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WHOSE?

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Editorial

Authority is something that mankind has chafed under since our first parents swallowed the serpents' lie in the garden of Eden, rebelled against their Creator and desired to be like Him, knowing good and evil. Since that first rebellious act all people throughout the ages have struggled with authority. The plain facts though, are that all of us, regardless of who we are, whether rich or poor, slave or free, are under authority, and there is no getting away from it.

When we consider the reality of authority, we have to start with the Originator of authority: God. All authority comes from Him, and there is no authority apart from Him.

Then we come to those who are in authority in an earthly sense, such as governments and heads of state, parents, church, teachers, police and minor bureaucrats. What we see appears to be a hierarchy of some sort which begins with God alone and trickles down to that which He has established for the good of all mankind.

In a general sense, most people couldn't care less about where it comes from or why it even exists, all they know is that it is something to be opposed, and they will live with it under sufferance only as long as it doesn't impinge upon their perceived rights. It seems that not a lot has been learned since the days of our first parents.

However, for the Christian, we see things differently, don't we – or do we?

Surely, we agree that God has authority over all that he has created, and so all must bow in subservience to Him, and Him alone. However, it seems to get a little tricky after that doesn't it? How do we deal with those who are under God and exercise authority, are we to show subservience to them too? The clear answer to that is a resounding NO! Subservience can be understood as unquestioning obedience, and that is not what we owe to men regardless of their position. We owe all obedience to men only in so far as it is in accord with the word of God.

Yet, all that said, Christians and even unbelievers around the world struggled with how to respond to those in authority during the recent pandemic. It seemed that there were those who unquestioningly obeyed the government while there were others who questioned the use of coercion, force and fear. Still others rebelled completely and violently. It was a time of division as people struggled to grapple with whether governments actually had the authority to enforce restrictions on movement, worship, work and daily life in general and raised issues of overreach. It affected the church worldwide and probably left an indelible mark on many. Sessions struggled with how to deal with the issues that arose and congregations showed signs of stress as each member tried to understand what was going on and how to respond to it.

It is very plausible that we might do things differently, if such a situation were to occur again. In the meantime, let us seek to honour our God and live under the authority structures according to His word and learn to navigate this complex issue biblically.

Many thanks to our contributors for their biblical perspectives on this topic.
Soli Deo Gloria.

Featured in this issue:

Mr Michael Flinn deliberates about Whose authority we are under.

Mr John Rogers asks the thorny question.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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“Under authority, but Whose?”

MICHAEL FLINN

The Church worldwide, particularly the Church in the Western world, has been through a challenging time in the last two years.

What is to be done when heads of state, purportedly in order to protect their citizens from harm, require society to “lock down” and not congregate in numbers of more than a handful at one time? What is to be done when heads of state, purportedly for the same reason, require that physical separation must be maintained between those who are vaccinated on the one hand, and those who are not on the other? What does God require of us as Christians in such situations? Should we comply with these requirements, on the basis of such passages as Romans 13:1 and 1Peter 2:13,14? Is this, when all said and done, a 5th commandment issue, such that NOT to comply is, in fact, sin against God and his moral law? Or should the Church respectfully refuse to comply with these requirements, citing such passages as Daniel 6 and Acts 4:19,20? Is this a case of having to obey God rather than man, and taking whatever consequences may result with patience and equanimity?

These are not easy questions to answer, and it is not my intention in this article to argue for a particular course of action in relation to these matters. However, I do believe that these questions are pertinent and pressing for the Church today. The challenges that arose in the past two years have not gone away and it is only a matter of time before we are presented with these pressing questions in another iteration. What should the Church do, for example, if heads of state (again with the stated motivation of protecting vulnerable members of society) require all ministers of religion to acknowledge that marriage is *not* to be defined exclusively as a binding covenant between a man and a woman, or that all churches must embrace the ideology and

reality of gender transformations? What if, in the interests of saving the planet, heads of state require that all church services now be held via Zoom, so as to eliminate unnecessary travel and thereby reduce society’s carbon emissions? After all, church services, *in which people come together in person*, have already been deemed as “non essential services”.

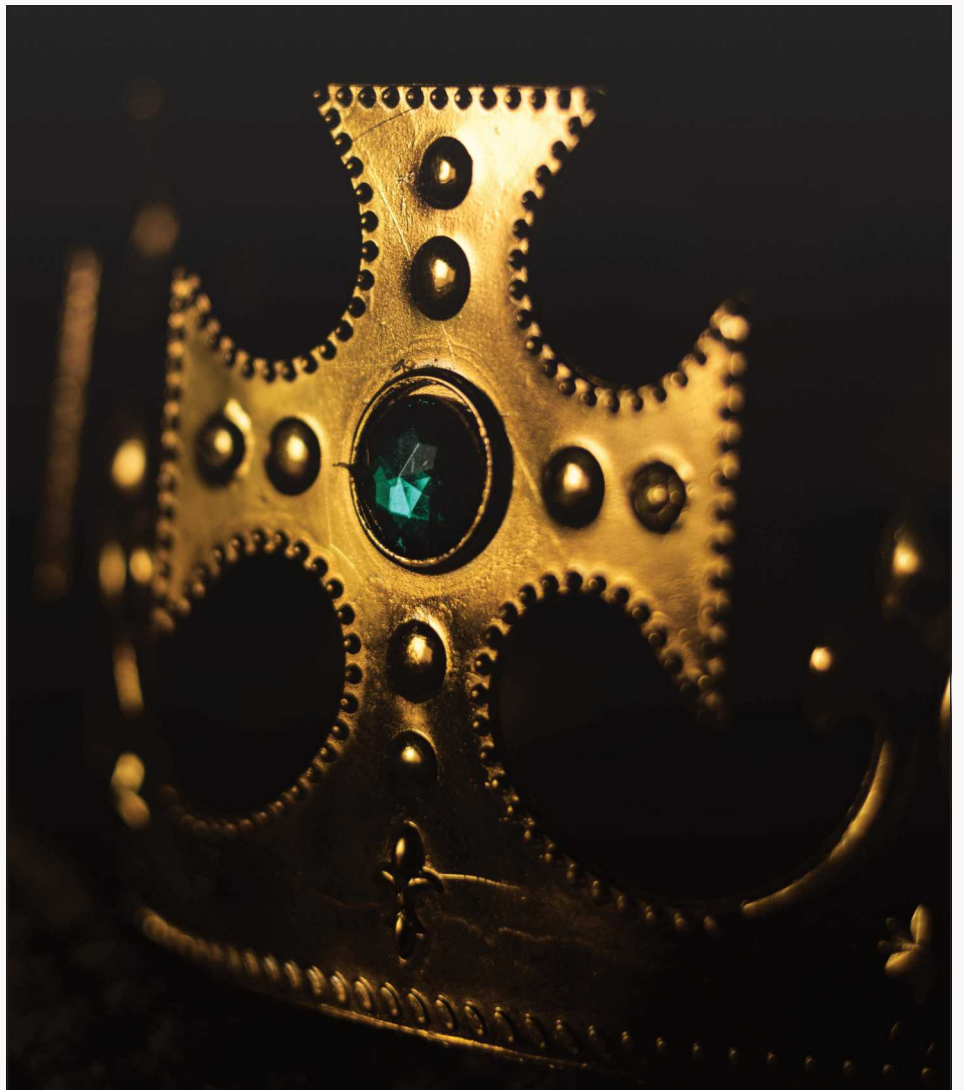


Photo by Roma Kaiuk on Unsplash

Breathing a sigh of relief now that the past two years are behind us, and looking ahead with boundless optimism towards the future, is short sighted. Surely it is incumbent upon us all, especially we who look upon the Reformation as formative in our theology and Christian practice, to go back to Scripture and examine the issues together over an open Bible. We ought not to be afraid of differences of opinion or “controversy” in relation to these challenging questions. Luther’s 95 theses were certainly controversial in his day. He nailed them up to the door of the church for the very purpose of generating discussion and the hammering out of biblical truth over the anvil of an open Bible. As children of the Reformation, it is incumbent upon us to discuss and debate these issues, not only for ourselves in our service to God, but also for society, in which we are called to function as salt and light.

In this article, then, as a contribution to further discussion, we will take a look at what the Bible has to say about authority and its role in the world that God has created. Along the way, we will make a number of observations about civil authority in particular, since decisions and actions of

civil rulers have the potential to cause significant challenges to the Church in the foreseeable future.

