



# **Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection**

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library  
12330 Conway Road  
Saint Louis, MO 63141

[library.covenantseminary.edu](http://library.covenantseminary.edu)

This document is distributed by Covenant Seminary under agreement with the author, who retains the copyright. Permission to further reproduce or distribute this document is not provided, except as permitted under fair use or other statutory exception.

The views presented in this document are solely the author's.

LD  
1401  
.R64  
=44  
2010

**DERIVATIVE GOVERNMENT**  
**DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF POLITICS**

**BY**

**JEFF K. ZEHNDER**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

**ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI  
2010**



DERIVATIVE GOVERNMENT  
DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF POLITICS

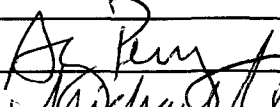
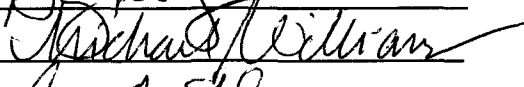
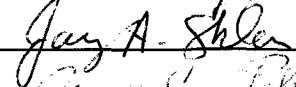

BY

JEFF K. ZEHNDER

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

---

GRADUATION DATE	JAN 14 2011
FACULTY ADVISOR	
SECOND FACULTY READER	
DIRECTOR OF THE PROGRAM	
DIRECTOR OF THE LIBRARY	

## ABSTRACT

Are there *biblical* political views? For this author, some thirty years of churchgoing in evangelical churches yielded only one explanation of political thinking from a biblical perspective, an explanation which relegated the Bible's sole comment on politics to a single issue. Yet at the same time political allegiances have retained some of the most strident personal devotion. Thus, the first means of understanding the question above speaks to ignorance: *whether* there are *biblical* political views at all. There is a second understanding, however, that concerns a different matter. For many (largely in academic circles but also those churches that command a virtually inseparable tie to politics), the above question is not *whether* there are biblical political views. The question is *which* political views are (most) biblical. This is a question of interpretation. Hence, while the venture into biblical political theology may be admirable, interpretive problems emerge, particularly two: the selectivity of the biblical passages used, and the reading of those passages in a way that respects their (literary, historical and theological) context. This project seeks to fill these gaps and others by building a biblical political theology one politically-oriented text after another. The method is inductive, translating each text, contextually interpreting the text, and considering main point(s) before appropriating any political import from it. Texts were chosen that: (a) were politically inclined and (b) concerned a nation that was external to Israel. Because these parameters leave yet a number of texts to choose from, the first text was a fairly arbitrary choice – Isaiah 44.24-45.13 – however the remainder – Proverbs 31.1-9, Romans 13.1-7, and Revelation 13 – had very direct things to say about civil government and could thus not be avoided. The project asks how the Bible speaks of those (Gentile) governments and what can then be gleaned for developing a biblical theology of politics. The project ends with a conclusion that synthesizes those contributions that were either most emphasized or most repeated among the texts chosen.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	The Bible and Politics?: Political Silence and Interpretation	1
2	A Pagan Rescues (Isaiah 44.24-45.13)	13
3	A Mother Instructs Her King (Proverbs 31.1-9)	56
4	A Society Submits (Romans 13.1-7)	71
5	John of Patmos Resists (Revelation 13)	103
6	The Bible and Politics: Relationship and Synthesis	148
	Abbreviations and Bibliography	168

**THE BIBLE AND POLITICS?****POLITICAL SILENCE AND INTERPRETATION**

Are there *biblical* political views?

It takes little time to discover the storehouses of books written on politics from a Christian perspective, especially coming out of the 1980s and 1990s. Navigating them comprises a toilsome project in itself. But it also takes little time to discover the groaning need, at least popularly, for intelligent and biblical political theory for those who prize the Bible as authoritative. For this author, some thirty years of churchgoing in United States evangelical churches yielded only one explanation of political thinking from a biblical perspective, an explanation that assigned the Bible's sole comment on politics to one issue alone (abortion). During that explanation, the presenter's time constraints could surely explain his brevity. But this brevity effectively told churchgoers what many in my experience so regularly hear about a biblical take on politics: very little. Puzzlingly to me, though, for all those same years, it was political party allegiances that appeared to garner some of the fiercest allegiances. In many (not all) churches, the dominant political party of the fellowship leads many to an erroneous notion that one

political party is the Christian political party.<sup>1</sup> In this, consciences have become soldered to a general theory. Some may be left wondering, where is the Bible? And is there more the Bible has to say? Dissatisfied with the unsubstantiated or incomprehensive nature of political theory in the church, I have undertaken this project to look for something fuller, something more rooted, from the Bible, hopefully willing to let the Scriptures shape the questions, even as I bring my own specific curiosities with me. I do not claim to solve the question upon which party line a United States Christian must fall. But I will chance something better, even if partial for now: a biblical theology of politics.

For others, though, political silence is not the problem. Weekly sermons feature political action among its applications and are intended to inform, directly or indirectly, some political agenda (the defense of Israel, for example) or failure (civil rights). These churches expose the Bible for its manifestly political consequence. But from people I have met, often the problem still persists: the majority party alliance in the church is the “Christian” party to join. And the question from the start remains: are there *biblical* political views? Is there more the Bible has to say?

