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WORSHIP AND POLITICS

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WORSHIP AND POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

Genuinely Christian criticism should strenuously attempt to outline a positive alternative to the professedly Christian views to which exceptions are taken. In offering an alternative the critic, equally as well as his respondents, lays himself open to the prospect of subsequent rebuttal, if not always refutation. Quite willing to become vulnerable to scrutiny in this way for the mutual advance of the Kingdom of Christ, the present critical essay attempts to put forward an understanding of the relationship between worship and politics (or, more broadly, of any communal action of a non-worship kind that seeks to grapple with the demonic structuration of contemporary life). In order to adequately discuss this relationship between worship and politics, it is not possible to enter into a structural analysis of worship as such; that undertaking would be simply too massive for this study. Nevertheless, what we do have to say about the relationship of worship and politics should be heavily suggestive of the general direction we would go in discussing worship according to its own structural integrity. Emphasis is now on the theme of the integrality of worship with the entire style of Christian life.

I. WORSHIP AND POLITICS: INTEGRAL TO THE ONE GREAT TASK

If life is truly understood to be religion—that is, service to God in loving obedience as a responsible human creature in one's particular historic situation—then it is impossible to seal worship and politics into mutually exclusive airtight categories. Life is integral. Integral reference beyond ourselves to the Lord Who made us is the condition of life even when we disobediently attempt to sunder that integrality. Authentically Christian worship will have concrete political significance; and authentically Christian politics will have concrete significance for worship.

This interlacement is nothing but the principle of the mutual integrity of the various creational functions in the fulfillment of the one integral, creational task of serving the Lord. Of course we are simply pointing to the relationship between sphere sovereignty and sphere universalism as it is in the older terminology. Despite the technical character of the terms employed, as Prof. Hendrik Van Riessen points out (The Society of the Future, pp. 68-86), these terms formulate a fundamental teaching of the Holy Scriptures, without which we can have no doctrine of the church-as-an-institution or of society or of creation. In the history of doctrine, these teachings have been quietly assumed rather than made explicit and formulated with rigor. Only in the reformed stream of the evangelical tradition do we find any serious attempt to explicate them at all.

Prof. J.C. Vander Stelt of Dordt College, in an address to the 1969 Congress of the Christian Action Foundation (now the National Association for Christian Political Action) has demonstrated that the credit, in modern times, for the formulation and explication of this foundational biblical doctrine goes almost exclusively to the line extending from Calvin to Althusius to Stahl to Groen to Kuyper to the circle around Dooyeweerd and now to a growing number of thinkers in Canada and America.
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IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To the People of God under the older administration of the Covenant, the integrity of worship and politics was obvious. In due time the political-government task and the worship task were so sufficiently differentiated from one another that we see not only distinctive rules for each but also distinctive organizations and office-bearers for each. Yet both remained tied together in mutual support of one way of life—total service to God. Politics and worship had one common religious direction. The implications of politics for worship and the implications of worship for politics coalesced in a common reference beyond themselves to the Lord God Whom they served. They both had as their outcome a life of total reference to the Lord. Thus, there is no verticalism whatsoever in the older administration of the Covenant. Loving service of the neighbour, according to the creational norms sometimes made explicit by the Lord Himself in His mighty acts, was, by the referential character of those norms, service to the Lord. Thus, there was no verticalism in the older administration either. Service to the Lord could not possibly be set over against service to the neighbour. There was no such choice. Politics and worship both, among other functions, served the neighbour as they served in the concrete circularly situation, no matter what it was, to refer the neighbour beyond the situation to the all-encompassing and integrating purposes of God. That is what the sovereignty of God meant to the people of the Old Testament. That is what the revelation of God in all that is, especially in Jesus Christ and in Holy Scripture, is all about even now. The worship of God in the congregation of believers cannot possibly be scoured clean of the needy, the oppressed, the outcast. Their plight reveals that God is being dishonored. Their plight reveals the magnitude of sin. Addressing their plight in a worshipful way in the worship service reveals that our politics and worship are going in the same religious direction: service to God. Praise of God, repentance of sin, thanksgiving for mercy are fundamentally distorted when denied of their concrete meaning in relationship to the rest of God's creation as one struggles to live in loving obedience before His Face in the only place given to live: creation! You can't serve the Lord without serving the creation.
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Because of the creation order of God, even distorted forms of worship have their political implications, just as distorted forms of political action have their implications for worship. Of course distortion enters into the very best of our human efforts; but we aim at the norm of loving obedience, without harrowing each other with some false perfectionism.

So, if the worship we offer is not normative worship, it will not only be defective as worship but will have an anti-normative influence as well on our politics. And, likewise, if our political action is not normative, it will insinuate its corruption into the very way in which we address ourselves to Almighty God in petition and praise and repentance and thanksgiving; into the very way we formulate our confessions of faith; into the very way we conceive the organizations we erect to order our communal worship. The Lord has so constituted life that if we seek to serve Him in worship and yet go running after some pretendedly neutral (or outright false) no-god in another part of life, we will end up corrupting our worship. We should evaluate the merits of various confessions, for instance, by their relationship to the political affairs of the people who formulated them. We dare to do this precisely because we see life whole; because we penetrate to the fundamental religious direction of life; because we face the possibility that the religious direction of God’s people both in the past (and at present) may have been (and may yet be) dualistic; an attempt to serve the Lord and Mammon at the same time.

To talk of religious direction like His breaks with all current notions that set religion and politics off from one another. That setting off is, in itself, an evidence of the fundamental dualism we oppose. Since life is religion, politics is religion, and worship is religion, and business is religion, and you-name-it is religion. A politics and a worship that are going in opposite religious directions betoken that a person, in the most fundamental sense, is going in opposite directions. To such a person or congregation or denomination or nation comes our Lord’s word, “You cannot serve two masters.”

What we must struggle for, in ourselves and in our brothers, is a politics and a worship that are mutually supportive; that are going in the same fundamental religious direction; that are going forward in the unfolding of God’s plan for creaturely existence in the full coming of His Kingdom.

So, all worship inescapably has political meaning. All worship either has destructive or constructive meaning for a person’s political action. All creeds and confessions and catechisms have a political meaning. All sermons have political meaning, even when no “specifically political topic or text” is addressed. All reading of the Scriptures and all scientific exegesis of them inescapably has political meaning. When the political meaning of worship and confession and sermon and prayer and hymn are not forthrightly faced, the conditions for existence still hold, but we become the blind victims of the particular choices, embedded in our worship, which we attempt to hide from ourselves. We hide these choices from ourselves most often because we do not wish to undergo the agonies of repenting of our sins. Implicit in our worship choices are political choices as well.

The two tasks worship and politics are, among others, properly distinct tasks, but they are together integral to the One Great Task of mankind before the face of the Lord. If they are set at variance to one another, either by the choice of forms of worship that undercut normative politics or by choice of forms of political action that undercut normative worship, so that they cannot mutually support one another openly in their distinctive ways, the Christian life becomes schizoid. And, as a whole, it begins to suffer God’s curse.
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and you can't serve the creation without serving it as creation, the Lord's creation, the creation that has no meaning except in integral reference beyond itself to the Lord. (We shall have, later on, occasion to refer to specific references, in the Old Testament, to the political-governmental task given by God to mankind and renewed for the New Mankind in Christ Jesus.)

III. WORSHIP AND POLITICS IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

At the threshold of the newer administration of the Covenant, you have to confront Jesus, the fully human form of God (Philippians 2:6) through Whom God Himself took on the form of His human servant (Philippians 2:7). In Jesus Christ, God immersed Himself in the human condition, in the human task with its historically-deepened brokenness. In Jesus Christ, God grappled with the anti-normative situation that obtained even for human worship in the synagogues of the Jews and in Israel's rebuilt Temple. Later, through the believing Body of His Christ, God was to grapple with the situation that obtained in worship outside the Jewish community.

In Jesus Christ, God also grappled directly with the anti-normative situation that then obtained in the political-government structuration to which Christ was inescapably related as a man among men. This structuration was part of the overall structuration of the Roman Empire, and so was linked to the entirety of world politics at the time. The teachings of Jesus, then, had a point-blank political significance to which anyone who calls himself "Christian" must face up. These teachings were direct responses to concrete political problems, political possibilities, political alternatives with which Jesus was confronted each day; and, thus, our understanding of these teachings must arise from an exegesis of the life-context in which and for which they were propounded. We must fathom the extremely dismal political conditions which then prevailed, the political structurations of the Empire which kept on re-infecting these conditions, and the idea Jesus had of His own task, as the fulfillment of that particular task related to these conditions and structurations.

We can only allude to a few of the teachings of Jesus that directly refer to politics.

A. "Give to Caesar what are his..."

When certain tricksters tried to trap Him, Jesus threw back in their teeth very quizzical remarks which our theologies have managed to eviscerate rather thoroughly. "Give to Caesar what are his, and give to God what are His" (see Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, and Luke 20:19-26), Jesus said on one of these occasions. Did Jesus here set aside the total referential character of creation? Did He cut
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Himself off from the Old Testament so entirely as to say that the Kingdom of God had no direct claim on Caesar, on government, on statecraft, on political action? Did He imply that underling the state there just was no structure for blessing of the whole life of the whole man in his whole service in community to God? Did He say that the creational structure for the state was not integral to the One Great Task and that the structure for the state was not integral to the creational order which in its entirety must be opened up by mankind? There is hardly an evangelical theologian whose ideas, when carried through fully to their logical end, would not have to contradict what our questions suggest about the positive thrust of our Lord's teaching. Yet to reject them undercuts both the significance of the fall into sin and the redemption in Jesus Christ for governmental-political action.

If the underlying creational structure for blessed human life manifested in human government and politics is not a good work of God, but a work of the Devil, then man's responsibility for the evil misdirection of his task in responding to that structure for government and politics is tremendously weakened. Man is hardly responsible for the evils of government and politics when these constitute a realm aside from the realm of God's gracious restoration of all things in Christ (Colossians 1:16-20). Man is hardly responsible for what can only lumber along, chained in its "secularity," its "naturalness," its "neutrality." In the end, the doctrine of two realms (a realm of nature over which presides government untouched by God's converting grace, and a realm of grace over which the church presides and through which it infuses a positive personal morality into individual believers in government and politics) leaves the state and the churches in a never-ending dialectical tension with one another, each fighting doggedly for empire over other areas of life. This existing tension, because of sinful choice, is raised by the two-realms doctrine into a veritable principle for human existence: it is made an inescapable unalterable unconvertible given of life which cannot be changed at the very root by the power of the resurrection. Thus, the doctrine of the two realms is in opposition to the doctrine of the resurrection, confining the power of the resurrection and clearing the way for Christian complicity in all sorts of political sin: the burning of Nero, the imperialism of the reformed-evangelical people of Britain under Cromwell, and Churchill over reformed-evangelical people of the Netherlands and South Africa, the imperialism of both over the subjugated peoples of their colonies, the agreement of reformed-evangelical people to the entrenchment of slavery in the U.S., the theological defense of slavery by professsor Charles Hodge and professor John Murray, the demonic political relationship of white evangelical Christians in the Bible Belt to the black people, the acquiescence of the pietistic "German Christians" in Hitler's political program which led to the horrors of Auschwitz, etc.

Against such pernicious practices, reinforced by the two-realms doctrine, just what does Jesus mean when He calls upon us to "Give Caesar what is his, and give God what is His?" No horizontalism-versus-verticalism is possible here. The man-to-man relationship of a political subject to a political office-bearer and to the political structuration which the office-bearer represents is, at one and the same time, a man-to-God relationship. There just are no purely "divine", no purely "natural" relationships in the integral creaturely existence to which we are all subjected by God's Law for life. There is no way of rendering anything to God without rendering it properly to other men. Everything, of course, depends here on the meaning of the word "properly." A full treatment of the term would return us to a more elaborate discussion of integrity and integrality than we can accomplish in this essay, yet we can say something extremely significant for such a discussion by looking at the life-context in which Jesus makes His statement in response to the tricksters.

Jesus could not answer the question put to Him in the way it demanded. It was couched in a false framework, a false set of choices, a false dichotomy between anarchy and political servility which always plays into the hands of injustice. The tricksters connived a question, requiring a "Yes" or "No" in front of the troubled multitudes, which Jesus could responsibly have answered only in a delicate statement to those who could understand its nuances and who would not abuse it. More than that, Jesus had to spring this trap set for Him without damaging His required freedom to finish out His teaching ministry before the appointed time of crucifixion.

Were Jesus to say it was out of harmony with the Law of God to refuse tribute to Caesar, in the light of the overwhelming injustice of that regime. His statement would have been used to inflame the forces of anarchy then existing in Israel. Were He to say it was in harmony with the Law of God to give tribute to Caesar (because, as presently alleged by evangelical theologians, Christian morality is satisfied only by individual subjectio to the official will of whatever government may exist and by ignoring any communal political responsibility to change radically government toward the service of God), then Jesus would have actually contributed to the forces of injustice. Rather than untangle the whole mess thrown at Him, our Lord chose to sling it back in the questioners' faces. In doing so, He did not drive any wedge between Christian responsibility in politics and in service to the coming of God's Kingdom, nor between worship and politics. He said
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It was not out of harmony with God's Law to give Caesar tribute as long as the giving of such tribute was a definite strategy in the struggle for the coming of the Kingdom. Even most of the believing Jews could not fathom such a strategy, but Jesus Himself had one. Such a strategy would have to include erecting signposts to God's justice through a stable just government here-and-now.

In the immediate situation, even this dodge served the coming Kingdom. The dodge made the learned tricksters look ridiculous to the crowds. Yet, something deeper was also taking place. The understanding of the all-pervasive character of God's Kingdom which the Jews had inherited from the Old Testament had not entirely disappeared. A careful pondering of our Lord's remark, in the light of the Old Testament, conceivably led some even among His enemies to see that Jesus had actually refused to give Caesar's regime a carte blanche for its political iniquity. When Luke writes that 'they began to accuse Him, saying 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, claiming that He Himself is Christ the King...''' (Luke 23.2), we are wrong to conclude that these false accusers were guilty of a total fabrication. We must remember that they were rightly threatened by the proclamation of Jesus that the Kingdom was at hand. They knew that this Kingdom was not simply a temple-kingdom, a synagogue-kingdom, a sabbath-day-kingdom. How could that threaten them? It would have left their sinful way of life intact just as Caesar had left it intact, using it for his own ends and merely replacing the old national injustice with his new international injustice. They knew the message of Jesus would re-order all of life according to the Word of God. For this reason, they had sought to trap Him and now they sought to snuff Him out.

We hardly do honour to the message of our Lord by narrowing it down to pseudo-spiritual confines. We hardly come to grips with the reaction against Him by shouting off the threat of His proclamation into a non-existent 'purely spiritual realm.' All of life is the scene of the struggle of the spirits. Jesus did pervert the nation from the standpoint of those who masterminded His crucifixion. Jesus did not entirely rule out some future communal refusal to give Caesar tribute, because He tackled on to His 'give to Caesar' a commandment which completely over-arches and overwhelms and conditions it: 'Give to God what is His.' The Jews were a people schooled in the reality that all of life is the Lord's.

The accusation made against Jesus links 'perverting the nation' and 'forbidding to give tribute to Caesar' with the claim that 'He Himself is Christ the King.' If Jesus were Christ the King, His enemies knew full well that the game was up. It was only a matter of time before Caesar was driven out of Israel, the forces of oppression in the world were overthrown, and the Kingdom of God established over all mankind. "No!" they said. "Not in our lifetime!" they cried. "We have too much to lose now under Caesar's regime." Finally, in the mouths of the chief priests came their own as-yet-unspoken answer to the question they had earlier put to Jesus, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15c). This answer is always the answer, when the test arrives, of those who hold to any two-realms doctrine. If the government-political dimension of life, really integral to the whole, is artificially made a realm of its own with its own worldly king not subject to the King of Kings and His norm for justice, then there is no Christian basis left for the whole-hearted struggle in Christ's Name against injustice in the public-legal system.

"Give to Caesar what is his, and give to God what is His" can have no other meaning than that we are to give to God all our lives, all our service, all our communal impact on the course of history. We are to give God alone the governmental-political outcome of our earthly pilgrimage, pointing it, too, to the coming of His Kingdom. In doing this, we do not simply negate Caesar or the present systems of government in Canada or in the United States of America. We recognize these as spiritually misguided structurizations of God's creational structure for the governmental-political dimension of our lives. We refuse simply to destroy, to make the governmental-political situation worse than before, to create a total public-legal vacuum into which worse demons may pour than the people have yet suffered under. Yet we do not canone any Caesar, Constitution, political party system, or law. As Calvin and the early Puritans taught, we retain our responsibility before God to act communally in the face of injustice. We are to communally disciple ourselves in the pursuit of a Christian political strategy, and that strategy may at times need direct resistance to unjust political office-bearers, unjust laws, and unjust governments. In such difficult times, we must find creative ways to give tribute to those rightful tasks which are the government's but which it has neglected in favour of the pursuit of its own Christless ends. In the governmental-political dimension of life, we must today develop a disciplined communal strategy, because "from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take away its peace by force" (Matthew 11:12). As wisely as serpents and as harmlessly as doves, we must work together to restore the manifestations of this peace in the public legal system, labouring there in such a way as not to lessen the very thing we seek and yet labouring effectively against all injustice which denies the kingship of Jesus Christ over all life.
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B. "My Kingdom is not of this world . . . ."

Another of the teachings of Jesus relevant to politics is His answer to Pilate’s question, “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me: what have You done?” (John 18:35).

Jesus answered him, “My Kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight in order to prevent My being delivered to the Jews. But right now My Kingdom is not advanced in that way” (John 18:36).

Again, was Jesus saying that His Kingdom was not of the creational order? Again, was He saying that men could be related to God in a kingdom of “Pure Worship” or of “Pure Spirituality” such as Plato had imagined and such as Augustine at times was to suggest? The Bible knows nothing of such a kingdom. Rather, when Jesus rhetorically asked Himself, “What is the Kingdom like? and to what might I point as a resemblance of it? He painted two word pictures of it to suggest it to our imaginations. First, He painted the picture of a tiny seed which a man, perhaps Himself, threw into his garden, perhaps overgrown with weeds during his absence and perhaps an allusion to the sinful structuration of life which man has developed in response to the creational demand to unfold all creaturely existence. In any case, the seed germinated, sprouted, overcame the strangle-tion of any weeds and the vicissitudes of weather. The seed, despite every obstacle, grew into a great tree, and the birds roosted in its branches (Luke 13: 19).

Second, He painted the picture of a leaven, a malt, a fermenting stuff. A woman, perhaps the Bride of Christ, took this life-giving stuff, “hiding” it in a large quantity of unappetizing dough which otherwise would have solidified into one unyieldable inedible mass. The woman could not bake bread “until the whole thing was leavened” (Luke 13: 21b). It is risky to draw definitions out of images, yet because these are Jesus’ own imaginative suggestions of His Kingdom, we cannot be far wrong in pointing to a third biblical image. In John’s Revelation, he sees “a New Heaven and a New Earth” and he hears “a great voice out of Heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His People, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God’” (Revel 21:1 and 3; read the whole of chapters 21 and 22).

It is not necessary to glorify the provisional manifestations of the Kingdom, as it is now coming in our world, in order to refuse to distance these manifestations from the final form of the Kingdom when it is fully here. The Kingdom which will come, as professor Herman Ridderbos has so cogently shown in his book, The Coming of the Kingdom, is that Kingdom which is coming now and will be complete only with the appearance here of Christ Himself, King of Kings.

Thus, when our Lord says His Kingdom is not of this world, He is not promising us an escape from the demands of creaturely existence to which we must respond for blessing or cursing. Our Lord, rather, promises us, out of the power of His resurrection, to lead the way through the brokenness of human experience in history to that final outcome and growth and leavening which He has died to guarantee. The Kingdom of Christ is indeed not of this world of brokenness, sin, and cursing. The Kingdom of Christ is the world of love, peace, blessedness which is a totally creational possibility but must be struggled for in the power of His resurrection against the powers of darkness. God did not become man and take upon Himself the creaturely form of His human servant simply to die. He did these things in order to arise again, to leave this world, and to make this earthly ministry which alone would serve as the leaven in the historical struggle of His People for His Kingdom come on Earth. Among other things, then, God became man in order to re-establish the possibility of political work which would manifest now the full blessedness to come in the public-legal order when it is totally restored to its task before His Face.