Destined to rule

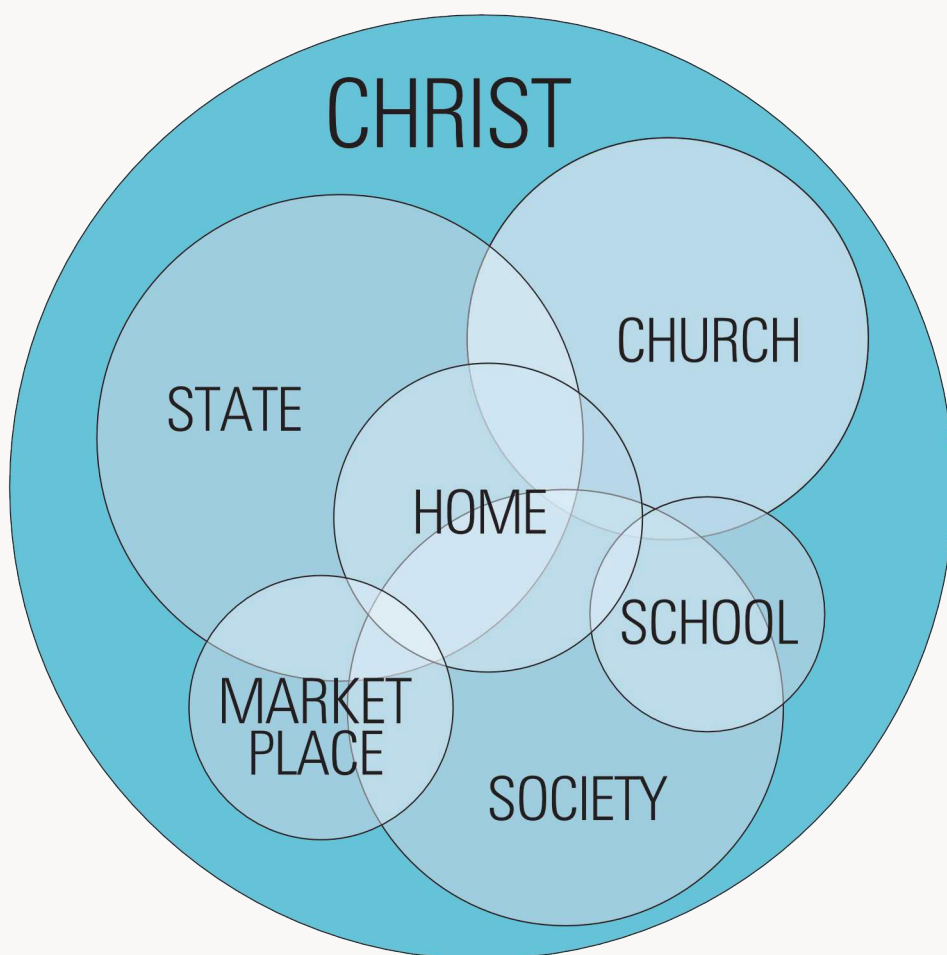
The Bible tells us at the outset that after creating and shaping the world in a period of six days, God decided to create man “in his own image” and “after his likeness”. This statement, in Genesis 1:26, is striking given the strict prohibition against making any graven image of God in the Torah. God insists that there is to be no attempt to represent him or to worship him in the form of a carved image (Exodus 20:4). But God himself is free to create a being that is “like him” that “bears his image”. Immediately after this statement, God announces his intention to allow his image-bearers to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen.1:26)¹ – in other words – over all the world that God has created and “given” to man with this purpose in mind. So important is this association between bearing the “image” and “likeness” of God and ruling over creation that

it reappears for emphasis in verses 27 and 28.

In church history a great deal of reflection has gone into what it means for mankind, exclusively, to be created in the divine image. It is a rich concept, and involves such characteristics as knowledge, goodness and holiness;² the ability of man to create things of wonder and beauty and to communicate or dialogue with his Creator. But for our purposes, we need to give due weight to the clear and repeated association between the creation of man in the image of God on the one hand and his calling to exercise authority and rule on the other. As Adam and Eve proceed to do this, they reflect and give expression to the authority and kingship of God himself. But, and this is important, they must rule as God would have them rule, for they rule in his stead, and in his name. They are not to rule autonomously or independent of the will and purpose of God. If they fail to rule as God wishes them to rule, they will answer to the One who has created all things, them included. And already, the language gives us hints that all might not be well should the path of disobedience and rejection of the Creator be chosen by his image-bearers. The Hebrew word for “subdue”, *kbs*, can mean violate or subjugate, it can also carry the connotation of domination – of forcibly bringing something or someone into bondage and slavery. Of course, had the Fall not occurred, Adam and Eve would not have ruled in an oppressive or destructive way. They would have exercised authority in a way that served the best interests of creation and harnessed its resources to bring glory to God. But all that changed with the decision narrated in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were not satisfied with ruling “under God” and in perfect and contented submission to him. Instead, they desired God’s position and authority – they wanted to determine for themselves what they would believe and how they would act, without reference to, or in submission to God.

The corruption of the Divine purpose

Given our first parents’ determination to do it “their way”, it is inevitable that man’s “authority” and “rule” within creation now take on darker tones as Scripture unfolds. We find Cain exercising his power and position within his family by rising up and destroying his brother (Genesis 4). We find Lamech glorying in his power over and subjection of others. He celebrates his abuse and violence in song

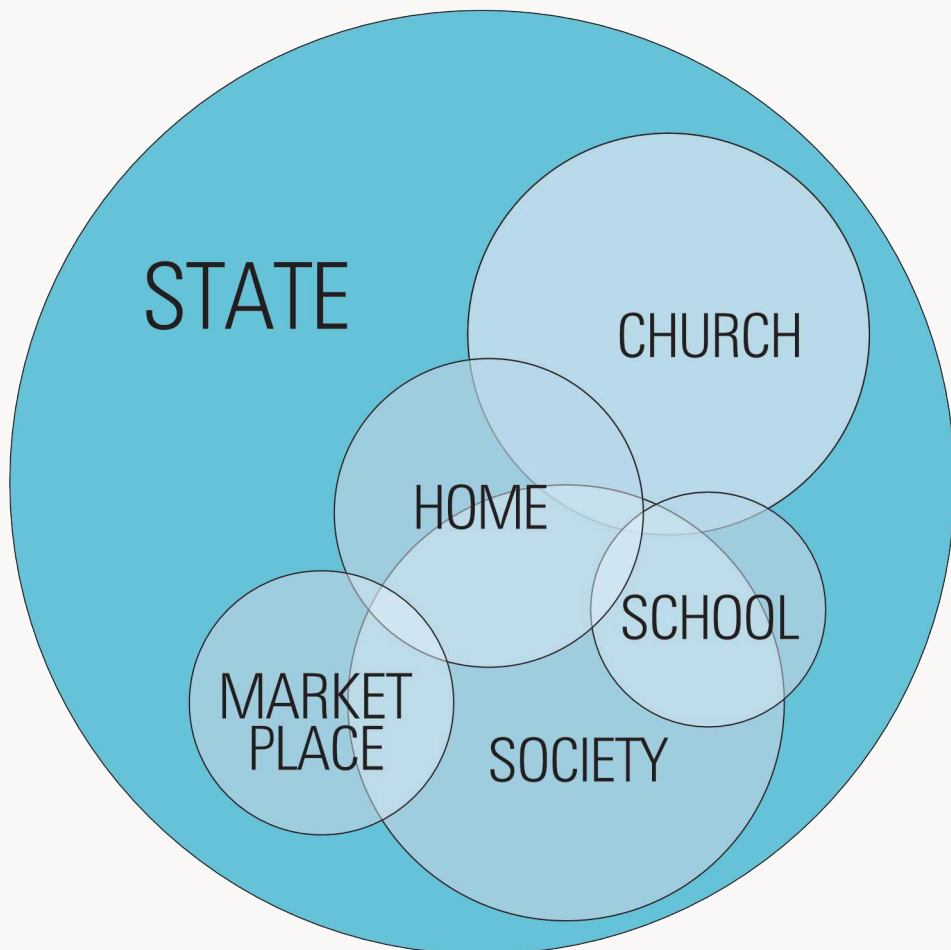


in Genesis 4:23, 24. His abuse of power and authority are not unique to him. By the time we get to Genesis 6, we find that “all flesh has corrupted their way on the earth” and that the entire earth is filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11,13); so much so that, in a striking statement, the LORD declares regret to have made man on the earth, and that he is “grieved” “at his heart” (Genesis 6:6).

The abuse of power in the ancient world

Post-Flood, things are no different. Again, we see mankind abusing his position in the world, this time attempting to build a city and a tower “with its top in the heavens” (Genesis 11:4). The motivation? “Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the whole earth”. The heart of man has not changed, and another judgement is warranted. This time, however, it will not be a Flood, because God had already promised never to do that again (Genesis 9:11). Instead, the very scattering which the ancients sought to prevent was brought about through the confusion of man’s language. But this is not the end. Now Scripture tells us of a divine plan to save the very families of the earth that are scattered after the Tower of Babel incident. God would bless these people through a man whom he chose and with whom he entered into a covenant arrangement. Over against the aspirations of mankind in the previous chapter, *God would make Abram’s name great* and cause him to be a blessing for all the families of the earth, namely the very families that have been judged and listed as nations in the previous chapter (Genesis 12:1-3). Amazing.

But all would not run smoothly. It is not long before we read of the entire people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, living *in oppression and bondage* in Egypt (Exodus 1) under the ruthless dictatorship of a foreign king, regarded by his own people as a god. This is further *abuse* of authority; it is, once again, unbridled tyranny and domination over others and now the ones who are suffering are God’s covenant people, his own “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22). The battle lines are drawn and the Pharaoh will not go down without a fight. But go down he will. He will be judged by the great King of all the Earth, the great I AM (cf. Exodus 3:14), whose will and purpose can never be thwarted. God sets free his people from their bondage and oppression and takes them forward towards a much brighter future.



