).

the Lord" (11:15). Similarly, when Saul later proves unfaithful, Samuel is called to anoint a new king, David (I Sam. 16:1-13). Long afterward, however, after the death of Saul, David is anointed a second time (II Sam. 2:4), this time by the people as king of Judah. Still later, he was anointed a third time by the "elders of Israel" to be king over the entire nation (5:1-5). Involved in this appointment was a "compact" between David and the elders (5:3).

Solomon, the next king, was in effect appointed by his father David and anointed at David's behest (I Kings 1:28-48). There is no indication of a popular ratification of Solomon's rule, but the new king did have to deal with some initial opposition to his reign before the kingdom was "firmly established in Solomon's hands" (2:46). From that point, we gather, there was a general consensus in favor of Solomon (3:28, 4:29-34), though see 11:14-40. Very different was the situation with Rehoboam, Solomon's son, who, having failed to satisfy the demands of "the whole assembly of Israel" (12:3), and having rejected the advice of "the elders" (12:6, 8),²⁰ lost the allegiance of ten tribes. God had promised to make Jeroboam a king (11:29-39), and the ten tribes "made him king over Israel" (12:20).

I will not seek to trace the kingship through its long history. The pattern ought to be clear at this point, and I don't believe it is contradicted in later texts, though the later texts tend to be less explicit about the details of the process by which a person became king.²¹ The kingship is both a charismatic office and a popular one: that is, both God and the people play roles in its establishment and continuance. It is God who sets the standards for the kingship (Deut. 17:14-20) and who frequently raises up men of his choice for the work, removing others for their unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, by divine warrant, the people of Israel also make a choice. From the viewpoint of the people, they are selecting another tribal ruler, a "chief of chiefs," who bears the same sort of authority held by the other chiefs or elders, but over a broader territory. They have the right-- at least God does not contest it-- to reject a ruler such as Rehoboam who will not rule according to their desires.²²

A similar development, evidently, takes place in the nations outside the people of God. Lamech the descendent of Cain sings a song of vengeance in Gen. 4:23f. As family head, he sings to his two wives about how he will execute vengeance for bloodshed. Unlike the simple reciprocity implied in Gen. 9:6 and in the Mosaic law of talion (Ex. 21:23-25), Lamech boasts that he will avenge seventy-seven times! "Family justice" indeed, but exaggerated far beyond anything our God would recognize as just. Still, we can see that, as in the believing line, the mentality of kingship springs up in the context of the nuclear and extended families.

Meredith Kline argues that this theme is resumed in Gen. 6:1-4. He believes that the offense which draws forth God's condemnation is the exercise of royal polygamy: earthly kings ("sons of God") accumulating harems ("daughters of men").²³ Whatever we may say about that exegesis, it is likely that the table of nations in Gen. 10, like the genealogy of the believing line in Gen. 5, is not a complete record of all who lived on the earth, but rather a record of notable leaders, perhaps kings. At any rate, it is clear that the development of kingship was

²⁰ Are these "elders" simply older men who advised Solomon, or are they also tribal rulers? I am not sure. 4:1-19 may list some or all of them.

²¹ It is also evident in the case of the abortive kingship of Abimelech in Judges 9:1-57.

²² Samuel Rutherford, in his influential *Lex, Rex*, (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1982; originally published 1644) offers a much more detailed defense of the popular basis of kingship, in the interest of defending "defensive war" by the people (under "lesser magistrates") against a king.

²³ Kline, "Divine Kingship and Gen. 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1962), 187-204. In Kline's view, indeed, "kingship" is one of the major unifying themes of the early chapters of Genesis: God himself as royal creator, the sun and moon "ruling" day and night (1:16), etc., man to have dominion over the earth (1:28, 9:1-3), man's failure to exercise godly rule (chapter 3), the genealogies (see text).

rapid in the world in general compared to its development in Israel. When Israel first asked for a king, it seemed to them, at least, that "all the other nations" already had them (I Sam. 8:5).