The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world of injustice, oppression, exploitation, and tyranny. Those who do not struggle against these things are of this world and are not whole-heartedly committed to Christ’s Kingdom. They need to convert their political witness to unreserved service for His Kingdom. Failing to do this, even in the name of the most “lofty” doctrines of “spirituality” places them in jeopardy. They have no right to any assurance of salvation. They are in danger when they say, “Lord, Lord” of hearing those terrible words of finality, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7: 21, 23).

They will not inherit the kingdom of the politics of justice for which they have not struggled, claiming they had “better” things to do. And their “orthodox” worship will not save them. It is difficult to point out these things, but the everlasting salvation of many is at stake. Therefore, it may be necessary here to make clear that the Lord does not demand perfection of us in politics, worship, or their inter-relation-ship. He knows, more than we can ever know, how tremendous these tasks are. Yet He does demand that we put ourselves into fulfilling these tasks with all our hearts. We must engage in the struggle. We must take up the cross. We must be driven by the resurrection power. And, thus, He will give us the crown of life. By
faith, our political sins and worship sins are covered over by the righteousness of Christ, and our own faith in Christ, worked out in fear and trembling in politics and worship, is accounted to us for righteousness.

C. "Your Kingdom come . . . ."

Consideration of this teaching of Jesus, coming to us in the context of His pedagogical prayer which we call "the Lord's Prayer," will allow us to bring together our earlier consideration and to focus everything up until this point in a lengthy consideration of prayer, an element vital to all true worship, in its relationship to politics today. With that elaboration on prayer today we shall conclude our discussion of worship and politics in the ministry of our Lord Jesus. We shall have at least adequate preparation, then, to look at the biblical guidelines for developing a normative relationship between political action and worship in any post-resurrection setting.

C. 1 The Lord's Prayer

In answer to the request of the disciples, the Lord Jesus taught them to pray. He taught by doing. He taught them to pray by praying a model prayer for their lives: "Our Father in Heaven, please make Your Name holy among us. May Your Kingdom come. May Your will be done on Earth just as it is done in Heaven. Please give us enough food to eat each day as it comes along. Please forgive us the sins we have committed, for which we cannot pay what we owe to You; and we promise to forgive those who cannot pay back to us our rightful due. Please don't abandon us to temptation, deliver us from evil instead" (compare Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4).

This prayer comes to us in variant forms in the manuscripts and apparently in the original recordings of what Jesus said. It has been suggested that Jesus prayed a similar but not absolutely identical prayer on several different occasions. This line of thought, if it is necessary to do so, would permit us to regard the recordings as remembered word for word. In any case, no matter how many different versions of the prayer may be original to Jesus, what we are given in the Lord's Prayer is one prayer and not many prayers. It is as a whole, as a unity, as a prayer with one spiritual direction that we may use it as a model for our prayers. That means that when we address the Father, we should address Him Whose Name should be holy among us and Whose Kingdom should be coming through us. We know no Father but the Lord God Who made all creation, Who has been dishonoured throughout the earth over the ages, and Who must be honoured again over the whole face of the globe. When we pray for

His will to be done again on the earth, we pray that all creation, including mankind, may be restored to the One Great Task which He gave and which He never withdrew. God's will, in the positive sense of the prayer, cannot be done and man cannot fulfill the purpose of his creaturiness, except in working at the task of opening up the whole creational order to God's glory. This task is God's will. This task is life. This task is meaning. And, now, because of sin and the need to overcome it in the pursuit of this task, the task is itself deepened: the whole of creational existence must be opened to God's glory in constant struggle against the demonic forces that would prevent that glory if they could.

The next element of the prayer is integral to the foregoing: it is the petition that the Lord give us enough food to eat each day. What did that mean to the disciples around Jesus? To the people of Israel? To most of the people of the world at that time? Most people lived near starvation. Speculators made great profits in selling the food grown in the fertile "breadbaskets" to the people in other areas. Everywhere, the wealthy, legally and illegally, took over the farmlands of the poor and those who had to sell out to meet emergencies. Often the government, notably in the Roman capital itself, bought large shipments of wheat from the speculators in order to quiet the hungry citizenry. We have all heard of Rome's "Bread and Circuses."

In the face of this concrete situation, Jesus led His disciples and believers ever after them to pray that God would overcome all these tremendous obstacles and feed the hungry. When Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread, He teaches us that all mankind has a right to ask even God Himself, the Sovereign of all creation, for a part of the earth's resources. His teaching flew in the face of all fatalistic views of life which accept hunger as the nature of things. Was this one of the teachings of Jesus that the chief priests claimed were "perverting the nation"?

When further we consider that the original form in which the One Great Task is stated in the Bible was an agricultural form (Genesis 1:8), we begin to see the enormity of the petition for bread coupled with the petitions that God's will may be done and His Kingdom may come. Genesis records God's command to mankind: "Have dominion over the earth and subdue it." In the agricultural setting then, in the agricultural setting of Jesus' time, and in the non-industrial agricultural setting of most of the world's hungry people today, this prayer has deep political reverberations. It has the power to set believing people in motion to do their part in God's program to feed the world. That must be His program, because Jesus taught us to pray that prayer! The coming of the Kingdom of God has to do with enough food for
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everyone each day.

It also has to do with communal life, with the mutual forgiveness of one another's sins, and the seeking of forgiveness from God for our own sins. The life of brotherly love is integral to feeding the world, to God's will being done on Earth as in Heaven, to the coming of God's Kingdom, and to making His Name holy. In praying this prayer together, we actually set in motion the process of forgiveness, first in our own hearts. At the same time, we shall also set in motion the process of struggling to feed the world. Our prayer itself is God's first step in answering our prayer.

We cannot escape the political significance of the Lord's Prayer in Jesus' ministry. Even without the petition for the coming of the Kingdom, it cut into the established ways of government. It established a new insight among ordinary people toward their possibilities, their responsibilities, and their rights. This perception of rights is as fully political as it is anything: Jesus was teaching His disciples to change their political perceptions through prayer. And such a change of perception is always preliminary to any far-reaching political change.

The final petition we cite is also important. On the one hand, the request is that we not be abandoned to temptation. What temptation? Not to covet? Yes. Not to steal? Yes. Not to commit adultery? Yes. Well, fine. We know what Jesus meant.

If we let things go at this, we make a mockery of the prayer. Most of us, when we pray it, make just such a mockery of it. In the end, the one temptation, to which we are here to ask that we be not abandoned, is the temptation to stand aside from the struggle for the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is through the coming of the Kingdom that we need and may claim our right to our daily bread. It is as a community of workers for the coming Kingdom that we need to forgive and embrace one another. It is for the coming of the Kingdom that we seek protection from this or that specific sin which might so easily beset us and thwart our over-all service to the Kingdom.

This final petition is actually a couplet which concludes, "deliver us from evil." A more pointed rendering is "deliver us from the Evil One." The Evil One is the Enemy to the coming of the Kingdom, and is not this or that individual sin, although these certainly contribute to the Enemy's cause. The Enemy rather is world ruler of the darkness. There is a Devil who unites the demonic forces to pull and to twist and to wrench apart, as best they can, the manifestations of the coming Kingdom. The Evil One resists the fulfillment of the One Great Task of Mankind: He does not want all creation to unfold itself in one great hymn of praise to its King: He does not want God's Kingdom to come on Earth as it is in Heaven; He will use whomever and whatever He can to resist that coming. Here the refusal to face up to the Christian responsibility in the governmental-political dimension of life plays into the cause of the Evil One. Jesus taught His disciples to pray against temptation and for deliverance. In doing this, He prided them loose from their captivity. He began the internal process of liberation which is God's answer granted to all our prayers. He completed that process on the cross. And He empowered His disciples for a new style of liberated life, including a new style of politics, through His resurrection from the dead.

C. 2. The Lord's Prayer Today

If we have begun to fathom the meaning of the Lord's Prayer in the ministry of Jesus, we would do well to compare that meaning with what it means in our own lives today. To do that, we should at last face up to some very unbiblical myths we have built up around prayer. Prayer is only one among many human activities in the integrality of the multi-dimensional life of service to God in creation. This creation is richly complicated and historically structured. Nothing in it is above the universal conditions for creaturely existence which God determines and we discover. A prayerful Christian can embrace this reality of creaturely prayer in order to pursue this aspect of his service to God. In any case, this reality is inescapable. Unless we conceive Christian faith in the way of absolute negation perfected by the Buddhists, we have to acknowledge that even prayer is scandalously "unclean" of physico-chemical, biotic, psychic, historical, aesthetic, analytic, linguistic, social, economic, political, and other distinguishable nuances. God made everything that way, including all the functions by which the human personality fulfills itself as the image of God. What is clean to God, let no man call unclean.

Prayer is a human function. Prayer involves all the inescapable dimensions of human personality in terms of a given person's particular historically developed cultural milieu. It is always a culturally formed and culturally related human personality that focuses itself in a unique structural way for the task of prayer (a task given in the creation and further verbally revealed in Scripture). What does it mean in America 1972 that prayer is a human function? What is involved for the human function of prayer in the fact, for instance, that it is now possible on the basis of existing technologies to plant electrodes in the human brain and to overwhelm, by means of these electrodes, all potential thought processes other than those which are selected, programmed, and insinuated into the consciousness by a master computer (see the December 1969 issue of Esquire)?
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In this fact we see that there are, already in our North American civilization, tremendous forces—people, organizations, technologies, societal structurations, demons—which work against the task of prayer. Sin itself becomes structurated. Sinful structurations of a society, which is shaped by and dominated by demonic powers, exert enormous pressure against, among other things, concentration on the task of prayer. It used to be, perhaps, that we could all individually try to clear our thinking of other tasks and matters for a while in order to give ourselves whole-heartedly to the task of praying to the Lord. But how could we ever clear the mind, in one individual act of exertion, of the very categories of thought and of the very style of life in which we were immersed? And what if these categories of thought and style of life were not nearly so Christian as we liked to presume?

In any case, history has unfolded in such a manner that—unless we communally address our other creational tasks in wholeness of heart—we shall find ourselves unable even to pray freely in the Spirit of Christ. Unless we take up our political, economic, aesthetic, analytic, technological tasks, we shall be unable to fulfill the tasks prayer and worship which we had falsely absolutized. (Of course, in such a day toward which we had passively prepared the way, the computer will see to it that we have been "enlightened" about prayer and that we thoroughly enjoy the limitations that have destroyed our very souls.)

Maybe our desire to protect the present form of godliness precludes our facing up to what Esquire so carefully delineated. Maybe the articles on bio-engineering included in such books as the symposium edited by Richard Kostelanetz, Beyond Left and Right: Radical Thought for Our Times, are too alarmist for our nervous systems. Even given that possibility, surely the accounts related by prisoners of war who have been brainwashed, as long ago as the Korean War, will not be lost on us: methods now exist which can render the human thinking capacity, including prayer, capable only of thought patterns predetermined by others.

Along similar lines, science writer and professor Lord Balmaszheimer of the University of Edinburgh, speaking at the Canadian Conference on Human Rights, December 1-3, 1968, summarized the techniques developed by technological capitalism for control of the human personality. Some of these techniques are only external; others are internalizable. Together they have implications for even the prayer life and worship experience of the would-be People of God. He listed miniaturization, solid state circuit electronics, one-way polaroid glass, infra-red photography at night, "lie detectors" and "truth serums," subliminal sound suggestion, subliminal visual messages, psycho-

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chemical techniques which can make concentration impossible or can produce trance-like withdrawal, computerized total information on the lives of people, groups, and their members, and even a more ordinary pressure upon cultural formation, a pressure that simply over-favours a particular culture via the global transmissions of communications satellites. Of the latter, Lord Balmasheimer said, "I am not talking about propaganda—that is obvious. I am talking about the rights that people have to their own culture—cultural privacy—which would be overwhelmed" by a grossly imbalanced over-communication of certain cultural perspectives without any viable free access to sufficient broadcasts adequately embodying other perspectives.

The point of all this is simply that government or any other agency with the money to do so could at very least organize total information on who prayed and what implications those prayers might have in regard to what Paul calls "overthrow of the existing order." Needless to say, a community praying and worshipping in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as evidenced in His own ministry, would be identified at the outset and rendered, by equally efficient means, harmless.

Add to the foregoing mix what we are beginning to understand about the impact of the very form of communications media on our ways of perceiving things. The alphabet, for instance, changed human perceptions significantly, slowly leading to a change in the life style of cultures in which there were a growing number of literates. We suggested earlier that Jesus, a literate in a highly literate nation where great importance was attached to studying the Word of God in its written form, fashioned a pedagogical prayer that would alter the perceptions of believers in a blessed direction.

Other media, as they develop, can also be used to serve the coming of His Kingdom in the same way. The printed page certainly had a deep impact on perceptions, its very form contributing to the displacement of Catholic Christendom and the rise of both the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Each in turn—radio, phonograph, the film, and now impactably television—all have changed our ways of perceiving things. (Marshall McLuhan, in his book Understanding Media, has popularized this important insight. If one has a Christianly critical tool to do so, one can deeply appreciate what McLuhan has to say without falling into the false absolutization of media as he does.)

All these media surely have enriched our lives in many ways, even opening us up more fully to the marvels of God's creational order which includes the perceptive possibilities of the human personality. However, we have not yet begun to locate the proper place in life for each of these media, so as to sense their most wholesome, properly
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structural role in the reconciliation of all things back to God in Christ (Colossians 1:20). So, just as surely as they have enriched us despite ourselves, they have, unguided by responsible Christian formation, contributed to our confused secularization. For many in our world today, the very form of these media conveys the impression that God is dead. In the midst of all the loud lies, there seems only to be a silence as to the ultimate meaning of creaturely existence.

Not least, all these media have become increasingly combined in such an overall pattern of communication as to increase our distance from one another. They have been structurated so as to tempt us to perceive ourselves more and more as social atoms in an otherwise great, undifferentiated mass. Worship, politics, economic relationships, everything is perceived as though across a great, unbridgeable chasm. In regard to worship as such, just as the Christian sermon structurally enriched and limited the other forms of ritual which had predominated in Israel, so other media, by God's providence, structurally enrich and limit the use of the sermon today. The task is to find the creational norms whose obedience will result in the most authentic experience of worship that all these media, in mutual inter-relationship again, can provide in their present development. While many novelties will quickly prove themselves superfluous to this task, not to face the unfolding of the new perceptual needs of the human personality over the course of the unfolding of creation through time is to drive the Christian people more and more into the tentacles of some unbelieving way of life that can never meet their perceptual needs. In the end, it means the undermining of the dynamic of prayer and worship, among other things, in the whole life of the believer. For the prayer experience, together with the rest of worship, is potentially enriched by integration with the total perceptual structuration of the human personality in any given culture. The prayer experience is dangerously isolated and distanced from life, from the life style of a given people, when it is not so integrated. The struggle is to make the entire life style explicitly Christian in its direction, utilizing all the unfolded potentials of the creation so far. (Needless to say, the Christian community is at a tremendous advantage in any given culture when it leads the way in the whole unfolding activity, rather than following everlastingly behind those which do respond, even in their blindness, to the pressure of the creation order to be realized to God's glory.)

Again, the prayer experience of ordinary believers changes under the impact of the unfolding. It is up to the Christian community, guided by leaders with a suitable gift for such matters, to lead the way in developing these changes so that they contribute to the full coming of Christ's Kingdom, which includes both the style and the content of prayer together with the rest of worship. In any case, prayer itself is jeopardized unless we, directed by the Holy Spirit, undertake a total cultural preparation for it. The political consequences, now looming before us, of lack of this preparation should alone be sufficient to impel us forward in our task. There really can be no question of a possibility of holding onto the older ways of doing things. In reality, we hardly pray or worship or organize our churches for these functions, no matter how we delude ourselves in this regard, as did the People of God centuries ago. Even where we attempt to imitate the letter of what they then did, we cannot do so. We cannot simply imitate them because our imitation can occur only in the full context of our own cultural settings, our own modern life styles, and our own ways of perceiving things. The meaning of the prayer and other worship of the People of God centuries ago is discovered in its full inter-relationship with the totality of their times, their styles, and their perceptions. We have no direct experience of all that cultural context. We have to live our lives in the setting God gives us, not theirs in the setting God gave them. The new life, then and now is the one true way of life in Christ Jesus, in that it is led by His Spirit in continual renewal toward the obedient opening of the creation and toward the re-lettering of the Law which always holds in every situation.

The meaning of our prayer and other worship is likewise determined by its inter-relationship with the totality of our times, style and perceptions. Of that we have the possibility of great experience since the confessing Christians are now so large in number and so widely spread throughout the globe. We dare not reject the new global multi-cultural context, spurious, in the name of any tradition. We must critically accept it — discerning the spirits in it and, with all our might, shaping it in an obedient direction. Neither in the Biblical Era nor in the Reformation Period nor in the Victorian Age can we come to rest. Even what may have been God-honouring in those times cannot save us now. All the conservatism in the world cannot hide the truth that our attempts at imitation of some past period, even in prayer, just do not mean the same thing, as what we would imitate meant in those earlier times. This is true in prayer and the rest of worship, in art, in communications, in politics, in business and economic relationships, in family life, and everywhere. From us to whom much more has been given, much more is required by the Lord.

This historical development in the meaning of prayer hardly means that prayer itself will disappear. Secular rationalism and the style of life of which it was a part had claimed the end of prayer. But the creation order, with its abiding demands, built right into the human personality, has its way. Rationalism had so thoroughly
soured prayer out of much of our western civilization that it has evoked an appropriate punishment according to God’s creational law order. Everywhere man feels alone in western society (see the anthology, edited by Eric and Mary Josephson, entitled Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society). In response to this punishment, this suffering under God’s curse, we cannot help but note the new upsurge in the phenomenon of prayer going on at the fringe of established culture. The counter culture, of which the hippies are an ever-present reminder, searches desperately to learn to pray. The use of hallucinogenic drugs, whether under communism or the illegal capitalistic traffic of the Mafia or the legal capitalistic traffic of Squibb Pharmaceuticals, works in the reverse direction of prayerlessness, manipulation by computers, control of the transcendental quest of the human heart (see William Braden’s The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God). Hippies and those in the West who seek comfort in eastern religions have a renewed sense of prayer, no matter how post-Christianly shaped that sense of prayer may be. The film, Easy Rider, provides a vivid suggestion as to the renewal of the prayer experience among these people. Whatever else that experience of prayer may yet prove itself to be in the ongoing counter-play of unbelieving historical forces, exactly there where we might least like to see it, we confront a creational point of contact with lost souls. The hippies are not rationalistically above prayer; they do not find it to be outdated or to be merely a trace of the pre-technological past; they, too, struggle, in their own way, against its manipulation for communication beyond the isolatable immediacies of the creation. (These immediacies may be wrongly experienced, that is, non-referentially and non-integrally).

Can we neglect to attempt to teach these peoples how to pray to the Lord God, the true integral reference of the whole creation in Whom alone it holds together? In desperation, the hippies have tried to use the modern development of technological capitalism against itself, utilizing its psycho-chemistry together with its advanced methods of distribution and hoping to have found a loop-hole through which to escape into freedom from the technological voice of God unbearable in their experience. They seek to escape. Yet, do they?

Do we ourselves, who claim to be the People of God, really escape that embrace? Technological mega-capitalism is working out the purposes of the demons that have always driven it. Even the creational blessings realized and idolized by so many in the sectors of our society now reveal themselves to be marginal phenomena so entangled with an overwhelming curse that many people are forsaking the whole of the capitalistic way of life as much as they can. Many of these talk of the life they hope for as “socialism” but they are deeply hostile to every statist technologicist society yet established. What they mean by “socialism” is hardly anything recognizable historically under that label (see Carl Oglesby, editor of The New Left Reader). We should be very careful in criticizing both capitalism and socialism that we do not appear to be enemies of whatever inconsistent light seeking people may have: it is part of man’s created structure, especially when he severely suffers the curse of God, to yearn blindly for the Kingdom. Even though he hates the King! What we must show by our very style of life is: no King, then no Kingdom!, false king, then great curse!