The Bible’s ambivalence to kingship

When, in 1Samuel 8, the Israelites demanded a king “to judge us like all the nations” (vs. 5), the prophet should not have been surprised. In fact, Scripture had already prepared the people for this moment. In Deuteronomy 17, Moses himself had spoken of the time when Israel would request a king³. Furthermore, the end of the book of Judges presents a dire picture including both civil war and horrific immorality in Israel. The expectation of a national leader, and even a yearning, is established with these words at the conclusion of the book:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

Nonetheless, Samuel was displeased. Why? We are not told in explicit terms. There is, however, an implication in the LORD’s response when Samuel takes this matter to him:

“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they

have rejected me from being king over them” (1Sam. 8:7).

If Samuel, in his latter years, was indeed taking this request as a personal affront, his objection, and later warning, would be rather petulant. Of far greater significance was the LORD’s reason for allowing a king to be appointed: *The people had rejected the LORD from being king over them*. This is a profound statement. It means that prior to this time, when Israel did not have a king “like the nations”, they nonetheless HAD a king, a far greater and wiser king than any other nation on earth possessed. They had the LORD himself. He was their king and judge. He was their lawgiver and the one who was fighting their battles. This he had shown repeatedly during the exodus event, during the period of the judges, and even most recently, when “single handed” he defeated Dagon, the god of the Philistines, and the Philistines themselves, forcing them to return the ark of the covenant after it had been captured.⁴

Ah, but the Israelites were determined to look to an earthly king for their future, and so the LORD gave them one. He was head and shoulders above the people

physically, but spiritually he was both insecure and short sighted. In many ways, Saul is a tragic figure in Scripture. The kingdom is wrenched away from him because of his rebellion, and in the end, he is killed by an Amalekite, a representative of the very nation the LORD had sent him to destroy (1Samuel 15). Samuel grieved over Saul, but much more significant, in words that echo Genesis 6:6, we are told that “the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1Sam. 15:35).

But aren’t things looking up with the ordination of David, the man after God’s own heart? Yes, but only to a point. David’s weaknesses and sins are well known. Even the greatest of Israel’s kings failed to reflect and express the justice and righteousness of Israel’s true king. The chronicle of the kings and their reigns is sad, but inevitable. In spite of brighter moments, with the reigns of men like Josiah, the kings traversed a downward spiral from bad to worse. Towards the end, Jeremiah, a prophet who tried to bring about reform, was thrown into a cistern for his trouble, and when he sent a scroll of God’s law to the king of the day, in rebellion and callous scorn, he promptly burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36). Moses had commanded that the future king of Israel was to read the book of the law all the days of his life and keep all the words of this law and these statutes (Deut. 17:19). The rebellion of the king in Jeremiah’s day was flagrant and offensive, and rebellion, we have been told in Scripture, “is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry” (1Samuel 15:23).

After the era of the kings is ended, what is there to learn? Well, the office of the king, though important, was never going to be perfectly or even adequately upheld by an earthly son of Adam and Eve. As Lord Acton put it, power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The temptations are too great. Israel’s stated desire to have a king “like the nations” was all too portentous. The problem was that the “nations’ kings” were usually despots and tyrants, determined to get the most from whom and over who they ruled.⁵ And they were not interested in serving God and upholding his law.

This is made all the more clear from the Scriptures’ descriptions of great rulers outside of Israel. They set up their kingdoms, and sometimes their empires, through violence and conquest of weaker peoples. The Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and the Romans were all the same – voracious and terrible beasts who ultimately foundered against the “stone cut out from

a mountain by no human hand” (Dan. 2:45).

Indeed, this is precisely where Israel’s hope lay after the fall and the failure of all of their earthly kings. There has to be a better king, a greater Son of David, a ruler of righteousness and justice, whose kingdom would reach well beyond the borders of Israel (cf. Isaiah 9:2-7). After the Babylonian Exile the royal psalms (such as Psalm 2 and Psalm 110) could still be sung, but they were sung now in expectation of the coming King who would rule over all the nations with justice and righteousness.

The New Testament

And so we come to the pages of the New Testament.

I’ll be brief here because doubtless others will speak of Christ and his kingdom in more detail in this issue of *Faith in Focus*. Suffice it to say that Jesus is the promised “ruler who will shepherd my people Israel” (Mt. 2:6). And beyond Israel? He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He reigns supreme, appearing in the book of Revelation as a victorious conqueror riding throughout the nations and bringing conquest through the sword that comes from his mouth (Rev. 19). His kingdom is “not of this world”, as he pointed out to Pilate, a representative of Roman rule. His kingdom is from above and changes the hearts of men and women and children. But, make no mistake he is the KING, whose coming was prefigured and spoken of prophetically throughout the ages. Only he, as the Son of God, can truly and perfectly practice and uphold the laws of God in his rule and exercise righteous authority and justice. Only he is the true Servant of God. And all early rulers will ultimately answer to him and be judged by him.

Back to the beginning

As Christians, then, we must confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10,9,10), not Pharaoh, not Nebuchadnezzar, not Alexander the Great or Caesar Augustus. And certainly not the Prime Minister or the World Economic Forum. Only JESUS is Lord, and that very confession summons us to worship and serve him only.⁶ At every point, we owe our allegiance solely to him.

Civil magistrates? Insofar as the King of kings has appointed them, we respect their office, pray for them, pay our taxes, “and obey them *in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God.*”⁷ Yes. Absolutely! The Westminster divines are drawing upon Scripture here at every point. But the qualification is vital. Civil rulers have

the duty and responsibility of reflecting the lordship of God in the world for the maintenance of order and the punishment of wrong-doers. But they are NOT equal to or perfect embodiments of Christ himself. To confess that JESUS is LORD means that we must serve and worship him only and when civil magistrates *require a belief or behaviour from us that disagrees with the Word of God*, we must demur and obey God rather than man.

So, then, in all of these challenging questions that have arisen and will arise for us as Christians, we need to go back to Scripture and face honestly and earnestly, and with humble hearts, the question: What does God’s Word require of us? We may find ourselves disagreeing and presenting different viewpoints as we discuss this question, but this is the vital and key question. It is not: What is the state currently telling us to do, but rather, what does God in his Word require of us? When we can answer that question clearly and satisfactorily, then we will know how we are called to act as Christians.

References

- 1 All Scripture quotations for this article come from the English Standard Version.
- 2 Cf. The Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 14 – “We believe that God created man of dust from the ground and he made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous and holy.” This explanation of what it means to be made in the divine image is drawn from Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 and has bearing on what it means to be born again, to be *created anew* in Christ “after the likeness of God”.
- 3 “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose.” (Deut. 17:14,15).
- 4 The amazing account of these events is presented in 1Samuel 5,6.
- 5 Cf. Rehoboam who soon found out what happens when the whip is cracked too severely. The result was a divided kingdom (1Kings 12:1-20).
- 6 Cf. Jesus’ statement in Luke 6:46 – “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?”
- 7 Westminster Confession, Ch. 36.

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JOHN ROGERS

To Obey — or — Not to Obey?

And if so, either way, then when or where or how and to what extent? Or am I already showing my rebellious heart? On the other hand, when I see authority being exercised as we are increasingly seeing all around us, and have seen a great deal over the past three years, something is stirring in my heart. Is it rebellion? Or is it righteous indignation at such egregious overreach? Aha, that is likely the hardest question of all!

The locus classicus on this subject, at least so far as civil authority is concerned, is Romans 13:1-7. The context is important. The last five verses of chapter 12 prohibit us from taking revenge. Revenge and justice are very closely related subjects, perhaps differing only in respect of motive (that problem again!) or in respect of who enacts it. At any rate, Paul tells us, to obviate that complication, the Lord has taken it out of our (personal) hands. The civil authority “bears the sword” and not “for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil” (v.4).

With that in the background, Paul teaches us that we are to “be in subjection to the governing authorities” (v.1) who “are not a cause of fear for good behaviour, but for evil” (v.3), “a minister of God to you for good ... an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practises evil” (v.4). The reason we are to be in subjection to the governing authorities, seemingly however they came to possess that authority, is because “there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (v.1). To resist established authority is to resist God’s providential ordering of the world (v.2). (Note: Paul says established, not legitimate; that is another question entirely; when, for example, does an

invading power become the established authority? – let alone legitimate?) Therefore, regardless of the question of consequences, we are to be in subjection “for conscience” – before God (v.5), “for rulers are servants of God” (v.6). This raises the question of legitimacy to another level, but it is not the question presently before us in what was once the free world.

For many, the question is settled. Obey the established authorities. The hymn says it pretty well:

*I vow to thee my country all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best,
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.*

One could rightly feel such sentiments – except for two phrases: “entire and whole and perfect...; the love that asks no question.” That love we may only ever, and must always, give to God. A Christian cannot sing those lines. There may be times when the state becomes tyrannical and/or idolatrous in its claims. Insofar as it does, then we must not obey the authorities over us – in such tyrannical and/or idolatrous claims. With the current trends we see in society and the political realm, we need to be thinking about this question; for we may soon enough find ourselves in a similar position to that in which German Christians found themselves 90 years ago. So let us interrogate Paul a little.

My first question concerns the implied charge the Lord gives his civil servants (authority, magistrate, whatever term you want to use). “For rulers are not a cause of

fear for good behaviour, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same" (v.3). Paul wrote Romans around 56-57AD. Nero was the emperor at the time. The barest acquaintance with history will inform one that Paul was not describing the rule of Rome under Nero! Indeed, for Paul lost his head by the sword of Rome, and was persecuted by his Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Paul is, in this text, prescribing – giving us the very Word of God for and about rulers. Verses three and four tell us what rulers are supposed to do.