For a final group, generally academic, the same question at the start sounds even slightly more different. These thinkers have found that churchmen have been advancing Christian political theory for over a thousand years, from Augustine (*City of God*) of the fourth century to Gustavo Gutiérrez (*A Theology of Liberation*) of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus, when a devoted Christian I know moved to Seattle from the conservative South, she found it “refreshing” to be able to express her more liberal political perspective with more receptivity in the church. And a fellow seminarian during my Master of Divinity told me he was the only politically conservative person in his black Maryland church. Both party-lines in the United States will have biblical texts footnoting their political theology. (Sometimes, both may be found vilifying the other view as not Christian). But are they correct?



twentieth, or they themselves have been advancing and rebutting political theories in the last thirty years. For these thinkers, having surveyed the theories on offer, the question, “Are there *biblical* political views?” is not a question of ignorance – *whether* one uses the Bible – but one of interpretation – *how* one uses the Bible. In this way, liberation theology, Christian reconstructionism (theonomy), and redemptive-historical political theory, quite different programmatic political theologies (the first two deriving from the same corner of Scripture, the Pentateuch), all marshal Scripture in their favor.

#### INTERPRETIVE ISSUES

Among biblical political thinkers, simply the *variety* of different approaches’ political conclusions reveals underlying differences in interpretive approach. Among these approaches emerge a handful of recurrent interpretive problems, chief of which are perhaps two. The first is the selectivity of Bible passages used. In the introduction to a 2002 book on ethical and political hermeneutics, J.S. Siker is cited as having analyzed “eight major twentieth-century theological ethicists” among whom he found a “widespread woolly, selective use of Scripture.” “Thus,” Craig Bartholomew summarizes, citing one of those famous ethicists, “Reinhold Niebuhr rarely engages in exegetical discussion and tends not to let the biblical writers speak on their own behalf.”<sup>2</sup> A number of recent writers have advanced some corrective theologies in response, advocating for ethics (the family head over political theology) that pay attention to the

---

<sup>2</sup> Craig Bartholomew, “Introduction,” in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O’Donovan*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 8.

larger narrative of scripture.<sup>3</sup> Some of them come to different conclusions to be sure, but their general approach largely coheres. Ultimately, though, such writers “remain the exception rather than the rule.”<sup>4</sup>

Related, the second interpretive problem is the contextual interpretation of the selected passages. Exegetes will often accentuate how critical context is, both literary (linguistic, local literary context, wider context, corpus context, and – arguably to some – canonical context) and historical (archaeological, historical backgrounds, semantic backgrounds, etc.). Systematic thinkers might retort noting that while the details may be slightly inaccurate, the larger idea remains unaffected. Naturally, accuracy in both areas is desired. But with respect to context, Richard Bauckham provides an excellent and readable summary of the above two issues, worth consulting (*The Bible in Politics*, 13-19). Although, I would add a further and important distinction to Bauckham’s summary. Sometimes treating texts contextually means taking the derived concepts and themes all the way through the Scriptures, and perhaps attempting a priority of importance on them (e.g. God’s kingship and Christ’s kingdom will command higher priority over say, distinctions on foreign policy), so that some sort of basic pan-biblical summary on the topic at hand – here, a political theology – could be provided for the reader to see the present political points in context with the Bible’s fuller themes on the subject. While the caution of his approach is worth emulating and his method is enthusiastically adopted in large measure here, Bauckham in short neglects to synthesize. Such a larger

---

<sup>3</sup> For ethics, see John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard B. Hays, among others. For political theology in particular, see Oliver O’Donovan, Richard Bauckham, and J.G. McConville.

<sup>4</sup> Bartholomew et al., 8.

thematic context (toward which synthesizing propels) is the third essential context to consider for a political theology that is biblically informed or defined.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a biblical theology of politics needs to account for the Bible's broadest story, ensuring the passages consulted are situated within redemptive history. For this, one can find some models in the narrative ethicists mentioned above.

In response to these four problems – silence or reductionism, unexplained selectivity, non-contextual interpretation, and reticence toward something comprehensive – and thanks to the prodding of some inspiring works on the topic, this paper is a step toward filling these various vacuums, in order to assemble a biblical theology of politics, which treats biblical texts respectfully within their literary, historical, and redemptive-historical contexts.

## PARTICULAR METHOD

There are two general methods to Christian political thinking. One way for a Christian to approach political theory could be seen as outside-in, what Jonathan Chaplin labels “Christian political philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> This approach starts with extant theories and ideologies and interacts with them via the scriptures or theology. For example, a person might begin with Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions*, a book that fairly portrays two differing views of humanity that undergird modern political visions, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Closely related to this may be a fourth contextual consideration: systematic theology in general and how it informs political theory, an approach this project tables for a later time.

<sup>6</sup> “Political theology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 599.

then critically assess the two visions in light of scripture.<sup>7</sup> David Koyzis takes the outside-in approach insightfully, assessing some common political ideologies (not exhaustive) in the light of scripture and theology, deciding that each has an equivalent truthful contribution, yet they also derive from a religious *idolatry* of one form or another.<sup>8</sup> The advantage of this outside-in method is the immediate contemporary facility – directly assessing philosophies familiar to readers. The difficulty in this method lies in allowing the Biblical texts to speak from their own place and context and also to frame the questions. This is the same problem of non-contextual interpretation mentioned above.