Kings in the "other nations" were known for conscripting laborers, soldiers, and wives, and for collecting extortionate taxes for private gain (Deut. 17:16f, I Sam. 8:11-18). History reminds us of the terrible, Lamech-like cruelties imposed by pagan kings in the name of royal vengeance. Still, the formal institutional picture is not different from what we have seen in Israel. The pagan kings abused their powers, but so, certainly, did the Israeli kings. The pagans did not have greater powers than did the kings of Israel. Even outside the covenant, the powers of the king come from God (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). And the pagan kings, like the Israeli kings, had essentially the power of tribal elders, however widespread their territory might be.

Once kingship appears in history, are we then able to speak of an "institution of the state?" Well, it isn't too important what you call it, as long as you understand what is going on. Yes, God has ordained authority within the family. Yes, he warrants the extension of that authority to extended families, tribes, nations. Yes, he warrants the popular selection of leaders to implement that authority (a selection into which, of course, he is always free to intervene, and over which he always exercises providential superintendence).²⁴ Yes, that authority includes the power to use deadly force and to resolve disputes which cannot otherwise be resolved. In that sense, we may say with Paul in Rom. 13:1 that "the authorities that exist have been established by God." But it is important to remember that the authority of the state is essentially a family authority, not something different. For that reason, I consider it somewhat misleading to talk about a "divine institution of the state," or to speak of "family, church and state" as "God's institutions," on a level with one another. I shall, however, use "state" to refer to the family elder-structures beyond the nuclear and extended families.²⁵

Let me now address some potential problems in this analysis:

1. Diversity in Modern States

Is it legitimate to think of political authority as tribal eldership, even in modern nations within which there is no discernible tribal unity? What of the U. S. or U. S. S. R., with people of many diverse backgrounds, or South Africa in which various racial groups are sharply estranged from one another? Well, God has never decreed that "tribes" should forever maintain uniform, and to say that he has is to adopt the heresy of racism. Israel itself was joined by a "mixed

²⁴ There is, I would think, some presumption that headship of an extended family would be vested in the oldest male member of the family. The oldest son normally received a double inheritance (Deut. 21:17), and therefore a kind of natural primacy over the other siblings (and doubtless additional responsibility as well; see Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 174-182) which may have made him the natural choice as the tribal leader. But of course primogeniture was often overridden. God chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau to head the covenant family. And indeed God's choice of Jacob was ratified by Esau himself, who sold his birthright, and by Jacob, who (by deception, to be sure) blessed Jacob. The law forbids a father to disinherit his first-born out of preference for a wife other than the first-born's mother (Deut. 21:15-17), but doubtless such disinheriting did take place for other reasons. Granted, then, some flexibility in the law of inheritances, it is likely that tribal leadership, similarly, was not based exclusively on seniority. We do have, again, the example of Jephthah in Judges 11, asked by the "elders of Gilead" (verse 5) to "be our head" (verse 8, re-emphasized in verses 9-11). Far from being a first-born, Jephthah was born of a prostitute and expelled by his brothers (verse 2). He was, they said, "not going to get any inheritance in our family." He was chosen, not because of primogeniture, but because of military competence (verse 1).

²⁵ We can, for convenience, think of the "extended family" as including one's direct ancestors two or three generations back, plus all the living descendants of those ancestors. But the definition isn't very important for the remaining argument.

multitude" when it left Egypt (Ex. 12:38). The line of the Messiah included the Canaanite Rahab and the Moabitess Ruth. Membership in Israel (even physical Israel, to say nothing of spiritual Israel) is not limited to physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The founders of the U. S. opened its borders to people of many nations, inviting them to join the tribe. Whatever practical problems this diversity produces, it does not change the essential nature of civil government. Certainly God has not given us additional revelation authorizing us to change the nature of government in response to these cultural trends.²⁶

2. State Interference in the Family

Some may find my view of the state rather ominous because it might be used to compromise the common Christian insistence on the protection of the family from state interference. If, as I am saying, the state is simply the government of the mega-family, then how could the nuclear family be protected from its often unwanted and unhelpful intrusion? How can family be protected from family?

