

RESPONSE TO CHARGE THREE

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This paper is divided into five sections, following the structure of the charge: the charge itself, the proof texts, the secondary standards, the question of whether my view of civil government is a violation of the system of doctrine, and the specification. I have added a sixth section as an appendix, in which I produce some quotes by important American Presbyterians showing that they were committed to the notion that civil government ought to be religiously neutral.

A. THE CHARGE	2
B. THE PROOF TEXTS.....	4
ROMANS 13:1-4, [5-7].....	4
PSALM 2:[1-9], 10-12.....	9
ISAIAH 2:1-4.....	13
MATTHEW 28:18; EPH. 1:19B-21; PHIL. 2:9-11	13
DEUTERONOMY 4:5-8.....	14
MATTHEW 5:17-19.....	14
ROMANS 2:14-16.....	15
HEBREWS 2:2	15
DEUTERONOMY 17:18-20.....	16
PROVERBS 16:10-12.....	16
PROVERBS 14:34	17
GENESIS 15:13-16; DEUT. 9:4-5; 18:9, [10-11], 12	17
C. THE SECONDARY STANDARDS.....	19
D. A VIOLATION OF THE SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE?.....	21
THE MINUTES OF THE SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA AND NEW YORK	21
THE ORIGINAL AND REVISED VERSIONS IN PARALLEL WITH PROOF TEXTS	22
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE 1788 REVISION	32
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROOF TEXTS, BOTH ORIGINAL AND AMENDED	33
THEOCRATIC VESTIGES IN THE AMERICAN REVISION.....	34
THE MEANING OF "GENERAL EQUITY" IN THE 1788 REVISED VERSION.....	39
CONCLUSION.....	41
E. THE SPECIFICATION	41
F. APPENDIX: AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS ON RELIGIOUSLY NEUTRAL CIVIL GOVERNMENT	43
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (PRE-1788)	43
JACOB GREEN (1776)	43
MEMORIALS OF HANOVER PRESBYTERY TO THE VIRGINIA STATE LEGISLATURE (1776-1785).....	44
JOHN RODGERS, FIRST MODERATOR OF THE GA (1783)	47
PREFACE TO THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT OF THE PCUSA (1788)	48
CHARLES HODGE (1851, 1863)	48
J. GRESHAM MACHEN (1924, 1932, 1933)	50

A. THE CHARGE

The Presbytery of Southern California of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church charges you, the Rev. C. Lee Irons, with violating your ordination vows by teaching, contrary to the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards, that civil government must be religiously neutral, and therefore not subject to the binding authority of God's special revelation in Scripture (including the Moral Law).

I acknowledge that I have taught that "civil government must be religiously neutral." Indeed, that is precisely the language I have used (see the quotes cited under paragraphs b, c, d, e of the specification below, pp. 41-42). However, I deny the second part of the charge, that civil government is "therefore not subject to the binding authority of God's special revelation in Scripture (including the Moral Law)."

If the parenthetical remark, "including the Moral Law," is left out for a moment, I deny that I have taught that civil government is "not subject to the binding authority of God's special revelation." Such a sweeping separation of civil government from any standards prescribed for it in special revelation would be going too far. In my "Reformed Theocrats" paper, I argue that God's special revelation in Scripture does contain principles that are binding on civil government – in particular, the teaching in Genesis 4 and 9 concerning the duty of civil government to exercise temporal justice in accordance with the covenant of common grace. Kline argues that God's promise to protect Cain against familial vengeance "contemplates the establishment of an institutional structure for a legitimate judicial office in man's fallen world."¹ After the flood, the judicial office was re-established more formally as part of the covenant of common grace (Genesis 8:21—9:17). The covenant of common grace also includes other authoritative norms for human conduct, such as the ordinances of marriage and labor.² Since civil government is an institution established by God under the umbrella of the covenant of common grace, it is subject to the binding authority of God's special revelation pertaining to that covenant.

When the parenthetical statement "including the Moral Law" is put back in, the charge is ambiguous. The fact that "the Moral Law" is capitalized and referred to as that which is "included" in Scripture, suggests that by "the Moral Law" the ten commandments is intended. The citation of WCF XIX:1-3 in support of the charge also suggests that the Moral Law here is the Decalogue. If that is what is being referred to, the charge is accurate: I do not believe that civil government is subject to the binding authority of the Decalogue. The Decalogue was not given to the nations. It is in fact called "the tablets of the covenant" between Yahweh and Israel, and the tablets were placed within the ark of the covenant inside the sanctuary. Furthermore, the 1788 American Revision of the Westminster Standards teaches that the civil magistrate may not enforce the first table of the Decalogue, in effect making this charge out of accord with our own secondary standards.

On the other hand, if the moral law is defined in accordance with WLC # 92-93 as the moral will of God given in the covenant of works before the fall, the charge would no longer be out of accord with our secondary standards. But then it would be accusing me of a position I do not hold. I affirm that civil government and its officers are subject to the moral will of God first given to Adam and thereafter continuously revealed to all mankind in creation and conscience. Civil governments are required to behave

¹ Kline, "Oracular Origin of the State," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor*, ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 136. Cited by Lee Irons, "The Reformed Theocrats: A Biblical Theological Response." See "(3) A biblical theological definition of the state" in which I summarize Kline's interpretation of Genesis 4:10-16 and 9:5-6.

² Kline makes reference to the "the creation ordinances of marriage and labor, instituted in Eden, reinstated after the Fall, and covenantally formalized in the postdiluvian covenant which God made with all the earth, explicitly for as long as the earth should endure." *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), p. 102.

according to "the light of nature" (WLC # 2; WCF I:1), "the law written in their hearts" (WCF IV:2). Civil governments are therefore accountable to not transgress God's moral will, in spite of the fact that they are not subject to God's special revelation in Scripture. For example, as I state in my paper "The Reformed Theocrats," civil government is not free to confess allegiance to false gods or to promote idolatry:

Any and all cultic activity - e.g., religious instruction, public confessions of faith in God or any alleged deity, cultic rituals such as sacrifice, the building of temples for the gods - has no place in the common grace state. ...the state must be religiously neutral, that is, confessing allegiance neither to the God of the covenant people nor to the gods of the unbelievers [cited in paragraph b. of the specification below].

Many other aspects of the moral law are also binding on civil government. For example, the moral law requires people to honor their contracts, prohibits the giving of false testimony in court, and protects various human rights such as the right to life and property, etc. These aspects of the moral law certainly have relevance to civil government in its various functions in society. Civil magistrates and governments that have engaged in the unjust taking of human life (e.g., the various genocidal regimes of the twentieth century), or that have otherwise violated other God-given human rights grounded in man's identity as the image of God (Gen. 9:6), will be held accountable at the day of judgment for these heinous transgressions of the moral law.

The presbytery has charged me with teaching that civil government is "not subject to the binding authority of" of the moral law. As I have said, I deny the charge, since I affirm that civil government is subject to the moral law. But perhaps the authors of the charge intended to charge me with teaching "that civil government is not required to enforce the moral law in society." In other words, it is conceivable that the authors of the charge hold that civil government must treat idolatry, fornication, homosexual practice, etc., as crimes punishable by the state, and that they are charging me with the doctrinal error of denying that civil government should do these things.

At this point we enter a difficult area that I am not sure anyone has the answers to. To my mind, this much is clear: civil government ought to be religiously neutral, and therefore ought not to enforce the requirements of the moral law pertaining to man's duty toward God. In other words, sins against the so-called first table of the law should not be treated as crimes by the state. I believe this is the official position of the OPC as witnessed by its having adopted the 1788 American Revision of the Westminster Standards. But whether civil government ought to enforce the requirements of the moral law pertaining to man's duty toward neighbor, is not a simple question. Certainly it ought to enforce the prohibition against murder as required in Genesis 9:5-6. But not every violation of the sixth commandment falls within the purview of the state - for example, "sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations," etc. (WLC # 136). Similar considerations apply to each of the commandments belonging to the so-called second table of the law. And the tenth commandment (prohibiting coveting) should be totally excluded from the state's purview, since the state cannot discern what is in a person's heart. So we can immediately eliminate the first, second, third, fourth, and tenth commandments from the purview of the civil magistrate.

With regard to the fifth through ninth commandments, we would have to carefully distinguish between sins and crimes. Not all sins against the moral law ought to be treated as crimes by civil government.³ In other words, when we are dealing with the question of the civil enforcement of the moral law, we are not really dealing with the moral law itself but with a subset of it. This must be acknowledged even by those who prefer the original, unrevised Confession and would like to see *both* tables of the law enforced in society. Although the original Westminster divines taught that the civil magistrate is the custodian of both tables, they did not teach that the civil magistrate must enforce the entirety of the moral

³ In his commentary on Romans 13:3-4, John Murray states that "it is not the prerogative of the ruler to deal with all sin but only with sin registered in the action which violates the order that the magistrate is appointed to maintain and promote." *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, p. 151.

law, which "require[s] the utmost perfection of every duty, and forbid[s] the least degree of every sin" (WLC # 99, sub. 1). Therefore even a theocratic civil magistrate would be enforcing, not the moral law per se, but a subset of it, since he would not want the state to criminalize private sins of the heart like anger, lust, covetousness, etc.

How do we draw the boundaries of the subset of the moral law that ought to be civilly enforced? Aside from the requirement of capital punishment for murder (Gen. 9:5-6), the Scripture is largely silent on this question. This is a difficult issue, and I do not claim to have the answer. It seems that the question will have to be determined by rational inquiry, by asking, "What are the effects upon society when the government pursues this or that policy?" Questions of public policy and civil law are in principle no different from the questions that arise in any other field within the common grace arena, such as medicine or civil engineering. In the arena of common grace, we do not have a divine blueprint to work with, since God has in effect granted permission to each society to work out these problems for itself through trial and error. (Remember, however, that this permission is only with regard to the question of enforcement. Civil government does not have permission to violate the moral law.)

There is one final point that needs to be made. Although civil government does not have permission to violate the moral law, it would seem that civil government by its very nature has the right to regulate violations of the moral law. The government may regard pornography as a grave social evil, and yet it may deem governmental censorship of pornography as an illegitimate encroachment upon civil liberty. The government may then opt for a middle approach: the regulation of pornography by restricting its sale to adults, by making the production and use of child pornography illegal, by permitting individual communities to set their own standards of decency, etc. Such a governmental policy is tantamount to the regulation of sin. To regulate sin is not to sanction it. The government is not itself in the business of making, selling or otherwise promoting pornography, so it is not violating the moral law or encouraging that it be violated, but it does regulate sin to prevent it from running unchecked and bringing even greater harm to society.

To summarize: Not only does the charge contain two separate offenses (contrary to BD III:2(c)), the charge is exceedingly ambiguous and capable of multiple interpretations. I acknowledge having taught that civil government ought to be religiously neutral, just as the 1788 Revision teaches. I acknowledge having taught that civil government is not subject to the binding authority of the Mosaic Law or Decalogue. I also acknowledge having taught (in keeping with the 1788 American Revision) that civil government is not obligated to enforce the entirety of the moral law. But I deny having taught that civil government itself is not subject to the moral law, or that the moral law is completely irrelevant to matters of criminal law, civil law, or social policy.

B. THE PROOF TEXTS

Romans 13:1-4, [5-7]

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore [or "so that"] whoever resists the civil authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of the civil authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. [5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.]

This may be the most important proof text cited in support of the charge, since it is one of the few passages in the New Testament that explicitly deals with the subject of civil government. However, Paul's teaching here is not addressed to civil rulers, as if he were setting forth principles of civil government that they ought to follow. In the immediate context, Paul is addressing the Christians at Rome. In Romans 12-14, Paul is giving various ethical instructions and exhortations to the Roman Christians. For example, in the paragraph just before 13:1-7, Paul's exhortations are reminiscent of the teaching of Jesus. He exhorts them to "bless those who persecute you" (12:14), to "never pay back evil for evil" or "take their own revenge" but "to leave room for the wrath of God," and thus "if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink," thereby "overcoming evil with good" (12:17-21). Immediately after calling upon the Christians to love their enemies, just as Jesus had, Paul applies this to their immediate situation in Rome: "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities" (13:1). The flow of thought is quite natural. One of the "enemies" that the Christians of the first century would have naturally been afraid of was the highly authoritarian government of Rome.⁴ In AD 19 the Jewish community of Rome was expelled from the city under Tiberius, and approximately eight years before Paul wrote Romans, in AD 49 the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews a second time (Acts 18:2).⁵ Many of the Gentile Christians at Rome had been adherents of the Jewish synagogues before their conversion to the Christian faith. Even after coming to Christ, they would have felt the reverberations of the Claudian expulsion, since at this juncture the Roman Empire still viewed Christianity as a Jewish sect. Paul's teaching in this passage, then, is not a treatise on civil government in the abstract, but an exhortation to the Christians at Rome, in view of their living in the most powerful city of the known world at this time. Living in the shadow of the dreaded Roman Empire, they needed to be encouraged to adopt an attitude of submissiveness to the civil authorities, rather than participating in the attitude of rebellion that was festering among the Jewish community in Rome.⁶

The structure of the passage, as laid out by Douglas Moo in his commentary on Romans, is as follows:⁷

- A. General command: "submit to the authorities" (v. 1a)
 - First reason ("for") for submission: they are appointed by God (v. 1b)
 - Consequences ("so that") of resisting the authorities: God's judgment (v. 2)
 - Second reason ("for") for submission: rulers are God's servants to reward good and punish evil (vv. 3-4)
- B. Reiteration ("therefore") of general command, with abbreviated reference to reasons for submission (v. 5):
 - "because of [fear of] wrath"
 - "because of conscience"
- C. Appeal to practice: the Roman Christians are paying taxes (v. 6)
- D. Specific command: pay your taxes and respect the authorities! (v. 7)

⁴ "... These words ['love your enemies'] would have had a concrete reference and relevance: to speak of enemies in that situation meant first and foremost to speak of Rome. The words meant, in short, 'Love your enemies, the Romans.' They constitute a repudiation of the path of armed national resistance." Marcus Borg, "A New Context for Romans XIII," *NTS* 19:2 (January 1973) 206.

⁵ Suetonius explains why: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (*Claudius* XXV.4) Who is *Chrestus*? Many scholars think Suetonius has garbled his sources and that what really happened is that the Roman Jews rioted over the preaching of the message that Jesus was the Christ. But Marcus Borg argues persuasively that it probably refers to Jewish messianic agitation in Rome provoked by the mistreatment of the Roman Jewish community by the Roman government. Borg, p. 212.

⁶ The Jewish Christian community in Rome (the original base of the Roman congregation) was likely expelled along with the Jews in AD 49. Because they shared the Jewish experience of social dislocation and persecution, the Christians at Rome were likely tempted to adopt the same anti-Roman sentiments of the Jewish community. Therefore, Paul had to exhort them to have a different attitude toward Rome, just as he had to address the problems created by the differing attitudes toward the Jewish dietary restrictions (Rom. 14). Borg, p. 213.

⁷ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 794.