The other route for political theology moves inside-out. Chaplin labels this approach properly as “political theology.”<sup>9</sup> The figurative coal miner enters the scriptures, searching for applicable texts and pulling out a base level political theory exegetically one polished diamond after another. Although not guaranteed, an advantage of this method lies in the greater potential for responsibility with biblical texts, and it also allows the Bible to frame or adjust the questions inquirers ask of it. The difficulties, though, are the self-awareness of the author’s inquiry – *especially* in their selectivity of texts – and the irrelevance or distance Bible-buried exegetes can

---

<sup>7</sup> *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> “I believe,” Koyzis writes, “a case can be made that those phenomena normally classified as ideologies do indeed originate in idolatrous religions. These include liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, ideological democracy and socialism, among others.” *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Chaplin, “Political Theology,” 599. In another reference book, although its authors desire a larger, more pluralistic endeavor, they agree that “political theology” in those terms is “primarily... Christian.” Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 1.

carve away from gritty contemporary life. One branch of the “coal-mining” approach, mentioned above, specifically ensures the narrative (for some, “redemptive-historical”) shape of the whole Bible is not missed. Oliver O’Donovan and J.G. McConville<sup>10</sup> represent this approach well for political theology in their own ways. But the present limits of space and a desire to expend more direct focus on particular texts require for this project some textual selectivity, albeit with an eye to the larger story.

The route of this project has taken the latter approach. Unlike the majority of political defenses by theologians, this paper’s primary tool is textual translation and exegesis. Such an approach lends itself to greater responsibility with the texts, but also I believe close detail work also unearths important subtleties missed by broader sweeps. Indeed this project, submitted for a postgraduate degree in exegetical theology, can also be seen simply as four exegetical studies on politically-oriented texts, with ultimate synthesis. As to selectivity of texts, the two authors mentioned just above examined political theory within the matrix of the politico-religious Israel (O’Donovan also branched into the New Testament). But in this project, the aim is on external governments. Texts are exclusively chosen wherein God’s people were ruled, or were *to be ruled*, by an external and religiously *other* people, asking *just how the Bible speaks of those external governments*. By doing so, hermeneutical challenges (and benefits) with respect to the nation of Israel are sidestepped, left to writers with a larger available page limit (or denser prose). Furthermore, these text selections are partly arbitrary (a

---

<sup>10</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); J.G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis-Kings* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

personal intrigue with Cyrus and minimal treatment of him for political theory elevated the first choice – see chapter two) and partly necessary (the most direct passages on civil government in the New Testament cannot be avoided), but they also represent different genres of literature as well. Thus, a fair representation of the Scriptures is maintained. The first, the prophetic-poetic Isaiah 44.24-45.8, refers to government parenthetically, whereas the other three – Proverbs 31.1-8 at the close of a book of wisdom, the epistolary Romans 13.1-11, and the epistolary-prophetic-apocalyptic Revelation 13 – all make very direct comments on government and governing. In this way the Bible's generic diversity is employed. Although only four texts are examined, a number of other texts and studies will be imported, extensive studies performed by this author but unable to be included for limits of space, especially work from Genesis 44 (Joseph), Leviticus 19 and 25, Psalm 72 and 110, and Jesus' command to "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's."

Finally on method, it is important when developing biblical theology, even when significant secondary information can be derived, to explicitly say at least a word about a passage's central burdens for two reasons: (1) of truth, to avoid twisting meanings and conclusions entirely unintended by the original author to suit a private (sometimes anachronistic) subject; and (2) of ethics, to prevent conscientious Biblicists and their readers from making a deductive rabbit trail (e.g. the role of politicians) into one of the Bible's superhighways.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> For example, in this way, a biblically-centered politician will enthusiastically shape his ethics by the Bible's political theology, but she will not shape shift the Bible into an exclusively (or even predominantly!) political book. Specifically, for instance, God's redemptive work never takes a backseat to

With all of the above in mind, each chapter is designed as its own separate study, wherein a passage will be examined closely through generally four stages. It will first argue for a translation, not primarily to challenge prevailing arguments on word choices or syntactical turns (although they will be advanced, too), but primarily to ensure the reader (and the writer) that a synthesized theology is grounded firmly upon the details of the passage, and to mine whatever gems may be missed by a cursory read-through. It will second consider context: literary, historical, and theological. Third, it will derive the central meaning(s) of the passage, all *before* fourth, implications are put forth for understanding civil government. In this last stage, sometimes a text will dictate its own fundamental political point (like that political authority is derived). To foreshadow what comes, the fourth stage will answer questions on: form of government, the nature of political authority, priorities of government and its leaders, and both the capacity and limits of governmental authority, with the United States political context as a backdrop. In the final chapter, some central contributions will be synthesized. Thus, in sum, this work could be seen largely as two projects: simple translation and exegesis on texts with a similar theme, and synthesized political theology.

There is one last problem that this project hopes to ultimately solve in time. Because Christian political theorists often write to fellow Christian political theorists, one problem is the *public availability* of their discoveries. Private vocabulary is rightly

---

a private (yet true) curiosity. God's redemptive work informs or undergirds less pronounced biblical truths.

left unexplained, and the books themselves necessarily command a certain level of intellect and knowledge in order to make their arguments within their page limits. But the result is that any Christian political thinkers who may lament the political or voting decisions of the public (if they do) in part would have themselves to blame for not publishing their good work at a popular level. For example, I firmly believe O'Donovan's *The Desire of the Nations* merits Wolterstorff's praise as the "most important contribution to political theology of our century,"<sup>12</sup> but what commoner will be able to access paragraphs quoted entirely in Latin (*Desire*, e.g. 237-38)? Hopefully, with this study as foundation or through someone else's, in the future the rich biblical theologies of politics available may reach the masses in something distilled and diluted, not of its truth, but of its distancing language.