I would answer simply by stressing the distinction between nuclear family and mega-family or tribe. As I mentioned earlier, Scripture probably forbids the nuclear family to exercise capital punishment among its members, so as not to compromise the ties of affection which bind that unit and so as to require involvement of the wider community in such a weighty decision. There are powers given to the mega-family which are not given to the nuclear family, and vice-versa. It is helpful to remember here that the state, as a tool for resolving disputes, is essentially a system of appeals courts. The rationale of the Moses-Jethro organization of Israel in Exod. 18:17-27 is not to center authority in one man who would then make all the decisions, but rather the reverse: to free up Moses so that he would not have to consider every little problem. By analogy, I would think that the "officials over thousands" would not seek to solve all the problems among their people, but would hear cases "too hard" for the officials over hundreds, and so on down the line. Thus the chief decision-making unit is on the "tens" level-- possibly the nuclear family itself. The higher levels of state power only handle cases too small to be decided locally. The essential localism, the from-the-bottom-up nature of this organization protects the nuclear family against intrusive assaults from broader courts, but also allows the wisdom of the wider community to be brought in cases where the nuclear family admits its inability to handle a problem. This is essentially the same model presupposed in Presbyterian church courts.

3. Education

Related to the above is the contemporary Christian concern about education. State schools in the U. S. have proven to be inadequate academically and especially religiously, as they have sought to impose a secular humanist ideology upon their students. Yet the state seems determined to maintain a virtual monopoly on general education by denying tax resources to schools which are not state controlled. Responding to this situation, Christians have argued that this is an unjust state intrusion into the proper prerogatives of the family. But can we maintain this critique if we regard the state as also, in one sense, "family?"

²⁶ We can see, however, that in nations like Japan or Sweden, which have a relative uniformity of ancestry, government is in some respects easier. In such countries, there is less suspicion of one another, more readiness to defer to one another, to trust one another as "family." Socialism is somewhat less burdensome, for example, when to some extent the taxpayer knows, understands, and trusts the people who are receiving the benefits of the welfare state. I don't think that socialism, ultimately, is workable anywhere; but democratic socialism does seem to be most stable in those sorts of societies. (Of course, nondemocratic socialism achieves stability in proportion to the power and the ruthless dedication of government to destroy all opposition.)

I think we can. I agree with the contemporary Christian argument that God commits the overall education of children to the parents (e.g. Deut. 6:4ff, Proverbs). And let us now note that he commits it to parents, not grandparents or uncles or aunts. The education of young children is the task of the nuclear family, and it is, of course, to be carried out in an atmosphere saturated in God's word (Deut. 6:6ff). Again, the distinction between nuclear family and tribe is an important one. The extended family would enter the picture only if and when the nuclear family is unable or unwilling to carry out its responsibility.

I conclude, therefore, that state authority is essentially family authority, developed and extended somewhat by the demands of number and geography. Thus I believe we may eliminate from our consideration the views of the Lutherans and Meredith Kline, as well as others, who see the state as a distinct institution ordained by God, with powers and responsibilities different from those of the family. We may also set aside the Anabaptist view that the state is essentially allied with Satan, without denying, of course, the possibility of Satanic states, or at least of Satanic rulers of states.²⁷

III. The State and Religion

We must now ask concerning the religious character of the state, so conceived. Does God permit the state to make a religious commitment? Does he command it to? In a word, yes to both questions.

In the first place, God calls all human beings to repent of sin and to put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those who have believed in Jesus are to do all things to his glory (I Cor. 10:31; cf. Rom. 14:23, II Cor. 10:5, Col. 3:17, 24). Anything the believer does, therefore, must be done according to God's standards and out of a motive of love for him. This principle certainly bears on any human associations, whether for business, education, charity, worship, art, recreation, study, government or whatever. The believer must press the royal claims of Christ in all areas of life. And to do that is, of course, to work toward Christian standards and practices in all those associations, so that there will be Christian businesses, Christian schools, Christian media, Christian charities, Christian churches, Christian art, Christian recreations, Christian scholarship, and, of course, Christian government. Why should government be any different from any other project in which the believer is involved? If we promote Christian schools because Christ is to be Lord of all of life, doesn't the same argument apply to government? And once Christian standards become the norm in such institutions, why should that institution not formally recognize that commitment by confessing Christ?