My next question concerns who defines the good and evil of which Paul speaks in this passage. The civil authority itself, driven by who knows what philosophy? But if that is the case, does it not follow that exposing unwanted newborns and (in the near enough future) doing obeisance to Caesar was fine by Paul, and consequently also by God? Or is good and evil in this passage, and in every other scripture, to be defined by God? It is inconceivable that Paul, speaking on behalf of the Lord, has anything in mind but good and evil as defined by God. It is that good, laid out pretty clearly in the law of God, that the civil authority is to uphold, to "praise", and it is the breach of the good outlined in that law that he is to punish. After all, the civil authorities are God's servants, established by him!

That leads to my third question: does

obedience to any authority have its limits? We all believe it does. "... they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18f.). "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28f.). Stated succinctly: when any human authority forbids us what God clearly requires, we must obey God. From which we may further state: when any human authority requires of us what God clearly forbids the answer is the same: we must obey God. As we confess, "Everyone ... ought to ... obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God" (*Belgic Confession*, Article 36); "It is the duty of people ... to obey their lawful commands" (*Westminster Confession*, Chapter 23.4).

But the above examples are clear, and clear cases are easy enough, however hard they may be to do! What are more difficult are situations the likes of which we have all faced more recently. They are more difficult because they caught us unprepared. Mind you, just as likely a clear case could catch us unprepared. They were more difficult because with just a little time to read and evaluate, we soon began to have good cause to wonder where the truth lay and, indeed, what 'the agenda' really was, especially given the hugely widespread and vicious suppression of any scientific debate and dissent from the 'official line': to the point of our own PM proclaiming, in effect, "I am the way, the truth and the life." As time went on, it began to look much more like another big step along the totalitarian path of 1930s Germany, only this time it is the whole world traversing that broad road that leads to destruction. We all admire Dietrich Bonhoeffer for his resistance to Hitlerian totalitarianism in the 1930s. Apart from a few very highly qualified doctors and medical professionals in the US, UK, Canada and Europe who have been shockingly traduced, or simply ignored, I don't see too much evidence that many of us would follow his example resisting the mixed facism/communism into which the

Gold Solidus of Valentinian II, Emperor of Rome.

Photographed by: York Museums Trust Staff
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west seems to be increasingly sinking. (And if you don't think that is where we are, just note the actions of the 'storm-troopers' at the Posie Parker rally in Auckland on Sunday, 26th March; they wore rainbows rather than brown-shirts but their methods were straight out of Ernst Röhm's Stormtroopers' Handbook.)

Thus we come to the matter of the extent of Christian obedience when the state becomes tyrannical. For there is a fourth question to ask about Romans 13. If v.1 is to be taken as a pretty broad command to obedience, v.7 does not reinforce that. V.7, which draws directly on our Lord's words in Mark 12:17, limits that obedience. "Render to all what is due them ... tax, ... custom, ... fear, ... honour" (v.7). Who determines what is due them? The pagan ruler who would also have you render to him what is God's?

Calvin abhorred revolution; and any sane person doesn't have to know too much about the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution to be of the same mind. He took a strong position on the citizen's duty to obey his rulers.

We must ... be very careful not to despise or violate that authority of magistrates, full of venerable majesty, which God has established by the weightiest decrees, even though it may reside with the most unworthy men, who defile it as much as they can with their own wickedness. For, if the correction of unbridled despotism is the Lord's to avenge, let us not at once think that it is entrusted to us, to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chap.XX, Par.31.)

However, in the immediately preceding paragraph (30), he had enunciated his 'doctrine of the lesser magistrate,' by which he meant that a lower/different civil authority was duty-bound to resist the higher when the higher acted tyrannically.

Consequently, his very next words, following the quotation above, are:

I am speaking all the while of private individuals. For if there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings [and he gives examples of such from Sparta, Athens and Rome], I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly

common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.

I have often wished (and for sure, for many more reasons than this) that NZ had more Calvinism. I remember back in the 1980s (I believe it was that decade), when the government of the day wanted to combine numerous local bodies, somewhat more than 85% of local bodies opposed it. One could think of less than honourable reasons for that opposition, but that knife cuts both ways. But regardless of that factor and leaving aside the merits or demerits of the idea, that seemed to me exactly the sort of occasion for the lesser 'magistrate' to say no. What could the government of the day have done, with the majority of local bodies simply standing on their rights and duty to their electors and refusing? After all, the creed of the great idol, democracy, is "of the people, by the people, for the people." Since then that process of steadily gathering up more and more authority to the centralized state has gone on apace. Rodney Hyde, of that supposedly bottom-up, classic-liberal party, ACT, gave us Greater Auckland. More recent examples are the Polytechs, the education system generally, the health system (for a second round), Three Waters.

This is not just about form of (even less, more efficient) administration. There are always people's lives and livelihoods involved; persons are tyrannized. I know of a large business which 'sub-contracts' health-care services to the state health system. During the recent Covid fiasco, people who had worked for this business lost their jobs because they would not get the jab (and in one case I know personally the refusal to get the jab was for particular, then known [and more recently confirmed], health concerns), even though they had carried out their duties perfectly acceptably during the previous year online and could perfectly as well have continued. Besides the injustice to individuals, that seemed to me another opportunity lost, by a lesser authority, to check the steadily progressing totalitarian juggernaut.

True, a business is not part of the state architecture, but it is certainly an important part of society and the larger the business, the greater its responsibilities to its employees and clients. And to this point, Calvin does not see the 'lesser magistrate' as strictly confined to the 'state architecture' either. In a footnote to the above-mentioned paragraph 31 (*Institutes*, Book IV, Chap.XX) it is noted

Only Christianity will ever have a doctrinal commitment to limited government. Every other philosophy or religion necessarily leads to totalitarian authoritarianism.

that Ulrich Zwingli, in his *The Pastor* (1524), “states that as [various states throughout history] and the German towns (had) their guild masters, with authority to check the higher rulers, so God has provided pastors to stand on guard for the people.” Neither is the church part of the ‘state architecture.’

Underneath all this, we have to reckon with the fact that the situation to which Paul speaks is different from that in which the Lord has placed us and therefore while we must still live out the principles Paul enunciated, for they were inspired by God, how we do so may possibly look quite different in 2023. This related to something else in Calvin’s thought to which he refers almost in passing in the quotation from his *Institutes* above (IV, XX, 31), and which we must also take into account as we think about Romans 13. He speaks about the possibility of kings who, by tyrannical actions, “dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God’s ordinance.”

The apostle Peter, speaking to the same subject in his first letter, chapter 2:13-17, and very similarly to Paul, also raises this matter of freedom. In verse 16 he says, “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.”

Our different historical situation and the principle of freedom are related. Christianity has done its work throughout the world but particularly in the West over the centuries. We do not now live under an empire of the nature of Rome. We in New Zealand live in a constitutional monarchy; from the ‘underside’ of the question, we live in a participatory democracy. That, to me, raises the question about the responsibility we have to preserve the freedom that Christianity has given us over the centuries of gospel leavening and social and legal struggle. Possibly all of our welfare and educational institutions have their roots in Christianity. Thinking of more recent history, we owe a real debt to, for example, Oliver Cromwell for a good deal of our constitutional arrangements, William Wilberforce’s struggle against slavery, and the 7th Earl of Shaftsbury’s various social reforms for which he became known as the Poor Man’s Earl and did so much to relieve the plight of the poor; all very sincere and committed Christians.

Peter comes at this principle of freedom with a caution: “do not use your freedom as a covering for evil.” In 1 Corinthians 7:20-24, the apostle Paul comes at it from the opposite end:

Let every man abide in the calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. (I quote the AV so that you may note Paul’s use of the word called. It is significant.)

In the west in the Year of our Lord (AD) 2023, we are heirs of a great deal more freedom than either the apostle Paul was in 56AD or John Calvin in the first half of the sixteenth century. That freedom, based to a great extent on the idea of limited government, is due to a very great deal to Christianity, in particular Protestant Christianity. Only Christianity will ever have a doctrinal commitment to limited government. Every other philosophy or religion necessarily leads to totalitarian authoritarianism. Human government, without the limiting principle of Christianity, will always tend to Messianism, which is idolatry. Contra the biblical ideal of “every man under his own vine and his own fig tree, drinking from his own well,” under God, is the humanistic, idolatrous ideal:

The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it. Daniel 4:11-12.

Any possibility of this humanistic ideal being fulfilled has been utterly crushed by Christ (Daniel 2:34f., 44) but the dream will continue to burn in the human breast until “death and hades are thrown into the lake of fire.” In the meantime, Jesus’ command stands: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s” (Mark 12:17).

Mr John Rogers is an emeritus minister and member of the Palmerston North Reformed Church.



The Free Reformed School Association (Tas) Inc. invites applications for the following positions:

TEACHERS

Urgently require Secondary and Primary teachers for 2023

**Full-Time, Part-Time,
12-month or 6-month
appointments accepted**

At JCS, our vision is to be a *strongly connected* community of learners, *deeply committed* to our faith and to continual growth, nurturing individuals to be their best in the service of God and to His glory.

We are looking to add enthusiastic, committed teachers to our team for the 2023 school year. Due to growing class sizes we need additional, suitably qualified, teachers. Applications for full-time and part-time employment welcome, with 6-month or 12-month appointments considered.