Part of the great curse which technological capitalism visits upon us today is revealed in its insatiable attempt to manipulate the general shape of society, its various societal structurations, its institutions, its general culture and life style, and the day-by-day life of all of us, including our way of perceiving things and our way of relating to others through the channels shaped by the various societal structurations. Among these latter channels are prayer and worship, shaped largely by fellowship groups and churches. Technological capitalism conditions what the institutional churches can mean in our lives and, hence, its purposes what our denomination can mean. In a future society where God forbid! the triumph of such a capitalism were complete, what meaning would be permitted to the prayer, “Your Kingdom come!” What societal and economic and political significances would be permitted to such prayer, even when a repressive tolerance allowed some powerless form of it to exist. The character of such demons as technological capitalism and socialism is not only to seek to shape society entirely in their own fashion but to use that shape as a many-faceted means to get inside of us. If a certain tolerance of prayer and worship are realized by such demons to be useful to their ultimate goal, then an eviscerated form of prayer will be tolerated, (perhaps, because of the creation order, no demon could ever wholly eradicate the prayer function of the human personality) even used in the way US President Richard Nixon uses evangelist Billy Graham.

If we are willing to face up to such problems, we can go one step further to ask whether prayer as now practiced among us individually, in the family circle, in the worship services, in schools, where it still exists, and in government is only an earlier variety of the ever-growing tendency to repressive tolerance by the mega-capitalistic demon which controls our culture.

It is clear that the prayers in government-run schools were tolerated for a very long time precisely in order to deflect attention from the fact that any Christian education was radically excluded
from those schools. An authentic Christian formation of the curriculum and the pedagogical methodology, which can only occur over generations and through which alone the full-orbed development of the child in a Christian way is possible in our highly complex society, was ruled out long ago. The chief instrument of the repression of Christian education was the denial of the fruits of capitalism, in the form of government tax monies, to all but humanistic education. While humanistic education, with a deceptively tolerated practice of prayer and Bible reading of no educational consequence, alone profited from taxation of the over-all capitalistic system, other possible sources of finance for Christian education were choked off in order to underwrite the wars, again by taxation, which mega-capitalism required in order to survive. The remaining monies available to the people for Christian education were seduced by massive advertising (which controls the mass media—newspapers, magazines, radio and television) to pay for wasteful consumption of the goods and services which mega-capitalism had to see on the domestic market.

In an even more subtle way, perhaps, the orthodox churches tolerated the prayer “Your Kingdom come!” in order to hold onto the people and to prevent their developing other organizations for worship which would actively support, through an authentic worship, the pursuit of the whole task for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom. Does the traditional worship do anything more than repressively tolerate prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ? Does it do anything more than render that very prayer sterile and, hence, rob it of its power for integral, dynamic Christian living in the world as structured and dominated today? Does the very way in which we, all of us, have been shaped to pray in Sunday School, Christian school, catechism, and worship really run counter to what the mega-capitalistic spirit wants? Have Sunday School, Christian school, catechism, and worship given radically Christian meaning, style, and outcome (they are integral too!) to the petition “Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven”? If these institutions and their forms of prayer have done what they ought, just why is it that there is no united effective community of believers struggling responsibly for the coming of that Kingdom in America and Canada? “Ask and it shall be given to you!” Clearly, despite all these prayers, we have not really been asking.

By the way, even when we give an apostate meaning to our prayers for the coming of the Kingdom, the Lord brings His Kingdom in anyway. Only He does so through others. That is what He is doing in America and Canada, by and large, today. He uses others, even in their damnable blindness, to do what those who call themselves His children ought to be doing.

What we actually experience in the lives of so many evangelical churches is the subtle co-optation of public prayer by the forces of darkness. This co-optation works to distance the worshipping congregations from their God-given responsibilities in all of life, including politics. You cannot worship the Lord in such a way as to make political activities seem trivial in relationship to worship and still expect believers to take their responsibility in politics seriously. Unless, of course, they are forced by conditions to take politics seriously! Such people soon decide that a God Who can be safely worshipped without reference to rampant political evil should Himself not be taken seriously. And this is precisely what is happening to Evangelicals all over the nation. One hears evangelical youth say this. One even hears pastors of long-time service who had been trained in the most conservative seminaries say this. They come to a crisis of faith itself because they have been led to conceive the Christian faith only in terms of an iron-clad disjunct between worship and social action. This disjunct is nowhere to be found in the Bible, but it is nowhere in reformed and evangelical theology. It is there because it serves the apostate political commitments of those who manufacture it. Being there, it is used to beat the life out of those who want to serve Christ’s Kingdom in all of life and who need a form of worship that can nourish them for their difficult tasks. If these witnesses, a remnant still alive throughout the reformed-evangelical world, are to worship responsibly, they must give and receive in the life of the congregation, especially in its worship and prayer and praise and diaconate, what the vast majority of consistory and pastors can no longer give nor receive: full support for the total coming of the Kingdom of God in an effective structural way in all of life. What consistorys, sessions, boards of deacons, together with the pastors, in the various evangelical denominations would seem to require is sphere sovereignty without sphere universality. Or, better, the integrity of the congregation without its integrity in the pursuit of the full task of the People of God.

What this means is that, since the Reformation, there has been an almost total breakdown in the understanding of the basic meaning of Christian community. Apparently, it is no longer understood that the congregation as an organization, simply because its chief task is worship, has no special standing before the face of the Lord. All false claims to special status over faithful life were in principle abandoned when Evangelicals surrendered the notion of Apostolic Succession. The organization for worship was seen simply as a creational structuration which, with many other such structurations, differentiat-
ed out of the original communal structuration, founded by Christ. That original communal structuration was certainly as much a political action organization as it was what we now call an institutional church.

Since the congregation for worship is a single creational structuration which does not exhaust the organized manifestation of the Body of Christ communally at work for the coming of His Kingdom, the congregations must pursue their unique structural task in communal interaction with all other Christian organizations to which they have the opportunity to relate. That interaction will be of a kind that gathers in the Christian political concern, the Christian economic concern, the Christian educational concern, the Christian aesthetic concern, receiving each from their confessional standpoint for the worship of God. That is, the organization of the Christian community for public worship does not stand above the muck of human life nor does it have any right to regard lightly the challenges that come to it to be a part of the struggle to speak the redeeming Word of God for the cleansing of that life in all creation. The prayer experience, the praise, the sermon, the election of office-bearers for the organization of worship have, no matter what, inescapable implications for the whole life of the people who worship in the congregation. Choices in regard to all these things are, in part, inescapably social, economic, and political choices.

The organization for worship can never claim that it seeks the coming of the Kingdom of God unless it struggles forthrightly to bring its whole weight radically on the side of a total, historically engaged movement of the People of God to press everywhere the claims of Christ in a meaningfully structural way. That means precisely that the organization for worship, along with all other Christian organizations, must meaningfully nourish its people so that they stand effectively against the demons of mega-capitalism, militarism, racism, alienation in the workplace, and many others. And for the strategic long-range, painfully historical development of the New Life in Christ refracted in all the dimensions, structurations, and tasks given by God in creation. Prayer and worship are inescapably involved in all this; prayer and worship, led by the Holy Spirit, will find themselves loaded with all sorts of otherwise prohibited nuances of all this.

Those who are actively engaged in the struggle for the Kingdom beyond the safe walls of the sanctuary will prove to have the highest regard for the organization for worship, for its task, for its role in their lives — a role without the normative/supportive fulfillment of which, in their own lives, they feel they cannot adequately carry out their offices in the other organizations. They simply must hear sermons, pray prayers in public communal worship, participate in the choosing of officers who share a common view of the Christian life — all of which strengthens them for their other tasks.

To summarize: there just is not one good thing in life you can prayerfully ascribe to God that you cannot ascribe to creational experience, nor one good thing you can ascribe to creational experience that you can hold back from its referring to God and from openly offering to Him in prayer. Concomitantly, there is not one evil thing you can ascribe to sin and the Devil which you cannot ascribe to people, movements, institutions, social systems and general creaturely formation or lack of it as these work against the coming of God’s Kingdom. Prayer in public worship or elsewhere cannot be removed from its integrity with the total concrete creational setting and with the on-going struggle in that setting for the sure victory of God’s Kingdom over the powers of darkness.

The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples must be understood in this way. What did Jesus mean when He said His Kingdom was not of this world? He did not say His Kingdom was not psychic, historical, aesthetic, analytic, lingual, social, economic, political, and confessionally all at the same time. Jesus did not say His Kingdom was not creational. What then? He was saying, "When you look about you at the Kingdoms, I assure you these that you now see are not what my kingdom is like or will be like. And, when you describe for me the kind of kingdom you expect me to establish, I assure you, because I know you so well, it isn’t that either. My Kingdom begins in the wholeness of human hearts, as they are radically renewed for service to God in everything and expresses itself in simple deeds of kindness in their full significance for life together for God’s glory, and builds itself from these into a total societal and cultural formation with all its necessary structurations so completely shaped for well-being and justice that the whole thing runs counter to anything you’ve ever seen or imagined. My Kingdom, as it comes, reveals these kingdoms to be antithetical to it. My Kingdom is here already in germ (even in you, despite yourselves); but what you see or think, isn’t it. It’s coming eventually in its fullness, but what you expect it to be is at best a signpost toward it. It’s just not of this kind of world around us which sinful men have made of their lives in the creation. But, the Kingdom is of the creation order! The Kingdom is coming on earth, just as fully as it is now in heaven, hid in the inscrutable and unalterable purposes of God. And the prayer I taught you for the coming of the Kingdom on earth as in heaven demands that you struggle on its behalf in the whole creation order.”

Like so much that Jesus said, about this saying the disciples had
hardly the barest inkling of understanding until after his crucifixion and resurrection. Perhaps we can insist that they did not consciously experience the Kingdom until Pentecost. In a real sense, Christian communal living, including its political dimension, did not break-through until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit made the would-be People of God truly the People of God with a genuine kingdom-consciousness. Only after we have received the Holy Spirit and become conscious of the coming of the Kingdom in the struggle of spirits, is authentic Christian communal political action possible.

D. Summary: the politics of Jesus

The political consciousness in the Spirit of the Kingdom, which came to God’s People only after Pentecost, Jesus already evidenced in His daily ministry. Our Lord’s whole ministry, death, and resurrection are tremendously political at every point. They constitute a personal political program in a special way that we cannot hope to duplicate if we truly believe in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour, Lord. His ministry, death, and resurrection are a continuum, with a continuous political dimension, which together become the root out of which our own political acts are to issue. Perhaps we might call the politics of Jesus “the politics toward resurrection”. We may compare it to the politics of John the Baptist. John, too, had a political program. John, who had a very different calling in history than did Jesus, actually insisted on confronting head-on the political powers of his day. He aroused a suffering people, especially the poor, to outrage against their constituted governors. John fired the lingering memories of the populace with visions of the heroic Maccabees. People thirsting dimly for personal and national identity flocked to this prophet of the Lord. And those who would make of Jesus a spiritist must face the fact that Jesus did not disown John’s politics of national liberation as necessarily outside the meaningful political possibilities of the People of God.

Yet, Jesus wanted to lay down the basis with his own life of radical obedience for cosmic liberation. Jesus Himself side-stepped, for Himself, such a political program as John’s. He did this as neatly as He could. This side-stepping did not mean at all that Jesus was any less interested in national liberation than was John, nor that He thought the concrete political situation in Israel to be inconsequential, unworthy of His sacrifice. It meant only that He knew His calling from God to be a total calling, with its political dimension to be sure, that went to the root of human life. John had not that calling.

Jesus intended to minister such a ministry, witness such a witness, die such a death, and arise again in such newness of life that the political possibilities, together with all the possibilities of human life, forever after would be fundamentally re-directed toward service to God. Jesus knew that mankind had worked itself into an historical impasse from which, without perfect obedience of the most radical kind, it could not recover. The threat of total nuclear annihilation, of over-population, and of an uninhabitable planet are the best modern images by which to suggest what had, in the time of Jesus, become of man’s task in unfolding the creational order to God’s glory and man’s blessing. The personal politics toward resurrection of Jesus were designed to cope with that predicament of fallen humanity. The political program of Jesus was the simple program of holding off His arrest until such a time as He was ready to use it for His own purposes. When He was ready, Jesus accepted arrest. You might even conclude that He provoked it, riding triumphantly into Jerusalem the way He did. How possibly, but as they did, could the Establishment respond to that?

In regard to the arrest of Jesus, it is important that we understand He did not accept it for “religious reasons” as against political ones. Instead of making a distinction between “religious reasons” and “political reasons”, we should distinguish the immediate political program of Jesus through most of His ministry, which helped Him along the path to the resurrection, and the political dimension of His resurrection itself. The politics toward the resurrection and the politics in the power of resurrection are not identical. The politics in the power of the resurrection is a communal task obligatory upon all who take the Name of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, is the foundational event in the unfolding process of human creaturely existence out of which the members of His Body are communally called to generate, according to the best possibilities offered in each historical setting, new political programs integral to the full coming of His Kingdom. We are disobedient to the death and resurrection of our Lord if we simply pretend to imitate the peculiar political program He pursued most of His life. We must undertake to live in everything, including politics, according to the same Spirit by which Jesus lived and revealed Himself as truly the Son of God.
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It did not take the disciples long after the resurrection to realize that everything they did in Jesus’ Name had deep political significance, including worship. They, a mere sect of the despised Jews, questioned the Roman Imperial Order to its very roots. “To shame the wise, God has chosen what the world counts weakness. He has chosen things low and contemptible, mere nothings, to overthrow the existing order” (I Corinthians 1:28, NEB). Did the Christians form a political organization for this purpose? Political organizations in any modern sense of legislative parties, of course, did not yet exist in the world. They do not appear as such until the late 1700s. But the task to which the later rise of the political party was a response was recreationally present, fulfilled after a fashion by the personal advisors to the Emperor (or lesser rulers), by members of his family, by his educated slaves, by his close social circle. Only when the Good News had penetrated all the way to “those of Caesar’s household” (Philippians 4:22) do we begin to see any possibility for a concrete Christian political program as such. Yet, always, the Christian community lived its whole life in such a style as to constitute a threat to the existing order—economic, political, cultic. Worship, in the Spirit of the risen Christ, from the beginning was politically loaded; the Christian community was by no means limited to the task of worship in its functions. The life of the community embraced the total lives of its members, the totality of what it meant to be a human creature in the historical setting of the Roman Empire. The organization of the community was no more a worship organization than it was a political organization, nor any less. At that time, neither institutional churches nor political parties existed; among the Christians there was just one undifferentiated communal organization, with varying offices, embracing all of life. That undifferentiated communal organization had on its shoulders a colossal task.

When Charles Williams says so lucidly, “The Apostles set out to generate mankind anew” (Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church, p. 3), he indicates that the original communal organization with its designated office-bearers was geared to the renewal of the whole scope of life. Williams is here referring to
the reality that life is indeed religion, that new life in Christ is itself a communal relationship shared among people who are busy at work in an ages-long attempt to direct the unfolding of history toward the full Kingdom of God; that they do this by pushing their way into an historical scene structured and dominated by demons which do not want to give them any room to live; that those demons will make room in repressive toleration for powerless prayer whenever necessary; that every inch of ground the People of God are to take must be fought for in a struggle of the spirits; that that struggle in no dimension of life is exempted from its role of contributing to the over-all struggle for the lordship of the risen Christ; that nothing is worship to the exclusion of politics and nothing is politics to the exclusion of worship.

A. The Political Setting of the Early Church

All that is implicit in Williams’ statement becomes explicit with a little attention to the historical theatre into which the Good News enters. The whole life of the People of God, at the time, was lived in every respect under the shadow of the Roman Empire. To read the New Testament in abstraction from this ever-present historical condition is to make it a string of pretexts. To read it that way is to distort even the meaning of salvation, which the early Christians knew had to be worked out in fear and trembling in the face of the overwhelming demonic imperial political power with its supporting economic system based on slavery and its supporting cultic system centered in the Pantheon.

Let us take a brief look, under the guidance of historian George Lichtheim, at what it meant to worship the risen Lord in the Roman Empire up until, at very least, Paul’s death. (We should note critically at the outset that Lichtheim uses the term “party” in an anti-structural way, based on a modified version of the Marxian principle of class struggle).

“It was the greatness of Rome that rendered the poverty of so many Roman citizens scandalous: thus ran the litany of the popular party founded by the Gracchi, continued by Marius, and ultimately inherited by Julius Caesar: by which time the party’s populist demogogy had become wholly meaningless and its mass following the willing cloak of an ambitious aristocrat aiming at dictatorial power. It is not wholly useless to be reminded that Caesar won power with the aid of the populares, themselves the inheritors of a party founded a century earlier by the Gracchi, whose appeal to the land-hungry Roman peasantry so frightened the Senatorial oligarchy that it had them murdered.

The ensuing civil wars and internal convulsions, which destroyed the ancient aristocratic Republic of the nobiles, made the army supreme. But the army was commanded by men who had amassed fame and fortune through their rule over conquered lands. Hence the fraudulent rhetoric of the populares, which paved the way for Caesar and his party, invoked the theme of imperial greatness no less than did the solemn oratory of Cicero, chief apologist of the Senatorial aristocracy. In the end both parties, after shedding torrents of blood in a succession of civil wars lasting a century, were joined in a common ruin, and on the wreckage of the Republic there arose the new imperial structure—sociologically speaking the creation of a unified and irremovable governing class. Aristocracy and democracy having vacated the scene, despotism took over, but it still clothed itself in republican form. The Caesars needed an ideology to legitimize their rule, and they found it in the imperium. No ruling class can function without a creed. That of the new imperial oligarchy lay ready to hand, inherited from the Republican past: it was only necessary to ground the effective power of the Princeps and his officials in the heritage of the Imperium populi Romani, and the Empire could be proclaimed the legitimate successor of the Republic. . . . Under Augustus . . . the Princeps-Imperator has now in point of fact become a military autocrat, although pro forma he is still held accountable to the Senate (the popular assembly having vanished from the scene) . . . For all practical purposes the Princeps has become the uncontrolled governor of the state” (George Lichtheim, “Imperialism: I”, April 1970 Commentary, pp. 47-48).

Henry Furneaux, in a classical work quoted by Lichtheim, details the historically-arrogated power to which the Roman Emperors had helped themselves by the time Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans:

| The Emperor | had supreme command over all troops whereabouts stationed, with him rest all ordinances respecting their levy payment and dismissal, the appointment of officers and regulation of the military hierarchy; Senatorial proconsuls had no power over the life of a soldier; and even in their provinces he has the right to collect fiscal revenue. He levies war, makes peace or treaty and represents the state in relation to all foreign or dependent powers. Again, he is the high admiral of the empire, with fleets near at hand; and, besides the troops attached to these, not only the praetorian guard his proper household, but even the police and night-watch of the city.
owed no allegiance to any magistrate of the republic, but only to Caesar and his prefects, and formed no insignificant force at his disposal on the spot... and he is so far the 'imperator' of the whole Roman world, that the whole senate and people, and even the provinces take the 'sacramentum' in his name, binding themselves in the most solemn terms to maintain his authority against all enemies, and not to hold even their own children dearer". (Henry Furneaux, editor, *The Annals of Tacitus*, 1st edition 1883, last 1965, pp. 81-83; I did not consult the original text. AG.)

That, roughly, established the major contours of "the existing order", in its then-crucial political dimension, which the Apostles were to "overthrow" in direct consequence of their setting out to "generate mankind anew". The Christian community, with its undifferentiated organization, was just as political as was the Roman Imperial Order. The difference was that the Emperor had vast public-legal power, whereas the Christian community did not yet have it and would never have it in the fullest sense until the Kingdom of Christ had fully come. In the immediate situation, the community had an image of that public-legal power of Christ's Kingdom in the internal discipline it exercised within its own organization (this was by no means a simple institutional-church discipline).

"Many present-day Americans," as Prof. Rene de Visme Williamson puts the matter, "do not realize that the church is a kingdom, but the pagan Romans realized it clearly. The Romans did not believe in Christ as either Lord or Savior, but they knew a kingdom when they saw one. They recognized an empire within an empire and feared it accordingly. From its very beginning, the Christian church has presented a political problem, which can be traced through the persecutions by Roman authorities, the conversion of Constantine, the long struggle between pope and emperor during the Middle Ages, and the wars and revolutions of the Reformation period, and the present controversies in several countries over the relations of church and state. If it be objected that the kingdom of God has suffered from disunity, disloyalty, rebellion, particularism, sedition, and secession, we must of course agree. The kingdom of God has indeed suffered from all these ills, and it still does. What kingdom has not? These ills do not disprove that it is a kingdom but only show that it has not yet reached complete fulfillment. The kingdom of God is on earth, but not yet on earth as it is in Heaven." (Independence and Involvement: A Christian Reorientation in Political Science, p. 178).