## NOTABLE INFLUENCES

A handful of books deserve brief note before the reader finds them littered throughout this work. The first, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* by Christopher Bryan (Oxford, 2005), a book I found on the shelves of a secular college, five years ago introduced me to the topic of biblical political theology. *Render* analyzes the Bible's view of empire from the Old Testament through the Second Temple literature and into the New Testament. One will discover my debt to Bryan in my approach for choosing texts (above). The second, *The Bible in Politics* (WJKP, 1984), is vintage Richard Bauckham: a series of separate exegetical studies

---

<sup>12</sup> Bartholomew et al., xix.



surrounding a common theme. Here, political ethics is their final aim, and the careful reader will see that it clearly serves as a template for this study. Bauckham's drawback is that he attempts no ultimate synthesis. Third, *The Desire of the Nations* by Oliver O'Donovan (Cambridge, 1996) stands as a stunning integration of OT political concepts, biblical exegesis, history of Christian political interpretation, and political philosophy. *Desire* commands redemptive history and controls the excesses of liberation theology by arguing that interpretation must treat biblical narratives (liberation theologians focus on the Exodus, e.g.) in light of the Bible's focus on God's kingship handed over to Christ the king. *Desire* also quite fluidly spills into church ethics, and provides some brief conclusions for the organization of political states. Ten years after *Desire*, J.G. McConville responded to it with *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology: Genesis-Kings* (T&T Clark, 2006), and as its title promises, it analyzes political theology in the biblical history from Genesis to Kings. A prominent argument by McConville is that political theology finds its root in creation, in the foundations of *justice and righteousness*, so that law (the sustaining permanence of civil governments) is therefore something chiefly positive, unlike O'Donovan's view which sees law as chiefly negative/corrective in nature.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> I found McConville's work especially persuasive in the chapters covering his specialty, Deuteronomic history, but weaker in the early Pentateuch, not for the *presence* of his claims – perhaps most fascinating is an argument for a creational order of righteousness and justice based upon the pagan Ahimelech's "righteousness" against believing Abraham's vacancy of it (Gen 20) – so much as *the strength* of his assertion. For example, although I strongly agree with McConville's conclusion that *justice* and *righteousness* are programmatic concepts for Old Testament political theology and law, I fail to see them as burdens whatsoever in the creation story of Genesis, a book which (as McConville concedes) employs no forms of *mšpt*, *špt* or *šdq* until chapter 16. I have virtually the same critique of David Van Drunen's defense of natural law deriving in creation. While I may agree ultimately that it does, his case for it is

## APPRECIATION

I have deep esteem for the above authors' works, which together with the Scriptures have been excellent tutors for me in the subject of political theology. I also am thankful for my Master of Theology advisor, Dr. Jay Sklar, and my willing research advisor, Dr. Greg Perry, and reader, Dr. Michael Williams. I carry a personal debt to Professor Jerram Barrs and Dr. Anthony Bradley for engaging my interest in the direction of political theology. The library staff of Covenant Theological Seminary, namely Kenny Gerlach and Brady Shumate, were especially helpful. And I carry an even greater debt of thanks to the entire faculty of Covenant Seminary, who gave me tools of biblical interpretation that I believe handle the Scriptures most responsibly, intelligently, and personally. I hope they see much of their training manifested in my work. Finally, deep honor extends to JoAnna my wife, upon whose back (literally, being a nurse) the burden of paying for this work fell, a burden she cheerfully and regularly accepted.

We begin in Isaiah.

## A PAGAN RESCUES ISRAEL

### ISAIAH 44.24-45.13

In Isaiah 44:24-45:13, a pagan king is to come to the rescue of Israel, Cyrus (Koresh) the Persian, called God's "shepherd" and labeled "anointed." What does Isaiah 44.24-45.13 say about a government external to and yet coming to rule Israel, and secondarily, what does the passage offer by way of biblical political theology? This chapter works out a robust translation, with translation rationale found in the footnotes. It will treat the long passage in two stages: 44.24-28 and 45.1-13, moving from stage one (translation) to two (exegesis) to three (political theological implications) for each section. In this way, the paper will interpret the message for Israel, and will stop twice to compile observations for political theory – considering how Israel was to understand and interact with this pagan leader over them, and how perhaps Cyrus was to understand his own role.<sup>1</sup> It will briefly entertain a hermeneutic question, whether Israel's relationship to Cyrus was a special one or a paradigmatic one. Then it will

---

<sup>1</sup> Important note: Josephus records that Cyrus actually read and responded to the Isaianic prophecy himself. *Ant.* 11.4-6. We hold this critically, as possibly (not probably) untrue, since Josephus, a Roman Jew, might wish for such a thing to happen in order to accentuate his people's influence in history.

consult other scriptures where support may be found for its conclusions. Finally, the paper will reach its objective, compiling all the findings in order to drive some practical stakes in the ground for understanding the nature of political leaders and ideologies for today.