John Calvin School currently has over 120 students from Kinder to Grade 10 with an average combined class size of 19. We are a well-resourced school, located in Launceston, a beautiful city in the north of Tasmania, a breathtaking part of God’s creation. (<https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/>)

Applicants must be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches, be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and be registered to work with vulnerable people.

Conditions and salary are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

Expressions of interest for future positions, full-time or part-time, are welcome.

For application forms, see the school website (www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment).

Forward completed applications to the Business Manager:

- E-mail: wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au
- Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

For more information, contact the Principal, Mr Daniel Coote

- E-mail: cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. VANDERPYL

June 1993

The Nelson Reformed Church is one the churches of "The First Hour" established in 1953. Some time later this year they hope to celebrate their first 40 years of faithfulness to the Reformed faith. At its last meeting of 1992 session reviewed the activities of the past year. "It was a humbling experience," wrote the author of the session notes, "looking back over the past year, and seeing how the Lord has blessed us, despite our many shortcomings." Nelson is quite unique as the congregation is regarded as "the ministerial team" with their pastor and session working together. Each member and adherent received a questionnaire to help session in their planning for the new year, 1993.

Last year, their theme was *To be a Blessing to one Another and in our Community*. For this year the church adopted the theme, *A Christ-like Life*, based on Galatians 5:22, 23 which presents the fruits of the Holy Spirit, – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the wider Nelson community could be affected by the yeast of this small church as it works through the whole batch of dough of their city as they see them walk in the Spirit.

The Masterton session decided by common consent "that our singing in corporate worship no longer be restricted to the 150 Psalms." At the same time session also "reaffirmed its commitment to preponderant Psalmody." In making this decision the Masterton session considered the following:

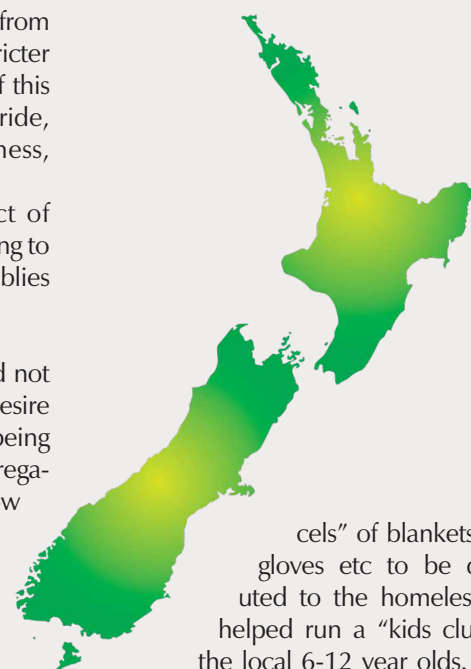
- The Biblical teaching that our praise (psalms, hymns and spiritual songs) should be from the whole revelation of God;
- The Presbytery decision, made in the light of events over the last few years, that "for the sake of the unity of our churches it is undesirable that the singing of psalms only be the established practice in any of our churches";
- The advice of the church visitors;
- The matters (pros and cons) raised by various members of the congregation privately and at a specially held meeting;

- The concern about harmful effects from continuing a practice which is stricter than Scripture given the history of this issue in our churches, such as pride, self-righteousness, strife, bitterness, division and individualism; and
- The importance of each aspect of corporate worship and of submitting to the decisions of the wider assemblies in matters of corporate worship.

Session stressed that this decision had not been made because of a personal desire to sing hymns, but solely for the well being of the whole congregation. The congregation was exhorted to respect and show honour to one another as they worked through the implementation of this decision.

Wellington has finally gained a pastor again after the departure of Rev. Neil Benfell to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Christchurch in 1990. In computer language, "search and Replace" took the best part of three years to locate and then extract a pastor from the claws of bureaucracy. But, by the grace of God, it finally came to pass. He has arrived! In anticipation, the whole church was mobilised into action to spring clean the manse, to fill the larder and polish up the pulpit. They even installed pigeonholes in the new vestibule for the manifold paraphernalia. We have them in Hamilton too and even the social and business pigeons seem to find their way to these holes. These pigeonholes also tell the congregation those who have been absenting themselves from the worship for some time by their "fullness."

Jackie Posthuma, a member of the Mangere Reformed Church, joined a summer project of the Campus Crusade for Christ ministry at UCI in the USA. She found it an exhilarating experience in her Christian life. Among the various activities she was involved in, she was, as she wrote "privileged to be a part of a ministry with others for a Saturday in South Central Los Angeles. We spent the day helping out a mission there doing various practical things. We cooked breakfast for the homeless in the area, made up "care par-



cels" of blankets, hats, gloves etc to be distributed to the homeless, and helped run a "kids club" for the local 6-12 year olds. It was an excellent opportunity to serve God in a practical and meaningful way." Jackie is now very keen to be involved in some full time ministry either overseas or in New Zealand. She may even join Janice Reid who works for the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) in the Philippines.

The satisfied child of God

Robert Vandoodewaard

King David's confession in Psalm 131 was that he did not concern himself with "things too great and too marvelous for me" (v. 1). This may seem like a strange confession for a king; after all, wasn't this his calling? Of all people, should not a king be aware of great matters, analyze them, and then chart a wise course of action for his nation? If you continue to read through Psalm 131, you may have another question: Why does David confess, "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother" (v. 2)?

To understand David's testimony, we must realize that David's soul must have been in turmoil at some point before this.

If this were not the case, he could not have gone through the process of calming and quieting. One of the things that gets many people stirred up is trying to understand what is beyond us. We may lose sleep trying to analyze current events, explain tragedies, or solve perplexing questions. When we go too far with this, we betray our pride. We have been trying to figure out what only God knows. We were never created to be all-knowing. We are not equipped to solve the world's problems. Christ alone can do this.

David's ancient testimony of letting go of overanalyzing is still relevant in our time. We live in the information age wherein we are inundated with "great matters" from all around the world. Most people have access to social media platforms where we are expected to chime in on the latest events. While awareness may be good, we should not try to carry the world's problems on our shoulders. We will never be able to grasp every issue, much less come up with a solution. If we are not careful, we can

end up trying to understand what only God knows about personal trials as well. There is a better way, and the Lord inspired David to testify about it.

David's comparison of himself to a weaned child is a helpful picture. In ancient times, children were often weaned from their mother's milk later than is common in many of our cultures. This meant more awareness than an infant had, and so weaning would be a challenging period. However, the day would come when children adapted to eating solid food and left their frustrations in the past. This was David's testimony: after a lifetime of many trials and some "kicking and screaming" against providences, he had learned to accept God's ways. He was now like a weaned child, content to be with his mother but without craving nourishment.

There was, however, more to David's testimony than mere "letting go." He taught this as he called his people: "O Israel, hope in the Lord, from this time forth and forever more" (v. 3). When we hope in the Lord, we have a sure knowledge that He knows all things and that He is sovereign over all things. Let us trust that He is working all things out for the good of His people.

Pastor Robert Vandoodewaard is pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Powassan, Ontario.

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Forcing our way into the Kingdom

GREG LANIER

When you know something is really, truly, even *ultimately* good, two responses are often at play. Some people are cynical Grinches who know it is good and try to prevent others from tasting it. Violence may be involved, like a child is breaking a sibling's beloved toy to spoil any enjoyment. Others, however, desire the good thing deep in their bones and strive to taste it with all the zeal they can muster. There is a kind of violence here, too: a willingness to undergo pain (birthing a child), to suffer (finishing a marathon), or to endure relentlessly (climbing a mountain) because you're convinced of the worth of your goal.

God's kingdom is the chief good. It is a hidden treasure that you'd sell everything to buy (Matt. 13:44), a priceless pearl worth all you have (v. 46), a wedding banquet so good that excuses for not attending seem absurd (Luke 14:16–24). Christ's kingdom offers blessings beyond anything the world

offers. Some try to steal it from others and rob their joy (John 10:8), while others strive to enter despite the cost (Luke 13:24).

Clamouring to obtain the goodness of the kingdom is pictured vividly in Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16, two complementary accounts of a difficult teaching of Jesus. He describes how, with history pivoting from the era of Israel to the new era announced by John the Baptist, the good news of the kingdom is preached – that is, the kingdom is “gospelized” in a fresh way. The absolute good has arrived, and Matthew and Luke sketch different responses. Yet it is tricky to sort out the sense of the Greek word *biazetai* that appears in both passages but with different nuances of force or violence. The word could be passive, such that the kingdom is *treated forcibly* by violent men (Matt. 11:12), but God's people *are forced* into it (Luke 16:16).

It is arguably better to treat it as a medio-passive conveying self-affectedness. The kingdom *compels itself forcibly* onto the world but is opposed by violent people who seek to snatch it from others (Matt. 11:12), and in response God's people *compel themselves forcibly* into it (Luke 16:16). Where does such compulsion – an almost violent, endure-anything fortitude – come from? From human willpower? No,

for such only leads to a Grinch-like robbing of the kingdom's goodness. Rather, it comes from the gospel itself. As Cyril of Alexandria articulated, the sacred message of the kingdom plants a deep desire in the regenerated heart to use all vigour and strength to enter the blessed hope. A compulsion given by the Spirit enables one to see the terrain of the kingdom not as the neutral ground of lukewarm people but as something that comes with divine force, suffers forceful opposition, and thereby must be entered with force. When a longing for the kingdom's goodness saturates your renewed being, no amount of worldly vanities, discomfort, suffering, pain, or even violent opposition can stop you from applying all godly force to press into it. It demands all, because it is worth all.