B. Paul's Letter to the Romans

Besides the general shape of the society into which any Spirit-led writer had to cast his bread during those first decades after our Lord's ascension, the discerning reader of the Bible must always consider, in order to achieve the greatest light for his own day from God's words to His People of another day, the historical formation of the particular kind of writing the inspired writer puts before the People. Paul's letters were part of a whole literary development in the ancient world. What we know about the wide extent of his education warns us that we take note of his probable mastery of the tradition of formal letter writing that existed in the Hellenistic world. More than that, we should especially note the tradition of political letters that had preceded Paul and upon which he seems to have drawn, when reading the letter to the Romans, because it has a key political passage (if indeed the whole letter is not basically a political letter, as this essayist suspects). We must leave it to the theologians, when they finally get about their business, to undertake this comparison, not precluding the possibility that Paul himself further developed the genre and made contributions of his own to it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In any case, the most careful study of irony, ambiguity, and reading between-the-lines is certainly in order. Not only is this course in order because of the explicitly Christian tradition—which sees the Lord Jesus Christ constantly playing with obscurities, double meanings, and purposeful ambiguities known already to ordinary believers, whether or not the Gospels were yet written—but this course is also in order because Paul faced a unique political situation. He had to give guidance to a body of radically-committed people, ready to follow Christ in whatever way He might call upon them to do so, and not chained by any conservatism to the Roman Imperial Order with its savage politics, who nevertheless had to be guided in a truly responsible way in whatever political action they might take.

The last thing we should do is dehydrate Paul's letter to the Romans into a toneless, tuneless, timeless list of propositions. To do that would be to reduce them to self-contradiction, as any close reading will show.

It is in the light of all the foregoing considerations that we must read Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul's letter is not the listing of some super-historical abstract propositions, definitive for whatever they allude to. The letter to the Roman Christians is, in part, a very diplomatic communication, in a tense political situation that could explode with bitter consequences for the Christian movement throughout the Empire. Paul attempts to give the least possible offense to the
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massive power reigning so menacingly over the whole Mediterranean world, while at the same time holding steadfastly to a way of worship in Spirit and in Truth that challenged the Imperial Order to its roots by strengthening the worshippers “to overthrow the existing order”. In Romans 13, Paul re-letters the old letterings of the Law of God. The whole history of the People of God up to that time had been to turn out, overthrow, wage relentless war against political orders and cultures which did not put the Lord God, His Word for blessed life in the creation, and the pursuit of His justice for all His human creatures first. (Alongside the commands under the older lettering to destroy utterly the peoples whose whole way of life was shaped by demons, we must always place the simultaneous commands to do justice for all, including, for instance, both the unbelieving Kenites in the midst of Israel and the strangers that are within the gate). Paul, in the Spirit, sets aside or fulfills for a new historical setting the old lettering. He tells us the old lettering of the Law murders, but the Spirit gives life (II Corinthians 3:6).

In the historical setting of the Roman Empire, Paul re-letters the Law, saying that we should not take up arms like the People of God had under Joshua, like the Maccabees had, like the Zealots had been anxious to do. He says, instead, we must now wait. It isn’t that the bearing of the sword is vain; no, that is still a ministry. Yet, he says, at this moment we can better bring about the generation of a new mankind, in its political dimension, without the head-on armed confrontation that God had required of us in other historical circumstances. God requires something else of us today. We must be as willing to serve Him without arms as with them, depending on what He wants for our moment in His total unchangeable purposes.

Elements of Paul’s program had already been present in Jesus. Jesus Himself had resisted appeals of some of His followers to take up guerilla action as had the Maccabees. For the sake of His unique calling in its particular historical setting, Jesus had refused. Now, Paul refused, for the sake of the communal calling of the People of God in another quite expanded historical setting which had seen resurrectionary communities of believers planted throughout the Empire and even in its capital city, Rome, and even obscurely somewhere in the center of its power, the imperial household (Philippians 4:22). The letter to the Romans itself conveys greetings from Erastus, the chamberlain of Corinth and a Christian (Romans 16:23). In any case, Paul did not at all go back on the task of justice given in creation and structured in the public-legal systems which we call government.

Paul did not go back on political service to God. Paul did not go back on the task of generating a new mankind to take up fully this creational, political-governmental task. In a desperate situation, he faced up to a false-but-historically-real dilemma: he said, in response to that dilemma, “overthrow the existing order” for the new order coming right now in the Kingdom of God preached among you in your worship service, but work at overthrowing it in a way that really has never been attempted before but which is now demanded by our present historical circumstances. Neither were the Christians to submit to a latter-day parallel of the old Egyptian or Babylonian captivities, nor were they, in a Maccabean-like revolt, to precipitate just another blood-bath in repetition of the preceding two centuries of imperial history. That path could only abort for a long time to come the actual obtaining of formative influence over the political order. Paul had to re-letter the Law because he was not leading the political action of the People of God against a Pharoah who could be escaped from over the Red Sea, nor against a mere desert kingdom of the kinds Joshua found along the route to the Promised Land, nor against encroaching Phoenicians such as Saul confronted, nor against Assyrians nor Babylonians striking out from a distant power-base upon peoples they could divide and move about in sections. Rather, Paul had to provide political leadership to a scattered diaspora in a culturally, economically and militarily unified Empire such as the People of God had never yet confronted. It is impossible to understand the letter to the Romans in a light contrary to or silent in regard to all this. Indeed, we may say that to “read” the letter while refusing to heed all this is to refuse to hear the Word of God revealed in that situation.

To make his case for this re-lettering, Paul, functioning almost as a political strategist, builds an argument. We should look carefully at that argument, but not as some abstract propositional exercise of a Pure Reason. Paul’s political argument begins, at least, in Romans 11. There, after declaring God’s incomprehensible majesty (11:33-35), Paul says “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever” (36 KJV). In regard to the creation, this is obviously a totality-passage the reference of which embraces universally everything not God Himself. All things, including human creatures and their relationships and institutions and cultures and achievements, are caught up into a single expression “all things” repeated emphatically three times. Further, it is impossible to exclude from this all-embracing reference the historical dimension in accord with which all things formed by human action made their appearance in the process of time. Among the things which are of, through, and to the Lord God are government(s) and politics (political order, organization and action). Here no distinction between what is Caesar’s and what is God’s makes entrance. Life is religion, Paul is saying.
This totality-passage, in regard to its explicitly political dimension, may be taken in two markedly different ways by us: first, it can be taken in a simplistic conservativistic way; or, second it can be taken in a more complex, extremely rich, and radically Christian way. Conservativistically, it can be made to say that because of God's sovereignty over all the unfolding of history as a whole, the Christian people should embrace any governmental or political or economic or overall societal system currently in power. Or, at very minimum, in content with it. That is Christians should accept any status quo as the Lord's will and bear witness to their neighbours, no matter what the actually existent conditions, that such acceptance is what God wants of them. Of course, this conservativistic reading of the passage is inherently contradictory with itself because it leads equally to the uncritical acceptance of both anarchy and revolution; to acceptance of the outcome of any revolution equally as much as it would support a regime long established. Should any of these possibilities obtain, why the Christian would have to say that they are all equally unobjectionable.

In a radically Christian reading, quite in the spirit of DeGraaff and Sceveld's *Understanding the Scriptures*, matters are less glib and less contradictory. In this way of reading scripture, one sees that God is sovereign indeed, that He Himself according to His own counsel (11:34) is working forward even in the most diabolical, unjust, repressive, and God-dishonouring historical settings through the holy inspiration of His People (and others, despite their doubtful confession) to the continuous fulfillment of His purposes. In that strictly historical-eschatological sense, all evil political-governmental orders, nevertheless, are of God, through God, and for God. Don't be afraid of the odds against which presently you must struggle, little flock, it is His good pleasure to give you the Kingdom precisely through your working out your salvation in politics, and all of life, with fear and trembling. In your historical work God Himself is working and He already has the victory.

This reading is integral to Paul's next phrase in his argument for a particular political strategy: "I beseech you therefore brethren..." (12:1a). That is precisely because you know by faith, despite all contrary appearances all around you, that God is absolutely sovereign in the political order of created existence and that you are not alone in your struggle against injustice, present the full functioning of your lives sacrificially (12:1b). Because of God's historically-active sovereignty, don't be conformed to the Roman Imperial Order and the culture which nurses it, but be completely changed in your very depths for exclusive service to Me, in political action too (12:2a).

Why again? So that you may prove that I am sovereign and that I consider my sovereign will, which is good and acceptable and perfect, to be at stake in the unfolding process of creation, as well as its political order (12:2b).

Next in this rich argument for a particular political strategy comes a section which is usually isolated from chapter 13. To isolate it is to serve a reactionary political purpose; it is to presuppose that Paul writes in a fragmentary way in this letter. There's no ground for such a presupposition, one but needs another presupposition in order not to read it so. A radically Christian reading here is open to the possibility of a build-up, at least from 11:33, through to chapter 13. Paul, with politics in mind, writes section 12:3-18 about the organization of the entire then-organizationally-undifferentiated community of believers. He writes of the then-current single organizational form of the Body of Christ (not of the latter-day so-called institutional church). Paul talks of the need for humility, of the gift of faith in different measures, of the variety of office that already acknowledges that some are to follow others in the whole community's fulfillment of any particular office, and of the different measures of the faith by which the coming of the kingdom is perceived either more deeply or more shallowly in any given dimension of life according to God's variously distributed gifts among the members of the Body.

It would seem that to every believer is given the one faith, but to everyone a different office (in the sense of an individually-unique combination of gifts for both formal organized offices and informal ones). Here one leads, but there one follows, all across the spectrum of life's functionings. It is not a case, on this view, of some having more faith than others: the faith is the total communal way of life. The measure of faith has to do with the unique contribution any individual can make to the community with the totality of what he has been given by the Lord. To hold back on this contribution is not to have a smaller measure of faith, but rather it is to apostatize in some way or other. Thomas contributed his honest doubt and lived. Ananias held back just a portion of his wealth and died.

What Paul is laying out here is the very foundation of the Christian conception of democracy, of government which embraces the contribution of all the people, of the Christian community-ideal in its political dimension. There was no authentic idea of democratic government in the ancient world. The Greek notion of democracy was a far different thing from what later emerged in Europe, as it was based on slavery and cultural imperialism. It is Paul's teaching, the political dimension of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which makes subsequent political thought in Europe attain to a more
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authentic notion of democracy. Besides the humanist distortions of this
deal (Machiavelli's Prince and Hobbes' Leviathan are equally as
humanistic as more democratic views), we may look to certain motifs in
scripture as the inspiration of the Christian Democratic Parties of
Europe, Latin America and Indonesia. The Anti-Revoluuctionary Party
in the Netherlands is only one, albeit an extremely important one, of
the national political organizations arising out of the Christian democratic
idea. The chief danger to these is that they are not radical enough in
their understanding of the measure of faith: too often they wait for the
signal from the institutional church, which is organizationally incompe-tent
to give political advice, to lead the way in politics. A deeper insight
into organizational competence, office, gifts, communal contribution
would lessen this tendency.

Not to be confused with the Christian democratic ideal in politics,
against the foundation we have suggested, is "the democratic ideal" of
America and Canada. This is a corruption of the Christian ideal; it is,
not, in a sense, a Christian heresy; but, in any case, it is destructive of
the authentic ideal itself. Dr. Hendrik Hart, in his booklet The
Democratic Way of Death, has correctly characterized what has been
done to an originally Christian conception. He points out that the
absolutization of the principle of majority rule ("majoritarianism")
makes of democracy a totalitarianism as despotic and oppressive as
any political system that ever man has shaped. This totalitarian
democracy does away with all God-ordained organizational competence,
office, gifts, and communal contribution. It levels in all ways, except in
the way it gives a special place to exploitation based on
power and money and advertising. It levels the qualifying function of the
structure of human personality, the function of faith, and reduces
people of all faiths to an undifferentiated mass except, again, as they
conceal to form special-interest groups to get a bigger piece of the pie.

Paul's teaching speaks implacably against this tendency. His teaching
lays the groundwork, on the basis of the Christian community as a
kind of model, for a structurally pleniform political order in which all
people participate, first, on the basis of their community that body
of people in the world who together share a faith at least for politics,
who together out of that faith contribute to its articulation in regard
to meeting the problems of living as neighbours with all mankind in
the world, who together have a common view of the various
structurations of society (the individual, marriage, family, education,
art, language, business, daily work, politics, government, etc.). They
participate, second, on the basis of their special competence for
political leadership in accord with the root-value of that community.
We would add, third, they participate most competently through a

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communal organization which itself is geared to the political task, to
perceiving in depth the political dimension of life, and to providing
explicitly political leadership.

Paul's teaching in this section (12:3-18) had implications for his
own role in the community of his own time and established the basis
for his authority to contribute a specific political strategy to it. Paul is
saying that the authentic Christian political leader, in the upcoming
case (especially Romans 13) Paul himself, has an office which he
fulfills in accordance with the peculiar political measure, depth,
insight, experience of his life in the faith. Those without this political
depth to the faith are to follow him in order to be more fully in the
faith. Those with similar depth, we may conclude, are to exchange
with him and to inter-act with him and, perhaps, even to challenge
him (as he was willing to challenge communally Peter on another
important issue). In the vortex of this dynamic communal inter-relation-
ship among the politically gifted, all seeking to be led by the Holy
Spirit, the whole community would find the way toward perfect
obedience for their time. Concomitantly, the political leaders are to
follow others who lead in other dimensions of life, according to the
measure of faith apportioned these others for different tasks of the
community.

The entire direction of the whole community as a movement in
history toward the coming of the Kingdom, under the leadership of the
Holy Spirit, is to be determined in the dynamic of this giving of one
another and receiving from one another, conscious that each giving
and receiving, came to be recognized as an Apostle in this way, the
canon of the books which constitute the normative written revelation of
the Lord came to be recognized in this way, the later creeds and
confessions of the community through the ages came to be recognized
as binding in something of this way (see Charles Williams, The Descent

Looking about him, Paul enumerates various existing offices of
the community at that time: prophecy, ministering, teaching, exhort-
ing, ruling, showing mercy (12:6-8). That these offices are not modern
so-called institutional-church offices is apparent, since Paul is talking
about the then-single undifferentiated organization of the whole
community of believers in all its functions, which had strategically
decided to make itself structurally competent for carrying out
obediently all the functions to the extent developed until then, rather
than precipitously to differentiate itself into a number of communal
organizations. This strategic choice is always the choice for any
Christian organization, including the churches: either be competent for
the fulfillment of more than one creational task as these tasks are increasingly discerned in the historical unfolding or support the development of some additional organization structurally competent for a newly-distinguishable task. To hold back the differentiation of communal organization for too long becomes disobedience and results in appropriate curse. It prevents a given organization from fulfilling adequately any function, because the organization then is torn between the claims of deeply-differentiated competencies."

The organization of the early community had made itself competent internally for a number of tasks. To that extent it certainly shows itself as undergoing a continuous process of differentiation from the original sole office of Apostle to the various lists of differentiated offices and, sometimes, their formulated qualifications (compare Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:27-30, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9 and 2:7-8, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:25-31). Despite this exploding differentiation of offices in the course of roughly thirty years, the time was evidently not yet ripe for organizational differentiation.

Unfortunately, the community matured little beyond this point during the next 250 years until the conversion of Constantine had produced the trauma of having to tackle the Christian organization of the government of the Roman Empire. Out of this tragic anti-historical irresponsibility, we have inherited the false problematic of the church-versus-state dilemma. In all of this time, there was one significant and happy development, too often utterly ignored in Protestant thought. We have in mind the development of orders, brotherhoods, sisterhoods, monasteries, and such. Originally these were to a very great extent work communities, engaged in farming and weaving and translation and distribution to the needy. (They were often recognized by and used by the government for this latter purpose.) Later, in the Middle Ages when the Christian community had to address the historical problems of civilization and training tribal people in Europe, the monasteries were Christian communal centers on the frontiers; they were engaged in clearing forest, cultivating lands, all sorts of crafts, education. Bible-copying and many other tasks (see Daniel Rops, *The Church of the Dark Ages*). "To work is to pray" was no empty slogan.

In any case, one of the offices which Paul recognized was the teaching office. This was no "vertical" thing. Paul himself attempted to fulfill this office in many ways that are clearly anti-verticalist. Paul presumed to have the office of teacher and in fulfillment of this office, among other things, he taught politics. As a Christian political teacher and strategist, Paul does not allow the minister if that is the more priestly, liturgical, sacramental, and distinctly worshipful office in the undifferentiated organization of the community—to stand apart from or above his own right to function in this somewhat political authority. (In regard to the differentiation of the offices, we should not take lightly Paul's statement, "Christ did not send me to baptize" (1 Cor. 1:17). We might ask as well, did he, except under unusual circumstances, minister at the Lord's Table? In these regards, it is important to note that Paul's ability to teach did not necessarily make him competent to do other things, even in worship. Today, it is an open question—with universal education, including Christian schools, and with the mass media—whether teaching should ever normally take place under the competence of the organization for worship rather than another organization. If nothing else, the existence of the Underground Church today points to the fact that even worship takes place only marginally in the institutional churches. Whether the Underground Church may have within it promise of a significant differentiation in the worship structuration or whether it may constitute a simple search for renewal with both revolutionary and reformational possibilities is beyond the scope of this discussion.)

Paul's point, in discussing the differentiated offices of the undifferentiated organization of the Christian community, is that all the functions for which these offices exist are to be carried out in a way mutually supportive of the New Life in Christ.

Then Paul returns, from concentration on the many offices, to focus on the character of the over-all communal relationship which these offices are to nourish. "Let love be without dissimulation" (12:9a). Paul had elsewhere said that love was greater than even faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13). He knew well that the obedience to the Law of God was itself summarized in love (Matthew 22:37-40). He knew that the Law could be faithfully re-lettered only in loving obedience led by the Spirit. All this stands by itself, but Paul is not content with it. "Lest he be mistaken, Paul goes on immediately to play off against "Let love be without dissimulation" a stylistically-parallel construction, "Abhor that which is evil" (12:9b). Paul does not allow love to stand grandly by itself, as though loving obedience could ever be some super-added sentiment by which Christians in community transcended an otherwise acceptable way of life such as that of an unbelieving society. The Christian community is not organized, he is saying, merely to add something special to something common. The Christian community is organized for the realization of a total love-relationship to God in everything it means to be a human creature; it is organized against whatever is not the fruit of such loving obedience. "Abhor that which is evil" is no mere metaphysical remark in the Greek spirit. Paul has not the ghost of a metaphysical ethics. He has
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talked of the very down-to-creation realities of human organization, concluding love as that organization's purpose. In the sharpest contrast possible to such love, he refers to evil. Evil is people, institutions, movements, cultures, societal formations insofar as they are motivated and, resolutely, structurated, by anything other than loving obedience. Paul can talk about evil in so fully a creational manner even after having said, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory forever" (11:36). He can do this because he does not mean that all things are good in the conservative sense that whatever has happened, or has endured, historical sitting up until now, receives the Lord's approbation and our love. Abhor, among the things that God will surely work through historically-eschatologically to His glory, those that are evil. In the setting of the Roman Empire and in the light of the teaching about a community motivated by love as well as the political purposes of this whole argument, Paul is calling for evaluation (does a contemplated strategy arise out of love to the community and to God?), judgement (wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove), and communal action ("living sacrifice" 12:1 and "proof" 12:2) of, among all else, the concrete political order which the Christian community could not escape confronting. You cannot abhor what is evil if you do not submit what now obtains to a fundamental critique in order to ascertain what specifically and structurally is evil within it. Just as "love without dissimulation" takes place communally, so now abhorring the evil at work in the whole political order, among other things, takes place in this same communal setting. And those who lead the worship of the community, it is safe to conclude, have no right to place their work in isolation from those who lead the critique of the political evil against which the community must struggle in order to prove what is the politically good, the politically acceptable, and the politically perfect will of God. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult, if one does not insist on artificially chopping Romans 11-13 apart into air-tight little fragments, to put worship over against social responsibility, including political action. It is clear in Paul that they are in positive, mutually-supportive inter-relationship to one another and that they, worship and social responsibility, suffer when disjoined from one another. Rather than disjoining worship from social responsibility, Paul is bent on disjoining Christian worship together with Christian social responsibility from all other worship together with all other social action.