In the second place, God claims families with a special zeal. He chose the process of childbearing as the means by which his son would enter the world and announced that fact at the beginning of redemption (Gen. 3:15). He saved the *family* of Noah from the flood (6:18, 7:1, 13, 8:16ff), and he gave to that family dominion over the earth and the right to avenge bloodshed (Gen. 8:20-9:17). He called Abram, promising to bless his offspring, and to bless all nations through that offspring (Gen. 12:7, 15:4f). God commanded as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant an injury to the male organ of generation, and he commanded that that sign be applied to all of Abraham's family including the young children (17:9-27). Similarly, Israel, the family of Jacob, was to circumcise its males on the eighth day of their lives (Lev. 12:3) to acknowledge God's claim upon all their seed. (Cf. also the consecration of the firstborn by ransom of his life, Ex. 13:12.) Certainly, then, there is nothing strange about a family head professing faith in God on behalf of his household. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," said Joshua, "but as for me and my *household*, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

²⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 50.

Household commitments, indeed household baptisms, are also found in the New Testament (Acts 2:39, 11:14, 16:15, 16:31, 18:8, I Cor. 1:16). To me and others, these references are a strong argument in favor of infant baptism: surely first century Jews would have understood these events as a continuation of the Old Testament practice of claiming households for God and of administering the sign of the covenant to all those in the household. At any rate, God continues to call families. The importance of the family to God is not exhausted when the "seed" of Gen. 3:15 comes in Christ. Rather, Christ himself, now at the right hand of God the Father, continues to work through families to extend his kingdom throughout the earth (Matt. 28:19ff). And indeed, his goal is not only to rule families, but extended families, tribes, nations (Psm. 2, 72, 110, Matt. 25:32, 28:19, Rom. 4:17f, Gal. 3:8, Rev. 2:26, 12:5, 15:4, 20:3, 21:24ff, 22:2).

On my earlier account, states are family governments. If a family is to profess Christ as Lord, its government must do the same. If a tribe or nation is to profess Christ as Lord, its government, the state, must do the same.

A non-Christian family-state should also profess its religious commitment. For there is no neutrality, for states any more than for individuals. Those who are not for Christ are against him. A non-Christian state is, of necessity, committed to something other than the God of Scripture, and in honesty it ought to confess that fact. In practice, it may be difficult for some states to formulate their religious commitments, because of multiple religions among the citizens and rulers. But even a state in such a situation can tell us what it is *not* committed to. If it wishes to profess Christ despite the diversity of individual commitments, it should do so; if it wishes to deny the authority of Christ over it, it should indicate that as well.

IV. The State, the Church, and the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is that sovereign exercise of God's rule "where not merely God is supreme, for that is true at all times and under all circumstances, but where God supernaturally carries through his supremacy against all opposing powers and brings man to the willing recognition of the same." (27) What is the relation of the state to that kingdom?

As I mentioned earlier, God uses the family as a means to bring his salvation into the world. The family was the vehicle for the incarnation. After Jesus' resurrection, the kingdom grows as God claims families for himself and, in time, nations.

The state also serves the kingdom by extending the righteousness of God in the earth (Matt. 6:10). When the state acquits the innocent and punishes the guilty, it is a ministry of God (Rom. 13:1-7). As states come more and more under the influence of God's word, their judgments will become more and more righteous.

The family, therefore, and the state as the government of the tribe, do play roles in God's redemptive kingdom. Family and state are not our saviors from sin, but they are tools, as well as objects, of God's saving rule.

Beyond this general role, we find in the Old Testament that God made special use of one particular family, the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He chose them from among all the other nations to be his uniquely holy people (Deut. 7:6). In the tabernacle and temple, God dwelled in the midst of Israel as in he dwelled in no other nation. He gave them special blessings of protection and provision. He gave them human gifts: prophets, priests and kings. He gave to them the unique blessing of written "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1ff). And indeed, because of their special holiness he also punished them for their sins with swiftness and severity (Amos 3:2, see our earlier discussion).

The "special holiness" of Israel reflected in the law is, I think, essentially the special presence of God in the tabernacle and the temple, a presence which created a "zone" of holiness within which persons, animals, houses and the like had to be ceremonially pure. Israel's laws had to account for that reality, just as the laws of all nations must account for the real situations of those nations. (Not to be irreverent, but if Beaver County had a population of 100,000 elephants, there would have to be numerous laws regulating the comings, goings, diets, training, disciplining, etc., of elephants. Israel's problem was similar, but much more awesome in its implications.)