At the heart of the general command (A) is the imperative: "be in subjection to." The verb *hupotasso* does not usually mean to "obey" but is used "of submission involving recognition of an ordered structure, with dative of the entity to whom/which appropriate respect is shown" (BDAG). Paul is not exhorting the Christians at Rome to obey the civil government without qualification. Obviously, Paul would not have encouraged them to obey any laws that would require them to disobey God or to renounce Christ (cp. Acts 4:19; 5:29).⁸ Rather, Paul is exhorting the Christians at Rome to recognize the legitimacy of the present civil and political order and to show it appropriate respect. As the context shows, one of the ways in which the Christians at Rome can demonstrate this attitude of subjection and respect for the civil order is by paying their taxes (vv. 6-7) – just as, by contrast, the Jewish Zealots showed that they did not recognize the legitimacy of Rome by refusing to pay the taxes it demanded.⁹

Having given the general command to adopt an attitude of subjection to and respect for the civil government, Paul then gives two reasons for this command. The first reason is stated in verse 1b: "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Here Paul simply states a well-known truth taught in the Old Testament: God is sovereign over all the affairs of men and nations, and therefore no ruler or government attains such authority by its own might or ingenuity, but only because it is God's sovereign will. The lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned is that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone He wishes" (Dan. 5:21; cp. 4:17, 25). God is the one who "removes kings and establishes kings" (Dan. 2:21). Note the absoluteness of Paul's statement here: "there is *no* authority except from God." The statement admits of no exceptions. This is important because it shows that Paul is not speaking in prescriptive terms, as if he were saying that some civil governments that have been established by God are legitimate, and others are not. He plainly says that there are no civil governments that have not been established by God. To make sure we don't miss the point he states it in the positive form: "and *those which exist* are established by God." The Christians at Rome would have applied these words to their own situation and would have concluded that Paul was exhorting them to regard the Roman authorities as established by God.

The truth that God is the sovereign establisher of all civil governments leads to an important implication: "Therefore whoever resists the civil authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." Since the civil authority is ordained by God, whoever fails to yield the proper subjection to and respect for the governing authorities, has opposed an authority structure that has been ordained by God. In Greek the phrase "the ordinance [*diatage*] of God" links back to the preceding statement that those authorities which exist are established or ordained [*tetagemnai*] by God, as well as to the earlier command to be in subjection [*hupotasso*] to them. All three words derive from the same verbal root, "to ordain, to set up" [*tasso*]. Since God is the one who "ordained" civil government, civil government is an "ordinance" to which we have an obligation to be "sub-ordinated" [*hupo-tasso*]. Paul adds, "and they who have opposed [*anti-tasso*] will receive condemnation upon

⁸ Cranfield states that the Christian's duty to "be in subjection" to the authorities is "limited to respecting them, obeying them so far as such obedience does not conflict with God's laws, and seriously and responsibly disobeying them when it does." Such civil disobedience must be done in a responsible and respectful manner, so that it is actually consistent with the command to be in subjection. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), vol. 2, p. 662.

⁹ Josephus states that the Zealots ("the fourth philosophy") regarded the payment of Roman taxes the equivalent of slavery; they claimed that God alone was their Ruler and Lord. Josephus blames the Zealots for inciting the Jews of Jerusalem to revolt against Rome in AD 66 by refusing to pay the annual tribute to Caesar, leading ultimately to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.1, 6; *The Wars of the Jews* 2.8.1; 2.16.5. This is the historical context behind the gospel story in which the Jews tried to trap Jesus by asking him whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. If Jesus replied that it was lawful, he could be accused of denying that the theocratic kingdom of Israel was under the God's Lordship. If he replied that it was not lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, he could be accused of sedition and delivered over to the Roman authorities (Luke 20:20). By replying, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" Jesus showed his utter lack of sympathy for the Zealots' revolt against Rome, and effectively desacralized the theocratic civil order of Israel, reducing it to the common grace level along with Rome and all other civil governments.

themselves." To "oppose" the civil government is not the same thing as to disobey it, since responsible disobedience is necessary when the government demands that we disobey Christ and would, in such cases, be consistent with the command to be in subjection. To oppose the civil authority, then, means to not recognize its legitimacy, to be in open rebellion against it (e.g., like the Zealots).¹⁰ Those who engage in this kind of rebellion, Paul says, will receive condemnation upon themselves. Paul is probably referring here to God's condemnation as expressed through his servant, the civil government.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul now gives a second reason why Christians ought to be in subjection to the civil government. "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." The flow of thought and the logical connector "for," suggest that the good behavior and the evil behavior in verse 3 must be defined not in general terms, but in relation to the topic at hand. Good behavior apparently refers to being a good citizen, to displaying the sorts of behavior that the civil authority is likely to reward. While "the good" ought not to be narrowly defined merely as the equivalent of being in subjection to the civil authorities, it must have some relation to individual's interaction with the civil order, and cannot be defined so expansively as to include those private virtues of goodness and morality with which the civil authority has no concern. The good is that public good which merits the civil authority's praise. Similarly, evil behavior must be defined in relation to the civil authority's response of wrath. The context suggests that "the evil" probably refers to the opposition to civil government described in verse 2, although it may go beyond that to include other forms of political behavior that the state judges to be detrimental to its authority.¹¹

Notice that Paul is not *prescribing* the sorts of behavior that the civil authorities ought to reward and to punish. He is merely *describing* a fact about civil government: it rewards behavior that it approves of and it punishes behavior that it does not. When this passage is read against the historical backdrop of the Roman Empire in the first century, Paul's descriptive statement that the state is "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil," covers a considerably narrower field of "evil" than that which the Westminster divines envisioned. In the original Confession they stated that the civil magistrate has the duty of punishing heresy and blasphemy (WCF XXIII:3), or anything "contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness" (WCF XX:4). This expansive definition of "the evil" that is the proper concern of the civil magistrate to suppress and punish clearly finds no place in Paul's thinking, for if anything is clear, it is that the Roman government of his day was in fact a major promoter of religious error and idolatry. And yet, in spite of this obvious shortcoming, Paul states that the political order of his day was "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." In view of the immediate concern of Paul in this passage – viz., the exhortation to Christians to adopt a submissive attitude toward government in contrast with those who would oppose the legitimacy of Rome – it would seem that "the evil" that elicits the wrath and condemnation of the authorities is that behavior which in some manner undermines Rome's lawful authority.

Having established the two types of citizens (the one who does "good" and the one who does "evil," where both are defined in terms of actions that elicit a response of praise or condemnation from the civil authorities), Paul then asks: "Do you want to have no fear of the authority? Do what is good and you will receive praise from the same." Remember, Paul is still addressing the Christians at Rome. The "you" in his question, "Do you want to have no fear of the authority?" is not rhetorical, as if Paul were addressing all citizens, whether Christian or not. Paul is aware that some of the Christians at Rome are afraid of the Roman government. They have good reasons to be afraid, given Rome's hostility to Jews in general and to Christians in particular. It is precisely this fear that has occasioned his strong exhortation to be in subjection. Rather than responding to Rome's tyranny and authoritarianism in the manner of the Zealots,

¹⁰ Bammel states that "they who have opposed" could be translated "insurgents" and suggests that this verse provides "evidence for Zealot inclinations in the Christian community at Rome." *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 370.

¹¹ "The kind of disobedience that is contemplated is not every form of law-breaking, but that kind that could be expected to result in Rome bearing the sword of war: rebellion." Borg, p. 216.

who are in opposition to Rome and in danger of receiving condemnation upon themselves (which literally occurred in AD 70), the Christians at Rome must be in subjection. To paraphrase, Paul is saying: "I know that you Christians at Rome are afraid of Rome. Do you want to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good. Be in subjection to this government that God has sovereignly ordained. But if you do what is evil – if you oppose Rome as the Zealots do – be afraid; for the Roman Emperor does not bear the sword¹² for nothing."

What does Paul mean when he states that the civil ruler is "a minister of God *to you [soi]* for good" (v. 4)? Cranfield's comments are helpful at this point:

We take it that by *soi* the Christian who is doing "that which is good" is meant, and that *theou gar diakonos estin soi eis to agathon* ["for he is a minister of God *to you* unto good"] is an assurance addressed to him ... The ruler helps the Christian toward "the good" which God has in store for him, toward salvation ... if he is a just ruler, by providing him with encouragement to do good and discouragement from doing evil ... while, if he is unjust, he still, by God's over-ruling and in spite of his own intentions, must needs help (for the troubles which he will contrive for the faithful Christian will be among those "troubles of this life" of which Calvin says in his comment on 8.28, that "so far from hindering our salvation ... they rather assist it").¹³

It is of course possible that "to you" could be rhetorical – not addressed to the Christians at Rome but to any citizen whether believer or unbeliever. The fact that it is singular rather than plural might seem to support this interpretation. However, the singular has been used throughout this paragraph, beginning with the initial command in verse 1: "Every person is to be in subjection [third person singular] to the governing authorities." The singular form is continued in all of the main verbs in verses 3 and 4: "Do you [singular] want to have no fear of the civil authority? Do [singular] what is good and you [singular] will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you [singular] for good. But if you [singular] do what is evil, be afraid [singular]." The singular verbs in verses 3 and 4 link back to the initial command in verse 1 which is addressed to the Christians at Rome using the singular form. This grammatical link supports Cranfield's interpretation of Paul's affirmation that the civil authority "is a minister of God *to the Christian* for good."

Cranfield's interpretation is further supported by noting that in section B (v. 5) Paul reiterates the general command of section A (v. 1): "For this reason it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake." If verses 3 and 4 were a rhetorical address to any citizen, whether believer or unbeliever, Paul's reiteration in verse 5 would not be appropriate. In particular, the reference to being in subjection "not only because of wrath *but also for conscience' sake*" would be out of place. As Moo explains:

"Conscience" refers here to the believer's knowledge of God's will and purposes. Christians know what Paul has just taught: that secular rulers are appointed by God (v. 1b) and that they function therefore as his servants (v. 4). The "necessity" for Christians to submit to government is therefore no mere practical expedient, a means of avoiding punishment; it arises ultimately from insight into ... God's providential ordering of the world for our good and his glory.¹⁴

While the unbeliever may be motivated to be in subjection to civil government merely to avoid the magistrate's wrath, as Christians we have a higher motivation. We know that the civil authority has

¹² Contrary to popular opinion, "the sword" in the Roman Empire was not a symbol of capital punishment but of military power – the kind of military power that the Empire often used against those who rebelled against it (e.g., the Jewish revolt in AD 68-70). Cranfield, p. 667. Borg points out that in the LXX the word "sword" (*machaira*) is never used to denote the power of the government to punish criminals, but almost always as a literal weapon of warfare or as a metaphor for warfare. Borg, p. 216.

¹³ Cranfield, pp. 665-66.

¹⁴ Moo, p. 803.

been ordained by God, and therefore in light of our conscientious knowledge of the Lordship of Christ over the civil sphere, we have a doubly good reason to be in subjection. We do so in submission to God himself, who is the sovereign Lord of all rulers and governments on earth.

I assume that this exceedingly important text was cited in support of the charge, and placed first in the list of proof texts, because it affirms that the magistrate is "a minister of God," and therefore presumably shows that civil government ought to confess the true God and not be religiously neutral. But as I have shown, Paul's view that the civil authority is "ordained by God" is universal in scope and does not admit of any exceptions. Paul is speaking, not from the vantage point of God's preceptive will (that which God commands), but from the point of view of God's decretive will as manifested in his providential ordering of the civil arena (that which God ordains). And because the powers that be are ordained by God, it follows that for the Christian the civil authority is a minister of God to him. Notice that if Paul were dealing with the issue from a preceptive point of view, he would not have said that the Roman Emperor is a minister of God (which he most evidently was not in terms of his religious confession), but would have called upon the Emperor to renounce his false religion and *become* a minister of God.¹⁵

The additional reference to rewarding the good and punishing the evil in verses 3-4, is presumably interpreted as teaching that not only is civil government not to be religiously neutral, but as a minister of God it has a moral obligation to enforce the moral law in society. But again, Paul is not addressing the civil magistrate as if he were prescribing the duties and functions of civil government. Rather, Paul is addressing Christians and exhorting them to be in subjection to the civil ruler, since he is, whether consciously or unconsciously, a minister of God *to them* for their spiritual good. Paul is merely describing the way the civil authority of his day (Rome) was responding to political activity among its citizens. The good and the evil are not defined with reference to the eternal moral will of God, but in political and social terms – the sorts of political behaviors which elicited from the Roman government a response of praise or a response of wrath. The Roman government certainly was not enforcing the moral law. It was in fact blasphemously promoting and encouraging the violation of the moral law by means of its state-sponsored idolatry and the cult of the Emperor. The evil that Paul observes the Roman government punishing must therefore be the narrower evil of rebellious political behavior. In addition, notice that Paul describes the Roman government's various responses to good and evil political behavior in order to motivate the Roman Christians to be in subjection. If they are not in subjection, the Roman government will become the unwitting tool in God's hand to chasten and judge them – just as a decade after Paul wrote this epistle, Rome became the unwitting minister of God's judgment upon the Jews who revolted against Rome. However, the real reason Christians should be in subjection is not because they are afraid of the wrath of Rome, but "for conscience' sake." The Christian's subjection to civil government is a conscientious subjection to God himself who has sovereignly ordained the powers that be. In conclusion, then, Romans 13:1-4 does not support the claim that civil government must confess the true religion (the opposite of being religiously neutral) or that it has a moral obligation to enforce the entirety of the moral law in society.

Psalm 2:[1-9], 10-12

It is important that we examine vv. 10-12 in the context of Psalm 2 as a whole. The psalm divides into four stanzas of three verses each:

¹⁵ The notion of a pagan king being God's "minister," whether he acknowledges the LORD or not, is common in the Old Testament. E.g., Cyrus, king of Persia (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). More directly parallel is the Assyrian king who was God's "minister" of wrath upon the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah 10:5ff: "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation ... But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations."

Verses 1-3: Earthly kings in rebellion against God and his Anointed King

Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"

Verses 4-6: God's response to the rebellious nations

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, 6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

Verse 7-9: The Anointed King reads the terms of his royal grant

7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

Verses 10-12: Exhortation to do homage to the King

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. 11 Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. 12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

In the first stanza the psalmist expresses the concern and distress of the covenant people of God as they look out among the nations and see them restlessly stirring and preparing to rebel against God's anointed king.

In the second stanza we are introduced to God, "the One who sits enthroned in heaven" (v. 4). He is scoffing at those who are plotting their pitiful rebellion. Unlike the covenant people, he is not fearful as he contemplates the rebellious nations. He is serenely seated on his universal throne looking down upon the world. The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers in his sight. He is fully aware of the plotting and scheming that is going on down below. But he is not concerned and can barely contain his contempt as he solemnly declares, "But as for me, I have installed my King upon Zion, my holy mountain." The nations may be preparing to throw off the reign of the human monarch who reigns in Jerusalem, but God says that he has a heavenly king installed upon Zion.

With this heavenly perspective still in view, we come to the third stanza (verses 7-9). The psalmist suddenly hears another voice speaking. Who is it? It is certainly not Yahweh, for this speaker quotes something that Yahweh said to him. This speaker must be the very king that Yahweh referred to in his confident speech. He is none other than Yahweh's Son. God's own Son is installed as king in heaven. In the New Testament Psalm 2 is quoted approximately 18 times with reference to Jesus Christ.¹⁶

In verses 8-9, the Son recounts the contents of the royal decree his Father has given him. Yahweh has not only installed his Son as King in the heavenly Zion. He has given him a royal charter, a deed of grant. Just as an earthly king might reward one of his faithful commanders after a successful military campaign by giving him a royal grant of a piece of land as his perpetual possession – so here, the Son of God is holding a title deed, a royal grant given him by his Father. The very ends of the earth have been given to the Son as his inheritance. The entire creation belongs to the Son. It has been legally deeded over

¹⁶ Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; John 1:49; Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 1:5; 2:26-27; 11:15, 18; 12:5; 19:15, 19.

to him as his eternal possession. It is only a matter of time before he takes possession of it in fact. Yahweh the Creator God has made his Son the heir of the entire created cosmos, including all its inhabitants. And this entitles the Son to use whatever force is necessary to take his rightful inheritance. If he must, he is entitled to break the nations with a rod of iron and to shatter them like clay pots.