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Focus on faith

LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON

The death of an infant

My dear friend,
I must leave a line to tell you that we sympathise with you and your wife in your severe trial (*the death of an infant*). But, at the same time, I rejoice exceedingly in the Lord's goodness, enabling you to be resigned and satisfied with His will, despite all the feelings and pinchings of flesh and blood.

If you can *now* believe and say, “*He does all things well*” – with what transport would you say it, if the *whole plan* of His wisdom and love was unfolded to your view! He will condescend to unfold it to you hereafter, and it will fill you with

admiration. It is an affliction to be cordially rejoiced in – when the Lord, who cares for us intimates His will by the event.

Healing and wounding are equally from His hand, and are equally tokens of His love and care over us! “*The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!*” Job 1:21

You are in the *wise and merciful* hands of One who *prescribes* for you with unerring wisdom, and has unspeakably more tenderness than can be found in all human hearts taken together! He *weighs* all your painful afflictions with consummate accuracy! You shall not have a single *grain* of trouble more, nor for a single *moment* longer – than He will enable you to bear, and will sanctify to your good.

We know all things are dispensed to

us by infinite wisdom – in number, weight, and measure; with a far greater accuracy than any doctor can adjust his medicines to the state and strength of his patients.

The *flesh* will feel the sharp affliction – but *faith* and prayer will lighten the burden, and heal the wound. Daily your sense of the Lord's goodness will increase, and the sense of pain will abate – so that you will have less sorrow, and more joy, from day to day.

What a blessing to be a Christian – to have a *hiding* place and a *resting* place always at hand! To be assured that all things work for our good, and that our compassionate Shepherd has His eye always upon us – to *support* and to *relieve* us. I am affectionately and sincerely your friend, brother and servant,

John Newton

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

There are 50 countries which are monitored by *World Watch Monitor* for being places where Christians around the world are under pressure for their faith.

Freedom of belief, guaranteed by the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*, plays a critical part in the unfolding, complex story of the 21st Century. We exist to tell this part of the story with accuracy and authority. We respect and uphold everyone's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Our focus is on the global Christian Church.

We will bring you summaries from different countries each issue so that you may be focussed on praying for the needs of Christians' everywhere.

Iran

Ethnic Iranians are seen as being Muslim, and carrying out any Christian activities in their Farsi language is illegal. An Iranian man who leaves Islam can be sentenced to death and a woman to life imprisonment, although such sentences haven't been carried out for more than 20 years. However, in 2017 over a dozen Christians – most of them converts to Christianity – were given prison sentences of between 10 and 15 years for "acting against national security". According to religious freedom watchdog Article 18, such political charges attempt "to avoid international outcry at religiously motivated charges". Several imprisoned Iranian Christians have undertaken hunger strikes in protest.

Iraq

Once home to one of the largest Christian communities in the Middle East, Iraq today is in danger of losing Christianity completely. The Islamic State group forced thousands of Christians to flee after it stormed through the Nineveh Plains in 2014. Some have now returned, following IS's military defeat. But even with IS gone, in many areas of Iraq daily life is governed by Sharia (Islamic law) and Muslims are forbidden to leave Islam.

Israel

Christians in Israel enjoy a higher level of religious freedom than in most other countries in the Middle East, although, being a Jewish state, Jewish citizens receive preferential treatment. Messianic Jews and those who convert from Judaism to Christianity may be branded traitors by ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations, while converts from a Muslim background can face pressure from their families. Some churches and monasteries have been subject to vandalism, and clergy abused, although reported attacks have decreased in recent years.

Ivory Coast

After years of political conflict, the October 2015 elections were said by Freedom House to be "arguably the freest, fairest and most peaceful in the country's history". However, the legacy of past violence looms large, and there have been several recent examples of increasing Islamist militancy, such as the killing of 18 people at a beach resort in March 2016. The growing influence of radical groups, following a hard-line Salafist ideology, poses many challenges to Christians, particularly in the Muslim-majority north of the country. This is especially true for Christians who have converted from Islam, who face serious discrimination.

Jordan

Jordan has long been one of the Middle East's more religiously open countries, but the tide is turning. Expatriate Christians and historical Christian communities are relatively free – as long as they do not evangelise Muslims. But Christians from Muslim backgrounds face serious oppression from local authorities, Muslim religious leaders and their own families. The large number of Muslim refugees that have come to Jordan from Syria and Iraq, combined with the rise of radical Islam, is also putting increasing pressure on Christians.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's repressive government seeks to control all areas of life. Religious freedom has been further restricted by recent legislation, while the government is using the threat of militant Islam as a pretext to clamp down. Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background come under the most pressure – from the government, family, friends and wider community. Churches that are active in evangelism are subjected to raids, threats, arrests and fines – especially if the church has not been registered.

Kenya

Most Kenyans are Christian, but violence against Christians has increased in recent years – predominantly at the hands of Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab, which continues to target Christians in regions near the border with Somalia, where the group is based. Militants cross into Kenya to raid towns or attack buses, where they separate Christians from Muslims, and execute the Christians. In April 2015, Al-Shabaab slaughtered 147 students at Garissa University, and Christians were singled out and killed.

Kuwait

The atmosphere in Kuwait is becoming increasingly hostile – though not yet violent – towards non-Muslims. Islamic law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Christians from Muslim backgrounds are seen as second-class, foreigners and infidels, and are prevented from participating in community activities. Expatriate or migrant Christians often struggle to obtain licences and registration for using places of worship.

United Methodist Church's perversion push costs more delegates

The United Methodist Church is now losing its regional bodies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

On March 18, United Methodist Church delegates from Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Estonia voted for allowing regional bodies to leave the denomination. The delegates also voted against a proposal that would have authorized the blessing of people living sexually perverted lifestyles.

The split comes as United Methodists in America and western Europe are pushing support for such perverted lifestyles. *theworldview.com*

Sweden: from dead Christianity to Atheism to Islam

Islam continues to take control of Great Britain and many parts of Europe. The following is excerpted from "Replacement theory is alive in the Islamic takeover of Europe," Israel National News, Mar. 15, 2023: "Sweden had 8 percent Muslims in 2016. In 2050 it will have 11 percent Muslims if immigration stops completely, but up to 21 percent if it remains 'normal,' and 31 percent if it continues at the same

pace of the last years. ... Not bad for the country that boasted of being 'the least religious in the West.' There was the transition of an entire people from Christianity to atheism. A Gallup poll said that only in China are there more atheists than in Sweden. David Thurfjell in a book called it *Det Gudlösa Folket*. The people without God. Speaking with Dagen, theologian Alan Hirsch said: 'Christianity is decaying throughout the Western world and here it can die out in a generation.' In a conversation this week with the Tribune Juive, the Algerian writer Boualem Sansal,

author of the ... novel 2084, says: 'Islam is today the second religion in Europe, but undoubtedly the first in terms of number of practitioners. I see Islam establishing itself in the West and it has imprinted powerful evolutions which little by little change the internal structure of the West. Laxity and the art of retreat are in place and have formed the minds of people to the point that we no longer even know whether a mortar shell in broad daylight in Paris is incivility, barbarism or jihadism. Europe is falling apart and is on a slope, absorbing blow by blow without being able to respond. But Europe would be too stupid not to understand that the weak have no future in the world to come and that globalization is not peace and prosperity for all as it naively believed, but a battleground between the strong.' *Way of Life Literature, volume 24, issue 12, March 24, 2023*

Communist Chinese disciple children to reject God

Since 2018, China has escalated its crack-down on Christians. Pastors are arrested, sometimes in the middle of services. One pastor was sentenced to five years for trying to print "illegal publications" – meaning the Bible. And Bible texts are reinterpreted to fit Chinese communist propaganda, explains *Christian Freedom International*.

Capturing the hearts and minds of Chinese youth is essential to the communists' plan. Children are banned from attending church. Parents are banned from teaching religion to their children. China's Compulsory Education Law makes homeschooling or private unregistered schools illegal.

When Christians in an impoverished region were told to replace pictures of Jesus with posters of Xi Jinping, a Communist Party chairman said, "They think God is their savior. After our cadres' (APPLE CA-dree) work, they'll realize their mistakes and think, 'We should no longer rely on

Jesus, but on the party for help.'"

In Exodus 20:2-3, Moses recorded these words. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 'You shall have no other gods before Me.'"

theworldview.com

The religion of the Left: Greta Thunberg awarded honorary doctorate of theology

The following is excerpted from "Yes, Leftism Is a Religion," PJMedia, Mar. 20, 2023: "[Q]ueerness, along with the rest of the Left's agenda, including climate hysteria, the vaccines, race obsessions, and every other aspect of the Left's obsessions, are for them a god. Leftism today is a religion, a sad and tatty substitute for genuine religion, but a religion nonetheless, an all-consuming preoccupation and a prism through which the devotee sees and understands all things. The University of Helsinki confirmed this anew on Monday by announcing that it was giving climate hysteric Greta Thunberg an honorary doctorate ... in theology. ... Nor are the solons of the University of Helsinki by any means the first Leftists to make a religion out of their delusions. ... New York Governor Kathy Hochul (D-Planned Parenthood) revealed in September 2021 that the COVID vaccines were a kind of sacrament: 'I prayed a lot to God during this time, and you know what – God did answer our prayers. He made the smartest men and women, the scientists, the doctors, the researchers—he made them come up with a vaccine. That is from God to us and we must say, thank you, God. Thank you. And I wear my vaccinated necklace all the time to say I'm vaccinated. All of you, yes, I know you're vaccinated, you're the smart ones, but you know there's people out there who aren't listening to God and what God wants.'"