God blessed Israel by his special presence so that Israel could fulfill the promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations would be blessed. Israel enjoyed God's special friendship, not for its own sake, but so that it might be a witness to the nations of God's grace and judgment (Isa. 43:10ff, 44:8f) and, eventually, so that they might present to the nations their Messiah as King of kings and Lord of lords. Ultimately, Israel bore false witness, and they lost their special standing with God. Though many Jews believed in Jesus, the nation's rulers rejected him; and thus God rejected them.

But the people of God continued in a new form. The church, composed of Jews and Gentiles (with, of course, their families) as equal members of one body, was the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). The olive tree of Abraham continued, but with some old (Jewish) branches broken off and some new (Gentile) branches grafted in (Rom. 11:11-24). The church received the titles of Israel: "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (I Pet. 2:9f, cf. Ex. 19:6, Tit. 2:14).

The new form of the people of God involved many new things. No longer was there a literal tabernacle or temple; Jesus himself was the temple, and he dwelt, by his spirit, within his people, so that in a sense *they* became the temple (John 2:19ff, I Cor. 3:16f, 6:19, II Cor. 6:16). Nor was the new people of God identified, even roughly, with a particular group of clans or tribes; it became an international body destined to cover the globe (Matt. 28:19f). It had a government, as did Israel, but that government did not possess the power of the sword (Matt. 26:51), but "only" the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). It conquers through love, rather than by violence (Matt. 5:38-48, Rom. 12:9-21).

No modern nation, or its government (state), then, will ever play the distinctive role filled by Old Testament Israel. God's purposes now are wider and broader; the whole world is the promised land (Matt. 28:19ff, I Cor. 3:21ff, Eph. 6:3 (cf. Ex. 20:12)). We need no longer the types and shadows of the tabernacle and temple, for we have the reality in Christ (Heb. 8-10). Modern nations still play the very general kingdom role noted earlier, as objects and tools. But even believing nations, if such there be, will not play the distinctive role of Israel, and therefore their governments, the "states" will not need to take those purposes into account as they rule.

In the modern world, then, each Christian is a citizen of two nations: An earthly nation like France, England, or the U. S. A., and the heavenly nation (Eph. 2:6) (not of this world, John 18:36), the church. Though we belong entirely to Christ, we do not on that account renounce our citizenship in the earthly nations, any more than we leave our earthly families. Indeed, we seek to be good citizens, for those earthly nations themselves, and their rulers, received their authority from God (Rom. 13:1-7). The church has its national and tribal leaders, its elders and deacons (I Tim. 3), who not only preach and teach, administer sacraments, etc., but also provide services that the elders and kings provided in Israel. They resolve disputes (I Cor. 5:1-6:8) and lead in battle (Rom. 13:12, Eph. 6:10-18, I Thess. 5:8).

The state also continues to have its leaders, who perform the corresponding services for their clans. We seek as much as possible to be obedient to both, though we are first of all citizens of heaven. When we have disputes we can't settle with other believers, we take them to the church elders; when we have similar disputes with unbelievers, we take them to the state. When we seek leadership in the battle against Satan, we turn to the rulers of the church, for the state

can't help us there; when we seek defense against physical attacks, we turn to the state, for the church has no swords, and we, being also citizens in good standing of the earthly nations, have as much right to their protection as anyone (Acts 25:11). We know, however, that when the church wins *its* battle, no more swords will be needed; so the spiritual battle is still the ultimate one.

Church and earthly nation are related, then, as two different families with overlapping members, occupying the same territory. They both serve the kingdom of God, but it is misleading, in my view, to describe them as two institutional forms of the kingdom coordinate with one another, as is often done in Reformed literature.²⁸ The church is the organization which has as its goal the spreading of God's kingdom through the earth. The state, if it is not a Christian state, does not share that goal at all, but may in spite of itself perform some services to the kingdom of God. If the state *is* Christian, it will represent the church in its earthly concerns, using earthly tools denied to the church as such, defending it from physical attack and so forth. It will be a kind of adjunct tool for the church, not an institution coordinate with it.

I should say more about what a Christian nation and its state, as government of a Christian nation, might be like.