After two stanzas of heavenly discourse between the Father and the Son, the psalmist now regains his own voice. In the fourth and final stanza, the psalmist speaks on behalf of the Son to the nations. The psalmist is no longer anxious as he was in the first stanza. He has been caught up into the heavenly arena and he now has a new perspective, a heavenly perspective. His attitude is now that of God's – like God he is serene and calm and confident. Fortified by this heavenly perspective, the psalmist addresses the tumultuous nations and exhorts them to repent before the Son's anger flares up.

We must now address the question of the *what* and the *when* of Christ's kingdom. What is the nature of his kingly authority in this present age? When does Christ take possession of the ends of the earth and rule the nations with a rod of iron? These questions are inseparably intertwined. The *timing* of Christ's kingdom is inextricably bound up with the *nature* of Christ's kingdom.

Our questions are answered by the New Testament's commentary on Psalm 2. In the book of Acts, Luke quotes Psalm 2 twice. In a sermon of Paul in Acts 13:33 we read that "God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that he raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" Thus, according to Acts 13, Psalm 2 was fulfilled at the resurrection. But Luke also quotes Psalm 2 earlier in the book of Acts, in chapter 4:

19 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; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." 21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. 23 When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? 26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' 27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

Here Luke says that even after Psalm 2 has been fulfilled the uproar of the nations depicted in Psalm 2:1-3 still continues. Luke tells us in chapter 3 how Peter and John healed a lame man who was begging for alms at the gate of the temple. After he was healed, he entered the temple with Peter and John, "walking and leaping and praising God." This caused quite a commotion. A crowd formed, and so Peter preached to them concerning Jesus. Peter said that it was not by his own power or piety that the lame man was made to walk, but only by faith in Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead. As Peter was speaking, we are told in Acts 4:1, that the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them and arrested Peter and John and threw them in prison. The next day, there was a gathering of the rulers and the elders and the scribes, along with Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas – the very ones who had handed Jesus over to the Romans to be put to death. Luke clearly sees the parallel between this

council and the one that condemned Jesus. The apostles are encountering the very same hostility that Jesus had encountered. Luke sees both of these councils (the one that condemned Jesus and the one that harassed Peter and John) as the fulfillment of the plotting and the conspiracy of the nations prophesied in Psalm 2. Herod and Pilate and the Jews conspired to overthrow Messiah's reign when they crucified Jesus. Even after his resurrection and ascension, the same enemies continue to conspire against the Messiah by conspiring against his church.

Although Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God, and thus the time of his glory has begun, nevertheless, his sufferings still continue insofar as his body, the church militant upon the earth, is suffering in union with him. Indeed, whenever the church is opposed and persecuted for its witness to Christ, that opposition is nothing less than the rebellious opposition of the nations against the ascended King in heaven. Although Christ is enthroned in heaven, during this present interim age, he permits the nations to plot and rage against him and against his body the church. The sovereign reign of the ascended Christ is real. But it is being currently manifested, not by means of judgment, but in a hidden form.

At first the believers of the infant church in Acts 4 do not understand why there is a delay in Christ's visible kingship and victory as promised in Psalm 2. They are confused. Why would God allow the rebellious nations, whom Christ has conquered, to continue to conspire against him? They think something is wrong. But when they pray and turn their eyes heavenward to see the glory of God enthroned on high and his Anointed King at his right hand, they understand. The purpose of the delay is to provide opportunity for the fulfillment of Christ's royal charter, that is, the Father's grant to him that he need only ask and he will give him the nations as his inheritance. Knowing this spurs them on to pray for boldness to proclaim the gospel in the name of Jesus (vv. 29-30). As we move from Psalm 2 to Acts 4, a wonderful translation in typological idiom occurs. "The ends of the earth" are given to Jesus, not only at the day of judgment, but now by means of the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 1:8; 13:47). The Father's promise to his Son in Psalm 2:8 thus takes on a double meaning. The nations that are the Father's gift to the Son are not merely the nations whom the Son will destroy at his second coming, but from the perspective of the new covenant, with its worldwide commission of preaching the gospel to the nations, the nations are Christ's possession, most importantly, in the sense that they belong to him as his redeemed people, whom he purchased with his blood, and whom he is calling from every nation and race on earth by his Spirit, through the preaching of the gospel. The royal prerogative and authority of God's Anointed Messiah currently find expression, not in the display of pottery-smashing wrath, but in his sovereign decree of amnesty now being promulgated by his servants to every nation (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Peter 3:9) – the call to kiss the Son and repent before his second coming, when he will break the rebellious nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15). The disciples of the King thus go forth as his ambassadors with a message of salvation and pardon for all who flee from the wrath to come and bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 2:10-11 commands the kings and judges of the earth to worship the LORD and do homage to the Son. This is presumably being interpreted by the authors of the charge as a command to civil magistrates (in their official, public capacity) to confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This text is presumably cited as a clear refutation of Kline's view that the civil magistrate must be religiously neutral, that is, confessing allegiance neither to the God of the covenant people nor to the gods of the unbelievers. However, this reading of the text as a timeless command fails to grasp the prophetic or typological idiom of this psalm. According to the New Testament's inspired commentary, the kings of the earth addressed in Psalm 2 find present fulfillment in many forms. The "kings" of Psalm 2 include the Jewish priests and elders that condemned Christ to death and who continued to oppose the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. Therefore, the command of Psalm 2:10-12 to do homage to the Son is not directed toward civil magistrates per se, but to all men. Since the text concludes: "How blessed are all who take refuge in him!" it is clear that the command is essentially a call to personal trust in Jesus Christ. By their very nature as corporate institutions, that is not something that civil governments are capable of. Since civil governments are part of the common grace order that is destined to come to an end at the second coming, the promise of eternal blessedness to those who take refuge in Christ would in any case be thoroughly irrelevant to civil government.

Isaiah 2:1-4

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.

This prophetic picture of the gospel age is couched in typological idiom. The mountain of the house of the LORD is not the earthly city of Jerusalem, but the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22). The nations that are streaming to Mount Zion are not geopolitical entities or civil governments but the Gentiles. The Torah ("instruction") that is going forth from Mount Zion is not the Mosaic Law but the gospel of Jesus Christ (also referred to by the parallel phrase, "the word of the LORD," verse 3). The beginnings of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 2:1-4 are recorded in the book of Acts, which describes an opposite movement: it is not that the nations are streaming to Zion, but that the apostles are taking the gospel to Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). And yet, since Zion is a spiritual locale, centered upon the enthroned Jesus in heaven, the entire church does indeed "stream to the mountain of the house of the LORD" every Lord's day when we gather for worship in the Spirit. The fact that Isaiah 2:1-4 must be interpreted typologically is demonstrated by the fact that the prophecy concludes with a promise of cessation of war among the nations. Yet Jesus proclaimed that war would characterize the inter-advental period until his second coming (Matt. 24:6-8). The peace that is here prophesied must have reference to the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles (and within different Gentile ethnic groups) that has been secured within the body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-17; Col. 3:11, 15).

Matthew 28:18; Eph. 1:19b-21; Phil. 2:9-11

Matt. 28:18: And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

Eph. 1:19b-21: These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Phil. 2:9-11: For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I affirm that Jesus has "all authority in heaven and on earth," that he is now exalted at God's right hand as Lord over every realm of creation, and that at the second coming every knee will bow to Christ. Among other things, this includes his sovereignty over the civil governments of the earth. In my "Reformed Theocrats" paper, I affirmed the Lordship of Christ over the civil sphere:

Only when the church honors the cultic boundary between the common grace institution of the state and holy kingdom of God, does the church truly honor the Lordship of Jesus Christ, for as

Lord over all creation, including the civil sphere, he himself is the one who has ordained that cultic boundary (Matt. 22:21; John 18:36). [see paragraph d. of the specification]

The implications we derive from the important truth stated in these texts will vary depending on what we think the Bible teaches concerning civil government. As I read it, the Bible teaches that civil government is a common grace institution ordained for temporal justice (Genesis 9). The Lordship of Christ over civil government is merely one manifestation of Christ's providential governance in accordance with the principles of common grace, as distinct from his holy kingdom of grace. These three proof texts are not relevant to the charge because they are consistent with either view of civil government. Both the theocratic view and Kline's common grace view affirm the Lordship of Christ over all of creation, including civil government.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

What relevance, if any, this proof text has to the charge is difficult for me to discern, since this text teaches that the Mosaic Law ("statutes and ordinances," "this whole law") was specifically given to Israel, not the Gentiles. It was given to Israel "that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it." As a result of possessing the Torah, Israel will be set apart from the nations surrounding it, and the nations will marvel at Israel's blessedness in possessing the Torah. The rhetorical questions in verses 7-8 demonstrate the uniqueness of Israel as a nation privileged to possess the Torah. Not only did the nations recognize Israel's uniqueness, Israel herself recognized and gloried in her privileged position: "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. *He has not dealt thus with any nation;* and as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 147:19-20).

Matthew 5:17-19

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For more on this text, see "Response to Charge Two," where I argue that the word "fulfill" does not mean "confirm" but to bring to completion. But even if we accept the interpretation of Greg Bahnsen, that Jesus came to "confirm" the Mosaic Law, this text still would not be relevant to the charge, for there is no evidence in the text or the context that Jesus is addressing the civil magistrate. He is addressing his disciples and setting forth the kind of life that ought to characterize the citizens of His heavenly kingdom. This is made clear when Jesus says, "Whoever keeps and teaches [these commandments] shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 19). Furthermore, at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock," etc. (Matt. 7:24-27). To apply these words to civil governments would be to mix the holy kingdom of salvation in Jesus Christ with the common grace realm. Not only does the

common grace realm not possess Christ's promise of eschatological security, it is in fact destined to pass away at the day of judgment since it will have served its God-ordained purpose (2 Peter 3:9-13).

Romans 2:14-16

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Paul here teaches that the Gentiles "who do not have the [Mosaic] Law" nevertheless have access to the moral will of God. They have "the work of the Law" (that is, the functional equivalent of the Mosaic Law) "written on their hearts." Paul explains what he means when he goes on to speak of "the conscience," which judges or defends just as the Law does. It is evident that Paul is talking about the Gentiles as individuals, not as organized civil governments. And he is dealing with the execution of eschatological justice at the day of judgment, not the execution of temporal justice by civil governments in the present age. This is clear from the preceding context:

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

The doctrine of civil government is not in view in Romans 2. Paul's concern is with the unrelenting demands of God's moral will as covenantally enshrined in the covenant of works. Every individual, whether Jew or Gentile, will be held to the same standard of judgment at the great day. There is nothing in this text which remotely addresses the norms that bind civil government. If we are to draw any implication from this text with respect to civil government, it would be this: since Paul explicitly teaches that the Gentiles are not subject to the Mosaic Law (Romans 2:12, 14), we can infer that the civil governments of the Gentiles are not subject to the Mosaic Law either. If anything, this proof text supports Kline's non-theocratic position.

Hebrews 2:2

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty ...

This text is referring to the Mosaic covenant ("the word spoken through angels").¹⁷ It states that that covenant was "unalterable" (except by the Law-giver himself). It also states that the penalties prescribed for transgressions of the Mosaic Law were "just," and that "every transgression" was punished. I agree with these statements and do not see how they are in any way relevant to the question of whether common grace civil government ought to confess allegiance to the true God. The Mosaic covenant was given to the holy covenant community of Israel and governed Israel as a theocratic kingdom, and therefore

¹⁷ That angels played a role in the giving of the Mosaic Law may be seen by comparing this text with Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; and Gal. 3:19.

has no bearing upon common grace civil governments with which God has never entered into such a special covenant.¹⁸

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

Although Moses is writing before the institution of the kingship in Israel, he speaks prophetically knowing that God will ordain such an office in the future. The king is hereby instructed to write a copy of the Torah for himself, and to read it "all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes." The relevance of this text to the charge depends on the assumption that the Israelite king serves as a model for civil magistrates outside of Israel. In order to accomplish this hermeneutical move, one must deny the unique role of the Israelite king as a theocratic officer of the typological, first-level kingdom. As I said in response to the preceding proof text, the Mosaic covenant was given to the holy covenant community of Israel and governed Israel as a theocratic kingdom. Therefore, the instructions given to the officers of the holy theocratic kingdom of Israel are utterly disanalogous to the principles that govern civil magistrates in the common grace arena.

Proverbs 16:10-12

A divine decision is in the lips of the king; his mouth should not err in judgment. 11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; all the weights of the bag are His concern. 12 It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness.

I agree with Kline's view that the book of Proverbs contains instruction that is not exclusively tied to the theocratic order within Israel and which may therefore teach principles that are transferable to non-theocratic contexts.¹⁹ This proof text is probably such a text. A king has a God-like function for all temporal judgments are a reflection of the perfectly righteous judgment that will be rendered by the Great King at the end of history. The reference to just weights and balances in verse 11 may be related as well, since the economic sphere is also under the king's jurisdiction and is often prone to corruption. The general principle stated in this text is that civil magistrates have an obligation to render just decisions. The moral law requires that civil governments have a just legal system that operates on the basis of rule of law, fairness, and equity. This is an important principle that has been recognized throughout history. I, for one, certainly embrace it.

¹⁸ For an extensive exegetical examination of Hebrews 2:1-4 in relation to theonomy, see Lane G. Tipton, "The Eschatology of Hebrews 2:1-4: A Critical Appraisal of the Theonomic Thesis," *Kerux* 15:1 (May 2000) 3-23. Mr. Tipton is a doctoral candidate at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia).

¹⁹ "Old Testament wisdom sets forth the general order of divine providence and gives instruction as to the life stance appropriate to Yahweh's servants living within that world order regulated by his covenants" (including but not limited to the covenant of common grace). Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, p. 65.

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Two different Hebrew words are used in this verse to refer to a "nation" (*goy*) or a "people" (*'am*). Neither term in Hebrew refers to civil government or civil magistrates, but to ethnic groupings or cultures. William Holladay lists the following uses of the word *goy* in Hebrew: "1. (a specific people): nation, often the pagan peoples in distinction and contrast to Israel, the heathen, mankind, people in general; 2. of animals, swarm (locusts)." The so-called "table of nations" in Genesis 10 uses the term *goy* six times to refer to racial/ethnic/linguistic groupings (vv. 5, 20, 31, 32). Notice that the word "nation" (*goy*) is interpreted by the synonym "people" (*'am*). Thus the meaning of the second word sheds light on the meaning of the first. For *'am* Holladay lists: "1. (a whole) people (emphasis on internal ethnic solidarity); 2. pl. peoples; 3. often not a whole people but a portion: people, inhabitants; 4. citizens; 5. the (non-Israelite) people(s) of the land."²⁰

Some ethnic groups in history have been able to assert their own political self-determination. But throughout world history, the political governments of the great world civilizations (e.g., Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome) have included many different "nations" (*goyim*) within their jurisdiction, thus proving that a *goy* is not the same thing as a government. Furthermore, in the LXX, *goyim* is frequently translated *ta ethne*, that is, "the Gentiles." E.g.: "From the rising of the sun even to its setting, my name will be great among the Gentiles [*goyim/ethne*]" (Malachi 1:11). This usage is followed in the New Testament. E.g.: "Go therefore and make disciples of *panta ta ethne* [all the Gentile ethnic groups], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The fact that the church is commanded to "make disciples" and to "baptize" the *goyim* shows that the *goyim* are not the organized geo-political entities that we today call "nations," for a nation-state cannot be baptized in the name of the Triune God or become a disciple of Christ. Rather, Christ is informing the apostles that the gospel is no longer restricted to "the house of Israel" (in contrast with Jesus' previous policy – cp. Matt. 15:24) but is now being sent to all the world, including the non-Jewish people groups.