Besides what Paul has been packing into his argument so far, we must now sharpen our reading of his letter by a further consideration. Not only is the love of the community, expressive of loving obedience to the Lord, to be made manifest by the open acceptance of the different offices of one another, including the critical office of discerning the spirits so that we may properly abhor what is evil in the totality of things as we experience them in our historical setting and as God moves forward in history to the coming of His blessed Kingdom, but further we are to "cleave to that which is good" (12:9c). Again, this "good" is no transcendent ideal state, attitude, or feeling. It is no "beatific vision". No stoic disposition that can reconcile itself to the status quo because it apprehends a universal good which does not appear in the particulars of concrete creaturely existence. We would like to read the concrete out of Paul, but he knows nothing but the concrete even in regard to "love", "evil", and "good". Paul refers to the things composing together the total mosaic of the historical setting which God has in His directing hands, all about the community and within it.

Given this ever-present concrete reference, Paul now speaks in an all-inclusive way that we leave out of consideration only to our own peril his knowledge of the Roman Imperial Order which, again, he has said the Good News overthrows (1 Cor. 1:28). In that overthrow, Paul wants us to distinguish and to cleave to what is good. In this he is not repeating his earlier reference to the community of loving obedience. The order as then structurated is to go indeed; the whole life of the Christian community, the community of loving obedience to God, is deeply implicated in that overthrow; but the community critically must hold onto whatever is good in it. The communal holding onto what is good is an expression of loving obedience as much as is its overthrowing of what is evil. Of course, holding onto the good does not entail merely purifying what has so far been achieved; holding onto the good entails conserving what good has been achieved, including the new potentials for positive change which could only have opened up at the cutting edge of the present ambiguous historical situation. Thus, conservatism is never an adequate world view for a Christian.

Nevertheless, the Christian is called to "cleave to that which is good". The good things of human life are good, whatever they may be, because they already betoken the on-going victory of the Lord, allowing us truly to acknowledge that "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things". These good things include all the attainments of human culture as well as the uncultivated riches of the creation which await responsible human work. These good things include all the attainments of human culture, which despite their entanglement in evil as a result of the deepening human sinful way of life, imperfectly reflect nevertheless the marvels of created existence and the glory of
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its Creator. The good is reflected in the commerce, art, inventions, mathematics, literature, philosophy, legal system, and statecraft of even the existing Imperial Order which must be overthrown. And not of the Roman Empire alone! But of the whole wide world throughout its historical experience globally and perhaps someday, beyond this single planet (for the earth, in the biblical sense, is wherever man is labouring to fulfill his mandate). It is the creation in this all-embracing sense which “groaneth and travaileth together until now” (Romans 8:22), suffering under the curse of sin and pleading, as it were, for man to address himself to it in loving obedience of the Creator so that it may experience the reconciling-redemptive work of Christ through its proper steward, mankind. Not only the falsely-conceived “natural world” makes this plea, but the entire societal-cultural formation, so increasingly twisted and broken, begs for its own overthrow so that it may become what it ought to be, so that its good may be liberated from its evil, so that its good potentials may be worked out and its evil potentials put aside forever. The renewal of the human heart reconciled by abiding faith in Jesus Christ and empowered by His resurrection is the key, then, to the cosmic renewal of creation in all its dimensions, the political dimension as well as all others.

Paul does not simply obliterate, negate, dialectically antithesize the cultural formations of the creation so far. Nor does he assume that the spirits that have prevailed almost universally in such formations can be accommodated. There just is no grace, no obedience, no love in the world which is not a manifestation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. One and the same Holy Spirit is at work wherever man obeys and blessing results, no matter what the measure nor how mixed the motive.

Again, however, Paul does not thereby endorse conservatively the Empire or the other kingdoms. How could he and still call upon the community of the kingdom-conscious to love without dissimulation, abhor what is evil, cleave to what is good? The Empire and its glorious achievements were built on the energies of the same prevailing evil spirits which had produced the institution of slavery. The Imperial Order rested on the institution of slavery. Aristotle centuries before had justified that slavery in order to conceive a society and a cultural formation at the apex of which was the leisureed philosopher; the Stoics of Paul’s time had fatalistically accepted slavery and all the other great social ills, retreating into the consolation of philosophy—not-after-Christ and proclaiming that whatever was had to be. Paul was rejecting all this at its roots; he was instead seeking to build a community which, feasting on the resurrection in its very worship, was set in motion against all this. Now Paul was detailing an argument as to how most wisely and effectively, given their historical situation, this inconsiderable community should best pursue its goal: the overthrow of the existing order and a restructuring of it toward the full coming of the Kingdom of God on earth as that Kingdom was already in heaven hid with God.

Loving without dissimulation, abhorring what is evil, cleaving to what is good, in Paul’s mind, while all-embracing of all history and society and culture, was not some esoteric relationship with far distant entities that only at moments intruded into daily life. Loving, abhorning, cleaving were revealed in the immediacy of every moment. They manifested themselves already in daily life within the community of the faith. It is here that we must turn for the beginning of a Christian political program. Where then did Paul seize hold of the essential foothold from which to approach the cosmic task in its political dimension, as well as all others? He began in the immediate situation over which the community could exercise observable power. Paul’s political program was a very humble one. Here was a People almost completely outside the channels of statecraft, still in a stage of basic tutelage, with no better a political teacher than Paul himself. And who was he next to Cicero or Seneca or the Herods or Pilate or any of those who knew Roman politics from the inside? What could this People do, making bricks, as it were, without straw? Well, they had the Holy Spirit. And, they would dare to start exactly where they were to do the best they could with their somewhat miserable possibilities (trusting, as no other community effective for political life in the Empire, could that “of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things”).

Even in their predicament, they realized by faith that they were part of a world-historical movement by which God would usher in, ultimately, His perfected Kingdom. So they began Christian political action with the kind of manifestation that is absolutely essential to it: “Be kindly, affectioned to one another. . . (12:10a)”. We must understand that this cultivation of mutual affection was no priority to be undertaken and neatly secured before political responsibility was to be undertaken; this was politics as much as anything else. Surely this mutual affection was to realize itself in the varied forms of friendship and communal sense of brotherhood; but this mutual affection and these friendships and this communal sense of brotherhood was never an end in itself; it was, like everything, of, through and to the Lord; it was, like everything, integral to an entirely new way of life in Jesus Christ that referred life, by its very style, beyond itself to the Lord for the coming of His Kingdom in all its dimensions. As a thing in itself,
mutual affection becomes just another form of apostasy. "Not slothful in business" . . . (12:10b, here business has primary reference to "diligence" of any kind). Once again, we have no isolatable command that is meant to underwrite the humanist-individualist ideal of the autonomous man in daily labour, including commerce, art, evangelizing, preaching, study, politics, or whatever. The commandment here is a positive reiterating of the older commandment, among other things, not to steal and not to covet, not to work on the Sabbath but to labour six days, resting on the seventh. It has communal responsibility and office as its textual background, as we have seen. It has the discerning of the evil and the good in mind. It has the curse upon Ananias and Sapphira, for their anti-communal dissimulation in economic matters (Acts 5:1-11) in mind. It has the need of many of the faithful (1 Cor. 6:1-4) and of the breadless, deprived, suffering, exploited, victimized, enslaved people of the whole world (Matthew 11:5, Luke 4:18, 6:21, 7:22; see H.N. Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, pp. 185-192), in mind. The business in which the community is not to be slothful is the whole of the Father’s business in creation to which the community has been restored in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In whatever historical setting and in accord with the requirements of effective action in that setting, the community is called also not to be slothful in politics. "Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (12:11b). "Fervent" is not redundantly the same here as "in spirit". "Fervent" does not mean "spiritedly", in the modern usage of the latter. "In spirit" means "in the total fundamental religious direction of your life-in-communion toward the historical coming of the Kingdom in all things". The term is, thus, at least an elliptical reference to being in the Holy Spirit. About this struggle against the evil spirits for the Holy Spirit in the coming of the Kingdom we are to be "fervent". Then, we shall truly be "serving the Lord". Against the implacable repression of the coming of the Kingdom, we are nevertheless to rejoice in unquenchable hope (12:12a), never succumbing to the temptation that we can do nothing. Paul refuses, even though there are no proper political channels open to the community, to give up on the task of Christian politics. He urges the community on to do what it can with what it can, however inconsiderable the available means seem. He knows that in politics, too, even this paltry effort will provoke reaction from the powers that be. There will be tribulation. Later on, when the imperial capital city of Rome suffers widespread arson, while Nero is Emperor, the Christians are selected as the scapegoats. Surely, they are not selected because they are uncritical supporters of the existing order. They are selected because they are about their Father’s business, and this business is unsettling for the Empire. They undergo the first official persecution by the state. Prophetically anticipating this eventuality, Paul’s commandment extends to cover it. “Patient in tribulation” (12:12b). Now we come to what, for our purposes in the present discussion, is an important juncture. We have already faced up to Paul’s statement that God is working in history toward His victorious inclusion of all things in His plan, by which He is glorified and by which we realize our own meaning as human creatures by glorifying Him. Paul has underlined our historical task to be living sacrifices and to prove in the world what is God’s good and acceptable and perfect will. Paul has pointed to the significance in all this of the Christian community, living out of the power of resurrection organized with at least a differentiation of offices. Paul has followed this outline of our way of life in Christ with a loaded commandment to love without dissimulation, thereby characterizing what the fore-going is all about. Paul has called upon us, motivated for this way by the Holy Spirit of love, to evaluate critically our milieu and its possibilities for the future. Paul has then shown us that we can begin our task even in the most impoverished political circumstances. He has then gone on to outline elements we can draw on to begin our political task. Here in the midst of this outline of these elements, he inserts the gem “continuing instant in prayer” (12:12c), and he goes on without lingering. We cannot absolutize prayer (or worship more fully conceived, for that matter), because he clearly has in mind all sorts of other things to which we must fully address ourselves. Prayer (and worship and evangelizing in the usual sense today) cannot exclude or minimize these others. Yet, prayer is integral to them. These other tasks are not what they ought to be if we pursue them prayerlessly. “Continuing instant” here does not signify so much spontaneity as immediacy. We are to persevere in prayer right in the midst of the concrete developments, problems, tribulations, hopes, possibilities of our day-by-day historical setting right within the Roman Empire. It is here in this, in relationship to this, with significance for this that we pray to the Lord and preach and praise and sing and eat at the Lord’s table and are baptized and witness across the whole scope of life. Politics is in no way excluded. The terms of the whole passage, starting with Romans 11:36 at least, are all-embracing.

We would not politicalize this entire passage. That would be a horrendous reduction of its terms. At the same time, we dare not depoliticize this passage, because its universal creation terms are a prelude to the passage zeroing in on the explicitly political dimension of integral life which is about to come in Romans 13. Without absolutizing the political dimension and, thus, without excluding the
suggesivenes of the entire passage for all of life, in its many dimensions, we must allow this passage its relentless motion toward Romans 13. That we do not in our modern humanist way conceive of politics at all the way Paul does only reveals that we have no Christian mind to perceive the unity of the entire discussion. The whole discussion aims toward Paul's suggestion of a communal political strategy in the midst of the Roman Empire. The remainder of Romans 12 must be read in this fashion. We shall highlight certain texts that are only too easily passed over otherwise.

"Distributing to the necessity of saints" (12:13a) has nothing to do with a myopic insular concentration on some sect that ought to ghettoize its existence. By concentrating on the needs of believers, we have exactly the purpose opposite to excluding non-believers. We do not exclude those who suffer (12:15b and 12:16b, "men of low estate" who usually lived in dreadful poverty in that culture). Neither do we exclude from our purposes the powerful who persecute us (12:14) or those, whoever they may be, who live at enmity to us (12:20).

Throughout, the references here are either communal or universal in their primary significance. They are never primarily individual. "Distributing to the necessity of saints" is obviously primarily communal, but we must have a good grip on what the Christian community is before we can understand it aright. Paul is calling on us first to pay attention to the needs of all the members of the community. This is a strategic consideration. We must aid the community because it is not a fraud, is the kingdom-conscious body of people in the world bent on working all of life for the whole creation's renewal to God's glory and man's blessing. We must aid the community because it is the many-gifted body empowered by the resurrection of Jesus Christ to take hold of the historical unfolding of the creation, aiming it once more toward God's service in loving obedience. That is the only motive for concentration on the needs of the believers: building the strength of the believers builds the number of those who can meet the needs of all mankind.

"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not" (12:14) prevents a ghetto attitude in reading the earlier text. "Bless" does not mean that we should merely pronounce a benediction upon those who persecute us. Far from it. To do that is most likely to co-opt such a benediction, making it an instrument of our own oppression by the wicked powers in high places. "Bless" does not mean we should pray, "Lord, please bless those who persecute us". "Bless" means that we should live in the world in such a lovingly obedient way that things change for the good. We should struggle not against the unjust in a merely obliterating way, but we should struggle to do justice, to make justice, to show what justice is in our society as it has unfolded. In pioneering the way, where others in their unbelieving blindness cannot see to go, we bring into the world a way of living which would not be there so fully without us. We serve Christ, in everything laboring for the coming of His Kingdom. This Kingdom is a kingdom of justice, meaningful work, friendliness, wholesome family life, meaningful art, economic security, medical care, healthy sexuality: blessedness, peace, shalom, irene. An integral experience of creaturely existence which, in order to be integral, must refer beyond itself to the Lord it glorifies.

To work for this positively, theologically, strategically is to bless. Its results are not held back from anyone, even those who persecute us. Hence the communal reference throughout this passage is never in isolation from the broader universal reference through which the community realizes its universal calling in the service to the Lord.

In blessing even those who persecute us, we do not cease from abhorring what is evil and cleaving to what is good. We do not let up in the struggle of the spirits. We often bless by forthrightly resisting many of those we seek to bless.

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (12:18). At this point, perhaps, we reach the key to Paul's political strategy for that time. Paul did not propagate an historically-irrelevant Good News: what he had to say penetrated to the root his society as it then shaped, the society under the absolutist political power of the Roman Emperor. Obviously, Paul could not live at peace with all men, especially those in political authority, because the Good News for which he lived evoked from the leaders of society their vicious reaction. Paul was insisting, nevertheless, that every move made by the Christian community which might bring it, its formal officeholders, or its members into confrontation with the corrupt system in which they were entangled every move be a fully strategic one for their historical circumstance.

"If it be possible," in your abhorrence of evil, in your cleaving to good, in your living sacrifice, in your proving what is good and acceptable and perfect for this society in God's purposes, "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Paul is here acknowledging that it is an open question, then as now, whether it is possible to live in peace with all men, including the political authorities. His own life demonstrated this time after time. Only by contradicting himself could Paul now insist the community universally live as though it were possible to come to terms permanently with the existing societal structuration which the dominating power had repressively established over the Mediterranean peoples and their cultures.
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It is in just this situation with the possibility of running up against the whole imperial power, that Paul then tries to make clear that in Christian communal action, in worship and in politics and in everything, the community and its members must never seek "the overthrow of the existing order" of relationships vengefully (12:19a). Vengeance is the prerogative of the Lord Himself. The Lord promises to take vengeance. "I will repay, saith the Lord." It is not necessary to take refuge in a naturalistic supernataturalistic dualism in order to feel the tremendous devastation in the Lord's words here. Contributing to the security of a way of life which causes others to suffer results incurably in curse, both now and over the generations and in the Last Judgement. Those who make themselves your enemies because of your righteousness in Christ cannot get away with the misery they cause you. As for you, you have the joy that all your suffering for Christ and His Kingdom is granted by God to have a share in the coming of that Kingdom. The enemies of the Kingdom have no such joy; they have a share only in a pseudo-kingdom of some sort that is marked for death; in the case of the enemies of the Kingdom in North America that death is now taking a distinctive form (see Dr. Hendrik Hart's booklet, The Democratic Way of Death).

Since the communal and universal references in this passage are always primary and the individual references at best secondary, the next text refers in its essential force to enemies of the Christian community inssofar as it serves the Kingdom of Christ. "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (12:20a). To that statement, Paul adds, "For in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (12:20b). Paul is not saying simply that you shall shame him. More fully, he is saying you shall take away from him the otherwise true accusation that he has been only one party, of which the Christian community has also been a party, to a mutually unjust or exploitative or merciless inter-relationship. Again, in removing all possibility of any mutual implication of the Christian community in the evil affairs of this world against the Lord and the coming of His Kingdom, Paul does not reserve the coals of fire, the judgement, only to the end of the unfolding of history. Paul is saying that the Christian community, inssofar as it is radically free of injustice, takes the world-historical initiative away from the various Christless movements (which can only end up acting unjustly despite any original intentions otherwise). In the course of the unfolding of history, the Christian community heaps coals of fire on the heads of the enemies of the Kingdom as the peoples of the world, instruments of God's cursing, turn away from these and turn toward those who are constant in the struggle of the spirits to bless mankind. The Christian community has the crucial advantage in the struggle because it knows that giving the glory to God and obtaining blessing for mankind are inextricably one.

Paul ends what has become chapter 12 of the letter to the Romans in our Bibles by returning stylistically to the inter-play he had introduced in 12:9b,c. After concluding his elaboration of the communal idea, together with its offices, in the command, "Let love be without dissimulation" (12:9a); he began his discussion of the basic political program of the Christian community with the further commands, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (12:9b,c). In closing his discussion and in preparation for his opening the next discussion, he repeats the previous command, intensifying it. "Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good" (12:21). Abhorring what is evil has the purpose of overcoming it through communal action; cleaving to what is good entails the task of advancing it through communal action. When Paul later talks of rulers not being a terror to good works but to the evil and when he then later asks rhetorically, "Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good" (13:3); he does so against the background of his own command to overcome evil. We are to engage, everywhere both in our obedience to the powers and in our refusal to obey in a struggle of the spirits for the coming of the Kingdom, All this in community of the faith.

Towards summarizing our discussion of Paul's political strategy in 12:9-11, we would underscore the necessity of reading the Bible aright at this place. We are so accustomed to reading passages like this one in what we consider to be an "other worldly" and "spiritual" way that is really, in the biblical sense, quite worldly and carnal. By tearing 12:9-21 apart from 11:36 - 12:8 and, equally as important, from 13, we individualize, marginalize, and cause to be self-terminating these commandments. The outcome of such a process is rightly called moralism and is to be rejected in favour of a view which sees these as universal characteristics of a life-style lived kingdom-conscious, embracing all of life in many unfolding dimensions. Our perceptions are so shaped blunted by our particular North American variety of humanist culture that we do not see the elements of such passages as political, economic, cultural, societal, multi-dimensional at the same time that they speak directly to each of us. Our inability in the Christian community today to see this puts us at a very serious disadvantage, because our society at large Right, Left, and Center is beginning to see it with increasing clarity. At the risk of a long quotation we offer from current political literature an example of this deepened perception. In a review article, Kingsley Widmer interacts, in a way illuminating for our present purpose, with Theodore Roszak, author of The Making of a Counter-Culture.
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Libertarian radicals traditionally want to change power so as to change institutions which will finally result in changed men: from political revolution to social revolution to cultural revolution. Much of what is happening in America today must be seen as the attempt to do it the other way around, to change the social order by making a revolution in sensibility. That is much of what the rising subculture of the past two decades, the bohemian-beat-hippie dissident movement is really about. Certainly it has succeeded in some remarkable changes of styles of dress and sex and feeling and dissent and, apparently, even dreaming. We should all be delighted. But can it finally change the institutions, humanly subvert the technocratic bureaucracies in the interstices of which most of us live? And can it somehow transform the power of the automated salesman, political morticians, and plastic cannibals who despoil the scene, so thoroughly control us, and drive all towards Armageddon?

Implicitly, such questioning pervades The Making of A Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition, by academic-humanist-radical-prophet Theodore Roszak. With an odd mixture of naive fervour and learned skittishness, he speculates around a political end sought by no political means! Partly he describes the current 'youth culture' and partly he develops his own cultural counteracting of the growing dehumanization of our world. . . . More sympathetic in principle than in fact to the young counter culture—[He] rightly senses that most subculture literature is not High Art but [I would add] chant, curse, celebration, prayer, and therapy which serves para-communal but not literary-library functions. Roszak is 'impressed' with the passionate energies of hip popular music but finds it 'too brutally loud and/or electronically gimmicked up'.