(1) Then the nation and church will have approximately the same membership.²⁹

(2) Would such a nation be a "holy" nation? Not in the sense that Old Testament Israel was, for there will be no tabernacle or temple. But since the church is a holy nation, and the membership of nation and church are virtually the same, we can speak of the nation being "holy" because of the presence of Christ in his people in that place through the Spirit.

(3) The church elders would come to overshadow the state courts, pretty much the reverse of the situation today. Most disputes within the society would be settled by the church elders. But some state courts would remain (staffed by Christian elders probably, for who else would be wise enough to solve disputes in a godly way?) to serve the small unbelieving remnant of the population.

(4) The legislative and executive branches of the state would seek to bring the laws of the land (and their implementation) into accord with biblical standards. They would still not put all of Old Testament law literally into practice. They would have to re-apply those laws, making allowance for the lack of a tabernacle or temple (see above), and taking account of other situational changes.³⁰

(5) How should such a Christian government treat the non-Christian religious minorities? Many today reject the very idea of Christian government out of fear that such will lead to a renewal of the religious wars of long ago, or to Christian Ayatollahs. They fear the sort of religious persecutions many came to America's shores to escape. That fear seems even more legitimate when we consider that in the Mosaic law there were death penalties both for false worship and for seducing others into the worship of false gods (Deut. 13:1-18, 17:1-7).

I agree with Vern Poythress that these death penalties are based upon the special holiness of Israel. When God condescends to live in the midst of a nation as did God in Israel, it is particularly insulting to permit people to commit idolatry. It pollutes the holy land where he

²⁸ This sort of representation is common in both the Kuyperian-Dooyeweerdian and the Christian Reconstruction traditions.

²⁹ As in Old Testament Israel, not everyone in the nation would profess faith.

³⁰ E.g., relevant cultural changes. Since most people today do not entertain guests upon their roofs, we would not want a law which literally said the equivalent of Deut. 22:8; but we would want to incorporate the principle behind that law, namely that of maintaining safe facilities.

dwells. That rationale for the punishments of Deut. 13 and 17 does not apply to modern states. I agree with Poythress, therefore, that the simple acts of publicly worshipping false gods and of inciting others to do so should not be punished by the state.

However, to say this might lead some to believe that in such a Christian state all religions should be treated on a precisely equal basis, with no favoritism shown to any of them, any such penalty being, in effect, a "penalty for false worship." That would please the "principled pluralists," and it would bring some satisfaction to those who hold Kline's position. But I cannot accept it, for it would in effect make a truly Christian state impossible. A Christian state, if that name means anything at all, is a state which observes Christian standards in formulating and implementing the law. To do this is already to "discriminate," to give a privileged position to one religion over another.

To make the same point from another perspective: all sin, and therefore all crime (crime on God's standards being a subset of sin) is religious. The murderer is a rebel against the true God, who says "You shall not kill." Similarly the thief, the false witness, the rapist. People who do such things are saying in their heart "there is no God" (Psm. 14:1), though they know in their hearts that God is real (Rom. 1:18-21). Wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, all sins, come from the fact that people "did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God" (Rom. 1:28-32). Therefore, to punish murder is at the same time to punish the murderer's religious decision to ignore God; it is to punish the religious statement the murderer makes through his crime. In *his* religion, murder is not wrong, at least for him. In punishing him, the state is telling him that at *this* point, at least, he may not put his religion into practice.

This sort of issue, of course, comes up very explicitly in the news from time to time. A Jehovah's Witness refuses a blood transfusion to his dying child, parents in a healing cult refuse medical treatment to their children, fanatical polygamists in Utah kill off disloyal former followers. Even now, though American law lacks a full Christian commitment, it discriminates against religiously motivated actions of that sort. Defenses of such behavior based on religious liberty are unacceptable. But the same thing happens, essentially, in all criminal cases: the state is pitting its religious commitment, such as it is, against that of the accused.

A godly state, therefore, would be discriminating all the time against false religion. If such discrimination is unavoidable even for non-Christian states, surely it is impossible for a Christian state. The only question, then, is how far may such discrimination go?

It by no means follows from these remarks that no toleration of false religion is possible within a Christian nation. I have said already that the mere acts of false worship and of seduction to false worship ought to be legally tolerated by a Christian state. Indeed, even Old Testament Israel, which executed those who worshiped falsely in public, tolerated the presence of "aliens" and "sojourners," even those aliens who had not professed faith in the true God by circumcising the males of their households. These were given explicit protections in the law (Lev. 19:33, 25:6, Num. 15:16, 35:15).