So what does Proverbs 14:34 teach? It teaches that a culture or people group that is characterized by righteousness is exalted. A culture or people group characterized by sin is disgraced. Notice that "righteousness" and "sin" are not defined here in terms of the Mosaic Law.²¹ These terms should be understood in keeping with the standards of God's moral will as revealed to all mankind in creation and conscience ("the light of nature" by which unbelievers sometimes "frame their lives," WCF X:4). In keeping with the nature of wisdom literature, Proverbs 14:34 is a perceptive observation, valid for any culture in human history, including our own. I affirm the principle enunciated in this text. This prof text is not relevant to the charge since the duties of civil government *as an institution* are not addressed.

Genesis 15:13-16; Deut. 9:4-5; 18:9, [10-11], 12

Gen. 15:13-16: God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old

²⁰ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 57, 275.

²¹ "There is no reference to the specific Israelitish Law, and the relation between integrity and success is conceived under the general laws of social life." Crawford H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970), pp. 301f.

age. 16 Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

Deut. 9:4-5: Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, "Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land," but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. 5 It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Deut. 18:9-12: When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. [10 There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.] 12 For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you.

The conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua is foretold by the LORD in Genesis 15:13-16 and again by Moses in Deut. 9:4-5. The LORD tells Abraham that his descendants "in the fourth generation will return here [to the land of Canaan]," and explains why there will be such a long delay before Abraham's descendants inherit the land: "For the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." In the parallel text in Deuteronomy, Moses warns the Israelites not to say in their hearts that God is driving out the Canaanites and giving them the land because of their own righteousness. The real reason God is dispossessing the Canaanites is because of their wickedness, and in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This text seems to be quoted in support of the charge because it shows that God judged the Canaanites because of their lack of conformity to the moral law. Therefore, the argument apparently goes, the nations of today are also subject to the binding authority of the moral law.

But as I have already affirmed, I agree that civil governments and magistrates are not free to violate the moral law. Civil magistrates will be judged at the day of judgment for their idolatry, for murdering innocent civilians, for stealing property from their citizens, etc.

Another problem with the employment of these three texts is the meaning of the word "nations" (as I pointed out earlier). In English the word "nation" brings to mind an organized political and civil order, whereas in Hebrew *goyim* is more accurately translated, "non-Jewish ethnic peoples" or "the Gentiles." God's judgment on the Canaanites merely demonstrates that the Gentiles are accountable to God's moral will, and will be judged by it at the day of judgment.²² Through the light of nature, the Gentiles know that child-sacrifice, divination, witchcraft, and calling up the dead, are idolatrous practices and contrary to God's will. The fact that the Gentiles are without excuse, even apart from God's special revelation in Scripture, is also taught by Paul in Romans 1-2.

Conclusion

None of the proof texts cited in support of the charge teach that civil governments are obligated to confess the true God and not be religiously neutral. Nor do any of these texts address the difficult question of how to define the subset of the moral law that is appropriately brought under the purview of the civil government with regard to its enforcement in the civil arena.

²² Kline sees God's judgment upon the Canaanites by means of theocratic holy war as an anticipation or "intrusion" of the day of judgment ahead of time. See *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, pp. 154-71.

C. THE SECONDARY STANDARDS

This offense ... is also contrary to our subordinate standards (emphases added):

WCF XIX:1. *God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience...*

WCF XIX:2. *This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments...*

WCF XIX.3. *...this law, commonly called moral...*

WCF XIX.4. *To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.*

WCF XIX:5. *The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.*

WLC Q 93. *The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.*

WLC Q 99, sub. 7. *That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.*

WSC Q 39. *The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.*

WSC Q 40. *The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.*

WSC Q 41. *The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.*

I agree with all of the above statements (for further explanation see "Response to Charge Two" in which many of the same Confessional statements are cited). I would only add a brief comment at this point. As I stated at the outset, the presbytery has evidently confused two separate issues: whether the moral law is binding on civil government, and whether civil government has a moral obligation to enforce the moral law in society. The confessional citations above appear to have been quoted in order to show that both civil magistrates as individuals and civil governments as institutions, are subject to the moral law. But I affirm that. The real debate between myself and the presbytery is whether civil government has a moral obligation to enforce the entirety of the moral law in society. But most of the above-cited portions of the Standards are irrelevant to that question. The only citations above that are relevant are WCF XIX:4 and WLC # 99, sub. 7. But, as I will argue below in section D, the American revision of the Standards affects how these statements are to be interpreted in our current political context.

WCF XXII:2. *The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence... Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.*

This is one of the theocratic vestiges that must be interpreted in light of the 1788 American Revision as a whole. There are two more theocratic vestiges in the citations below. I will deal with all three of these, together with "general equity," in section D below.

WCF XXIII:1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good...

I affirm this statement without reservation. As Paul teaches, civil magistrates are ordained by God. It is true that "under him" was probably fleshed out by the original divines in such a way that to be truly "under God" a civil magistrate would be obligated to enforce the true religion (WCF XXIII:3, original version) and the "general equity" of the Mosaic civil laws (WCF XIX:4). However, in light of the American Revision, the meaning of "under God" has changed. It cannot now be interpreted in a theocratic manner. Of course, civil government, being a part of the common grace order, brings glory to God, as does the entire realm of common grace.

WCF XXIII:2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth...

Another theocratic vestige.

WCF XXIII:3. ...as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger.

This is a quotation from the American version of the Standards. The only proof text given for this statement is Isaiah 49:23: "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers." To be honest, I question the legitimacy of this exegesis. I do not know of any other possible passages that may establish that it is one of the duties the civil magistrates to protect the church. The added statement "of our common Lord," reflects a late eighteenth century situation in which the various denominations in the United States were entirely Protestant and largely orthodox. To make this statement today would be to imply that the civil government has no obligation to protect other churches and religious organizations, including heretical groups and false religions. When I was licensed in 1995 I expressed my reservations at this very point. Commenting on WCF XXIII:2, I wrote:

I would simply add: "without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians **or any other religion** above the rest." Of course, civil magistrates may suppress religions that involve the violation of the civil liberties of others ... I hold that the state ought to be religiously neutral and tolerant of all religions.²³

WCF XXIV:4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife.

Another theocratic vestige.

WCF XXIV:6. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

²³ "Lee Irons: Exceptions to the Westminster Standards," submitted to the Presbytery of Southern California during my licensure examination on October 20, 1995.

I am in favor of the civil magistrate making attempts to remedy willful desertion. I do not see how this is relevant to the charge.

D. A VIOLATION OF THE SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE?

This is an offense serious enough to warrant a trial in that it not only disturbs the peace, purity and unity of the church, but violates the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms (BD, III.7.b. para.2; cf. XXIII.8(2) and (6), second and sixth ordination vows).

In this section I set before the presbytery the historical context of the 1788 American Revision, the revision itself together with the two sets of proof texts (in parallel columns), along with my interpretation of the theological significance of the American Revision. I also attempt to explain the theocratic vestiges in the Standards that were left unrevised (many of them have been cited above in the charge). My thesis is that the theocratic vestiges no longer have a theocratic meaning, since they must be reinterpreted in light of the Revision as a whole. The fact that the proof texts were revised by the American Presbyterians in the late eighteenth century is highly significant for my argument, because it sheds tremendous light on their intentions in making these changes.

The minutes of the Synod of Philadelphia and New York

On May 28, 1787, three days after the Constitutional Convention held its first session, the Synod of Philadelphia and New York, meeting in the same city (Philadelphia), proposed certain amendments to the Westminster Confession of Faith as part of a larger plan of government that led to the reorganization of the Presbyterian Church into a General Assembly in 1788-89. The Minutes of the Synod²⁴ take note of these momentous developments:

The Synod took into consideration the last paragraph of the twentieth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith; the third paragraph of the twenty-third chapter; and the first paragraph of the thirty-first chapter; and having made some alterations, agreed that the said paragraphs, as now altered, be printed for consideration, together with the draught of a plan of government and discipline.

Meeting again in Philadelphia the following year, on May 28, 1788, the Synod adopted and ratified the revised Confession, and ordered that it be printed in full. Having adopted and ratified the amended Confession, the Synod added:

Resolved, That the true intent and meaning of the above ratification by the Synod, is, that the Form of Government and Discipline and the Confession of Faith, as now ratified, is to continue to be our constitution and the confession of our faith and practice unalterable, unless two thirds of the Presbyteries under the care of the General Assembly shall propose alterations or amendments, and such alterations or amendments shall be agreed to and enacted by the General Assembly.

Thus far only the Confession itself was revised. But on the following day, the Synod considered the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which were adopted with one small amendment: the removal of the words "tolerating a false religion" from question 109 of the Larger Catechism.

²⁴ *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United State of America 1706-1788* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 539, 546-47.

Thus the American Presbyterian Church revised the Westminster Standards. Below I have placed the relevant sections of the original and the revised versions in parallel columns for ease of comparison. I have set the two versions side-by-side in order to cast into bold relief the definiteness with which the American church wanted to express its rejection of the older theocratic views of the civil magistrate and its adoption of a fundamentally new understanding of the teaching of the Word of God on this subject. Underlined sections of the original Confession indicate portions that were removed or rewritten by the American Presbyterians. Underlined sections of the American version indicate new material that differs from the original.

However, to merely show how the text of the Westminster standards was revised would not sufficiently highlight the radical nature of the changes that were made. In addition to the amendments to the text of the Confession, the proof texts cited by the Westminster divines were also revised. Those for WCF XXIII:2-3 and XXXI:1-2 were revised, while those for the deleted clauses at WCF XX:4 and WLC # 109 were simply removed. Note that I have included paragraph 2 of WCF XXIII, both versions, even though the text itself was not revised. I have done so because the proof texts were revised, thus suggesting a shift in understanding of paragraph 2 in light of the changes made to paragraph 3. Although the proof texts did not have binding constitutional authority, they illuminate the intent of both the Westminster divines and the Synod of Philadelphia and New York with respect to their doctrine of the civil magistrate.

As you read the 1788 Confession and its proof texts, in comparison with the original version and its proof texts, it ought to become apparent that the position held by the original Westminster divines (viz., that the civil magistrate is obligated to enforce in the civil arena the Decalogue's prohibition of false worship), was formally and intentionally repudiated by the American Presbyterian church. It follows that this theocratic conception of the civil magistrate continues to be repudiated by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The Original and Revised Versions in Parallel with Proof Texts

ORIGINAL TEXT of 1646 ²⁵	AMERICAN TEXT of 1788 ²⁶
<p>WCF XX:4</p> <p>And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God [1]. And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or</p>	<p>WCF XX:4</p> <p>And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God [1]. And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either, in their own nature, or in the</p>

²⁵ From *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990). I have attempted to copy the formatting of the proof texts as printed in the FPP edition (e.g., certain words and phrases are emphasized with the use of italics).

²⁶ From *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, printed in 1797 (Evans Early American Imprints # 32711). There were two earlier printings of the Constitution of the PCUSA, in 1789 (Evans # 22079) and 1792 (Evans # 24711), but they did not include proof texts. The GA did not erect a committee to select proof texts until 1792, and these were first published in 1797. Unlike the FPP version, the American proof texts were originally printed without the use of italics to emphasize certain words and phrases.

in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church; they may lawfully be called to account [2], and proceeded against by the censures of the church, and by the power of the civil magistrate [3].

[1] Matt. 12:25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. **1 Pet. 2:13-14, 16** Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well ... As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. **Rom. 13:1-8. Heb. 13:17** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

[2] **Rom. 1:32** Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. With **1 Cor. 5:1, 5, 11, 13** It is reported commonly that there is *fornication among you*, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. Ver. 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Ver. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. Ver. 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. **2 John 10-11** If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. And **2 Thess. 3:14** And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. And **1 Tim. 6:3-5** If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. And **Titus 1:10-11, 13** For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake ... This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. And **Titus 3:10**

manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church [2]; they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church [3].

[1] **1 Pet. 2:13-14, 16** Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: Whether it be to the king, as supreme; --- or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. --- As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. **Heb. 13:17** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. See also **Rom. 13:1-8**.

[2] **Rom. 1:32** Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. **1 Cor. 5:1, 5, 11, 13** It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. --- To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus. --- But now I have written unto you and [sic - should read "not"] to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. --- But them that are without judgeth God. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

[3] **2 Thess. 3:14** And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. **Titus 3:10** A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.

A man that is an heretick, *after the first and second admonition, reject.* **With Matt. 18:15-17** Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, *go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone:* if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, *then take with thee one or two more,* that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, *tell it unto the church:* but if he neglect to hear the church, *let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* **1 Tim. 1:19-20** Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have *delivered unto Satan,* that they may learn not to blaspheme. **Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20** I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou *canst not bear them which are evil:* and thou *hast tried them* which say they are apostles, and are not, and *hast found them liars.* Ver. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that *hold the doctrine of Balaam,* who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. Ver. 15 So hast thou also them that *hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,* which thing I hate. Ver. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou *sufferest* that woman *Jezebel,* which calleth herself a prophetess, *to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication,* and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. **Rev. 3:9** Behold, I will make them of *the synagogue of Satan,* which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

[3] **Deut. 13:6-12** [And that prophet, or *that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death;* because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God ... to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. Ver. 6 If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers.] **Rom. 13:3-4.** With **2 John 10-11** [If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.] **Ezra 7:23-28** Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for *why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?* Ver. 25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, *set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people* that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. Ver. 26 And *whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let*

judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment. Ver. 27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: Ver. 28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me. **Rev. 17:12, 16-17** And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. Ver. 16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. Ver. 17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. **Neh. 13:15ff** In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. Ver. 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Ver. 21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. Ver. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. Ver. 25 And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Ver. 30. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business. **2 Kings 23:5ff** And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. Ver. 6 And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. Ver. 9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. Ver. 20 And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon

them, and returned to Jerusalem. Ver. 21 And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. **2 Chron. 34:33** And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers. **2 Chron. 15:12ff** And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; Ver. 13. *That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death*, whether small or great, whether man or woman. Ver. 16. And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, *he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.* **Dan. 3:29** Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. **1 Tim. 2:2** *For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* **Isa. 49:23.** And kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. **Zech. 13:2-3.** And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered; and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophecy, then *his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.*

WCF XXIII:2

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto [1]; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth [2], so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the new testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions [3].

[1] **Prov. 8:15.** *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.* Ver. 16. *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.* **Rom. 13:1, 2, 4.**

[2] **Ps. 2:10-12** *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.* **1 Tim. 2:2** *For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* **Ps. 82:3-4** *Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.* **2 Sam. 23:3** *The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.* **1 Pet. 2:13** *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme.*

[3] **Luke 3:14.** *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.* **Rom. 13:4.** **Mat. 8:9.** *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.* Ver. 10. *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* **Acts 10:1.** *And there was a certain man in Cesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, Ver. 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.* **Rev. 17:14, 16.** *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.* Ver. 16. *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.*

WCF XXIII:2

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto [1]; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth [2], so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the new testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions [3].

