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Prof. Tinder's response to Prof. Stek contains some claims whose consequences I find deeply disturbing.

First, if coercion is always evil, as he asserts, and God commands coercion, then it follows that God commands us to do evil. What is worse, it also follows that God himself does evil since Scripture tells us that those whom God loves he disciplines. Moreover, not only does God both command and do evil in particular circumstances now, but he will perpetuate that evil everlastingly since the final end of believers is to be a Kingdom over which his Son will reign forever.

Tinder denies this last point, of course, but does not tell us why he thinks that the apostles Paul and John hint that "in eternity there are no states." I don't find any such suggestion in the New Testament. Instead it seems to me that Scripture speaks with one voice on this topic. Isaiah, for example, sees the final rest for the people of God as one in which the Lord will "judge between the nations," "the government shall be upon his shoulder," and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom . . . to uphold it with justice . . . forevermore." And the book of Revelation says (in Handel's immortal words) "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigns!" Obviously, where there is a throne, a kingdom, and a King who reigns, there is a state.

Perhaps Tinder is thinking that state coercion must be evil because he's assuming it must be violent. That, I think, is a mistake. There are many forms of coercion which are not violent. The barrier that prevents my getting on the subway till I have paid the fare is a form of coercion, but it is not violent. It is not necessary that every sort of enforcement of justice be the sort which either injures or threatens to injure people. Furthermore, there

are less than injurious forms of coercion that Scripture views as right for private persons to exercise: parent's punishment of children, for example. I therefore believe we should take Jesus' admonition "Do not resist one who is evil" in the light of all that Scripture teaches, and not try to understand it in isolation. Jesus made his remarks to an audience steeped in Scripture, so they must be taken in their total doctrinal context. He did not announce a new and fundamental principle on the subject, but added to the interpretation of what Scripture already taught.

Taken in this way, it seems to me that Jesus' remarks are best understood as admonishing us not to undertake actions which are properly those of the State. Notice that his examples (someone strikes you, steals your cloak, kidnaps you) are all crimes punishable by law. The attitude Jesus advocates, then, is that if we are victims of a crime we are not to try to execute the punishment for it ourselves. And this fits perfectly with what Scripture says everywhere when it tells us not to seek vengeance for wrongs against us. Scripture never says, however, that there is anything wrong with the State's apprehending and punishing a criminal. As private citizens we are to accept "the spoiling of our goods cheerfully," but at the same time "the magistrate bears not the sword in vain, but to punish evil doers."

Because this last point seems so obvious, I am led to suspect that there may be a certain confusion lurking behind Tinder's view. I refer here to his confusing the rightness or wrongness of an act with the rightness or wrongness of our motives for acting. Given our fallen natures, I am quite prepared to admit that those who are officers of the state may carry out its coercion with less than loving concern for those whom they are protecting. Once police officers see a victim of a crime, it's hard for them not to enjoy bashing the perpetrator in the course of apprehending him, for example. But that doesn't make the apprehension of a criminal an intrinsically unloving act; it only means that it is an act that can be done unlovingly. For this reason, I do not believe Jesus sinned when he drove the money changers from the Temple (as Tinder must believe if he's to be consistent.) I believe that Jesus was sinless, and that he took his action with love in his heart for God, Israel, the Temple, and even the money changers. After all, don't even we sinful parents sometimes manage to punish our children without anger, and completely out of loving concern for their best interests?

It appears that there is a hidden assumption to Tinder's view, namely, that he thinks there is a necessary conflict between law on the one hand and grace and truth on the other hand. Though he alludes to this only in a passing remark at the end of his letter, I suspect it is the real motive for his seeing love and justice as opposed. But the belief that law and grace are opposed, and the inference that under the fullness of grace there is no need for law, is without foundation in Scripture. Frequently, John 1:17 is quoted in its support: "For the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The fact is, however, that John 1:17 does not really support this theological error at all. The contrast drawn there is not between law and grace, but between Jesus and Moses. The real force of the Greek text is this: the law was given through Moses, but Jesus Christ created grace and truth. In other words, the greatest figure of the old covenant was still only a human prophet, but the Messiah is more than merely human (which is, after all, the main theme of John 1.) Under both old and new covenants, law itself is a gift of God's grace. So both covenants see all people as subject to both the norm of justice and the norm of love.

This last point is, I believe, the most important difference between Tinder's position and mine. I see justice as having to do with obligations that arise because of what is fair, and ethics as having to do with obligations that arise because of what is loving. Doing what is fair is one sort of good, while doing what is loving is another sort of good. The two are not identical though they are, of course, related. Their relation is, roughly, that while we can be fair to others without being loving, we cannot be loving without at least being fair. On this view, it is a precondition of being loving that we be just. And I see Scripture as enjoining both obligations upon us equally.