Way of Life Literature, volume 24, issue 13

Farmers win victory over Dutch government's environmental nuttiness

The following is excerpted from "Dutch Government Reconsiders Green Agenda Following Farmer Victory," *The European Conservative*, Mar. 22, 2023: "Members of the Dutch government called for alterations in the Green Agenda after the recent victory of the pro-farmer party BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB) in the provincial elections. The BBB, which based its support on fighting damaging environmentalist policies, will now become the biggest party in the provinces as well as the Senate. ... In the regional governments, the BBB said it will not enforce any anti-farmer laws. *The BBB's rise is the result of policies that threatened to close thousands of farms, as the Dutch government followed EU plans to halve nitrogen emissions by 2030. This provoked an outbreak of farmer's protests, leading to the BBB's electoral landslide on March 15th. The BBB will also be the biggest party in the Senate – which is elected by the regional governments – giving it serious sway in the law-making process.* The BBB chairman, Erik Stegink, insists that the government's environmentalist policies must be dropped, especially its plans to buy and close farms, saying that '2030 must be off the table and expropriation is also not an option.'" *Way of Life Literature, volume 24, issue 13*

Minneapolis approves 5 daily Islam calls to prayer over speakers

Minneapolis, Minnesota will be the first major city in America to allow the Islam religion to dominate the city, by broadcasting religious announcements to prayer five times a day for all to hear — from 5:30 am to 10:00 pm, reports The Star Tribune.

The City Council unanimously approved this exception to the city's noise ordinance last Thursday. *theworldview.com*

38 new Bible translations completed in 2022

The United Bible Societies report 57 translations of the Bible or parts of it were completed in 2022. It's a record for new translations in a year.

This includes 14 new complete Bible translations, five New Testament translations, and 38 translations of parts of the Bible. These efforts make Scripture available to 100 million people for the first time.

Still, an estimated 200 million people covering nearly 4,000 languages do not have Scripture in their language. The United Bible Societies hopes to finish 1,200 more Bible translations in the next 15 years.

Psalm 22:27 says, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You." *theworldview.com*

Disney rolls out Homosexual "Pride Nite"

Speaking of Disney, the company's California-based amusement park, Disneyland, announced plans for its first "Pride Nite" on Monday.

The announcement came hours after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis called for new regulations on Disney's Florida-based amusement park, Disney World.

DeSantis has been working to end Disney's special self-governing status in the Sunshine State. The feud between DeSantis and Disney goes back to when the company opposed a Florida law that protects young children. The law bans teaching about sexually perverted lifestyles in early grades of public schools. *theworldview.com*

European atheists and agnostics increase

Atheists and agnostics continue to increase in western Europe.

A new report found that 40% of people in Spain said they have no religion last year.

That's up from 27% in 2018. Even among Spaniards who identify as religious, over 60% said they do not practice their faith.

Also, a new poll from France suggests over half of the population do not believe in God. In 2011, 56% of people in the country said they believe in God.

In both countries, the youngest generation of adults were the most likely to reject God.

Psalm 10:4 says, "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts." *theworldview.com*

Indonesian Church opened Easter Sunday after 15 years of delay

After over 15 years of dispute, an Indonesian church, Yasmin Church, located in the city of Bogor, just south of Jakarta, was finally allowed to open on Easter Sunday this year, reports International Christian Concern.

The church building initially opened in 2010 but was quickly shut down when the local government invalidated its building permit.

Objections from Bogor's majority Muslim community have been a significant obstacle for Yasmin Church and the primary reason it had not been allowed to reopen.

Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." *theworldview.com*

Making sense out of Nonsense

A brief consideration of present day 'progressivism' ¹

SJIRK BAJEMA

There has come about within western countries a quite radical change in mindset. What was until quite recently frowned upon and even legally prohibited is now trumpeted as the imparting of the most enlightening of all ideals. So illuminating is this secular humanism, that its strongest proponents are punishing those holding to the old ways with an even greater antipathy than they themselves ever endured in previously advocating what are now the 'new ways'.

This is a new philosophy that is so all embracing that anyone holding to anything perceived as even just off centre from it must

be removed altogether from any influence in the public sphere. Together with its allies in the mainstream media it effectively cancels any views that might dare offer an alternative rationale.

This belief, shared by an alliance of groups ranging from environmental to racial equality to global economic, and called such pejorative titles as 'wokeism' and 'political correctness,' penetrates far beyond traditional political views, reaching into the classroom and even into private intimate living spaces.² It is so involved in its sense of what is right that all else must be wrong. Indeed, in



Photo by Callum Shaw on Unsplash

They [the Progressives] are not having you on — they sincerely believe in the truth of what they are doing. In fact, they believe that we are living the lie — the lie which deceives us as to the enlightenment they are blessed to know.

response to those identified by them as wrong there is no measure of loving concern to gently convince those people to change but only the huge weight of its hate — an action shown in the ‘cancelling’ it so effectively does.

In a very small time period many have either taken on the values of this new thinking or been so bullied by it that there appears to be very little said against it. The vast majority have come to ‘bend the knee’ to its ideology — whether on the football field or in the classroom — across so much of society. Even churches have buckled under it, despite it being diametrically opposed to the very basis for their constitution. Or, at least, that is what we read or hear or see in the mainstream media.

One recent example is what the leader of the Liberal Party in the State of Victoria, Australia, has done to one of his M.P.’s who attended a feminist rally in Melbourne. Rather than get his facts right he jumped on to the transgender bandwagon and proceeded to have her expelled on the basis of an association with Nazis (who used the feminist rally to push their own agenda). And then there was the follow up protests by the transgender movement in New Zealand to have the English feminist keynote speaker at that rally barred from New Zealand, also largely perpetuating this misinformation. Look it up! But, please, don’t go to the mainstream media who are avowed devotees.³

And this is only one in many such instances of people expressing what were always conservative and traditional views now being, wherever possible ‘cancelled.’

The lesson from the past

In my library I have a book which fascinates me. I probably picked it up in an op-shop, where its eye-catching title refused to let me leave it there. And now it is becoming so prophetically true, though perhaps not in the exact way its author thought it would. You see, the title of this book is *You Can Trust the Communists (to be Communists)*.⁴ Well, like me, you might be thinking that any book written in 1960 at the height of the Cold War bringing out the difference between the Communist ideology and the capitalist philosophy would have little bearing, if any at all, on what we face today. It took only a few pages of reading it to see how very wrong I was. Dr. Fred Schwarz actually showed me quite clearly what indeed is happening today.

Already on the first page of this book there is the same clarion call we must hear today to deal effectively with the nonsensical truth that is pervading our society. He writes: “In the battle against Communism, there is no

substitute for accurate, specific knowledge. Ignorance is evil and paralytic. The best intentions allied with the most sincere motives are ineffective and futile if they are divorced from adequate knowledge.”

In a nutshell Schwarz sums up what was needed to counter the devastating march of Communism through the different spheres of society in his time. And, let’s be honest, it is no different for us today as Marxism’s children continue their march of destruction on the heart of capitalism in our day. There may be different names given to those secular humanism forces today but don’t be in any way fooled. Its motivation is set against the natural family and its base found in the Christian ethos which has so blessed our modern world. As much as the USSR brought up its children in state-run institutions, including many orphanages, so today its Communist descendants are making schools the brainwashing centres for a depraved and degenerate future generation. From Drag Queens telling stories in public libraries to the children on the streets protesting climate change there can be no doubt that there is an incredibly manipulative ideology at work orchestrated by hardened socialist activists. The most vivid example is that of the well-known climate change icon — Greta Thunberg. Do you think, for a moment, that what comes out of her mouth is genuine childish innocence and concern for the planet? No, there are adults at work, and, in her case, it’s her parents and their cohorts who have indoctrinated her into an extremely environmentalist and socialist thinking.

You shall know them by their fruit

A Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young song from the 1960’s had the words, *teach your children well*. In it a positive and instructional interaction with our children is very much promoted. But, that, it seems is not how the new ideology works. The source of all enlightenment and of our total and undying dedication must be in the latest education curriculum which our government has put out. From those who have gone consistently against God’s Word with removing an effective means of discipline for children, right through to completely confusing them with the LGBTQIA2S range of deviant lifestyles, there has been no slowing down. Indeed, it couldn’t be more the opposite. A simple examination into the recent changes in New Zealand’s Education Curriculum bears this out clearly. In history the white colonisers become vilified whilst the Maori are brave resisters; traditional knowledge (mātauranga Māori) is inserted everywhere

in the curriculum and given equivalence with modern knowledge, including science and maths; students are divided by race into Māori and non-Māori; and we see the creation of what these proponents describe as a “racialised curriculum”.

Just think of how the early missionaries will fare under this revisionism. And so it is – the introduction of Christianity is seen to be on a par with the rest of white colonisers without taking into account the positive influence those evangelical believers had in helping to promote and draw up such a visionary contract as the Waitangi Treaty between the British Government and Māori.