### **Why Isaiah 44:24-45:13?**

As to selectivity, the texts that interest me are those wherein *God's people are ruled by non-Yahwist authorities* (see Introduction). Perhaps surprisingly, having tabled Israel's extensive law and political history, the pool of remaining applicable texts remains quite enormous. Joseph participates in Egyptian government, Moses leads against it, and the stories of Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah show individuals acting as magistrates of the state, not to mention prophecies that address Babylon, Assyria, and the Persian king Cyrus, important sections of Jeremiah pertaining to the civil state, and the Massan King Lemuel in Proverbs 31, Jesus addressing Rome, Paul interacting with Rome heavily in Acts<sup>2</sup>, Paul and Peter instructing on political interaction with the empire, and John dreaming and writing of the abuses of the same, later, Roman empire. Again, the instructive texts are numerous. Choosing the Cyrus oracle among these options was a bit of an arbitrary choice, but was selected because of its greater amount

---

<sup>2</sup> For a brief examination, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (New York: Cambridge, 1996), 253-4.

of material (below), perceived difficulty of translation, because it goes unmentioned in Bauckham's helpful book,<sup>3</sup> and in part because of a personal intrigue with Cyrus.

## 1/ Translation and Exegesis Isaiah 44:24-28

A translation method should be explicit. Throughout this work, for translation, I seek the most transparent transfer from ancient language to English, so that an English reader knowledgeable in the original languages can (largely) discern many of ancient words behind the English equivalents. Particularly, this means, *ceteris paribus*: (1) like words and phrases are rendered alike, (2) ancient word order is sought, especially in poetic literature, (3) more common uses of words and grammar are favored over obscure possibilities, and (4) dynamic equivalents are acknowledged but avoided for translation.<sup>4</sup> Citations during the translations will take a shortened form, usually a last name, that the reader can easily match to respective sections of the bibliography.

44: 24 Thus says YHWH, your redeemer and the one who forms<sup>5</sup> you from the womb:

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. the word families of *ṣdq* and *dikaioō* will ideally retain 'righteous' somewhere in them, and the conjunction *ו* will predominantly take "and," even if "yet," "but" or "although" might suit. Also, with respect to syntax, in this Isaiah text, the participles of 44.24-28 will be translated in similar form (English present), even where another tense might suffice.

<sup>5</sup> Although the verb regards clearly past events, it should be rendered with something of a progressive or present force. Rendering it in non-progressive past tense (e.g. ESV NRS NIV) confuses the participial usage, and is unfound among Williams' categories (§213-222). A progressive (NKJ) or substantive (NAS) translation is preferred. Cf. John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 40-66* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 149-150.

“I am YHWH,<sup>6</sup>  
 who makes<sup>7</sup> all things  
 who stretches out the heavens alone  
 who beats out<sup>8</sup> the earth – who was with me?<sup>9</sup> –  
 25 who frustrates the signs of empty talkers<sup>10</sup>  
 and diviners he will<sup>11</sup> make fools  
 who turns wise men back<sup>12</sup>  
 and their knowledge he will make folly  
 26 who makes the word of his servant stand,<sup>13</sup>  
 and the counsel<sup>14</sup> of his messengers he will fulfill  
  
 who says to Jerusalem, “She will be inhabited,”

<sup>6</sup> An equivalent translation would take “I, YHWH” as the subject, with the following participles as the active verbs.

<sup>7</sup> עָשָׂה, “to do or to make,” probably leans more to the latter thanks to the creational statements which follow (cf. Gen 1:31 – “God saw everything that he made” עָשָׂה).

<sup>8</sup> Most renderings, like “spreading out” (NAS), “who spread out” (ESV NRS NIV RSV Delitzsch), and “spreads abroad” (NKJ), miss the descriptive activity that רָקַע “beat, stamp, beat out, spread out” (BDB 955, Watts “beating out”) takes with earthy materials, like silver and gold. “Founded” (Oswalt) fails on the same count. “Hammered the earth into shape” (NJB) comes closer.

<sup>9</sup> This phrase is found in the Kethib, LXX, and Vulgate, whereas the Qere “other than me” or “by myself” (ESV NAS NIV NRS) appears to have fused the two Hebrew words. Oswalt’s conclusion works: “The number of mss. and versions that support the Kethib, plus the parallel sense with 40:13, seem to tilt the balance in its favor.” 189.

<sup>10</sup> Parallelism and the rarity of this word govern its translation. Parallelism (to “diviners,” 25b; cf. the following four lines as well, where parallelism is clear) allows *baddim* to be “false prophets” (NIV, Motyer 1993) or “soothsayers” (NJB), since both lines in the couplet concern something supernatural. Because of the word’s rarity, however, it seems best to retain something broad and related to speech, like “empty talkers” (Oswalt) or “babblers” (NKJ). “Boasters” (NAS) and “liars” (ESV NRS KJV RSV) may add more than we know.

<sup>11</sup> Although justifiable to translate these imperfects in a present sense, because of the consecution of the participles, the future sense is preserved to highlight the difference of the verb aspect used.

<sup>12</sup> אָחֹר “back” here specifically refers to “the hind side” or “back side.”

<sup>13</sup> “Confirms” or its variants (ESV KJV NJB NKJ RSV NAS) work, yet “carries out” (NIV) exceeds the lexical range. “Makes [to] stand” (Oswalt) reflects the Hiphil קָרַם “to raise, build, set” best. BDB 877.