Here the visiting humanist misses the point. The best of the counter arts go beyond as well as below cultural modernism outside elitist subleties and defensive withdrawal from our mass technological disorder. These popular arts subsume the electronic and synthetic and our noise and affluence and distortions and turn them into sheer play, sensation, magic, fantasy, and communal expression. Technology as well as traditional institutionalized culture gets subverted, renatured into the personally kinesthetic and socially immediate. The popular protesting culture attempts to take up our realities, rather than making a schizoid withdrawal into the Land of Culture, and turn them into the more richly human.

IV. AFTER THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The cultured critic finds this subculture suggestive, if hardly to his taste. Its religiosity, he admits, seems rather like "the cultic hothouse of the Hellenistic period". The drug cultism he sees as 'decadent', and he makes a good case that it serves to 'diminish consciousness by way of fixation'. The 'psychedelic crusade' ends in the absurdity 'that personal salvation and the social revolution can be packed in a capsule'.

Similar conflicts run through much of the American subculture: activists vs. contemplatives, politicalization vs. poetization, religion vs. revolution. Curiously reversible at times, these are variations on the same discontents; sometimes the political cadres seem more religious and ritualistic than the mystical communes, which display surprisingly social and political sense. Roszak seems to agree and assumes that the New Left and the subculture make up one countering movement. Still, antithetical imperatives are there, and the hip humanist inclines to hedged bets on the counter possibilities of a full social revolution or a new mass religion even though one might well become the other (Counter-Culture, Anarchy, No. 109, March 1970, pp. 78-79).

Such discussion deserves our careful communal reflection and critique elsewhere, but for purposes here it is only necessary that what is usually talked about as personal morality, as taste, as culture, as sexuality, as sensibility—these elements of life are not outside of dynamic inter-relationship to politics. These all, together with worship have deep political implications. Paul in 12:9-21, as he well knew, was not talking apolitically. His discussion in 12:9-21 is preparatory to his further discussion in 13, which latter we all recognize as political.

Only in the light of God's sovereignty in all of life throughout the course of time, in the light of the communal relationship with its organization and officebearers, in the light of the struggle against evil for the coming of the Kingdom, and in the light of an emerging Christian lifestyle explicitly contrary to the lifestyle underlying the political order of the Roman Empire is Paul ready to discuss the Christian relationship to the existing government. Elsewhere he writes that Christ has "spoiled principalities and powers", making a "shew of them openly, triumphing over them" (Colossians 2:15). What is true universally in principle, God in Christ Jesus through those who are in Him, will work out concretely over the course of history to the "overthrow" of "the existing order" (I Cor. 1:28). Then, Paul says, "Let everyone be subject unto the higher powers" (13:1).

It is crucial here that we get some kind of grip on what the Bible, especially the New Testament, means in its multiform references to
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power. Taking just one of the Greek words, exousia, in its several usages, we find the following: power (Matt. 28:18; Mk. 6:7; Lk. 22:53; John 19:10, 11; Acts 1:7, 5:4, and 26:18; Romans 9:21 and 13:1, 2, 3; 1 Cor. 7:37, 9:4, 5:12, 18, 11:2, 16; Eph. 1:22 and 2:2; Col. 1:13 and 2:15; and Heb. 2:14); higher powers (Romans 13:1); magistrates and powers (Luke 12:11); principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10, and 6:12; Col. 1:16; and Titus 3:1). A quick examination of these texts, even though a scribal error or deletion may have crept into our list, shows that there is far more difference within these various classifications than between them.

Taking the three different Greek words for power (exousia, dunamis, and energes) used in the New Testament leads us to a similar blind alley. There are far more potential and existing different usages of these words within the areas of meaning possible to them than between the words. And yet, in an inexplicable absolutization of the science of philology, evangelical theology still ponderously tries to establish what the Bible means in such cases in terms of a set of categories which freezes overlapping words into contrary definitions: painfully elaborate arguments are adduced to show that exousia means one thing and dunamis means another thing and that the two things are never the same things. This philologic obsession obscures the fact that exousia may mean very different things in its different context while dunamis may mean first one and then another of the things that exousia means. An unfortunate instance of such philologism occurs in Dr. Klaas Runia’s treatments of Romans 13 in International Reformed Bulletin (“The Biblical View of the State,” October 1969, pp. 212). Here, and especially in a Decision Magazine article, Dr. Runia attempts to reserve the meaning of “authority” to exousia, while the broader meaning of “power” in the English language, at least, he wants to assign to dunamis. Following this procedure, Dr. Runia likens the use of dunamis in the New Testament to the brute force of nature. He would be obliged to have Paul, then, say in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, for it is the brute force of God toward the salvation of everyone who believes.” Such are the destructive implications of the philologic procedure. Politically, this procedure allows Dr. Runia and others to impose a totally conservative interpretation on Romans 13. Because we do not accept the philologic presupposition, we are unable to make such an imposition.

Because we face up to larger considerations, involving another pre-theoretical presupposition, we can come forward to admit point-blank that we are held in our heart by a view of reality which preconditions the basic set of categories with which we come to all texts. This basic set of categories is not, however, something that is pre-biblical. We have been taught this view of reality by the Holy Spirit through the biblical Word, but in such a way that we always test our reading of the Bible by that pre-theoretical, fundamental, religious commitment of our heart. We believe it will open the Bible to us, and our experience continues to strengthen our assurance in that regard.

Most theologizing, evangelical as well as other, refuses steadfastly to face up to the prior commitment of the heart of the exegete when he reads the Bible. Almost universally, it is wrongly imagined that the exegete can and should simply strip himself of all prejudices whatsoever, allowing the text of the Bible “objectively” to speak for itself. “The Bible is its own interpreter,” so that saying goes in evangelical theologizing. This is an unbiblical slogan, denying the demand of God that man always be responsible, even in interpreting the Bible, for every aspect of his activity. No exegete can approach the text of scripture as though his intellect were momentarily a Pure Reason, transcending the full creaturely conditions that God has been pleased to establish as the inescapable boundaries of his life. Therefore, it is never an autonomous analytic functioning without world view and without politics that reads the Bible. It is always a man who reads. It is always a man who has or has not the coming of Christ’s Kingdom, also in politics, on his heart. It is always a man who is or is not abandoned to doing justice for the Lord’s sake who bids us come look at the Bible. For this reason, no one should ever allow himself to be taught to read the Bible by a theologian who has not cast the whole weight of his life on the side of those who most suffer, are most discriminated against, are most in need of the working out of the Good News of Christ’s Kingdom in daily life. For the Holy Spirit who truly opens our hearts to the scriptures through the community of faith (II Peter 1:20) is the same Holy Spirit who directs us to struggle together with that community of faith against all the demons of injustice, exploitation, and self-seeking. Thus, the issue is whether or not the Holy Spirit ever leads the community of faith in Jesus Christ to interpret the text of scripture in a way contrary to the full revelation of God in the creation order which integrally refers beyond itself to its Maker. We, for our part, confess that the revelation of the creation order, in its historical unfolding for blessing and cursing, and the written revelation of scripture are one revelation integrally referring beyond itself to its one Lord, Jesus Christ by Whom God made the whole creation. Neither the creation order nor Holy Scripture, which is itself creationally structured as a faith object (not a logical object!), are correctly exegetable except in relationship to one another.
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The view of reality, with which we come to scripture and which we find in scripture and which allows us to see scripture as a unified, consistent, singular, unerring power for our lives, opens up the reading of Romans 13 in such a way that it can hardly be made to do service for any form of conservatism. This view of reality awakens us to ask the kind of question we believe the Christians of Rome asked when they received Paul’s letter to them: What does Paul mean when he talks of “power”? Power, like everything else, according to the Spirit-led view of reality, must be understood first in its totality, in its historicity, in its significance for blessing and its significance for cursing. “Power” is not a term clarified merely by philological variations among texts. Rather, it is a term now deriving its chief nuances within a Christian world view which sees all things integrally and revelatorily. We must, therefore, make certain distinctions in regard to “power”.

First, there is the total power of God; this is the creational power by which He constitutes all existence through time, orders that creational existence according to His perfect will, builds into that creational existence its experienceable structural varieties (man, societal structurations and relationships through which man fills out his own personality, environmental structurations and relationships which also play their role in the individuality of each man), and sets the conditions for blessing and cursing of all of these.

Second, there is the historical-redemptive power of Jesus Christ, focused in His sufferings and His resurrection but evident throughout the historical unfolding of the coming Kingdom of God in Him and for Him; it is this historical-redemptive power by which God overcomes the power of sin and re-establishes the proper direction of human existence, through His New Mankind, toward His service in everything.

Third, there is the varied power of concrete individual humans and of concrete human relationships (which may become institutions) and of concrete non-human things, all in inter-relationship to one another and all empowered by God’s foundational power of creation, each of which are expressed in office, in authority of one kind or another (individual, family, government, worship, craftsmanship, enterprise, teaching, art, mass, movement, spatiality, numerical discreetness, and so on).

Fourth, there are the demonic powers which take hold of men in their hearts and which parasitically feed on the creational power in its historical unfolding to misdirect human life in concrete ways (again, individual, marriage, family, government, worship, and so on) away from integral service to God. Against these powers the Good News comes to set us free through faith in Jesus Christ, putting us in total combat against them for the coming of His Kingdom.

Perhaps our formulation of the distinctions loaded into a frail word such as "power" are inadequate. Perhaps it contains some unnoticed important flaw. It can be revised. The Holy Spirit can overthrow this particular set of distinctions, assigned, in an effort of faith, to the biblical usage of “power”. Yet, the Holy Spirit will do this only on the basis of what He has taught us about how we stand with all creation before the face of the Lord God, never relieving us of our responsibility to approach scripture with some set of distinctions growing out of some world view. We are put in this position that we might the more radically cling to Him, prayerfully seek His leading, and steadfastly put down all idols made with our own hands— including our exegetical methods. We are human creatures; we are made so as not to be able to live any other way than in abandoned dependency on the Lord; and to hide this dependency from ourselves makes us prey to false world views and false spirits.

Having made the above all-important proviso about our distinctions in regard to “power”, we can experiment with the various usages of exousia, dunamis, and energeia in the New Testament, assigning each usage to one or more of our distinctions. A first attempt at this seems to bear results and to suggest that the method of analysis which has been suggested to us by our world view is more fruitful than the methods of analysis which come out of other world views. With the hope that our method will bear results in regard to Romans 13, we turn now directly to the text.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.”

Which powers? Are we commanded by Paul to be subject to the demonic powers as they take hold of human hearts and relationships? Are we to be subject to the varied powers of concrete human relationships, expressed in office and authority (marriage, family, government, worship, etc.)? But these never occur neutrally, never occur except as more or less dominated by the evil spirits that now work in the children of disobedience or by the Holy Spirit at work in the children of loving obedience. Clearly it is no simple matter, “for there is no power but of God” (13:11b). There are no powers at all that ultimately operate aside from God’s own creational power and which are a real power in, of, and unto themselves. In the course of the unfolding, not even the most malignant demonic power overrules the power of God. “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever.” (11:36) Not only of Him but to Him are all things. God’s creational power and His historical-redemptive power are, perhaps, distinguishable but they are not separable.
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The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the world-historical power which will triumph, through God's People, over all demons. There is no power ultimately but of God and no demonic power but in losing battle with God.

Now comes a subtle but tremendous shift in the usage of "powers". "The powers that be are ordained by God." (13:1c) This refers directly to the existing powers, including the political powers of the Roman Empire. These, Paul says, are ordained by God; but he says this against the entire background of the whole passage from Romans 11:36 at least through to this point which we have attempted to read aright. "The actually existing powers" - the political powers of the Emperor too - "are ordained by God." They exist only on the foundation of God's own creational power. They are nothing in themselves. They exist only in the inter-play of God's historical-redemptive power in Jesus Christ over against the demonic powers of this world. They exist nowhere but in the midst of the struggle of the spirits. They exist nowhere but in the midst of our abhorrence of evil and our cleaving to good, our overcoming evil with good. In our relationship to governments, economics, societal systems as a whole, we must accept whole-heartedly the concrete given historical situation with its concrete specific Nero or Hitler or Churchill or Stalin or Mao or Ho or Nixon or Agnew or General Motors or United Auto Workers or "public education" or modern communications powers. To attempt to live the Christian life as though these powers did not exist or held no power by virtue of the constitution of creation, as though they had nothing to do with God's own creational powers, as though they did not find their place within the inter-play between the historical-redemptive power of Christ and the historical-damnative power of demons is to resist what is ordained by God Himself. There is no transcendental world beyond creation for the resurrectionary Christian. It is here-and-now that God Himself pursues, through His People, the realization of the historically hereafter, the world to come. Those who resist facing up to these powers ordained by God receive damnation to themselves (13:2).

Clearly, Paul does not here capsize all that he has taught us previously. He does not here remove the political side of our calling to be living sacrifices, of our calling to prove what is good and acceptable and perfectly His will, of our calling to be not conformed to the world's evil, of our calling to abhor the evil and to cleave to the good, of our calling to live, if possible, peaceably with even the men who serve demons as we seek to overcome them. Only a reading bent on serving the evil spirit of Conservatism can make such a shambles out of the richness of the written revelation here: unfortunately, too much of the Christian experience through the centuries is bound by this same spirit; the confessions and preaching and worship do break down at just this point, making themselves religiously subservient to an uncritical acceptance of and passivity in the face of this evil spirit of Conservatism.

With our foundational understanding of the historical concreteness of "the powers ordained of God", we find Paul's further statement considerably illuminated, "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." In keeping with our reading so far, we cannot put aside God's creational order, nor the concrete figures, movements, tendencies which embody for blessing or for cursing the power of that order. We cannot follow Conservatism to become passive in regard to all these, nor can we follow Anarchism to seek to obliterate them. We would not resist the creational order of God, but we would resist the evil parasitical entwining around that order. Because the concrete powers are so ambiguous, so ambivalent, embodying as they do both the evil and the good we cannot simply do away with them. We must, in community led by the Holy Spirit ever-deeper into the truth about them, become critically responsible in our inescapable relationship to them. We must acknowledge that there always is, must be, government among men. To resist that is to resist the ordinance of God. We must never allow a particular government to follow its own path as though life could be blessed without integral reference beyond itself in everything to its Maker. Not to resist this last tendency is to resist the ordinance of God. We must never so construct the prohibition against resisting the power as to remove the political dimensions of the all-encompassing task of the Christian community to "overthrow the existing order" insofar as it is dominated by the demons. Not to resist the power of evil is to resist the historical-redemptive power of the resurrection of Christ, to make His cross of no effect, to quench the Holy Spirit, and to take one's stand outside the gracious salvation which God has for His New Mankind.

To summarize our discussion so far, Paul in Romans 11-13 does not teach Christians to be anti-revolutionaries. Romans 11-13 leaves the possible revolutionary role of Christians at any given time in history a matter to be decided in community under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Romans 11-13 certainly does prohibit both Conservatism and Anarchism. (It is interesting to note that in our century there has been more formidable foe of both Conservatism and Anarchism than the Communists. It is not in regard to opposition to these movements that Communism so viciously fails).

Paul goes on, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to
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the evil.” (13:3a) On the usual conservativistic reading of this passage, one would be free to say that any de facto government, including the present regimes in the Soviet Union, People's China, Cuba, North Vietnam, and the Viet-Cong-held villages of South Vietnam “are not a terror to good works, but to the evil”. Obviously, this is quite unacceptable a reading. But in discarding it, we also discard the same sort of reading in regard to the Nixon-military-industrial regime in the United States of America today. We cannot say that the American “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil,” letting it go at that. Neither can we construct Paul’s remarks here as though he were simply saying the Imperial Order of Rome and the representatives of that order are “not a terror to good works, but to the evil”. Were Paul merely saying that, he was proved wrong by his own trial and martyrdom. Unless, of course, his preaching was evil. We reject that his preaching was evil. We reject that he was justly put to death. We reject that the Imperial Order of Rome behaved in relationship to him and in relationship to a good many of its citizens on many occasions “as a minister of God... for good” (13:4a). We reject that it should not have been overthrown.

Paul was saying something far richer than a conservativistic reading allows: he was saying that the evil and good are always inextricably bound up together in human action, relationships, and structurations, but that we must, nevertheless, always oppose the evil in them. The task is precisely to oppose the evil in such a fully responsible way that we do not at the same time destroy the good. The good includes the potentials for good not yet realized in the present situation but possible because of the stage of unfolding to which the present situation brings creaturely experience. For the sake, then, of God’s on-going purpose in creation, made that way for your blessing, “Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?” (13:3b). Won’t you weigh carefully in community, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, just because you fear God and not men, the style and timing and strategy of your God-given calling to change things for the better? “Do what is good, and thou shalt have praise” of the power (13:3c).

Again, this latter statement of Paul’s is patently false if it is pretended to mean what actually happens in concrete situations when the Christian community attempts to live out of the power of the resurrection and peaceably, as much as it can, with the governments shaped by demonic powers. Sometimes the governmental powers praise meaningfully the good that comes out of the struggle for the coming of the Kingdom; usually they do not.

“For he is a 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.” (13:4)

This text, once more, has to do with the office-bearer of the political order viewed eschatologically, viewed normatively, viewed from the standpoint of the office-bearer who fulfills his governmental task in loving obedience against those in society who are bringing curse upon it. Of course, such was not the case in Paul’s day; nor had/has it been the case during most of the historical experience of God’s People; this is not the way things are today by any means.

The long decades of lynchings of black people in which the police power at least sat back; the merciless beatings of protestant youth at the Pentagon in 1967 and at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 (Described by Norman Mailer in his books, The Armies of the Night and Miami and the Siege of Chicago); the genocide of Black Panthers by the police (including the cold-blooded shooting of Fred Hampton while in bed in his apartment in Chicago); the arming of inexperienced National Guardsmen with live ammunition which resulted in the Kent State University slaughter; the murders of black students by white police at Jackson State College; the Augusta, Georgia police murders all these are only the more vivid surface phenomena of a political order today which is not the minister of justice to the people for good. Such a clearly Christless disobedient political order bears the sword in vain. It takes political office in vain. It is not ministering the justice which receives the blessing of the Lord. It is not “the minister of God to thee for good”.

Yet, in seeking to overthrow such an existing order, the People of God do not simply destroy, negate, obliterate it. The People of God do not seek the uncritical abolition of the sword which would entail further injustice. Rather, precisely under the impetus of that normative vision of the political-governmental order, the Christian community evaluates its actions in its project of resurrectionary renewal of all of life. They do seek the overthrow of the existing anti-normative misuse of the sword and its return to normative use. They do this because they see eschatologically “the ruler,” ordained by God and a minister “for good”.

Because they so see the whole political-governmental task, including the bearing of the sword, the Christian community is never neutral in its relationship to those who bear the offices of the government. Insafar as the community is not actively against the existing order, it is fearlessly for it. Better yet, the community is both actively against its evil and actively for its good, including its potentials for blessed change at the same time. The Christian community picks and chooses. It is free to work out communally
levels and degrees and extents of both support and resistance, but it may not be neutral. It must abhor the evil effectively, overcoming it. It must cleave to the good right within the ambiguity of the mixed historical formation of the government which it confronts. “Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake” (13:5).

Interestingly, Paul selects for his discussion only the curse-side of the task of the government: the bearing of the sword. This emphasis on the curse-side constitutes no definition of the task of government in God’s unfolding creation plan. (We glibly talk about “the biblical definition” of this or that, presuming a true reference to something is a true definition of it. Or presuming that if only we compile all the true references to something in the Bible that compilation affords us a true Christian definition of that something. We refuse to read the unfolding revelation of the creation order for the purpose of receiving a more and more full-orbed insight into the Truth under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our theologies especially have hardly begun to face up to such foundational issues about responsible-to-the-Lord thinking. We desperately need definitions of terms we throw about like “biblical definition”, “biblical usage”, “biblical presupposition” before we can ever get an adequate formulation of what we mean when we say “the Bible is true”. Too often such statements are a cover for our seeking support of conservativistic repression political-economic-societal positions, among other things. Theology, including our evangelical-reformed theologies, is in a must shabby state as a science, but nevertheless we crucify in the name of orthodoxy those people who resist the outcome in daily living of the often self-contradictory theological presuppositions we read into the Bible without ever admitting their presuppositional pre-exegetical character.

As with the godless faction in the United States of America today who divorce “Law and Order” from “Justice”, their counterparts among professing Christians like to read Romans 13 as though God made the curse-side of the task of government an end in itself.