Again it is another case of ideology trumping science and every other possible subject in the State educational curriculum. As one Professor of Education stated: “What are we meant to make, for instance, of the “Purpose Statement for Mathematics and Statistics in the New Zealand Curriculum,” which states: “Being numerate in Aotearoa New Zealand today relies upon understanding diverse cultural perspectives and privileging te ao Māori and Pacific world-views?”⁵

If this were not enough proof of the fruit of the new ‘progressivism’ one only needs to turn to the ‘progressives’ redefining of biology. “Men can have babies” is the catch-cry and this is actively pursued through hormone medication from an early age, together with gender reassignment surgery. And don’t dare offer up actual medical research and evidence from the most reputable sources. Again, this is ideology driven, and no sense of actual common sense is going to get in its way.⁶

The ‘Progressives’ have the ‘Truth’

They are not having you on – they sincerely believe in the truth of what they are doing. In fact, they believe that we are living the lie – the lie which deceives us as to the enlightenment they are blessed to know. It doesn’t matter that their ‘truth’ can be refuted by logical scientific means. As was the case with the Communists in times past it is the received truth that they believe because of who has told it to them. Again Schwarz cuts to the chase here: “The Communists invariably tell the “truth,” but it is the Marxist-Leninist “truth.” Those who believe that the Communists will lie in the interests of Communism are mistaken. In fact, it is not possible for a Communist to lie in the interests of Communism. By definition, if a statement is in the interests of Communism, it is the truth.” (p.8)

You come across examples of this when

certain figures have at a later point been ‘revised’. At first they were figures which supported a certain government’s action or non-action, but when the actual truth came out the whole issue has dissipated down to an insignificant newspaper headline, if being published or broadcast at all. When alternative media picks up these blinding disparities, well, what else would you expect in such extreme right-wing, fascist, white-privileged media outlets?⁷

Schwarz goes on in this point: “Any lie that advances Communist conquest is, by definition, not a lie but the Marxist-Leninist truth. The maturity of a Communist can be judged by the extent to which he can divorce himself from the evidence of his sense and totally identify himself with the verdict of the Communist Party. When confronted with a choice between the evidence of his eyes and the verdict of the Communist Party, the mature Communist will believe with such conviction what the Party has said that, were he given a lie detector test, he would pass it with flying colours. He would experience all the emotions associated with truth when he thought of the decision of the Party.” (p.10)

George Orwell in his book “1984” called this ‘doublethink’, which in 1972 was coined ‘groupthink’ by the psychologist Irving Janis. The *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology* defines this phenomenon as “a condition in which highly cohesive groups in ‘hot’ decision situations display excessive levels of concurrence seeking that suppress critical inquiry and result in faulty decision making.”⁸

One only needs to consider the legislation passed in a number of western countries which bans hate-speech and, in particular, bans any therapy which may be applied to dissuade those who have entered upon the process of gender-change to cease that, and prohibits counselling for those wishing to return to their birth sex. Gender-regret is a very real issue⁹ and yet detransitioning is openly frowned upon.¹⁰ The groupthink narrative must be heeded.

On a more local level anyone living in New Zealand would have heard from the mainstream media that Cyclone Gabrielle and the damage it has caused in areas of the North Island is irrevocable proof of climate change. Yet, when challenged by independent journalists on the historical data for such storms and the rainfall figures through the last hundred years, the scientific evidence has shown something quite different. Even so, it will not stop their bleating on this danger of climate change, whether from the *Greens*, *Greenpeace*, or

those working for the *National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research* (NIWA), a Crown Research Institute of New Zealand. As one journalist noted, this is no longer a scientific debate, but it is about whose propaganda to believe.¹¹

The spirit behind it all

Deuteronomy 22:5 appears in a passage of what seem to be, at first, quite disparate verses. It states, “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.” And we wonder what it’s got to do with the following verses regarding bird’s nests and building regulations and sowing vineyards with two kinds of seed, ploughing with an ox and donkey together, and wearing cloth of wool and linen mixed together.

But while verse 5 might seem a bit out of kilter here, it is making a point about the way we were created. Mankind is made up of two sexes – male and female. Right from creation itself it is clear there are these two distinct biological sexes. All of God’s living creatures confirm it. And when he took them into the ark it was a male and female of every variety.

This is a distinction we must uphold because it is what’s at the heart of creation. To blur the sexual divisions or the vital importance of the connection between the two is going against God. And it is God’s way with nature which Deuteronomy 22:5 and its subsequent verses are dealing with.

Now, it seems the immediate background to this cross-dressing of verse 5 is the religious practices of the pagan nations around Israel. At least seven other times elsewhere in Deuteronomy the word translated “abomination” here comes up in connection with those religions. How truly up to date this is! For don’t we have a false religion out there doing the same in our own day? While this here is more specifically known as ‘transvestism’, it’s just one aspect of what we see in the secular humanism all around us.

So right throughout the ages this has been one way that the devil has attacked the gospel. While in Galatians 3:28 Paul says that there is no difference now between male and female, that is about status in the sight of God. It definitely doesn’t apply to what you wear.

Indeed, this verse is against an escalating trend in society today. It is clearly against the intentional masking of male or female characteristics in an attempt to defy one’s God-given gender. How much wasn’t that

shown in our recent New Zealand Census questions?

The word for “garment” in the first part of verse 5 shows this as it covers more than what you wear. Just as the property of the Israelite’s neighbour was to be regarded as sacred, so also the divine distinction between the sexes. And this included also all domestic and other utensils.

When we see this as a direct attack by Satan, it all begins to make a lot of sense. Our Lord quite clearly calls him out as the “father of lies” in John 8:44. Listen to the passage in which that saying is found. In John 8:43-46 Jesus says, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.”

Those Jews debating with Jesus sincerely believed they were right. However, they were very wrong. They had thoroughly convinced themselves that being related to Abraham physically ensured they were right with God spiritually. But that was a lie. Their being saved didn’t depend on to whom they were related, or what they could do, as the present-day exponents of ‘the lie’ believe. And, yet, when you or I meet their spiritual descendant today, it will be with the same spirit they answer. This is, after all, their destiny.

In line with this Schwarz writes: “Communists believe they have a destiny. Their destiny is to create a new world and regenerate mankind. To do this they must conquer the world, shatter the Capitalist system and, by Communist dictatorship, establish the regenerative environment of Socialism. This new environment will rear the young to perfection.” (p.15)

The way to respond

So, then, how do we respond to an ever-increasing and all-pervasive attack upon our Biblical principles? As these forces barge their way into all types of learning institutions, workplaces, sports clubs, shopping centres, and even churches, – what can we do?

Well, in the first place, you must be determined to do something. Many will agree with you that things are not right, and they too are concerned but very few will actually be motivated to do something about it.

This action begins with learning more about what confronts us. We must read and watch that which is concerned with the actual truth, and especially that which comes from those who firmly believe the One who is the Truth! Seek out websites and authors who specialise in exposing the lie that is being openly proclaimed. Support them wherever you can, whether encouragingly, financially or practically, for instance, by organising presentations in your suburb or town. Enable yourself to present those arguments so that in discussion or debate with neighbours, family, or others, you will be prepared to guide people to the only answer for life’s ultimate questions. You have to see those you meet every day as those who have souls which desperately need saving. Be in prayer for them, before and during, and after you have spoken to them. While we may be upset with the ideology that has taken them in, we must treat them equally as part of God’s creation and as those who need to be cared for and helped.

If the person with whom you are speaking is part of the radicalised, don’t step down. Be firm and polite in addressing the gravity of the nonsensical view they believe. Because, believe me, this is a religion to them. And they will fight for it with as much intensity as any other zealot has done in the past. You have to have faith to believe what they believe – but it’s far from the true faith!

Like the pagan religions and humanists ideologies of the past this too will pass away. However, will you be found standing at the end of the day?

*O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled over us,
but your name alone we bring to remembrance.
They are dead, they will not live;
they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end you have visited them with destruction
and wiped out all remembrance of them.
But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the land.*

Isaiah 26:13-15

Footnotes:

1. Wikipedia: "Progressivism holds that it is possible to improve human societies through political action. As a political movement, progressivism seeks to advance the human condition through social reform based on purported advancements in science, technology, economic development, and social organization."
2. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/gClioGfncZU>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvFcwP3thoc>
4. Published by Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., U.S.A., 1960.
5. <https://commonroomnz.com/graham-adams-hipkins-stealth-revolution-in-education/>
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PbjxU-Db3w>
7. <https://familyfirst.org.nz/2023/03/02/analysis-media-coverage-of-parliament-protest-2022/> <https://commonroomnz.com/john-oconnell-the-vaping-epidemic/>
8. <https://www.cram.com/essay/The-Power-Of-Groupthink-In-1984-By/PJQY7QY7WG#:~:text=Janis%20chose%20the%20name%20groupthink,likely%20to%20suffer%20from%20groupthink.>
9. <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20191007/Hundreds-of-trans-people-regret-changing-their-gender-says-trans-activist.aspx>
10. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-transyouth-outcomes/>
See also: <https://www.foxnews.com/world/christian-escaped-china-persecution-warns-us-descending-communist-style-governance>
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Luzf-4mFZMA>
A further inconvenient truth is the failure of local and central government to deal with such issues as ‘forestry slash’ – the accumulation of forestry waste which caused significant damage to regional infrastructure and private property.

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