[1] **Prov. 8:15.** *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.* Verse 16. *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.* **Rom. 13:1, 3, 4.** **1 Pet. 2:13, 14.**

[2] **Ps. 82:3, 4** *Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. --- Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.* **2 Sam. 23:3** *The God of Israel said, the rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.* **See 1 Pet. 2:13** *[Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: Whether it be to the king, as supreme.]*

[3] **Luke 3:14.** *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.* **Mat. 8:9 and 10.** *at large. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.* **Acts 10:1, 2. Rom. 13:4.**

WCF XXIII:3

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven [1]: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses of worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed [2]. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God [3].

[1] **2 Chron. 26:18** And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD*, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: *go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.* With **Matt. 18:17**. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. And **Matt. 16:19**. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. **1 Cor. 12:28-29**. And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Eph. 4:11-12. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. **1 Cor. 4:1-2**. Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. **Rom. 10:15**. And how shall they preach expect they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Heb. 5:4. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

[2] **Isa. 49:23** And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. Ps. 122:9 Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good. **Ezra 7:23, 25-28. Lev. 24:16** And he that blasphemeth the name of

WCF XXIII:3

Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments [1]; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven [2]; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith [3]. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest in such a manner, that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging, every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger [4]. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth, should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief [5]. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretence of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance [6].

[1] **2 Chron. 26:18** And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God.

[2] **Matt. 16:18, 19**. At large. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. **1 Cor. 4:1, 2**. Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. --- Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

[3] **John 18:36** Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: Mal. 2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. **Acts 5:29** Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

[4] **Isa. 49:23** And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers.

[5] **Ps. 105:15** Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm. **Acts 18:14, 15**. At large. [And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or

the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. Deut. 13:5-6, 12 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God ... to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. Ver. 6 If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers. 12 If thou shalt hear say in any one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, &c. **2 Kings 18:4** *He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. [1 Chron. 13:1 to the 9th verse. 2 Kings 24:1 to the 26th verse.]* **2 Chron. 34:33.** And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers. **2 Chron. 15:12-13.** And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

[3] **2 Chron. 19:8-11** Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. 9 And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. 10 And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass. 11 And behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good. [2 Chron. 29-30.] **Matt. 2:4-5** And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat.]

[6] **2 Sam. 23:3. 1 Tim. 2:1 and 2.** At large. [I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.] **Rom. 13:4.** At large. [For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.]

<p>WCF XXX1:1-2</p> <p>1. For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils. [1]</p> <p><u>2. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with about matters of religion [2]; so if magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies. [3]</u></p> <p>[1] Acts 15:2, 4, 6. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissention and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders about this question. Ver. 4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God hath done with them. Ver. 6. <i>And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter.</i></p> <p><u>[2] Isa. 49:23 And kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. 1 Tim. 2:1-2. I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: Ver. 2. <i>For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 2 Chron. 19:8-11. 2 Chron. 29:30 throughout. Matt. 2:4-5 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. Ver. 5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet. Prov. 11:14. Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.</i></u></p> <p>[3] Acts 15:22, 23, 25. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas ... and Silas, chief men among the brethren: Ver. 23. And they wrote letters by them after this manner, The <i>apostles, and elders, and brethren</i> send greetings unto The brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. Ver. 25. <i>It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.</i></p>	<p>WCF XXX1:1</p> <p>1. For the better government and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils [1]: <u>and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification, and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies [2]; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church [3].</u></p> <p>[1] Acts 15:2, 4, 6. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissention and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders about this question. --- And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders; and they declared all things that God hath done with them. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter.</p> <p><u>[2] 15 chap. Acts.</u></p> <p>[3] Acts 15:22, 23, 25. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: --- And they wrote letters by them after this manner, The apostles, and elders, and brethren send greetings unto The brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.</p>
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WLC #109

What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion [1]; the making any representation of God, etc.

[1] Deut. 13:6-12 If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers ... 8 *Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him.* Zech. 13:2-3 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. 3 And it shall come to pass, that *when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.* Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. Ver. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. Ver. 15 *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* Ver. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Rev. 17:12, 16-17 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. Ver. 16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. Ver. 17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

WLC #109

The words "tolerating a false religion," along with the proof texts, were deleted.

Note: "tolerating a false religion" is erroneously printed in various recent editions of the Westminster Standards published by Great Commission Publications. The OPC's *Committee to Prepare Proof Texts for the Larger Catechism* noted this printing problem in its Report to the 2000 GA (see *Minutes of the 67th GA*, pp. 259-60).

Historical Background of the 1788 Revision

Philip Schaff describes the historical background of the statements in the original Westminster Standards concerning the civil magistrate, as follows:

The principle of intolerance has been charged upon Chaps. XXIII (Of the Civil Magistrate), XXX (Of Church Censures), XXXI (Of Synods and Councils), and the last clause of Ch. XX (Of Christian Liberty, viz., the words "and by the power of the civil magistrate"). The same charge applies to a few words in the 109th question of the Larger Catechism, where "tolerating a false religion" is included in the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment with reference to some passages of the Old Testament and of the Book of Revelation (ii.2, 16, 20; xvii.16, 17).

There is no doubt that these passages assume a professedly Christian government, or the union of Church and State as it had come to be established in all Christian countries since the days of Constantine, and as it was acknowledged at that time by Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. It is on this ground that the Confession claims for the civil magistrate (of whatever form of government) the right and duty not only legally to protect, but also to support the Christian Church, and to prohibit and punish heresy, idolatry, and blasphemy.

The power to coerce and punish implies the principle of intolerance and the right of persecution in some form or other, though this right may never be exercised ... All acts of uniformity in religion are necessarily exclusive, and must prohibit the public manifestations of dissent, whatever may be the private thoughts and sentiments, which no human government can reach.

It is a fact, moreover, that the Westminster Assembly was called for the purposes of legislating for the faith, government, and worship of three kingdoms, and that by adopting the Solemn League and Covenant it was pledged for the extirpation of popery and prelacy and all heresy.

The few Independents demanded a limited toleration, and were backed by Cromwell and his army, which was full of Independents, Baptists, Antinomians, Socinians, New Lights, Familists, Millenarians, and other "proud, self-conceited, hot-headed sectaries" (as Baxter calls them). All these sectaries, who sprung up during the great religious excitement of the age, but mostly subsided soon afterwards, were of course tolerationists in their own interests. But for this very reason the prevailing sentiment in the Assembly was stoutly opposed to toleration, as the great Diana of the Independents and supposed mother and nurse of all sorts of heresies and blasphemies threatening the overthrow of religion and society ... The advocates of toleration were defeated, and could only exact from the Assembly the important declaration that God alone is Lord is the conscience.²⁷

As Schaff states, it cannot be denied that the original Confession contains certain theocratic principles when it argues that the civil authority has the duty of ordering and settling the church, calling synods, enforcing true worship, and preventing idolatry. Schaff goes on to explain that ...

the objectionable clauses in the Confession and Larger Catechism have been mildly interpreted and so modified by the Presbyterian Churches in Europe as to disclaim persecuting sentiments. The Presbyterian Churches in the United States have taken the more frank and effective course of an entire reconstruction of those chapters, so as to make them expressly teach the principle of religious freedom, and claim no favor from the civil magistrate but that protection which it owes to the lives, liberties, and constitutional rights of all its citizens ...

²⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 796-798.

The changes consist in the omission of those sentences which imply the union of Church and State, or the principle of ecclesiastical establishments, making it the duty of the civil magistrate not only to promote, but also to support religion, and giving to the magistrate power to call and ratify ecclesiastical synods and councils, and to punish heretics.²⁸

Following Schaff, my thesis is that in 1788 the American Presbyterian church as a corporate body decided self-consciously to reject its theocratic/establishmentarian heritage, and to move in the direction of religious liberty and pluralism. The very fact that the Confession itself was revised, rather than merely interpreting the Confession's theocratic articles in a non-theocratic sense (as had been done prior to 1788),²⁹ suggests that this new, American, non-theocratic tradition was a unanimous,³⁰ corporate conviction. The church was saying, in effect: "We not only allow non-theocratic views of civil power with respect to religion, but we reject the theocratic views of our forefathers as unbiblical and erroneous." In the providence of God, the eighteenth century Presbyterian church in America had come to realize the error of her predecessors, and determined corporately to denounce those errors and to confess a more biblical approach.

The Importance of the Proof Texts, both Original and Amended

To appreciate the full impact of the amendments to the text of the Confession, the removal and/or amendment of many of the original *proof texts* must be carefully weighed. The vast majority of them are from the Old Testament and deal with the suppression of idolatry and the execution of blasphemers and seducers to idolatry. The American revision sedulously avoids citing the judicial law of the Israelite theocracy, and quotes primarily from the New Testament, or, if the Old Testament is cited, it is usually a text that does not involve theocratic principles.

Charles Hodge explains the significance of this:

All those laws ... in the Old Testament, which had their foundation in the peculiar circumstances of the Hebrews, ceased to be binding when the old dispensation passed away ... Deplorable evils have flowed from mistakes as to this point. The theories of the union of Church and State, of the right of the magistrate to interfere authoritatively in matters of religion, and of the duty of persecution, so far as Scriptural authority is concerned, rest on the transfer of laws founded on the temporary relations of the Hebrews to the altered relations of Christians. Because the Hebrew kings were the guardians of both tables of the Law, and were required to suppress idolatry and all false religion, it was inferred that such is still the duty of the Christian magistrate. Because Samuel hewed Agag to pieces, it was inferred to be right to deal in like manner with heretics. No one can read the history of the Church without being impressed with the dreadful evils which have flowed from this mistake.³¹

When reasoning from the word of God, we are not authorized to argue from the Old Testament economy, because that was avowedly temporary, and has been abolished; but must derive our conclusions from the New Testament.³²

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 799-800, 807.

²⁹ From 1729 until 1788 the American Presbyterian church operated under the original Confession, but with the common understanding that the church "does not receive" the theocratic articles in a theocratic sense. See Appendix below (p. 43).

³⁰ Charles Hodge states that "there is not the slightest intimation on the minutes of the want of perfect unanimity." Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1851), Part II, p. 413-14.

³¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), vol. 3, p. 268.

³² Charles Hodge, "Relation of the Church and State," in *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 117.

Although Hodge was writing a century after the amendments were made, he gives expression to the general consensus of the American Presbyterian position on religious tolerance in the civil arena. That consensus had emerged during the Revolutionary era and was rather uncontroversial until the rise of modern theocratic views in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

Theocratic Vestiges in the American Revision

In spite of these significant amendments, there are a number of "theocratic vestiges" that the American Revision left unchanged. My thesis is that these must be reinterpreted in light of the amended documents as a whole, otherwise the revised Confession will have to be set aside as hopelessly self-contradictory in its doctrine of the civil magistrate.

(1) The duty of the civil magistrate "to maintain piety" (WCF XXIII:2)

In the paragraph immediately preceding the third paragraph that was extensively revised, the Confession states that it is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a civil magistrate. It further gives some directions in the exercise of such office: "they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth." In the 1788 revision the duty of the civil ruler to "maintain piety" was retained. However, the proof texts were slightly edited. (See the two sets of proof texts in parallel.)

Why did the American church remove Psalm 2:10-12 and 1 Tim. 2:2? Because these texts had been appealed to by the Westminster divines in support of a theocratic interpretation of "maintaining piety." Psalm 2 was interpreted theocratically, since the kings and judges of the earth are commanded to "kiss the Son" (that is, to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ) upon threat of perishing under the Son's wrath. The divines apparently did not interpret the warning of Psalm 2 eschatologically, as the NT does. According to Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15, those who do not kiss the Son will perish when Christ returns in visible glory at the end of history to rule the earth with a rod of iron. The de-eschatologized exegesis of the Westminster Assembly was applied as a warning that magistrates who do not "maintain piety" and recognize the Lordship of Christ in the exercise of their civil power, will be removed "from the way" in this age through temporal judgment.

1 Timothy 2:2 was also interpreted theocratically. At first this does not seem to be a very theocratic text, but consider the part of the verse that was highlighted. Paul commands us to pray for kings and for all who are in authority in order "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." In our modern, democratic context we read the "in order that" clause in a "hands off" way. We pray for civil authorities *that they may permit us* to voluntarily lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty.

But the divines had a much more "hands on" interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:2. They apparently read the text as commanding us to pray that civil authorities would exercise their rule in such a godly manner *in order to ensure that* the citizens under their authority led a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty. The piety of the ruler, not merely in his personal life, but the way in which he publicly maintained piety, was to strengthen the religious fabric of society as a whole.

Evidence that this was how the divines read 1 Tim. 2:2 is close at hand: this verse was cited as one of the proof texts in support of the (subsequently amended) statement in XX:4 that those who publish opinions or maintain practices that "are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness ... may

lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church, *and by the power of the civil magistrate.*"

It is clear that the Westminster divines of 1646 and the Synod of 1788 had somewhat different notions of what was involved in the civil magistrate's duty to "maintain piety." Presumably, the Philadelphia divines believed that even in a democratic nation like the United States, with its freedom of religion, elected officials ought to be pious, even professing some sort of Christian or theistic belief. Their difference with the original Confession arose over the degree to which magistrates were required by the Word of God to "maintain piety" in the land, to enforce godliness among the citizenry. All that the Westminster divines intended by that one word "maintain" (which appears again in WLC # 191: "the church ... countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate"), with its implied use of coercive legal authority in the name of Christ, should not be read into the amended Confession. The hermeneutical implications of their amending the proof texts, and completely rewriting the immediately following paragraph (WCF XXIII:3), cannot be ignored. The meaning of "maintain piety" in the revised Confession has changed, even though the words have not.

(2) "Waging war upon just and necessary occasions" (WCF XXIII:2)

A second theocratic vestige may be found in the same paragraph, which states that the civil magistrate may "wage war upon just and necessary occasions." The original divines cited Rev. 17:14, 16, where the "ten kings" turn against the harlot that had ruled her and destroy her and burn her flesh with fire. Notice that this proof text appeared at several key points in the original Confession as justification for the civil magistrate to enforce true worship and to remove idolatry – see the proof texts at WCF XX:4 and WLC # 109.

At the time of the English Civil War, the book of Revelation was interpreted by many Puritans as holding the key to church history. Puritan exegesis of Revelation at this time was influenced to a large degree by Joseph Mead's *Clavis Apocalyptica, or The Key of the Revelation*, originally published in 1627. Mead's volume was republished in 1643 with a preface by "Dr. Twisse now prolocutor in the present Assembly of Divines" (so states the advertisement on the front page). Although widely known today for his premillennial/chiliastic exegesis of Revelation 20, the popularity of Mead's work in the seventeenth century is to be attributed, not primarily to Mead's minority position on the millennium, but to his setting forth a coherent system of interpretation that enabled a religio-political application of the book of Revelation in support of the progress of the Protestant Reformation in both the ecclesiastical and civil arena.