Dr. Paul Woolley, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, quietly demolishes this co-opting of Romans 13 for the pernicious purposes to which it is put nowadays. In his booklet, Family, State and Church: God’s Institutions, Prof. Woolley sums up biblical texts, which no biblicalist dare ignore, that outline the blessing-side of the task of government (XX pp. 21-25). He refers to two chief elements on the blessing-side: safety, under which he classifies protection of “men from harm which may come to them from the existence of factors which in themselves are right and proper” (p.22) and health; and, as a second chief element, social welfare. In order to flesh out the biblical idea of social welfare, Prof. Woolley points to the text inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia: “Proclaim liberty through the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Leviticus 25:10). The chapter, of which this text is an integral part, relates liberty “to conditions of the tenure of farm land, and of city property, with the methods of cultivation, with interest on loans, with the holding of slaves and with the redemption of slaves” (p. 23). In the professor’s words, “It is important to note two things here. This is divinely ordered civil legislation, and it has to do with such matters as the status of titles to real property, methods and conditions of agriculture, interest on loans, conditions of labor” (p. 23).

Other texts are then cited to demonstrate the same point in regard to the positive task of the government: “property damage claims (Exodus 22:6); perjury, bribery (Exodus 23); the use of magic; prostitution, weights and measures (Lev. 19); inheritance of estates (Num. 36); debt (Deut. 5); the use of forests (Deut. 20); clothing (Deut. 22); and security for loans (Deut. 24)” (pp. 23-23). In regard to the biblical acknowledgement of the need for social legislation, Prof. Woolley says, “The one really important thing about this is the fact that God provided and approved legislation in those diverse areas of social welfare to be enforced by civil authority. It is not important for our present purposes to note just what the detailed content was or what the sanctions were. We have here legislation which was adapted to certain then-existing conditions as far as detail was concerned and which had the sanction of God’s direct revelation. These conditions and this direct sanction no longer exist. But the fact that civil legislation is proper and is needed in these areas is as true today as it was in Moses’ time” (p. 23).

It was also as true in Paul’s time. The whole point of Paul’s teaching in regard to the bearing of the sword is that it must be borne in fulfilling a governmental ministry “for good”. There is nothing in the Bible to underwrite by one jot or title the notion that government exists to repress protest against evil, repress overcoming evil. The bearing of the sword is no good in itself.

The bearing of the sword for curse has the purpose of preventing injustice so that justice may flourish. The bearing of the sword for curse has the purpose of allowing the government to fulfill its larger task for blessing. The bearing of the sword for any other purpose than justice itself evokes its own curse; those who suffer most from the unjust bearing of the sword rise up to curse the disobedient sword-bearer. This is the case in America today. Whether or not the Christian community should participate in such an uprising is a matter of historical strategy, having much to do with the capacity of the
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community to contribute meaningfully to a more just administration of government. Paul saw that this was not possible at that time in the Roman Empire. He clearly put the weight of his argument against it for his time. We must communally decide the matter under the leading of the Holy Spirit for our time. In any case, the overwhelming consideration is not whether we may successfully bear the sword, but whether we are able to contribute anything significant to the task of justice of which the sword is the negative cursing/punishing expression. We need to develop a positive notion of the government's task for our day with its greatly unfolded possibilities for evil and for good.

We must see that in not taking up our task to develop the meaning of justice in our historical setting of a highly complex technological mega-capitalistic societal structuration with its racial exploitation, its thriving on foreign wars, its corruption of the mass communications media, and much more - we do injustice. We are not ministers of good and we contribute to the bearing of the sword in vain. We cannot escape our co-responsibility for the ministry of government "for good". An interpretation of the Bible which allows our smallest withdrawal in the face of injustice serves a political purpose inimical to the coming of the Kingdom of Christ in all of life. An interpretation of the Bible which puts worship (or prayer or Bible study or evangelizing) over against authentically Christian communal political action corrupts worship itself, making it an instrument of repression.

Now, Paul is willing to make some comment on the issue our Lord Jesus could responsibly side-step: taxation. The very resurrection of Jesus and the development of a resurrectionary community preclude any continued side-stepping. Where Jesus left all the questions unanswered, avoiding a quarrel with people who wanted to compromise Him, Paul finds it necessary to offer some direction. He does so only after pointing to the place of government in God's unfolding creation order and after pointing to government's normative task for blessing together with the curse-side of that task. For conscience sake, "pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually" (13:6) to their God-given governmental ministry. But, of course, this is true only of government seeking somewhat successfully to fulfill its creational task in loving obedience. Paul's statement is not true of the Roman Empire or its provincial governments or dependencies. Paul so words his statement - "attending continually" - that it is clearly not true about the government under which his readers lived. They knew he was not talking about the actual government over them. Paul points to the norm and, thus, places the task of on-going evaluation on the shoulders of the community. That evaluation is no less our task today. Most taxation in the world and in the United States of America is tremendously unjust. Its revenues are used in unjust ways. As Michael Harrington put it in his book, The Other America. "We have capitalism for the poor, and socialism for the rich". The rich, in hundreds of ways especially written into the laws for their benefit, receive the overwhelming amount of tax write-offs, tax rebates, subsidies, and welfare. The poor get a tiny and ineffectual amount of the monies returned by government to non-governmental hands. And, of course, the huge amount of the national budget circulates in and out of government to keep well-lubricated the engines of imperialistic warfare by which a small number of Americans grow tremendously wealthy. On a smaller scale, the same was true in Paul's day. Paul knew it. Jesus had known it; it was for this reason, at least in part, He refused to give a straightforward answer to those who baited Him. But Paul's point is: to the extent that you can critically ascertain that the taxes are going to their proper end of securing full justice in the land, you pay those taxes as unto the Lord God Himself. Those tax monies then are just as much given to God as any collected and distributed within the Christian community itself; your special attendance to the needs of the community does not have the purpose of excluding the rest of mankind in its manifold need.

We must allow Paul to say all this to us, clearly and unmistakably. Yet we must not for one moment imagine that Paul is actually describing how things are taking place in the Roman Empire of which he is a part. Paul, we may assume, knows only too well the corruption, the duplicity, the gouging, the bleeding of the poor. He knows these things, he stands against them, and he prepares the community from scratch to live in such a way that it will overcome evil with good. He goes in and out throughout the Empire teaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ and building a community that is dedicated, among other things, to driving out the evil rulers, these tax-robbers. He has no intention of leading the People of God into making more secure the position of these defilers of their task. He does not drive out, as did Jesus, the money-exchangers in the Temple, but he provokes a civil disorder in Ephesus where the image-industry had felt the pinch of Paul's preaching. Were Christian people to stop buying autos today, we would have much the same impact on the economy and we would evoke much the same reaction from General Motors and the United Auto Workers which Paul evoked from the master silversmith, Demetrius, and his craftsmen in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-41). Today, however, government could pretty well be counted on to subsidize the auto industry, taking tax monies from all the people to do so, instead
of attempting to restructurate things so as to achieve a greater economic justice for the poor. In any case, Paul knew that he was being provocative in persuading and turning away “much people, . . . almost throughout all Asia,. . . saying they be no gods which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26). We must admit that Paul writes a tremendously political document when he writes his Letter to the Romans.

Interestingly, Paul does not use the name of the current Emperor when he writes. Nor the name of any other officials of the Emperor. This is not because he has anything against naming names (II Timothy 4:10). Why does Paul not say “Let every one be subject to Nero, the Emperor of Rome, and to his representatives in the various provinces”? Why does he not say, “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power of Nero and his representatives resisteth the ordinance of God”? Why does he not say “Nero and his representatives are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. . . Do that which is good, and thou shalt have the praise of Nero. . . For Nero is the minister of God to thee for good. . . Nero and his representatives bear not the sword in vain. . . They are God’s ministers, attending continually to their God-given ministry”? Paul does not because he cannot. Paul cannot identify the office-bearers nor even the concrete offices of the Empire with the norm which they ought to fulfill. Paul’s statement here is loaded with very untypical cautious “abstraction”. It is not really an abstraction, but a literary device by which he hints at a political position that could endanger his very life. He refuses to identify the norm with any particular official or office, because he is not talking about any of these. He leaves it to the community to work out how they shall interpret his “abstraction” in regard to the concrete situations they faced in the imperial capital, Rome, and especially in Caesar’s household. He refuses to give a law, while at the same time he refuses to underscore the need for loving obedience to God’s creational norm for government. Strategically, he is generally on the side of getting along, as much as possible, with the present system. His own conduct reveals, however, that he saw limits to even this.

While Paul avoids translating his teaching in Romans into allegiance to any particular office-bearer or any particular office, he also carefully avoids alienating any powers in Rome who might get wind of his letter. He carefully avoids stirring up any action by the Christian community in Rome where a blood-bath could easily ensue, while he himself was contributing cause to social friction in Ephesus (Acts 19:31). Considering it not strategic for him to go there, they advised him against it. Paul gives his advice to the Roman Christians in the same way. He advises paying taxes to the current regime in the same way.

Paul gives the Roman Christians as much endorsement of a non-revolutionary attitude for his time as he can. But in those politically-charged days, we may be sure that the Christians in Rome gave his letter a very careful reading. They knew about God’s creational power, about the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, about the authority-relationship of marriage, family, government, guilds, and the communal organization, and about evil spirits controlling men in high places. They knew that Paul was not describing their rulers when he said “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil”. They knew that Paul was not describing their administrators when he said “he is the minister of God to thee for good”. They knew Paul was not describing their tax-collectors when he said “they are God’s ministers, attending continually” upon their God-given responsibilities. They had to laugh out of hearing their trusted teacher or they had to ask themselves just what does Paul mean. It is clear from the persecution of Roman Christians in the succeeding years that they did not take Paul to mean they should live, including their worship-life, in such a way that the Empire should not feel threatened. The demons in the Empire were threatened, and Paul’s highly political and artful letter to the Romans had a lot to do with it.

We can close our discussion of Romans 13 with brief attention to a final text:

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour” (13:7).

Where have we heard this before? Paul’s statement here is loaded with the same ambiguity in regard to any particular official who collects tribute that the statement of Jesus contained. Paul, unlike Jesus, formulates the norm which obligates us to pay taxes for the doing of justice in the public-legal order. Yet he does not release us from critically evaluating exactly who under what political structuration ought to receive our tax monies. Tribute, custom, fear, and honor should be rendered to those to whom it is due. God’s governmental ministers attending continually to their normative task of doing justice for all.

Add to this reading the commandment to live by the Spirit which gives life rather than by the letter (II Cor. 3:6c) and you come away from Romans 11-13 with a most non-conservative understanding of the Christian task for the coming of the Kingdom in its political dimension.
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(At this point of concluding our discussion of Romans 13, an aside in regard to the use of scripture translation seems appropriate. The King James Version has been our main source, against our ordinary preference for a modern colloquial version. However, the colloquial versions of today are generally more conservative than was the KJV which was translated under the patronage of a king of England who regarded himself as an absolute monarch by “divine right.” The American Bible Society's Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English Version puts forward a most abominable translation of Romans 13: “Everyone must obey the state authorities. . . .” This totally eviscerates the richness of Paul's language and precludes, of course, the reading we have offered. Good News for Modern Man insists on saying exactly what Paul is trying to avoid saying while he still wants to make the strongest case for the underlying foundation of all government in God's creational order. Thus, at this point we find an anti-Christian political presupposition to have dominated the translation of Holy Scripture itself. It is doubtful how this can be Good News for those who suffer repression under apostate political systems today. The same version also undermines 1 Corinthians 1:28; God “chose what the world looks down on, and despises, and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important.” Paul is not talking here about the destruction of thoughts only; he is not talking about “spiritual concerns” over against “secular concern.” Paul is referring to a way of life, with its inescapable political dimensions, which is despised and at present powerless in many ways but which is driven by the power of the resurrection. That despised way of life will not destroy the world’s thought-processes only (should any come away from this version with such an idea). The despised way of life will “bring to nought the things that are” (KJV) or, better yet, will “overthrow the existing order” (NEB). In keeping with this the KJV says that at the end Christ “shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power” (1 Cor. 15:24) and that already He has “spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). We await to see whether forthcoming translations, especially those by evangelicals (like the New York Bible Society's A Contemporary Translation) are content to serve the cause of political repression. In any case, the instances cited above testify adequately to the truth that it is impossible to separate political belief, faith, ultimate conviction from Bible reading, prayer, preaching, confession, and worship. We must seek to be gripped radically and exclusively by the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ both for worship and politics, knowing that the two cannot be isolated even though structurally they constitute different facets of the One Great Task for the coming of the Kingdom of God.)

V. WORSHIP AND POLITICS TODAY

The ministry of Paul, like the earlier ministry of Jesus and like our later ministry today, takes place in its distinctive political setting. We must understand Paul's politically-oriented utterances in relationship to the society in which he sought to function and to lead the People of God. Further, we must understand that the worship in which the People of God then participated, at a time when they had only the barest political program, was itself fraught with political implications. To teach and to preach the resurrection was not to seek an abstract intellectual assent to an allegedly "historical" event, as theologians of our post-historicistic-empiricist period would have us believe. Rather, for the early Christians the doctrine of the Resurrection was a doctrine that Christ had arisen and in His arising had performed a deed of world-historical importance.

What we call "the doctrine of the resurrection" today is very unlike what the early Christians meant by any such designation. First of all, what they meant by "doctrine" had nothing to do with our modern meaning. We mean by "doctrine" a scientific formulation that serves to define something. In evangelical theology, the so-called "biblical data" referring to a given something is regarded as capable of providing a definition and then a presumed definition of it is erected on the basis of a compilation of all the references to that something. The early Christians had a quite different meaning in mind. They regarded "doctrine" as non-definitive teachings about events which they confessed to be clearly instances of God's dealing with them toward the coming of His Kingdom. These non-definitive teachings made no pretense to scientific formulation, nor to definition, while certainly these teachings were regarded as making true statements about these events especially from the standpoint of their contribution to the guiding confession of the faith shared by the community. For worship, prayer, and praise, no scientific formulation is absolutely essential. For politics, no scientific formulation is absolutely essential.
The science of theology, however, does claim, through its ongoing work, to enrich the worship and the rest of the life of the faithful. There is, thus, a place for scientific formulation. But the biblicistic-empiricist version of such a formulation is not only inadequate scientifically, it also offers as definitive what cannot be such. First, it limits itself to the so-called "biblical data" in a misguided hope that thereby it can achieve a finality not possible when the whole creation is involved. Second, by excluding creational revelation it denudes the very biblical references themselves, pushing them up into some transcendental realm where they lose their life-context. Third, hoping to attain finality in this way, it robs science of its tentative character and it opens the way for attributing to scientific definition a non-tentative absolutistic character which the confession of the Bible's normative authority rightly reserves to the Bible's teachings only, as true non-exhaustive non-definitive statements. It falsely enlarges the truth that all statements in the Bible, because they are true, exclude contradictory statements. While the truth-character of all statements in the Bible does exclude statements contradictory to them when all words are used in the same senses this simple truth-character of the Bible does not justify transforming its statements into concepts which universally govern the truth-character of all possible statements using any of the same words in any of the senses possible to those words. Such an enlargement of the field of reference of biblical statements to the conceptually-most-universal range possible serves no purpose other than allowing the theologian to pretend to gain control over the Truth by compiling biblical references. It demands a concomitant narrowing of the possible field of reference of all statements not found in the Bible and of daily human experience all in the hope of gaining an absolute certainty by means of comparison of biblical texts in isolation from any other form of revelation. The biblicistic-empiricist approach does this because it does not want to face the wide-ranging host of alternative understandings that continuously unfold within a non-propositional biblical framework, without contradicting biblical statements, and yet withholding themselves from the control of even the biblically-driven critical thinker. The whole process involved in this biblicistic-empiricism assumes that the rest of creation in its unfolding is not consequentially revelatory. If this unacknowledged presupposition of biblicistic-empiricism is false, if the creation order in its unfolding is perspicuously revelatory (but scientifically elusive) under the leading of the Holy Spirit, then the alternative formulations of how the various legitimate senses of biblical words and statements may be tentatively construed and elucidated becomes an ongoing task.

In pursuit of this task, various lines of construction and elucidation can gradually be excluded because, as they are pushed through to their conclusions, they may reveal either that they are self-contradictory or that they finally do contradict any possible unity of the biblical statements as a confessionally-structured whole. In this way, the Bible controls the free labour of those who would submit to it but the Bible is not controlled by those who would make something of it far different from what it claims to be (see J.P.A. Mekkes, "Knowing", in Jerusalem and Athens). Meaningful, tentative, non-biblicistic-empiricist, scientific formulations of biblical doctrines then become possible and enriching to the life of the Christian community as it struggles in everything for the coming of the Kingdom. At one and the same time, scientific formulation of the biblical teaching of the resurrection and the biblical teaching itself of the resurrection are both liberated to come into their own.

The scientific formulation of the biblical doctrine of the resurrection is free, then, to ask: what is an event? what is the unfolding process of events? what place does the unfolding process of events have in the whole creation order? what is an historical-redemptive event? what is an historical-damnificative event? what is an event of blessing? what is an event of cursing? what is the reconstruction of events in historiography as this reconstruction relates to the events themselves? are there any special reconstructive aspects (to the Bible's true statements about the resurrection which reflect the Bible's own special purpose as a guide to our faith-life) integral to all of life? This course in scientific formulation can lead to very fruitful tentative insights which do full justice to all the Bible's statements in regard to the resurrection.

What this course does is leave the biblical statements as such untouched, only excluding those logical possibilities which undercut the statements by vitiating their capacity to give guidance to a life of whole-hearted struggle for the coming of the Kingdom. Doctrine, in the non-scientific biblical sense, remains intact. Doctrine in the biblicistic-empiricist sense, meets a wall beyond which it cannot pass.

Modern "doctrines of the resurrection", in the latter sense, systematically rob it of its significance for daily life in the creation. These modern doctrines--modernist, neo-orthodox, and evangelical alike--have indeed robbed the biblical teaching of the resurrection of its meaning for daily life. As we have said, for the early Christians the doctrine of the resurrection was a doctrine that Christ had arisen from the dead, showing that a life of loving obedience is rewarded by God with blessing. No matter how terrible the suffering that precedes the blessing, Christ's obedience and blessings were so far unique that they
constituted, together, an event of world-historical importance, proving Christ's election as Lord of Creation (Ephesians 1:17-23; Colossians 1:16-20) and proving His power to overcome evil entirely. The early Christians believed that the Lord who arose from the dead had promised them His power. They had experienced tokens of this power in their lives already (Acts 2:1-11; Acts 5:12) and they were committed to live out of this power in everything it meant to be God's human creature. The power promised and experienced was the power to renew human life and to set it again on its proper track as it unfolded toward man's full service to God in every dimension of life. To confess the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to pray, to sing, to give money or goods, to exercise discipline, to organize the community, to worship God as one of His resurrectionary people was to strengthen the forces of radical change in the Empire. The Empire itself came to realize this. And it was because of the political implications of Christian worship in the Spirit of the resurrection, revealed in the Christian refusal to give allegiance to the Emperor, that the Empire persecuted the believers. Paul knew the real political threat to the Empire which was implicit in the whole resurrectionary Christian life, including its worship. That had very much to do with the careful way he wrote his letter to the Roman Christians. Such letters, circulated through the various meetings of the Roman Christians, could easily come to the attention of those in power. Paul wanted to give the Roman Christians guidelines for their conduct; he wanted the believers to avoid precipitous actions which could only end, as they eventually did anyway (but it was then already too late to snuff out the community), in their slaughter; but he did not want to give and he certainly did not give the Roman Imperial Order a Christian endorsement. Paul did not say everything he could truly have said about the resurrection; he did not pretend to give a scientific formulation of it, attempting to encapsulate its meaning in a definition that would exclude all other possible statements—true or false—about it. In regard to the meaning of the resurrection, Paul did not erect bombshelters but signposts pointing truly in the right direction toward the coming of the Kingdom. Unlike Paul, our modern theologies which pretend to say everything that can be said actually do not say the truth. No theological formulation about the meaning of the resurrection is true which does not put it over against the forces of darkness in the daily struggle for the Kingdom. We have only to look at the way of life of the early Christian community to see what meaning the resurrection had for it.