<sup>14</sup> “Prediction” (NIV, NRS, Delitzsch) overstates the effect of the prophetic speech here, even though the messengers are unmistakably the prophets. “Counsel” or “advice” (ESV, NKJ, Oswalt) is the normal rendering of לַצָּדָה and should be retained. BDB, 420.

and to the cities of Judah, "They will be built,  
and their ruins I will raise."  
27 who says to the ocean deep, "Be dried up."<sup>15</sup>  
And your rivers I will dry up."  
28 who says to Koresh, "My shepherd,  
and all my will<sup>16</sup> he will perform,"  
saying to Jerusalem, "Let her be built,  
and let the temple's foundation be laid."

**24.** Immediately YHWH and creation come into view. The reader may begin to notice the abundance of participles preserved in this translation by "who..." at the start of every phrase, which continues until the end of chapter 44. One by one, these verbs emanate out of the energizing source in verse 24: **אֲנִי יְהוָה** "I am Yahweh," so that YHWH immediately rises as the sole being from which everything that follows both derives and, implicitly, is sustained. Clearly, at creation only YHWH stood, a time into which Israel could insert no conceivable power greater than Yahweh, yet nevertheless, in case God's people were slow to figure it out, the author strengthens YHWH's solitary role with *alone* (24d) and the rhetorical question, "*Who was with me?*" (24e) Israel hears that YHWH reigns. Mankind receives. In the announcement's preface stands a personal word – "who creates you from the womb," which both directs Israel to YHWH's personal attention to each Israelite and furthermore locates their own life and breath, just as with the universe about them, under YHWH's creative power.

---

<sup>15</sup> Poetically positioned, this is the same word as "ruins" (26e), and a clever translation would attempt to keep them the same. However, when referring to water, it means to "dry up." Both have the meaning of "desolation."

<sup>16</sup> **הִפִּיץ** in several passages in Isaiah reflects "the good pleasure, will, purpose, of YHWH" BDB, 343.

- 25        who frustrates the signs of empty talkers  
              and diviners he will make fools  
              who turns wise men back  
              and their knowledge he will make folly  
 26        who makes the word of his servant stand,  
              and the counsel of his messengers he will fulfill...

**25-26b.** Proceeding from YHWH's creational position, verse 25 declares the embarrassing folly of people who claim to understand the world and its ways. The signs of false prophets, or "empty talkers" (25a), proven by YHWH to be empty, betray their spiritual ignorance. The poor credibility of the "knowledge" of the wise men will betray their prudential ignorance (25c-d).<sup>17</sup> YHWH exposes them both, so that *any source of understanding* of the world by one other than YHWH's spokesmen will reveal itself as counterfeit. Those of understanding in the world's eyes, by their own folly roll out a red carpet for YHWH's spokesmen, who reveal nothing untrue, whose words YHWH "establishes" (26a). The parallelism in these three couplets fuse them together and assure Israel that the only reliable word of truth about the world in which they live come exclusively from YHWH, their creator.

- ...who says to Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited,"  
              and to the cities of Judah, "They will be built,  
              and their ruins I will raise."  
 27        who says to the ocean deep, "Be dried up.  
              And your rivers I will dry up."

---

<sup>17</sup> The parallelism in these couplets is interesting. 25a-b appears to be dynamic semantic parallelism in reverse, because the intensified statement precedes the general one. And 25c-d is the same, but both phrases show intensification through specificity, but I am unable to tell which is more specific than the other. 26a-b follows with rather static semantic parallelism: two phrases in general parallel.



28           who says to Koresh, “My shepherd,  
                   and all my will he will perform,”  
                   saying to Jerusalem, “Let her be built,  
                   and let the temple’s foundation be laid.”

**26c-28.** These verses cohere in the repetition of YHWH speaking (“who says...”).

Why so much already about YHWH’s authority and the reliability of his word? Because: one of his messengers (26b) is about to declare a long-expected promise, but in a shocking way, and in YHWH’s undeserved grace, the author frames the message by starting with the long-expected promise. YHWH’s word which once effectually said, “Let there be light,” now says that Jerusalem *will be inhabited*, and the desolate cities of Judah *will be built, and their ruins I will raise* (26). In a summary foreshadowing, YHWH stood as *redeemer* in the preface (24). And to clarify a second time that redemption will be taking place, the author makes a powerful (but disputed) allusion. Generations ago, YHWH preserved his people who were under the control of another foreign power. His redemption from Egypt was powerful, sure, and full of unexpected occurrences, like when he led them through the Red Sea on dry land. Here in Isaiah 44 to God’s captive people, the prophet speaks of the oceans being *dried up*, particularly the *rivers* (27).

Some commentators tie this powerful word exclusively to the *Enuma Elish* and other ancient near east stories which speak of a powerful primordial ocean deep, where supernatural powers reside, and thus YHWH’s word stands as an aside word of his power over the uncertain forces of the world. Justifiably, such an interpretation would perform a similar reassurance rhetorically – recall YHWH’s indomitable power? – before laying a startling claim about deliverance. Some also tie the statement “*Be dried up*” to a

historical event with Cyrus that came later.<sup>18</sup> However, the ready illustration of the exodus found itself reappearing so often in Hebrew literature that even a passing statement as this stands safely as a reference to the exodus.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Israel's confidence lies in Israel's past: YHWH will rescue Israel from captivity from a foreign power again. With all this build-up, beginning with YHWH's solitary role in creation, to the surety of his word in the mouths of the prophets, and his promise – how it tickles the ears of Israel – that their beloved cities and people would be restored, the author then reveals the potentially disquieting news: deliverance would come by a pagan.