Michael Walzer describes the political implications of Mead's interpretation of Revelation for the Puritan Revolution:

What finally made men revolutionaries, however, was not only this secret preparation, but an increasingly secure feeling that the saints did know the purposes of God, a more open and direct reinforcement of their pride and contentiousness. This new, aggressive, and self-confident mood took hold of Puritan ministers and gentlemen only when the idea of warfare was brought into a fairly specific system of historical reference and prophecy. Beginning at some point before 1640, a group of writers, including Joseph Mead of Cambridge University, began the work of integrating the spiritual warfare of the preachers with the apocalyptic history of Daniel and Revelations [sic]. The religious wars on the continent and then the struggle against the English king were seen by these men as parts of the ancient warfare of Satan and the elect, which had begun with Jews and Philistines and would continue until Armageddon ... Stephen Marshall, the greatest of the parliamentary preachers, described the transition from just war to revolution in a sermon delivered before both houses in 1644. Abruptly turning to the soldiers present, he said, "Go now and fight the battles of the Lord ... for so I will not now fear to call them ... although indeed at the first nothing clearly appeared but only that you were compelled to take up arms for

the defense of your liberties ... all Christendom ... do now see that the question of England is whether Christ or Anti-Christ shall be lord or king."³³

This is the historical context behind the Westminster divines' citation of Revelation 17:14-16 as biblical justification for the civil magistrate's duty of waging war "upon just and necessary occasions." Revelation 17 was thus interpreted as a prophetic mandate for godly magistrates of properly constituted Reformed nations to wage war on behalf of the cause of the Protestant Reformation.

In the 1788 revision, this proof text was removed from the Scriptural basis of just war, while the other texts from the NT were retained. Yet the Confession itself remains unchanged at this point, because American presbyterians also affirmed that civil authorities may "wage war upon just and necessary occasions." What has changed is that now American Presbyterians do not include *religious* war for the sake of advancing the Protestant faith to be one of the just and necessary occasions. Were we bound to follow the original intent of the Westminster divines at this point, the amended Confession would contradict itself.

(3) Removal of idolatry "according to each one's place and calling" (WLC # 108)

When we turn to the Larger Catechism, which was revised in 1788 by the removal of a mere four words in question 109, we find that there are two significant theocratic statements that were not revised explicitly, but which must be reinterpreted to avoid incoherence within the amended standards.

The first instance occurs in question 108, which states that one of the duties required by the second commandment is "the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it [viz. false worship], and all monuments of idolatry." The qualifying phrase "according to each one's place and calling" is crucial.³⁴ There can be little doubt that the original intent of the Westminster divines was to affirm that heads of households were required to enforce true worship in their households, that church officers were obligated to remove false worship and idolatry in the church, and that civil magistrates must remove false worship from the civil sphere.

In light of the American revision, the removal of false worship "according to each one's place and calling" can no longer be applied to the civil magistrate. The duty of removing false worship in the first two spheres of authority, viz., in the church and in the family, certainly continues for American Presbyterians. But the application of these words to the civil magistrate, as envisioned in the original Confession, has been implicitly amended. An explicit amendment was not necessary, because the words "according to each one's place and calling" do not explicitly include civil magistrates, and are capable of being construed in strictly familial and ecclesiastical terms.

(4) The church "countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate" (WLC # 191)

The second instance in the Larger Catechism where the hermeneutical implications of the 1788 revision must be taken into account, is found in the answer to question 191. In the second petition of the Lord's prayer, which is "Thy Kingdom come," we are to pray that "the church ... [would be] countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate." These words have a very definite meaning in the context of the original Confession, with its Erastian leanings. Recall, according to the 1646 Confession, the civil magistrate "hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses of worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God

³³ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 291-96.

³⁴ Similar language is used in WLC # 99, sub. 7 ("according to our places and callings ... according to the duty of their places"). This is one of the Confessional statements cited in the charge.

duly settled, administered, and observed" (WCF XXIII:3, original). To "countenance and maintain" the church must necessarily include all of those activities with respect to the church if the original intent is strictly followed.

But this would contradict the intent of the divines seated in Philadelphia in 1788. Although they chose not to remove these words, they apparently determined to put upon them a different construction and interpretation, which they have made abundantly clear by their explicit amendments. Thus, the civil magistrate's responsibility of countenancing and maintaining the church is not understood by the American Presbyterian church in an establishmentarian sense. To "countenance and maintain the church" is now understood in the manner defined in the revised language of WCF XXIII:3: "Yet as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest." The meaning of WLC # 191 in the American Presbyterian context is different than the meaning of WLC # 191 in the original Westminster Standards (the Confession and Catechisms taken as a hermeneutical unit). The hermeneutical implications of the changed context in which the Larger Catechism now functions must be reckoned with.

(5) Oaths imposed by lawful authority must be in the name of God only

WCF XXII:2. *The name of God only* is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. . . . Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old; so *a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.*

It is unnecessary for me to repeat my argument that this theocratic vestige must be reinterpreted in light of the non-theocratic context of the 1788 American Revision. I would simply point out that we have contemporary evidence that this was indeed the way in which our American Presbyterian forefathers understood this clause in the Confession. The evidence comes from Francis Alison (1707-1779), an Old Side Presbyterian minister who was regarded as a strict Confessionalist and not in favor of the religious excesses associated with the New Side revivalism of the Tennents. Alison was a highly respected leader of the Old Side faction. He was originally from Ireland and educated in Scotland (University of Glasgow). When he came to America in 1735, he was ordained and became pastor of a church in New London, Pennsylvania. In 1743 he established New London Academy, and then later moved to the College of Philadelphia, both of which were essentially Old Side seminaries for the training of ministers. He was one of the key Presbyterian educators of ministers. Alison was influenced by the political philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, under whom he had studied at the University of Glasgow.

Since Alison taught "Moral Philosophy" (which at that time included political philosophy) in his classes, we have a good idea of his political views. He held to the social contract theory of government, which was the foundation for the American idea of the consent of the governed. In lecturing on this topic he naturally gave consideration to the role of religion in civil society. Like his contemporaries he recognized that oaths were an important area where religion and civil government intersected. While Alison did not consider the possibility of atheists taking oaths, it is significant that he was quite ahead of his time in recognizing that the civil government must administer oaths to citizens of varying religious backgrounds. In response to the emerging religious pluralism of his day, Alison argued that the deity by which men swear in the civil arena is not religiously specific – an interpretation that implies a significant shift from the original intent of the Westminster divines. He wrote:

Persons of the most different religions may agree in some general description or titles of the deity, and these should be used when persons of different religions are required to swear."³⁵

Not only do we have the contemporary testimony of a Revolutionary-era American Presbyterian, but the subject of the oaths administered by the civil government underwent further change in subsequent American Presbyterian history. In the original confession the divines added that "It is a sin to refuse an oath touching any thing that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority" (WCF XXII:3 – the paragraph immediately following the one cited here). One of the proof texts cited is illuminating. In the Mosaic Law, if a man temporarily entrusts to his neighbor's care an animal of economic value (e.g., livestock), and if the animal dies or is hurt or escapes, but no one saw it happen, "*then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both*, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good" (Exodus 22:11, italics original).

However, in 1903 this entire clause in the Confession, together with the proof texts, was removed. Interestingly, this is one of the two 1903 revisions that the OPC incorporated within its version of the Standards as adopted in 1936. The larger revisions of 1903 that softened the Calvinism of the Standards were not adopted by the OPC, but this one was retained.³⁶ Notice that both paragraph 2 and 3 employ the phrase "being imposed by lawful authority." There is therefore good reason to believe that the striking of this phrase from paragraph 3 has implications for the use of this phrase in paragraph 2. Our Confession (in its present form) no longer teaches that the civil magistrate may "impose" an oath that would be sinful to refuse. How, then, can our Confession (in its present form) be interpreted as teaching that vows taken in the civil arena *must* be taken in the name of God?

(6) Marriage in relation to civil law

WCF XXIV:4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity *forbidden by the Word*. Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful *by any law of man* or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife.

The last theocratic vestige that I must deal with, is the statement in the Confession that the law of man (presumably the civil law of the state) cannot make "lawful" a marriage that is defined as off-limits in Scripture. The question is, What is meant by the word "lawful"? Are the divines saying that no law of man can make an incestuous marriage lawful in the sight of God? If that is all they are saying, I agree. Or are they saying that no law of man can make an incestuous marriage lawful in the civil arena? I do not have enough historical information to judge with certainty. But given the theocratic views of the divines as a whole (as evidenced in their heavy reliance on the Mosaic civil laws as containing a "general equity" that obliges the modern state), it is a safe bet to assume that they meant the latter. However, given the non-theocratic views of the divines seated at Philadelphia in the year 1788, it is also possible that they interpreted these words in a different manner, and would have allowed the possibility of the state giving its recognition to marriages that the Bible does not recognize. I am not claiming that the eighteenth century American Presbyterians would have been able to conceive of state recognition for same-sex civil unions. But I don't think it is a stretch to say that they would have been able to conceive of state recognition for *some* marriages that fall within the degrees of consanguinity and affinity forbidden by the Word.³⁷

³⁵Quoted by James L. McAllister, Jr., "Francis Alison and John Witherspoon: Political Philosophers and Revolutionaries," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54:1 (Spring 1976) 44.

³⁶The other 1903 revision that was retained by the OPC was the removal of the statement identifying the pope as the antichrist (WCF XXV:6). See the Report of the Committee on the Constitution, *Minutes of the Second GA* (1936), p. 13.

³⁷Clearly a case of outright incest would have been inconceivable for them, but what about a man marrying his deceased wife's sister (a common colonial practice)? This was interpreted by many American Presbyterians as a marriage forbidden by parity of logic based on Leviticus 18:16; 20:21. Other Presbyterians, however, were not so sure of this argument. This is was a hotly debated topic at the time.

Conclusion

Although it is theoretically possible that the American revisers simply missed certain theocratic vestiges in the original Confession, and would have revised them if they had been aware of their existence, it is more likely that the Synod intended their *explicit* modifications to have an *implicit* affect on the portions that were left unamended. The unamended statements were retained because the original wording, in and of itself, does not necessarily endorse religious intolerance or Erastian principles. Even if such ideas may have been originally intended, they could not now be fairly read into those statements *when read in the context of the amended document as a whole*. The fact that the proof texts were amended at several points, where the text of the Confession itself was not, is a good indication of this.

The Meaning of "General Equity" in the 1788 Revised Version

We have seen that the theocratic vestiges must be reinterpreted in light of the 1788 Revision as a whole. But what about the Confession's teaching that there is a "general equity" in the Mosaic civil laws which is relevant to civil governments today? I do not consider this statement a "theocratic vestige," since the American Presbyterians left this clause in the Confession, presumably because they still affirmed that there is a general equity to the Mosaic civil laws.

However, that does not mean that WCF XIX:4 retains the exact same meaning that it had in 1646, since the original divines certainly did interpret the general equity of the Mosaic civil laws in a theocratic manner, as the proof texts cited in support of the duty of the civil magistrate to root out heresy and blasphemy demonstrate. Kline raises the perceptive question: "Did the 1788 revision of the Confession in explicitly modifying 23:3 implicitly modify the meaning of the unchanged wording of 19:4?"³⁸ In view of the examples above, we must take this suggestion seriously. Kline is not arguing for an implicit modification of some totally unrelated doctrine. Apart from additional argumentation or evidence, it would be unacceptable to argue that the revisions of 1788 implicitly affected the Confession's teaching on, say, the doctrine of predestination. But WCF XIX:4 is directly related to the sweeping modifications of WCF XX:4 and XXIII:3 because these passages address the civil magistrate, specifically, the application and enforcement by the civil magistrate of the Old Testament judicial laws against idolatry and false worship.

Recall that the Westminster divines extensively cited passages from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Kings, Chronicles, etc., passages which refer to the responsibility of Israel's theocratic officers to root out idolatry and blasphemy, and to generally promote and enforce true worship. The divines also cited Ezra 7:23-28, where the pagan ruler Artaxerxes is praised for his enforcement of Israel's judicial laws. All of these proof texts concerning the judicial laws of Israel, were simply *removed* by the American Presbyterian church. They are no longer interpreted as legitimately supporting a theocratic understanding of the present duties of the civil magistrate in the church age.

³⁸ Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *WTJ* 41 (Fall 1978) 174.

Furthermore, consider the original and amended proof texts at WCF XIX:4:

ORIGINAL	AMERICAN
<p>To them also, as a body politick, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require [1].</p> <p>[1] See Exod. 21:1—22:29. Gen. 49:10. <i>The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. <u>With 1 Pet. 2:13. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Ver. 14. Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. Matt. 5:17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil. With</u> Ver. 38. Ye have heard, that <i>it hath been said</i>, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: Ver. 39. <i>But I say unto you</i>, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 1 Cor. 9:8. Say I these things as a man? Or <i>saith not the law the same</i> also? Ver. 9. For <i>it is written in the law</i> of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Ver. 10. Or <i>saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes</i>, no doubt, <i>this is written</i>: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thrasheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.</i></p>	<p>To them also, as a body politick, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require [1].</p> <p>[1] See Exod. 21:1—22:29. Gen. 49:10. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Matt. 5:38, 39. Ye have heard, that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil. 1 Cor. 9:8, 9, 10.</p>

Is it not significant that Matthew 5:17 has been deleted in the American version? Not only did the American Presbyterians leave out this crucial text, they left in Matthew 5:38-39, where Jesus specifically sets the Mosaic *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye) aside, and calls his disciples to the path of patient endurance in the face of persecution.

The implications of this profound sea-change for our interpretation of the general equity clause at WCF XIX:4 are enormous. For even if the general equity of the Mosaic judicial laws may have been interpreted by the Westminster divines as requiring civil magistrates to enforce true worship, the Philadelphia divines have clearly rejected that particular interpretation of general equity as a misapplication of the Word of God. The original wording of XIX:4 was retained because they found no need to change it. They agreed that the judicial laws "expired together with the state of that people." They agreed that these judicial laws were "not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require." Where the American Presbyterians differed from the Westminster divines was in their understanding and application of general equity. The removal of proof texts citing Mosaic judicial laws in support of a presumed theocratic responsibility on the part of the civil magistrate, and the explicit amendments to the Confession, were, in the minds of the American Presbyterians, sufficient to indicate their rejection of a theocratic interpretation of general equity. In other words, if general equity is applied to the state today, it must be applied in a religiously neutral manner. General equity must now be applied to civil policy in a manner consistent with a religiously pluralistic society governed by the principles of common grace.