Neither the community before Paul's coming to it, nor after, accepted the life style which the structuration of the Roman Imperial Order supported. Paul, did not build a conservative political community willing to put up with whatever laws, regulations, or economic practices typified the Empire. Indeed, internally in the Christian community there was a sustained effort to develop a restructured communal legal system. Believers were forbidden to take one another to the Roman and provincial courts, and, we should remember, Roman law was one of that culture's greatest contributions to the world. Further, believers engaged in an attempt to build a new kind of economic structuration (Acts 4:34-37). The account of Ananias and Sapphira is ample evidence of the seriousness of that attempt. We should not look on the endeavor as limited to Jerusalem either. The sending to Jerusalem of cargoes of foodstuffs and other supplies by communities elsewhere (Romans 15:26) is strong testimony to the idea that the restructured economic program was well on its way to becoming Mediterranean-wide. Do we think that this tendency did not provoke hostility from the economic powers then taking off much wealth for private purses? These powers had lost a market. Perhaps a small market. But the communities were growing everywhere and raised the spectre that markets would be lost everywhere. On top of this, the Christian community was a very real threat to certain forms of luxury industries that induced the poor to buy what they could ill afford, like the idol-industry of Ephesus. In view of the tightly-knit guild system of the time and in view of the cult associated with each guild, we can also imagine that Christian masters and craftsmen were continually running into conflicts with the official guilds. Perhaps in certain towns and areas, the larger portion of some guilds were to be numbered among the believers. This would produce a marked change in the entire life of the local guilds involved, very likely entailing their expulsion from the larger guild organization of the province. In the military, undoubtedly conflicts arose because believers among soldiers and centurions could not fulfill all the commands given them by unconverted superior officers. In regard to the slave system, it is possible (as certain latter-day slave-holding theologians, like Charles Hodge, remind us) to attempt to justify the practice by dwelling upon Paul's by-passing the formal master/slave relationship of Roman society; but Charles Williams in his way shows the absurdity of that, "It may be conceded that slavery is not, formally, anti-Christian, so long as the slave's natural and supernatural rights are preserved. But the proper preservation of those rights is apt to make nonsense of slavery." (The Descent of the Dove, p. 209) For Christian faith never deals with anything formally. It always addresses itself to the concrete, not concrete circumstance in isolation either, but in its historical setting, penetrating to the heart of a relationship in
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discerning the spirits which dominate it. Without any political or economic power to speak of, Paul coped with a slave-situation so as to destroy it at its root. He used the formal slave-situation in order utterly to reverse its purpose and to bring into Roman society something which otherwise did not exist: a work community in service to the Lord. Philemon, "thou shouldst receive" Onesimus "forever not now as a servant but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself" (Philemon 15b-17). To imagine, in any meaningful sense at all, that Philemon had regained a slave is absurd. As far as being a slave-master was concerned, Philemon now had to take into his household a former slave as "a brother beloved," living with him and working with him to God's glory alone.

What, we may now ask, did all these radical changes of societal relationship mean for the worship as such, of the Christian community? Were social forces, social problems, social issues matters the community could not specifically pray about or discuss or reach decisions about or exercise discipline about? Quite the opposite. In the New Testament, as in the Old, there is no disjunct whatsoever between worship and political-economic-societal action.

Indeed, the whole attempt, very prominent in much of the history of Christians, to introduce a disjunct between worship and political-economic-societal action is evidence of the deep intrusion of demonic influence upon the People of God. But, you may say, the creeds evidence no social concern; they concentrate exclusively on God and the doctrines of the faith. So much the worse for any such creeds or confessions! Political-economic-societal action is doctrine of the faith, although it is carefully circumvented in most of the creeds and confessions. For the early Christians, the teaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a societal doctrine. Needless to say, the onslaught of Greek influences in the Christian community took their toll. The resurrection was tampered with by believers unwilling to let go of Greek political-economic-societal ideas, beliefs, faiths. The resurrection was kicked upstairs into the limbo of transcendental propositions; it was transformed into a weird historically-isolated event, to be believed because of its very weirdness, its wow!, and thus to demonstrate that Greek-influenced Christians subscribed to a weirdness different from those weirdnesses usual to unbelieving Greeks. The resurrection then became a synthetic doctrine. Far different was the belief of the early radical Christians. They believed that the resurrection was an event upon which all subsequent events of history turned. Its uniqueness stemmed from the fact that it served a unique purpose in God's historically-redemptive plan. There is no hint that the creation order was set aside in order to allow for the resurrection's presumed otherwise-impossible occurrence. Indeed, the Christian confession still remains that the resurrection of Christ, as an event, was unique only in that it was the first of many resurrections, including yours and mine, and in that first resurrection, ours are possible as a result of the historical-redemptive power it unleashed. Without faith in the resurrection, entailing a resurrectionary life, it is doubtful whether one arises to the blessed life built upon it at the full coming of the Kingdom. Resurrection faith is integral to resurrection life.

In 323 Anno Domini, as it is called, Constantine, upon the death of Licinius, became sole Emperor of Rome. Earlier these two contenders for the Imperium had issued the Edict of Milan, which granted toleration to all communities. This meant that, however imperfectly, the Christian community had, after some centuries, attained one of its preliminary goals. It would be a mistake to think, as our humanistically-shaped minds tend to do, that the Christians had pursued the goal of so-called "religious freedom", that they had in view merely the right to hold their own worship services, that they attempted to get as many people as possible to believe in a Hellenized list of "doctrines", and that they would otherwise go peacefully about their business as good Romans. The Christians were out to change the whole world in every respect so that a New Mankind might, in everything, joyously develop the creation potentials to the Creator's glory and the blessing of mankind (His servants). "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things." To the extent this was not true of them, they were not Christians. It did turn out to be increasingly not true of them, for already the radicality of the Good News had been greatly blurred. Constantine, for his part, was not about to seek a radical restructuration of statecraft. Nor were the intellectuals of the Christian community tremendously interested in such things. They were more interested in Greek-like disputes, and they quickly turned their energies to the great creedal controversies. We see from that time on a general creedal failure among Christians. Doctrines, like that of the resurrection of the Lord, became theoretical constructions to which assent was required; and "doctrinal accuracy" in this new Greek sense became the central all-consuming preoccupation of believers. Its only escape was into mysticism. Worship, too, became the celebration not of the new life of the New Mankind in Christ Jesus, God's Son, but of doctrinal accuracy. We can, of course, cleave to the good in both the ecumenical creeds and in the mystics without neglecting to abhor the evil in them and resultantly, in the life
of believers (see Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove*, pp. 58-63). The disjunct between worship and political-economic-societal action had by now become the prevailing way of life among professing Christians. There are happy exceptions, as we noted, to be found especially among the various monastic movements at various times and places. Internally, however, these also suffered from the tensions of the unhappy disjunct.

The Reformation and the Renaissance felt the stark weight of all this. The Reformation struggled, in the renewal of the teaching of justification by faith, to return to a concern for the new life. Especially Calvin made a breakthrough in this regard. He again saw Christian faith to be nothing short of a world-historical-redemptive movement to renew human life by bringing it back, in everything, to service to God. For this reason, he attended to the educational and medical and commercial and labour and governmental problems of the City of Geneva as Prof. André Bieler documents exhaustively in his *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin*. Calvin also maintained lengthy correspondence with reformational movements far away from French-speaking Europe. He maintained contact with reformational circles in Lithuania and in Hungary and with a soon-murdered Patriarch of Constantinople. Worship in Geneva struggled to overcome the disjunct. Congregational psalm-singing in the language and rhythms of the people were part of an effort in this direction. The Psalms, unlike grandiloquent doctrinal hymns, are loaded with pleas for mercy, justice, freedom from oppressive enemies, and with the surety of God’s sovereignty over human history. The restoration of preaching had an equally great impact for the whole of society. In a day when most people were as yet illiterate, when printing was just beginning to transform society and perceptions, and when there were no other mass communication media aside from the press, preaching served the purpose of shaping a Christian public opinion on public issues. All over Europe, kings and lesser nobility and even the magistrates of the free cities trembled under preaching inspired through the Genevan experiment. Indeed, the preaching of many of the Reformers set revolutionary forces in motion. Such preaching in the worship services led eventually to the colonization of New England. Yet, in all this, the creeds and confessions and catechisms remained tremendously inadequate. They continued scholastically to convey Christian faith as unhistorical. They just were not reformational enough. Over two or so centuries time, the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed Churches, the Westminster Standards (drawn up rather ecumenically under the auspices of the Parliament of England), the Augsburg Confession of the Lutherans, the Philadelphia Confession of the Baptists all bear the earmarks of the anti-resurrectionary world views of their day. They do not attempt to set Christians in motion, communally, for the renewing of daily life. At best, they limit the full-orbed resurrectionary significance of the faith to creedal articles on “Good Works”, conceived in a highly moralistic and individualistic fashion. None of them live up sufficiently to the possibilities the Holy Spirit had for them in their times. They contributed heavily to the continuing disjunct between worship and political-economic-societal action, despite some momentary tendencies to overcome it.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in regard to politics. Almost all the confessions of the Reformation period entrench Constantinian notions of the political order in the articles of faith. As individualism was then arising, under the impact of the Humanistic Renaissance, with its ideas of social contract as against community, this Constantinian outlook became more and more unbearable. Thus, we see Rev. John Witherspoon, signer of the American Declaration of Independence, leading the way for a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith to suit the interests of bourgeois liberalism. His was a Humanistic reaction to a Hellenistic view of politics.

No confessional developments followed later on as mercantilist, imperialist, colonialist, racist and other movements gained power in the centres of the Protestant Reformation: the Netherlands, Britain, America, Canada. No confessional developments occurred in an effort to focus the meaning of the Good News for societies fast succumbing to the evil and the good of the Industrial Revolution. All these failures in confession, worship, and the broader contours of Christian life took place because the leadership of the institutionalized, denominationalized churches had sold out to some very apostate spirits at work in the lives of their cultures and societies. The theological systems which were elaborated during the period are all tragically compromised by their anti-Pauline anti-resurrectionary refusal to come to grips with their historical setting with its new dangers and new opportunities for service to God’s coming Kingdom. Worship had become a tool of a repressive existing order, no matter how Christian a gloss it boasted. Social concern in prayer and sermon and liturgy were forbidden in huge sectors of the institutional church, except when it came time to rally support for “the defense of freedom”. There were reactions to this state of affairs. The Wesleyan movement—afterward the Methodist and Holiness churches—took the plight of the industrial workers and of the slaves quite seriously. The perfectionist movement in the Northern Presbyterian Church of America (Charles Finney of Oberlin College) and then the Southern Presbyterian Church (Columbia Bible College) did the same. The former aided the cause of the Abolitionists.
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For a while. And then the same old blight set in. Another reaction took the form of a foreign missionary movement. Other forces, in the Humanist sector of society, were also percolating. Among these were the Utopians, the Socialists, later the Communists and the Anarchists. Their historical sensitivity, their discipline, and their careful critique of the conditions that oppressed so many people had the effect of galvanizing significant numbers of evangelicals.

In the 1890's, Pope Leo X issued the first of the great social encyclicals, De Rerum Natura. Also in that period the Christian labour movements including those which organized people of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and Switzerland began to emerge.

In America, it was not until the Federal Council of Churches, under the leadership of Harry F. Ward (often accused, rightly or wrongly, of being a Communist), adopted in 1908 its Social Creed that a broad consensus on social responsibility was even attempted among Protestants. The Social Creed had a negligible effect on the life of the churches, since that witness was neutralized by their conservatives. The Social Gospel as a whole was a movement that had divorced itself from the Bible and the resurrection. This movement shared common problematic with the evangelical-confessional factions in the various denominations in that “the Social Gospel” accepted the terms of the disjunct between worship and societal action established by the evangelical-confessional factions. Where the evangelical-confessional factions opted for worship, prayer, evangelization, foreign missions, and the institutional churches as centers of withdrawal from society, the Social Gospel factions opted for political-economic-societal action directly through the churches. In the words of the leading thinker of the Social Gospel, Walter Rauschenbusch, “The Kingdom of God breeds prophets; the Church breeds priests and theologians.” Both the Social Gospel movement and the evangelical-confessional factions had this in common: they had lost the connection between the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the new life lived communally in the world over against the demonic powers; they had both lost the sense that the Good News offered something radically different from what the various streams of contemporary Humanism were offering (the Social Gospel choosing liberal reformism and the evangelical-confessional factions quietly refusing to resist conservatism; it should be pointed out that the Social Gospel was not Socialist but oriented toward the more progressive reformist wing of Capitalism at the time; this explains John D. Rockefeller’s patronage of Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick). The Social Gospel added a gloss to the one, the evangelical-confessional factions added a gloss to the other. There was no need for differentiated communal organization outside the institutional churches, because either the churches were Humanist action centers or the churches were wholly disinterested in more than individual moralisms, leaving the lives of their members outside the sanctuary to the ravages of prevailing spirits. Only too clearly, the evangelical-confessional factions put worship and orthodox theology on the side of the most repressive forces dominating the American political-economic-societal order, the New Empire. Evangelical-confessional worship became ever more respectfully silent about the great ills and sufferings which were more and more obviously typical of the way of life of so many of the people of North America. That worship was, thus, itself an instrument of repression. Repression evoked its reaction. Finally, by the time of the Great Depression in the Thirties, many clergy were finding ways to be Christians and Socialists, Christians and Marxists. The polarization between the evangelical-confessional factions and the Social Gospel faction was most vivid in the Northern Presbyterian Church, which fought to an impasse in the Thirties. During those same years, the Christian Labour Association (USA) arose among members of the Christian Reformed Church, failed to gain solid support, and began to move into isolation. During 1935, Walter Reuther built the UAW local in Detroit from 75 members to 35,000 members with the encouragement of leaders of the Social Gospel Movement. The evangelical-confessional people failed to unite behind any kind of positive alternative, settling down to an anti-labour-organization outlook.

The experience of World War II, however, changed the pattern noticeably. In Europe, the easy optimism of the Social Gospel advocates there, which was undergirded especially by “the Higher Criticism” of scripture, was challenged by Karl Barth. Many who adamantly refused to have any truce with orthodoxy because of its societally-irksome way of life began trying to nose their way back to Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection. When this new movement, known as Neo-orthodoxy, hit America, it found ready ears, like those of Reinhold Niebuhr, which had given the Social Gospel its chance and had found it wanting. The Social Gospel did not take man’s sin, etched indelibly on the consciousness by the events prior to and during the War, seriously. It, thus, was found not to take seriously enough repentance, conversion, and the grace of God. Neo-orthodoxy sought a return to preaching, to personal experience, and to acts of repentance. It also rejected Christian organization outside the churches. It opposed Christian education, Christian labour movements, and Christian political parties in Europe. It emphasized the solidarity of believers with all mankind, insisting that Christian
faith contributed little else than a special passion to work in society. The wartime Barmen Declaration, drawn up by people of the anti-Hitler Confessional Church in Germany, evidences this tendency in its anarchistic negativism in regard to all government. The creational order was pitted over against the experience of grace. In its entire venture, Neo-orthodoxy hoped that the new philosophical movement of Existentialism, with roots going back to Kierkegaard, would give it what sure ground there could be for humanity in the awesome confrontation with the Wholly Other. The same gap between worship and societal action remained, but now the gap was driven right into the heart of the individual believer.

In America, Neo-orthodoxy tended to take on a less severe form and to be mixed with unexpurgated traces of the Social Gospel. It came in such a form that it was able to produce a truly impressive new confession of faith for the now United Presbyterian Church. Even the evangelical-confessional faction in that denomination, the larger part of which remained within its bounds after the crisis of the late Thirties, found the Confession's final version to be rather acceptable. We refer to the adoption by the United Presbyterian Church USA of its Confession of 1967. The adoption of this Confession, for all its tragic inadequacies, was, we believe, an event of world-historical importance. That Confession insisted on relating the experience of reconciliation with God to the task of reconciliation among men. It augured a possible future break with the old false antithesis between worship and societal action, nevertheless it evidences none of the necessary commitment to the restructuration of society, through communal organization for action, in loving obedience to the norms of God's creation order. Yet, the certainty that Jesus Christ came into the world to change it, to bring it back to God, to open up life again for joyful service, rings throughout the Confession. We certainly have our criticisms of many of its formulations, but we feel we would be unfaithful to our Lord and to the most ancient creeds of the Christian people if we neglected to give the Confession of 1967 some straightforward praise, no matter how qualified.

We see only too clearly that those evangelical-confessional people who led the attack on the final version of the Confession of 1967 are actually seeking to protect a political-economic-societal faith which is contrary to the Good News of Jesus Christ. The older confessions suit the reactionary political purposes of these evangelical-confessional people only too well, for it is precisely in the name of the old confessions, in the name of doctrinal orthodoxy, in the name of tradition that they hold the Christian community back from taking its place in the struggle of the spirits today. The evangelical-confessional people are still led by those who are anxious not to wrestle with the demons that have shaped and structurated our apostate "American Way of Life". They do not want introduced into their worship strong and unmistakable concern for the poor, the exploited, the needy, the alienated who feel crushed in the machinery of technological megalimperial society. They do not want to have to repent in the concrete terms that would be necessary were they to face up to their complicity with the powers of repression. They do not want to face up to their complicity with racism, militarism, imperialism, and megal-capitalism. They want worship and societal action everlastingly disjuncted from one another.

As never before, however, the evangelical-confessional establishment is on the defensive. Several factors figure significantly in this: the unofficial ecumenical movement through which people who name Christ's Name have found each other from all sorts of backgrounds and among whom a deeper appreciation of conversion is shared than ever before in at least American history; the scandalous lethargy of the evangelical-confessional establishment in the face of God's revelation of the exploitation of black people, from which revelation no one can hide; the same scandalous lethargy in the face of the humanitarian religious motivation behind the Indo-China War; the rise of the small-group phenomenon within evangelical-confessional circles, to the point where the establishment has now to a great extent acknowledged it; and the move for liturgical renewal, especially among Roman Catholics and the Missouri Synod Lutherans. Together all these factors combine to exert a tremendous pressure for change in worship. People want to be nourished in worship for their tasks as Christians in all of life. Undoubtedly there are no assured results for the better in all of this, except that at least pockets here and there have already evidenced the kind of fruits which, from the standpoint of this discussion, betoken the deep leading of the Holy Spirit toward communal societal action, for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ toward firmer commitment to biblical doctrine, toward a shared life of joyous celebration of the grace of God in the midst of struggle.

Needless to say, the evangelical-confessional establishment, in banning this movement, makes impossible its receiving from or giving to it. This establishment remains content with sermons which of necessity are silent about elements of life that have developed since the writing of the New Testament, with prayers that are neutral in regard to "secular matters on which the congregation may not agree," with hymns written in the florid style of the age of western colonialism and sung in rhythms that do not allow modern people to feel their import (even Psalms can be distanced in this way), with liturgical formulas
that dehydrate the resurrectionary power out of Baptism and Eucharist, with readings from scripture that do not let its power pour directly into daily life today. Those who can no longer bear this—young, middle-aged, and old—thash about trying to find their way back to worship in Spirit and in Truth. The evangelica-confessional establishment can, it seems, only react. In some quarters witch-hunts have already been announced.

Where will this reaction drive many of those who might be led into deeper biblical faith if only they had the proper leadership, competent to meet their desperate needs with Pauline maturity? If only they could worship as whole men, who must be nourished to face their task in the struggle of the spirits in every dimension of life each day! These are the issues which disturb many who are patiently working at the reformation of worship as part of the reformation of all of life.

Reformational people, sensitive to the integrality of all created existence, evaluate worship also by the political orientation it supports. If worship serves as a buttress for an anti-Christian politics, then the worship itself needs to undergo an inner reformation. Worship and societal action are indissolubly linked. It is only a matter of what kind of societal action a given kind of worship nourishes. Worship, too, you can know by its fruits in all of life. Evangelical-confessional worship has borne bad fruit. If evangelical-confessional churches will not open themselves to renewal, then the people will have to forsake those churches. Perhaps there is more authentic freedom in the older denominations. Perhaps the day of denominations is over.

Whatever, God calls upon us to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth so that we may communally serve Him with our whole hearts in all of life as we fight the battle for the coming of His Kingdom.
The central theme of Albert Gedraitis’ *Worship and Politics* is that “it is impossible to separate political belief, faith, ultimate conviction from Bible reading, prayer, preaching, confession and worship. We must seek to be gripped radically and exclusively by the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ both for worship and politics, knowing that the two cannot be isolated even though structurally they constitute different facets of the One Great Task for the coming of the Kingdom of God.” A brilliant exegetical re-reading of the New Testament passages so often used to buttress a conservative view of worship and politics.

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