YHWH calls the pagan *Koresh*, or Cyrus, by the title “*My Shepherd*” (28a), a title given to some ancient Near Eastern kings, as many commentators are quick to inform. He promises about Cyrus that “all my will he will perform” (28b). And to make it very clear, he takes his initial redemptive promises – that Jerusalem will be inhabited (26c) and cities be rebuilt (26d) – and combines them, applying them directly to the pagan Cyrus – “Let [Jerusalem] be built” (27c). Not only will Israel have their city to inhabit, but worship and sacrifices can resume as well, since the temple’s *foundations will be laid* by Cyrus, too. Recalling the reliability of YHWH’s word, Motyer points out this promise’s

---

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Franz Delitzsch: “The expression calls to mind the drying up of the Red Sea (ch 51:10; 43:16), but here it relates to something future, according to chapter 42:15, 50:2 – namely, to the drying up of the Euphrates, which Cyrus turned into an enlarged basin of Sepharvaim, so that the water sank to the depth of a single foot, and men could ‘go through on foot’ (Herodotus i.191).” *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 7: Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 442.

<sup>19</sup> Oswalt finishes with the same conclusion. Discrediting Delitzsch’s (and others’) basis in Herodotus: “But Young, who favors the equation with Babylon [the Targum translates ‘the deep’ as Babylon], points out that cuneiform sources do not support Herodotus’s report.... D.M. Gunn believes it to be, along with 50:2; 51:10; and 55:10-13, an allusion to the flood. But these references, which undoubtedly do share some of the same language as this one, are more clearly aligned with the exodus, which suggests that this is the meaning here.” John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 195-196.

intriguing fulfillment: “Interestingly, as Ezra records (3:10-13, 5:16), in the days of Cyrus the rebuilding of the temple did not progress beyond the laying of the foundations.”<sup>20</sup>

*Summary Points.* The principle aim of Isaiah 44:24-28 is to comfort exiled Israel, assuring them of deliverance and rescue, and doing so by first establishing the trustworthiness and solitary power of YHWH in his ability to write out his script as he pleases, and in this case through a pagan leader, Cyrus. This first aim must be kept in mind. That said, along the way, Isaiah 44:24-28 offers a handful of points pertaining to political theology. Some of them will become even more explicit in the next section.

**(I) YHWH’s preeminence over political states.** These four verses reveal three things about YHWH. First, here with Cyrus, (a) *YHWH is history’s overseer.* Unquestionably apparent, YHWH is the first cause and orchestrator: of creation, frustration, and a particular movement of redemption. YHWH “forms,” YHWH “makes,” YHWH “spreads out the heavens,” “beats out the earth,” “frustrates the signs,” “returns the wise men,” “says to Jerusalem” “says to the ocean deep” and “says to Cyrus.”<sup>21</sup> Every active verb in this section belongs to YHWH. Even those that *may* arguably proceed from Cyrus stand as passive verbs, wherein YHWH may be assumed to be the mover – “Let it be built! Let the temple’s foundations be laid!”(44.28). The use of the

---

<sup>20</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 284.

<sup>21</sup> An intriguing concise summary of the comprehensiveness of YHWH’s control lies in his three audiences. In a row, he speaks to cities (perhaps the highest of man-made structures, v. 26), the natural world (27), and human beings (28).

personal pronoun (44.24) summarizes YHWH's role as architect; to YHWH, Cyrus is "my" shepherd. Paul Hanson writes, "the [literary] technique used involves an unbroken chain of participial clauses that elaborate the initial 'I am the Lord' by proclaiming how everything... radiates from one purposeful center."<sup>22</sup> Now, one must clarify the nature of this divine providence. Indeed, although every active verb is the property of YHWH here, close inspection of YHWH's activities (above) reveals he does not manipulate Cyrus as a marionette manipulates a puppet. His actions rather resemble orchestration, arranging fortuitous events around his actor to produce his desired outcome. One *might* speculate that YHWH manipulates Cyrus' internal thoughts and decisions, although the text simply does not make that explicit.<sup>23</sup> YHWH here performs orchestration, not manipulation. YHWH's "first cause" position will carry some important corollaries for how one views the political state. Two points follow.

In particular, (b) *YHWH sometimes permits the (non-Yahwist) powers of the world to govern his own people*. Writing this passage while Israel suffered under an oppressive foreign power, the author yet calls YHWH "your redeemer" (44:24).<sup>24</sup> In this

---

<sup>22</sup> Paul Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 96. Much of the rest of Hanson's work is, in my view, distracted by the hypothesis that these chapters were written in the sixth century BCE. Thus, he arrives at tenable – and contemporarily relevant – conclusions for that period, yet with a universalist (and ultimately biblically untenable) view of pagan religion. An almost humorous example emerges when he exemplifies the faith of the great political reformers Nelson Mandela and Vaclav Havel, and in so doing makes their faith analogous in Isaiah 44-45 to Cyrus, yes, Cyrus the pagan.

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the only suggestion in these four verses that YHWH might manipulate individual figures is his determined promise of Judah's cities that "their ruins I will raise" (26). But again, manipulation here is only speculative, since it names no actual people he would use.