Conclusion

Examination of the 1788 American Revision in light of the amended proof texts shows that my views are not a violation of the OPC's doctrinal standards as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. In 1936, the OPC considered the various forms of the standards that were available at the time. It considered the original 1646-48 version, the 1788 version, and the 1903 version. The OPC rejected the 1903 version, since the strong Calvinistic witness of the standards had been significantly toned down by that version. But the OPC also rejected the original 1646-48 version and opted to maintain continuity with the American Presbyterian tradition by adopting the 1788 revision, along with a few minor revisions made in 1886-87 and 1903.³⁹

E. THE SPECIFICATION

Specification: You have written as follows:

a. "The Mosaic Law, then, was not given to provide a blueprint for all the civil governments of the world, but to provide the historical, covenantal context for the incarnation of Christ who was 'born under the Law' in order to bring it to its perfect fulfillment (Matt. 5:17). As Paul says, Christ is 'the *telos* [goal, fulfillment, terminus, completion] of the Law' (Rom. 10:4). If Paul is correct about the exclusively redemptive historical purpose of the Law as teleologically terminating in Christ, and if 'the Law is good if one uses it lawfully' (I Tim. 1:8), then Bahnsen's claim that 'civil magistrates in all ages and places' are obligated to enforce the terms of the Mosaic Law is an unlawful use of the Law. ("Reformed Theocrats: A Biblical Theological Response," p. 11).

b. "Having established the distinction between God's holy theocratic kingdom and the common grace institution of civil government, Kline then draws the logical conclusion that there is a 'cultic boundary' separating the two spheres that may not be violated. The cultic boundary may be defined as follows. Any and all cultic activity - e.g., religious instruction, public confessions of faith in God or any alleged deity, cultic rituals such as sacrifice, the building of temples for the gods - has no place in the common grace state. ...the state must be religiously neutral, that is, confessing allegiance neither to the God of the covenant people nor to the gods of the unbelievers." ("Reformed Theocrats," p. 13)

c. "Respect for the cultic boundary...would demand that the church adopt a civil libertarian position calling for the removal of civil confessions of faith in the public arena, e.g., 'in God we trust,' 'God bless America,' 'one nation under God,' and the public posting of the ten commandments. It would also mean that in policy debates on subjects like abortion and same-sex union, Christians must abandon appeals to Scripture and employ publicly accessible arguments grounded in religiously neutral, secular objectives. (Endnote 51 - "One obvious secular objective that should be the starting point for discussion is the protection of the civil liberties/rights of all citizens - both the born and the unborn, irrespective of sexual orientation, religious allegiance, and ethnic or racial origin. To see how the political principles espoused in this essay

³⁹ *Minutes of the Second GA* (1936), p. 13-14, 18. The mandate given to The Committee on the Constitution stated: "The Committee shall have power to recommend the elimination from that form of the Standards [the PCUSA's 1934 form] of the changes made in the Year of our Lord 1903, but it shall not have power to recommend any other changes" (*Minutes*, p. 13). The mandate effectively guaranteed that the 1788 Revision would be incorporated into the Confession of the OPC. For more on the 1886-87 and 1903 revisions, see Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1992), pp. 7-11

might be applied with regard to the debate over homosexuality, see Misty Irons, "A Conservative Christian Case for Civil Same-Sex Marriage." ("Reformed Theocrats," pp. 13,22)

d. "The church must resist the impulse to have the ethical standards of God's covenantal revelation in Scripture legislatively enforced in the civil sphere. Only when the church honors the cultic boundary between the common grace institution of the state and holy kingdom of God, does the church truly honor the Lordship of Jesus Christ, for as Lord over all creation, including the civil sphere, he himself is the one who has ordained that cultic boundary (Matt. 22:21; John 18:36)." ("Reformed Theocrats," p. 13)

e. "The state was ordained and established by God, and he designed that institution...in order to provide for a pragmatic cooperation between believers and unbelievers for the achievement of certain temporal ends such as physical safety, rule of law, criminal justice, and self-defense. In order to fulfill these common purposes, the state must be religiously neutral, that is, confessing allegiance neither to the God of the covenant people nor to the gods of the unbelievers." ("Reformed Theocrats," p. 15).

f. "I reasoned, if the OPC officially repudiates the theocratic notion that the civil magistrate ought to enforce the first two commandments, on what ground could the church argue that the civil enforcement of the seventh commandment is an essential point of doctrine?" ("A Note from Lee Irons on Misty's Article," p. 1)

g. "...the magistrate's duty is here [WCF XXIII:3] defined as having special reference to the protection of all of its citizens, regardless of religious confession or lack thereof, against 'indignity, violence, abuse, or injury.'

The above interpretation of the American revisions might be debated at certain points, but I felt that I could at least make the case that Misty's position, while a minority view was within the bounds of the Confession of the OPC." ("A Note from Lee Irons on Misty's Article" p. 2)

Since I do not deny having written the statements quoted above, the specification is factually correct.⁴⁰ The question is whether it supports the charge. As I have argued in "A. The Charge," the charge raises two separate issues, and so the question of whether the specifications support the charge must be asked separately of each. As to the charge that the civil government ought to be religiously neutral, the above quotes (b, c, d, e) demonstrate that I have indeed taught this. But as for the charge that civil government is "therefore not subject to the binding authority of God's special revelation in Scripture," there is nothing in the above quotes to support this sweeping allegation. The quote in paragraph a. above merely shows that I teach that civil government is not subject to the Mosaic Law.

It is true that paragraph f. shows that I believe the civil enforcement of the first and second commandments is officially repudiated by the OPC due to its adoption of the 1788 American Revision of the Westminster Standards. That quote also shows that I have asked a question: If as a church we already hold that the civil government may not enforce the first two commandments, how can we argue that it is *morally required* to enforce the seventh commandment? Raising that question is not the same thing as teaching that the civil government may not enforce the seventh commandment. If the civil government enforces the seventh commandment it may do so, but only if it grounds such a public policy in pragmatic considerations, but it is not *morally required* to do so.

⁴⁰ One minor point: on March 11, 2002 (almost three weeks before the charges were filed), I removed the last sentence quoted in paragraph c: "To see how the political principles espoused in this essay might be applied with regard to the debate over homosexuality, see Misty Irons, 'A Conservative Christian Case for Civil Same-Sex Marriage.'" I removed the link to her article at the same time that I removed the article.

In paragraph d. I am quoted as saying, "The church must resist the impulse to have the ethical standards of God's covenantal revelation in Scripture legislatively enforced in the civil sphere." By "the ethical standards of God's covenantal revelation in Scripture" I mean the ethical standards given to the redeemed covenant community, whether in their old covenant or new covenant form. This statement is not a denial of the relevance to civil government of the moral will of God known through conscience (i.e., the light of nature).

F. APPENDIX: AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS ON RELIGIOUSLY NEUTRAL CIVIL GOVERNMENT

The Presbyterian Church in America (pre-1788)

The Synod of Philadelphia adopted the Westminster Standards on September 19, 1729 in the following terms:

All the ministers of this Synod now present, except one that declared himself not prepared ... after proposing all the scruples that any of them had to make against any articles and expressions in the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, have unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples, and in declaring the said Confession and Catechisms to be the confession of their faith, excepting only some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, concerning which clauses the Synod do unanimously declare, that they do not receive those articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil magistrate hath a controlling power over Synods with respect to the exercise of their ministerial authority; or power to persecute any for their religion, or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the throne of Great Britain.⁴¹

In 1786, a committee of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia was erected with a view to negotiating union with the Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed Churches. That committee explained to these other bodies its own terms of ministerial communion:

The Synod of New York and Philadelphia adopt, according to the known and established meaning of the terms, the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of their faith; save that every candidate for the gospel ministry is permitted to except against so much of the twenty-third chapter as gives authority to civil magistrates in matters of religion. The Presbyterian Church in America considers the church of Christ as a spiritual society, entirely distinct from the civil government, and having a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical policy, independently of the interposition of the magistrate.⁴²

Jacob Green (1776)

Jacob Green (1722-1790) was a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey. He was an ardent patriot and defended the right of the colonies to fight for their independence in a pamphlet titled, "Observations on the reconciliation of Great-Britain and the Colonies, by a friend of American Liberty." It was written after the Revolutionary War had already begun in order to answer the arguments by some Americans that the colonies should seek to be reconciled to Great Britain.

⁴¹ *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 1706-1788* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 94-95.

⁴² Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1851), Part I, p. 179.

'Tis not enough to say every religious sect should be tolerated, for no one should be established; and religion in general should be encouraged, and every man not only have right, but be encouraged to think and judge for himself in matters of religion: While no sect or party should be allowed to molest, disturb or encroach upon another, while they were all equally good subjects of the common wealth, and their principles and practice not detrimental to civil government.⁴³

Memorials of Hanover Presbytery to the Virginia State Legislature (1776-1785)

The Presbytery of Hanover communicated with the Virginia state legislature on numerous occasions during the Revolutionary War and afterward, entreating the civil government of that state to cease its past practice of granting special favors to the Anglican establishment. For example, the Anglican church was permitted to levy taxes upon all the citizens of Virginia, regardless of their religious affiliation; only Anglican clergymen were permitted to perform state-recognized marriages, etc. After the Revolutionary War, the various dissenting groups (which included Presbyterians), were invited to participate in the taxation system so that they would become equal benefactors of it along with the Episcopal Church. The Presbyterians of Virginia rejected this proposal and expressed their desire that all "illicit connection or commerce" between church and state be brought to an end.

To set the context for these highly significant memorials, we need to step back to the 1750's to the ministry of Samuel Davies (1723-1761) in the colony of Virginia. Davies was an effective Presbyterian evangelist, church planter, and the founder of the Presbytery of Hanover. However, since the Anglican church was the established church in Virginia, he and his fellow Presbyterians had the legal status of "dissenters." As dissenters they were legally tolerated by the government according to the Toleration Acts of 1689. However, the status of the Toleration Acts in the colonies was a point of dispute.

In Virginia Davies had to overcome the suspicion and hostility of Anglican officials who had the power to authorize and bar assemblies by religious dissenters ... In his struggle to gain licenses for his congregations Davies became known as an advocate of civil liberties. Eventually arguing against the king's attorney general that the Toleration Acts of 1689 applied to the colonies as well as the British homeland, Davies was able to secure enough toleration to allow open evangelism and organization of dissenting churches ... in 1755 he was instrumental in organizing the Presbytery of Hanover, the first in Virginia. In 1753 the Synod of New York commissioned Davies and Gilbert Tennent to conduct a campaign in England and Scotland for two years to raise support for the fledgling College of New Jersey (later named Princeton University). While in England, Davies received an official declaration from the king confirming his claim that the Toleration Act did indeed apply to Virginia.⁴⁴

In the end, Davies secured a legal victory for Presbyterianism in Virginia, by obtaining the king's official declaration that the Toleration Acts were applicable in the colonies. This dearly bought religious freedom was an important theological treasure carried on by the Presbytery of Hanover even after Davies' death.

With this historical background in mind, consider the following quotes from the numerous memorials on behalf of religious freedom from the Presbytery to the Virginia state legislature during and after the Revolutionary War. It should be evident that the position adopted by the Presbytery of Hanover is that civil government must be religiously neutral.⁴⁵

⁴³ Green's pamphlet was published in New York in 1776 (Evans # 14790).

⁴⁴ *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, ed. D. G. Hart (IVP, 1999), p. 77.

⁴⁵ Quotes from Charles F. James, *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA: J. P. Bell Co., 1900), pp. 222-40.

October 24, 1776:

"... We rely upon this Declaration, as well as the justice of our honorable Legislature, to secure the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of our consciences ... In this enlightened age, and in a land where all of every denomination are united in the most strenuous efforts to be free, we hope and expect that our representatives will cheerfully concur in removing every species of religious, as well as civil, bondage. Certain it is that every argument for civil liberty gains additional strength when applied to liberty in the concerns of religion; and there is no argument in favor of establishing the Christian religion but what may be pleaded, with equal propriety, for establishing the tenets of Mahomed by those who believe the Alcoran ...

"Neither can it be made to appear that the gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Saviour declares his kingdom is not of this world, he renounces all dependence upon State power, and as his weapons are spiritual, and were only designed to have influence on the judgment and heart of man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in the quiet possession of their unalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the Apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity by its own native excellence and under all disposing providence of God.

"We would humbly represent that the only proper objects of civil government are the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence, the security of the life, liberty and property of the citizens, and to restrain the vicious and encourage the virtuous by wholesome laws, equally extending to every individual. But that the duty which we owe our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can only be directed by reason and conviction, and as nowhere cognizable but at the tribunal of the universal Judge.

"Therefore we ask no ecclesiastical establishments for ourselves; neither can we approve of them when granted to others ... and for the reasons recited we are induced earnestly to entreat that all laws now in force in this Commonwealth which countenance religious denomination, may be speedily repealed – that all, of every religious sect, may be protected in the full exercise of their several modes of worship."

June 3, 1777:

"Neither does the church of Christ stand in need of a general assessment for its support; and most certain we are that it would be of no advantage, but an injury to the society to which we belong; and as every good Christian believes that Christ has ordained a complete system of laws for the government of his kingdom, so we are persuaded that, by his providence, he will support it to its final consummation. In the fixed belief of this principle, that the kingdom of Christ and the concerns of religion are beyond the limits of civil control, we should act a dishonest, inconsistent part, were we to receive any emoluments from human establishments for the support of the gospel."

May 26, 1784:

"Such partiality to any system of religious opinion whatever is inconsistent with the intention and proper object of well directed government, and obliges men of reflection to consider the Legislature which indulges it, as a party in religious differences, instead of the common guardians and equal protector of every class of citizens in their religious as well as civil rights ... We expect from the representatives of a free people that all partiality and prejudice on any account whatever be laid aside, and that the happiness of the citizens at large will be secured upon the broad basis of perfect political equality."

October, 1784:

"We conceive that human legislation ought to have human affairs alone for its concern. Legislators in free States possess delegated authority for the good of the community at large in its political and civil capacity. The existence, preservation and happiness of society should be their only object, and to this their public cares should be confined. Whatever is not materially connected with this lies not within their province as statesmen. The thoughts, the intentions, the faith and the consciences of men, with their modes of worship, lie beyond their reach, and are ever to be referred to a higher and more penetrating tribunal. These internal and spiritual matters cannot be measured by human rule, nor be amenable to human laws. It is the duty of every man for himself to take care of his immortal interests in a future state, where we are to account for our conduct as individuals; and it is by no means the business of the Legislature to attend to this, for there governments and states, as collective entities, shall no more be known ... In the present important moment we conceive it criminal to be silent, and have therefore attempted to discharge a duty which we owe our religion as Christians, to ourselves as freemen, and to our posterity, who ought to receive from us a precious birthright of perfect freedom and political equality."

August, 1785:

[This memorial was written in opposition to a bill pending in the state legislature of Virginia to levy a tax for the support of the teachers of the Christian religion.]

"When the late happy Revolution secured to us exemption from British control, we hoped that the gloom of injustice and usurpation would have been forever dispelled by the cheering rays of liberty and independence ... But our hopes have since been overcast with apprehension when we found how slowly and unwillingly ancient distinctions among the citizens, on account of religious opinions, were removed by the Legislature ... Our fears have been realized in certain proceedings of the General Assembly [of the State of Virginia] at their last sessions.

"We, therefore, in the name of the Presbyterian church in Virginia, beg leave to exercise our privilege as free men in remonstrating against [the pending bill] absolutely ... We oppose the bill – because ...

"The end of civil government is security to the temporal liberty and property of mankind, and to protect them in the free exercise of religion. Legislators are invested with powers from their constituents for this purpose only; and their duty extends no further. Religion is altogether personal, and the right of exercising it unalienable; and it is not, cannot, and ought not to be, resigned to the will of the society at large; and much less to the Legislature, which derived its authority wholly from the consent of the people, and is limited by the original intention of civil association ...

"The bill is also an unnecessary and inadequate expedient for the end proposed. We are fully persuaded of the happy influences of Christianity upon the morals of men; but we have never known it, in the history of its progress, so effectual for this purpose, as when left to its native excellence and evidence to recommend it, under the all-directing providence of God, and free from the intrusive hand of the civil magistrate. Its Divine Author did not think it necessary to render it dependent on earthly governments. And experience has shown that this dependence, where it has been effected, has been an injury rather than an aid. It has introduced corruption among the teachers and professors of it wherever it has been tried for hundreds of years, and has been destructive of genuine morality, in proportion to zeal, of the powers of this world, in arming it with the sanction of legal terrors, or inviting to its profession by honors and rewards.

"It is urged, indeed, by the abettors of this bill that it would be the means of cherishing religion and morality among the citizens. But it appears from fact that these can be promoted only by the internal conviction of the mind and its voluntary choice, which such establishments cannot effect

"It unjustly subjects men who may be good citizens, but who have not embraced our common faith, to the hardship of supporting a system they have not as yet believed the truth of; and deprives them of their property for what they do not suppose to be of importance to them.

"It establishes a precedent for further encroachments by making the Legislature judges of religious truth. If the Assembly [of the State of Virginia] have a right to determine the preference between Christianity and the other systems of religion that prevail in the world, they may also, at a convenient time, give a preference to some favored sect among Christians ...

