

# Church and State

“The origin, nature, and necessity of government have a bearing on its ends and limits.”

- Mortimer Adler

- I. Origin - trace the development in understanding the idea of government, state, and politics (genealogy) from Plato through the modern period, with a particular eye towards American government. Of course we can go all the way back to Genesis, and the biblical model of government (covenant).
  - A. Define our terms - what do we mean when we talk about government, politics, and state, etc?
  - B. Government, law, and politics are not bad things. With the exception of Marx and Engels, government is a good thing. What's the biblical precedent for this? Does Scripture give us any clue as to what government might look like?
  - C. Discuss the tumultuous history of the relationship between church and state pre-Reformation. There was a need for reform. Why? [“Men will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest.” — Denis Diderot]
    1. Augustine
      - a) *ex opere operato*;
      - b) against the Donatists, siding with Constantine controversy.
      - c) City of God vs. City of Man
    2. Luther
      - a) two functions of the law: (1) restrain evil [legal]; (2) shows our guilt before God [moral].

- b) Two Kingdoms: Right-hand Kingdom vs. Left-hand Kingdom (borrowed from Augustine)
- c) How do Luther and Augustine differ on their views concerning the Left-hand vs. the City of Man respectively? Augustine was more pessimistic about the City of Man (original sin). He thought man was in constant rebellion against God. Luther thought since the left-hand kingdom operates under divine authority, it can cooperate to promote God's purposes in society—this includes force if necessary. Luther included both civil government and the visible church in the left-hand kingdom.
- d) Two swords theory: God has given two swords to the church, the greater for sacred jurisdiction, the lesser of secular jurisdiction.
- e) However, for Luther, he did not consider civil government as the lesser sword. If anything, he did the opposite.
- f) For Luther, church and state (left-hand) had authority only over external behavior, not over conscience. God alone has authority over our consciences.

## II. Nature of State and Church

- A. Luther, John Wycliffe (1300s) and Jan Hus (1400s) advocated for state churches (churches being a branch of the state). This was based on Luther's left-hand kingdom concept that government and (visible) church were the greater sword. Did this work?
- B. Discuss how Zwingli's reform (constitution/covenant) improved on Luther's ideas on government (feudalistic).
- C. Calvin like Luther considered both church and state institutions ordained by God, that both had specific responsibilities, and that neither should interfere with the work of the other.
  - 1. Calvin saw education as a legitimate responsibility of the church (third use of the law).

2. Calvin's council known as the consistory made up of pastors and lay elders from different parts of the government. The consistory only regulated behavior. Since only God can see into the human heart, regulating conscience is impossible and is outside the scope of both church and state.
3. Calvin is credited for developing the argument for covenantal (contract theory is a misnomer) civil government with clear biblical argumentation.

### III. Necessity of Government "*Any form of government is better than none*" —Charles Darwin

- A. How did radical reformers such as Conrad Grebel, founder of the Swiss Brethren, change people's relationship with government? How did the anabaptist change the political landscape of their day, giving rise to the secular state?
  1. Magisterial reformers - working with the magistrate.
  2. Radical reformers - sharp distinctions between church and state. They content that the visible church had to conform as closely as possible to the invisible church — contra Luther.
- B. Two Kingdoms doctrine is replaced with Transformational model [Kuyper and Niebuhr].
  1. Transformation view is the most common view among conservative Reformed Christians, so much so that it is often incorrectly assumed to have been Calvin's view.
  2. Calvin's focus has always been on the gospel. He believed "once the gospel was proclaimed and a true church established, we could work to make a godly society, but until that happened, activism in rooting out the evils in society would amount to emphasizing the wrong things and, worse, could lead you to miss the gospel altogether."<sup>1</sup>

Sunshine thinks the Two Kingdoms doctrine doesn't work today. "The role of the

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn Sunshine, *Slaying Leviathan: Limited Government and Resistance in the Christian Tradition* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2020) 89.

state in promoting religion is good as far as goes: It gives us a standard with which to evaluate government.”<sup>2</sup>

3. How can the Transformationalist model be applied today to promote *shalom* of God’s Kingdom in our communities?

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 92.