This toleration in Israel depends logically upon the important distinction between sin and crime. Many human actions are sins against God which are not crimes punishable by the state. The law of Moses lists many sins to which no penalty is attached. The same distinction must be made by any modern nation which would strive to emulate the "general equity" of the Mosaic law.

Keeping that distinction in mind, I would think that a modern Christian state ought not to try to punish unbelief as such or even the expression of that unbelief in false worship or religious propaganda. It ought, however, to punish the expressions of false religion in such crimes as murder and theft.

I think too that it would be legitimate to limit the influence of false religion in society through other means. A "Christian state" is, at minimum, a state committed to follow the Word of

God as its chief authority in all governmental decisions. Such a commitment would doubtless be articulated in a written constitution, to which public officials would be expected to subscribe. As the rulers of Israel were required under God's covenant to obey his law, and as modern American officials are required to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, so, it seems to me, public officials in a Christian state ought to be expected also to subscribe to the constitution of that state which would, of course, entail a Christian profession of faith.

How theologically detailed ought that profession to be? It depends on how broad the Christian consensus is at the time. The denominationalism of the present-day church is, in my estimation, a terrible scandal for many reasons, and one which makes it difficult, to be sure, to conceive of such a thing as a Christian state. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a Christian state existing until God removes from us in large measure the curse of denominationalism. But should my imagination be too pessimistic in this matter, and should we have the opportunity to lead the nation to a Christian commitment in our present divided state, I would say that the various Christian groups will simply have to see what they can agree upon and hope that over time that agreed content will expand.

At any rate, I would see nothing biblically objectionable, and much positive value in, requiring of public officials a profession of faith in Christ and a commitment to follow biblical standards in their public decisions.

Take the argument one step further: why not also require a public profession as a qualification for the privilege of voting? That idea may horrify some, but it should be considered seriously. The idea of "one man, one vote" democracy is not required by Scripture. Scripture allows, I think, many specific forms of government (monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, etc.). Reasonable people, I think, will agree that democracy often fails in certain kinds of cultural settings (e.g. Haiti, Latin America, Africa, prewar Germany), that sometimes nations require more powerful leadership than democracy allows, simply to avoid chaos. Successful democracy requires a literate and knowledgeable electorate, relatively immune from temptations to pursue private interests by political means and relatively willing to accept defeat in the interest of maintaining public order. Many traditionally democratic nations such as Britain and the U. S. compromised their democratic traditions during war (remember, e.g., the internment of Japanese-Americans, the recent "states of emergency" in Northern Ireland). Democracy has much to be said for it in many contexts, and I certainly defend its continuation in the present-day United States; but it is not an eternal absolute. The scriptural requirement is not that government be democratic,³¹ but that government be just, according to God's standards. With that in mind, we might ask if the right to participate in government should be limited to those willing to support and defend a Christian constitution. Scripture leaves us free to qualify democracy in this way, and I think such a qualification would do much to prevent the erosion of Christian values within the political process.

Doubtless more could be said as to how much tolerance/intolerance ought to be permitted in a Christian state. I won't try to give a complete account here. It should be evident, however, that the question is not a simple one of "shall we tolerate or not?" Rather, there are many degrees and kinds of toleration in many different situations, as is recognized by the law of Moses. All of that would have to be worked out carefully by the founding fathers of a Christian commonwealth.

³¹ Although as I mentioned earlier, the people ought to have some say in the establishment of a particular political order, as in Israel's ratification of the kingship. Thus I insist (with the theonomist tradition) that there ought to be a popular consensus in favor of Christianity before a Christian constitution is actually adopted by a nation.

Summary and Conclusion

I have suggested that the state is essentially the government of a tribe or clan with, to be sure, some difference from the nuclear family in its rights and powers. Theologically, states are the government of the earthly tribes, which will in time be superseded by the government of the heavenly tribe, the church. Until that time, however, a Christian state may serve the church by resolving its temporal disputes with worldly powers. To carry out this task faithfully, it must be obedient to the law of God in Scripture, carefully applying that law to the present situation, taking account of changes both in redemptive history and in human culture.