"It revives the principle which our ancestors contested to blood, of attempting to reduce all religions to one standard by the force of civil authority ...

"Jesus Christ hath given sufficient authority to his church for every lawful purpose, and it is forsaking his authority and direction for that of fallible men, to expect or to grant the sanction of civil law to authorize the regulation of any Christian society."

John Rodgers, First Moderator of the GA (1783)

The Reverend Rodgers (1727-1811) was a Presbyterian pastor in New York. He had also been the leading member of the various committees from 1785 to 1788 that drafted the new Plan of Government by which the Presbyterian Church was organized into a General Assembly. According to Leonard Trinterud, the tradition that John Witherspoon was the chief architect of the reorganization of the Presbyterian Church is unsupported by the evidence. In his view, this role belonged to John Rodgers.⁴⁶ Although Witherspoon opened the first session of the General Assembly of the PCUSA in 1789 and preached the opening sermon, it was Rodgers who was elected as the first Moderator.

On December 11, 1783, right after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, Rodgers preached a sermon titled, "The Divine Goodness displayed in the American Revolution."⁴⁷ Rodgers chose as his text Psalm 126:3: "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad," and exhorted his hearers to "consider some of those great things our God has done for us; and which it becomes us to notice, and acknowledge this day." After enumerating the great things God has done for us in Christ and by the ministry of the gospel, he turns to the things God had done for the Americans as citizens of the State. He traces the providence of God at various turning points in the Revolutionary War. Then he begins to praise the Constitution. He acknowledges that it has its imperfections, like all human institutions, but he thinks that on the whole it is unsurpassed in wisdom, justice, and sound policy. He does not mention the bicameral legislature or the three branches of government or any of the purely secular aspects of the Constitution. Instead, he dwells on its provision for the free exercise of religion. What is most instructive about his comments here is that he explicitly includes non-Christian religions in this religious liberty:

The rights of conscience, both in faith and worship, are fully secured to every denomination of Christians. No one denomination in the State, or in any of the States, have it in their power to oppress another. They all stand upon the same common level, in point of religious privileges. Nor is this confined to Christians only. *The Jews also, which is their undoubted right, have the liberty of worshipping God in that way, they think most acceptable to him.* No man is excluded from the

⁴⁶ Leonard Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949), p. 292.

⁴⁷ Evans Early American Imprints # 18766.

rights of citizenship, on account of his religious profession. Nor ought he to be. What great things has the God of Providence done for our race! By the revolution we this day celebrate, he has provided an asylum for the oppressed, in all the nations of the earth, whatever may be the nature of the oppression (pp. 29-30).

One common interpretation of the 1788 American Revision of the Westminster Standards is that it merely removed the Erastianism of the original Confession by removing the notion that one particular Christian church should be granted an establishment and be officially recognized by the civil magistrate. On this interpretation, the religious liberty and liberty of conscience that the 1788 Revision envisions is not to be extended to all religions, but only to the various denominations and sects of Protestant Christianity, none of which would be given preferential treatment by the civil government. However, the above quote by John Rodgers, the first Moderator of the General Assembly, proves otherwise, since he explicitly rejoices that religious freedom in the United States also embraces non-Christian religions such as Judaism.

Preface to the Form of Government of the PCUSA (1788)

When the Presbyterian Church adopted the revised standards in 1788, it also adopted a new Form of Government to replace the old Westminster FOG. In the preface to the new FOG, the church made the following statement, prominently displayed as the opening paragraph. The newly organized church stated that they were "unanimously of opinion" ...

That "God alone is Lord of the conscience; and hath left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship:" Therefore they consider the rights of private judgment, *in all matters that respect religion*, as universal unalienable: they do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

Charles Hodge (1851, 1863)

In the context of his discussion of the 1729 Adopting Act, Hodge has an interesting aside where he contrasts the Presbyterians with the Puritans of New England. In contrast with the Presbyterians, the Puritans attempted to erect a Christian theocracy and were no friends of religious liberty:

[In Puritan New England], not only all places of power and trust, but even the right of suffrage was confined to members of the church. The magistrates were clothed with power to punish for opinion's sake; a power which they frequently exercised ... The intolerance of the Puritans, such as it was, arose out of their most cherished opinions. They came to this country to establish a society in which God should reign; where his truth should be preserved and his laws enforced. Hence all power was to be kept in the hands of the people of God. Hence the denial of the truth, or any moral offence, was regarded as a violation of the law of the land, and to be punished accordingly. Hence, too, when Roger Williams broached his doctrine of liberty of conscience, not only was he banished, but his opinions were laboriously controverted. A state founded upon such a principle, must be intolerant. Had no strangers come among them, their own children would have been disfranchised. Yet the Puritans adhered to this principle, and gave it up in practice by slow and reluctant concessions. This is not said to cast a reproach upon the pious founders of New England. Far from it. Those who retain the great scriptural doctrines for whose sake they constructed their whole economy, honour their memory far more effectually than those who merely garnish their sepulchres. They were the people of God; they loved and honoured the Saviour; and this is enough to preserve them in everlasting remembrance, and to shield them from all unjust or unkind aspersions. They were not fanatical persecutors, or blinded enthusiasts, but

sober-minded and devout men. They allowed themselves, however, to be fascinated with the idea of a Christian theocracy; which, beautiful as it is, cannot be carried out, in the present state of the world, without practical injustice. These men, therefore, good as they were, should not be honoured at the expense of truth, nor held up as the friends of religious liberty in contrast with the Presbyterians ... [since the latter] unanimously declared [in 1729] their rejection of the doctrine that the civil magistrates had the right to control ecclesiastical bodies, or to persecute for the sake of religion.⁴⁸

In his essay, "Relation of the Church and State,"⁴⁹ Hodge provides additional insight into his views on this subject. He begins by surveying the various relations of church and state throughout church history, beginning before the conversion of Constantine up to the Reformation. He then surveys the various theories of church-state relations among the Anglicans, the Lutherans, and the Reformed Church. Hodge cites Turretin as a standard Reformed authority. Turretin taught that the civil magistrate ought to establish the true religion, and when established, faithfully uphold it, or if corrupted, seek to reform the church. Turretin also taught that the civil magistrate ought to protect the church by restraining heretics and hindering the confession of false religions, by seeing to it that the confessions of faith and ecclesiastical constitutions be agreeable to Scripture, calling synods, etc.⁵⁰ Hodge states that the Westminster Confession of Faith, in its original form, taught the same general doctrine. It was also brought to America by the Puritans. As we have seen, Hodge argues that the New England theory of church-state relations was essentially theocratic. He mentions that John Cotton "even wrote a book to prove that persecution was a Christian duty." Hodge then summarizes the doctrine of the Reformed Church of Geneva, Germany, France, Holland, and Scotland, in the following three points:

The theory on which this doctrine of the Reformed Church is founded, is,

1. That the State is a divine institution, designed for promoting the general welfare of society, and as religion is necessary to that welfare, religion falls legitimately within the sphere of the state.
2. That the magistrate, as representing the state, is, by divine appointment, the guardian of the law, to take vengeance on those who transgress, and for the praise of those who obey; and as the law consists of two tables, one relating to our duties to God, and the other to our duties to men, the magistrate is, *ex officio*, the guardian of both tables, and bound to punish the infractions of the one, as well as of the other.
3. That the word of God determines the limits of the magistrate's office in reference to both classes of his duties; and as, under the Old Testament, there was a form of religion, with its rites and officers prescribed, which the magistrate could not change, so there is under the New. But under the Old, we find with this Church government the kings were required to do, and in fact did do much, for the support and reformation of religion, and the punishment of idolators; so they are now bound to act on the same principles, making the pious kings of the Old Testament their model.

Having set forth "the doctrine of the Reformed Church" on church-state relations, he goes on to set the traditional Reformed view in contrast to the "Relation between the Church and state in this country." He acknowledges at the outset that the American view of the independence of church and state deviates from the historic doctrine of the Reformed Church, and that it is recent and novel:

⁴⁸ Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part I, pp. 131-32.

⁴⁹ Charles Hodge, "Relation of the Church and State," in *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), pp. 106-18. Originally the article appeared in the *Princeton Review*, 1863.

⁵⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 316-36 (Eighteenth Topic, Q. XXXIV).

The doctrine current among us on this subject is of very recent origin ... yet to this doctrine the public mind in this country has already been brought, and to the same conclusion the convictions of God's people in all parts of the world seem rapidly tending. On what grounds, then does this novel, yet sound, doctrine rest?

Hodge then sets forth four arguments in defense of the American view of church and state:

1. In the first place it assumes that the state, the family, and the Church, are all divine institutions, having the same general end in view, but designed to accomplish that end by different means ... But as God has instituted the family for domestic training and government; the state, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, and the Church for the promotion and extension of true religion, the three are to be kept distinctive within their respective spheres.
2. That the relative duties of these several institutions cannot be learned by reasoning *a priori* from their design, but must be determined from the word of God. And when reasoning from the word of God, we are not authorized to argue from the Old Testament economy, because that was avowedly temporary, and has been abolished; but must derive our conclusions from the New Testament ...
3. That the New Testament, when speaking of the immediate design of the state, and the official duties of the magistrate, never intimates that he has those functions which the common doctrine of the Lutheran and Reformed Church assign him [viz., to be the guardian of both tables of the law – cp. point 2 on p. 49]. This silence, together with the fact that those functions are assigned to the Church and Church officers, is proof that it is not the will of God that they should be assumed by the state.
4. That the only means which the state can employ to accomplish many of the objects said to belong to it, viz., pains and penalties, are inconsistent with the example and commands of Christ; with the rights of private Christians, guaranteed in the word of God (i.e., to serve God according to the dictates of his conscience,) [and] are ineffectual to the true end of religion, which is voluntary obedience to the truth and productive of incalculable evil. The New Testament, therefore, does not teach that the magistrate is entitled to take care that true religion is established and maintained ... or that heretics be punished. And on the other hand, by enjoining all these duties upon the Church, as an institution, distinct from the state, it teaches positively that they do not belong to the magistrate, but to the Church. If to this it be added that experience teaches that the magistrate is the most unfit person to discharge these duties; that his attempting it has always been injurious to religion, and inimical to the rights of conscience, we have reason to rejoice in the recently discovered truth, that the Church is independent of the state, and that the state best promotes her interests by letting her alone.

J. Gresham Machen (1924, 1932, 1933)

Daryl Hart provides a helpful introduction to Machen's political views:

While Machen fought legislation that increased the size and power of federal government, he was also critical of the cultural Protestantism that often informed such reforms. Thus, while many viewed fundamentalist opposition to evolution as a threat to the freedom of public school instruction, Machen took aim at the Protestant moralism that pervaded government-sponsored education. He teamed up with Roman Catholics to oppose the introduction of character education into public school curricula and recommended that public schools stick to their proper function – "the impartation of knowledge." The only permissible form of moral guidance was the daily

example of the teacher in the normal workings of the classroom. A religious or philosophical grounding for morality, however, violated the public character of government schools.

By similar logic, Machen objected to prayer and Bible reading in public schools. Such practices, in his view, not only violated the separation of church and state but also obliterated real and significant differences between religions. Trying to find selected ethical teachings from the Bible upon which Protestants, Catholics, and Jews could agree was hopeless and resulted in making "even the best of books" to say "the exact opposite of what it means." The only satisfactory solution for religious instruction in public schools was a system of release time, where parents, if they chose, could provide for their children's religious upbringing. Even here, Machen cautioned that the state should not give credit nor should it attempt to regulate religious instruction imparted outside school.⁵¹

The following quotes are from Machen himself, as found in *What is Christianity? And Other Addresses*, edited by Ned B. Stonehouse:⁵²

From "Does Fundamentalism Obstruct Social Progress?" (1924)

The rapidly progressing loss of liberty is one of the most striking phenomena of recent years. At times it makes itself felt in blatant ways, as in the notorious Lusk laws for the licensing of teachers in the State of New York ... The Lusk laws, for example, which attacked liberty of speech in the State of New York, were opposed partly by the socialists against whom the laws were originally aimed ... The real defenders of liberty are those who are devoted to it for its own sake, who believe that freedom of speech means not only freedom for those with whom they are agreed but also freedom for those to whom they are opposed. It is such a defense of liberty which is favored by the true followers of Christ (pp. 247-48).

From "The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age" (1932)

To those lovers of civil and religious liberty I confess that I belong; in fact, civil and religious liberty seems to me to be more valuable than any other earthly thing (p. 273).

One of the most important elements in civil and religious liberty is the right of voluntary association – the right of citizens to band themselves together for any lawful purpose whatever, whether that purpose does or does not commend itself to the generality of their fellow men ... It would, indeed, be an interference with liberty for a church, through the ballot box or otherwise, to use the power of the state to compel men to assent to the church's creed or conform to the church's program. To that kind of intolerance I am opposed with all my might and main (p. 283-84).

There are those who tell us that the Bible ought to be put into the public schools, and that the public schools should seek to build character by showing the children that honesty is the best policy and that good Americans do not lie nor steal. With such programs a true Christian church will have nothing to do. The Bible, it will hold, is made to say the direct opposite of what it means if any hope is held out to mankind from its ethical portions apart from its great redemptive center and core; and character building on the basis of human experience may be character destruction; it is the very antithesis of that view of sin which is at the foundation of all Christian convictions and all Christian life ... Against such programs of religious education and character building, a true Christian Church will seek from the state liberty for all parents everywhere to bring up their children in accordance with the dictates of their conscience (pp. 285-86).

⁵¹ Hart, *Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p. 138.

⁵² Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951.

In the second place, you cannot expect from a true Christian Church any official pronouncements upon the political or social questions of the day, and you cannot expect cooperation with the state in anything involving the use of force. Important are the functions of the police, and members of the Church, either individually or in such special associations as they may choose to form, should aid the police in every lawful way in the exercise of those functions. But the function of the Church in its corporate capacity is of an entirely different kind. Its weapons against evil are spiritual, not carnal; and by becoming a political lobby, through the advocacy of political measures whether good or bad, the Church is turning aside from its proper mission, which is to bring to bear upon human hearts the solemn and imperious, yet also sweet and gracious, appeal of the gospel of Christ (p. 286).

From "The Necessity of the Christian School" (1933)

The answer is that if the law of God is proclaimed in public schools, to people of different faiths, it is bound, in the very nature of the case, to be proclaimed with optimism; and if it is proclaimed with optimism it is proclaimed in a way radically opposed to the Christian doctrine of sin ... But is not a law that is proclaimed to unredeemed persons with such optimism at best only an imperfect, garbled law? Is it not very different from the true and majestic law of God with its awful pronouncements of eternal death upon sinful man? (p. 298).

Many people tell us that the reading of the Bible can be put into the public schools ... What shall we say about that? For my part, I have no hesitation in saying that I am strongly opposed to it. I think I am just about as strongly opposed to the reading of the Bible in state-controlled schools as any atheist could be ... When, for example, the great and glorious promises of the Bible to the redeemed children of God are read as though they belonged of right to man as man, have we not an attack upon the very heart and core of the Bible's teaching? What could be more terrible, for example, from the Christian point of view, than the reading of the Lord's Prayer to non-Christian children, as though they could use it without becoming Christians, as though persons who have never been purchased by the blood of Christ could possibly say to God, 'Our Father, which art in Heaven'? The truth is that a garbled Bible may be a falsified Bible; and when any hope is held out to lost humanity from the so-called ethical portions of the Bible apart from its great redemptive core, then the Bible is represented as saying the direct opposite of what it really says (pp. 298-99).