Tinder thinks that being loving and enforcing justice are necessarily at odds because they "cannot be mixed in accordance with a single, coherent moral principle that enables an act of . . . loving coercion to be thoroughly good." But why would there have to be a single principle to encompass both justice (fairness) and morality (love)? That's like saying that we can't think of a species of orange that includes both apples and oranges. It appears that Tinder supposes that only moral goodness is really good. He thinks that justice cannot really be good because its enforcement sometimes requires coercive acts that would not be required by love alone in cases where no injustice was involved.

By contrast, I think the biblical attitude toward this issue is clear: unless we have done justice, we cannot fulfill the requirement to love. Even the punishment of a criminal may contribute to his reform as well as protect his potential victims. If either of these are neglected, we have not only failed in our obligation to be just, we have also failed our obligation to be loving.

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## Love and Coercion

*[In our February issue we introduced an article and a book written by Glenn Tinder, a political science professor at the University of Massachusetts (Boston). The article is "Can We Be Good Without God?" The Atlantic (December, 1989), and the book is The Political Meaning of Christianity. In "The Testimony" in that issue, I raised a question about whether Tinder's interpretation of Matthew 5:38-48 didn't make love and coercion irreconcilable.*

*[In response to my column, we received a response from Dr. John Stek printed below. We then asked Prof. Tinder to respond to Stek and me, which he graciously agreed to do. With these short pieces in hand, we next invited a number of others to join in the discussion. Their responses (or at least excerpts from their responses) follow Tinder's. More will be printed in the next issue. When all are in, we will put them out together as a Background Paper. — The Editor]*

*Do we not have to recognize (1) that biblically in its role as protector and executor of justice the state acts not as the representative of the people but as the representative of God, and (2) that Jesus' counsel in Matt. 5:38-48 was addressed to individuals as neighbors and not to the state as executor of justice—that Jesus did not tell the state to "turn the other cheek"?*

*As God's representative in matters of justice the "office" of the state is to protect individuals against injustice (hence Paul appealed to Caesar) and to impose just sanctions on those who have done injustice to their neighbors—both of which require coercion. An individual is not to execute justice when wronged; that is the office of the state. The state should not "turn the other cheek"; it should execute justice. Right?*

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I agree fully that love and coercion can be and must be mixed. Love alone would be weak and could not have the impact on the world it ought to have. Coercion alone would be demonic. My contention, however, is that love and coercion cannot be mixed in accordance with a single, coherent moral principle that enables an act of coercive love (or loving coercion) to be thoroughly good. Any act of coercion is evil to a degree. I am justified in carrying out a coercive act, I believe, not by any general moral principle but only if such an act is commanded by God, here and now, in the particular circumstances in which I find myself.

In facing the dilemma created by Jesus, on the one hand, forbidding us to resist evil and, on the other hand, accepting the state, which has the specific function of resisting evil, it does not seem to me to help very much to say that he was addressing his prohibition only to private persons and not to the state. To begin with, he did not say that; his command, "Do not resist one who is evil," is unqualified. Further, Jesus himself set an example of coercion by a private person in driving the money-changers from the temple. But further, if coercion is not evil, why did Jesus bar anyone from employing it? If coercion can be so fully fused with love that it is entirely good, then why should not private persons employ it? To claim that for the sake of good order the state must require that normally coercive acts be reserved for state officials is surely not the sort of pragmatic consideration Jesus was concerned with. And to suggest that state officials would be better at fusing love and coercion than would private persons is of course directly contrary to common sense; state officials are ordinarily less sensitive in such matters than private persons.

So let us assume that an act of coercion is always in some degree evil, even though it may be unavoidable. In that case, state officials are under conflicting norms when they employ loving coercion. Reserving such acts to the state has not resolved the problem.

Another difficulty involved in the theory that only the state can legitimately employ coercion is that occasionally, by every counsel of morality and common sense, a private person is compelled to carry out a coercive act. What if I see an adult assaulting a child and there is no policeman in the vicinity? What if I find myself as a private citizen in a thoroughly evil state in which no form of peaceful resistance is permitted? This, of course, was Bonhoeffer's situation [under Hitler's dictatorship in Germany].

It may be worth stating very briefly three general principles which I believe I am standing on in making these assertions. (1) Conflicting moral principles are inherent in our fallenness; our very circumstances make it impossible to adhere unambiguously to the requirements of agape [love]. (2) Conflicting moral principles also are inherent in our dependence on God; a moral act is one carried out in obedience to God, not one which is sanctioned unequivocally by a rational principle. (3) Finally, the state is inherently evil, even though it is necessary, because it is a coercive order. The state represents law, rather than grace and truth. By my reading, both Paul and John imply that in eternity there are no states.

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**This Q & A column seeks to address readers' questions about policies, government, and citizenship. Send us your question, whether particular or general, about a Christian view of political life.**

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