<sup>24</sup> Understandably, a theology could not be built upon this passage alone on this topic. But God's permissive will is sustainable by other portions of scripture, e.g. God's permission of Jacob's boys delivering Joseph into Egyptian slavery (Gen 45:4-8). In short time, too, YHWH will declare that he makes well-being and creates calamity (45:7)

way, YHWH still claimed to be Israel's redeemer even while Israel suffered under Babylonian control. Finally, (c) *God performs his will regardless of the faith of the political figure*. While Moses, a member of God's people, played the terrestrial redeemer during the exodus from Egypt, here Cyrus the pagan will be God's instrument.

**(II) The nature of the political leader.** Flipping the above observation over, Implicit in these four verses is that (a) *the civil authority performs God's will*. In this section, the political leader does the will of YHWH. As 44:28 assures: "all my will he will perform." Because of this, it is safely inferred that (b) *the power of civil authorities is derived*.

**(III) The meaning of redemption and the nature of political states.** First, (a) *God labors to redeem specific political and civil structures*. Many view redemption and salvation exclusively 'spiritually.'<sup>25</sup> Yet we find when YHWH calls himself "your Redeemer" to his people (44:24), he means not only a spiritual redeemer, but he labors to rebuild particular physical cities and to liberate Israel from oppression. George Knight especially highlights the "particularity" of God's redemptive work, when he points to the reconstruction here of a particular city. "Right at the centre of God's cosmic plan there stands a city."<sup>26</sup> Second, (b) *God acknowledges the redemptive capacity of political government – even without a believer among its magistrates*. In this instance, God plans

---

<sup>25</sup> This misunderstanding of redemption often betrays a dualistic view of the human body, one where soul and body exist detached. See, e.g. "Substance Dualism" by Stewart Grentz, in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel B. Green and Stuart L Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 33-60.

<sup>26</sup> George Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 84. Sadly, though, his interpretation of its significance is that the "particularism" cuts against "the wisdom of the Greeks."

to redeem Israel through political means. In a startling theological move, George Knight teases this out: “A corollary of this fact is ... that the pagan state can be used as God’s instrument of mission, just as much as can the church.”<sup>27</sup> The next section will flesh out how this mission will take place in Isaiah 44-45.

## 2 / Translation and Exegesis Isaiah 45:1-8, 13

This section will continue translation and exegesis, but will only briefly summarize (without translation) 45:9-12 which, though important, only indirectly concerns Israel’s relation to Cyrus, finishing to translate and exegete verse 13.

45: 1        Thus says YHWH to his messiah,<sup>28</sup> to Koresh,  
              “whose right hand I have strengthened,”<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> 85-86. Knight underlines his point on the “church” by pointing to the restoration Israel itself worked after Cyrus’ rescue: “On the other hand, while God used Cyrus for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, it was not he but Israel, the people of God, whose hands in the final event actually did the rebuilding.”

<sup>28</sup> I translate מָשִׁיחַ (*mashīaḥ* LXX χριστός *christos*) thus to illustrate the startling language accorded to Cyrus. “His anointed (one)” (ESV, NIV, NRS, NAS, Oswalt, Delitzsch, Young) certainly suffices, because not every anointing in the OT is messianic (e.g. priests, Lev 4:3; and kings, 1 Sam 24:7). Nevertheless, this anointing carries a Messiah-like deliverance of Israel, albeit without Davidic ancestry. Thus Cyrus stands as “a type of the Messianic Servant of the Lord, upon whom the Spirit came in greater measure.” Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol. 3: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 195. One might justifiably assume, then, that using this term, besides all the specialty it accords the leader (see Young 194-95 for further ways it sets Cyrus apart), also teaches Israel never to assume the precise ways in which YHWH will deliver – e.g. through the middle of a sea, or perhaps one day through a carpenter’s son from a small town, who conquers without sword and shield.

<sup>29</sup> Nearly every consulted translation, including three Spanish translations, use either “grasped” (ESV NRS) or the similar “taken / taken hold of” (e.g. NAS NIV Delitzsch Oswalt *tomar* CAB LBA NVI) for this Hiphil of הִקָּח. The support is strong: several references in Isaiah 40-55 (41:9, 54:2), including “taking by the hand” (42:6, 51:18), as well as the LXX’s κρατεω “grasp.” These in Isaiah indicate guidance, which could safely accord with this passage. “Strengthened” (Watts), however, coordinates with a direct object in Ez 30:25 very similar to the one here, when YHWH will “strengthen the arms [זַרְעוֹתָ] of the king of Babylon,” and carries the idea of support for battle, like here, and is a translation not unrepresented in Isaiah 40-55 (54:2, 41:7). Thus, either could safely be in play, but because of the context, “strengthened” leads. For the same reasons, I argue for “strengthened” in Is. 41:13.

- to subdue nations before him,  
and the loins of kings I will ungird,<sup>30</sup>  
to open before him doors and gates;  
they will not be shut.
- 2     “I will go before you  
and the exalted places<sup>31</sup> I will straighten  
doors of bronze I will shatter  
and bars of iron I will hew down.
- 3     And I will give to you the treasures of darkness  
and the hidden treasures of secret places<sup>32</sup>  
In order that you will know that I am YHWH  
The one who calls by your name,  
The God of Israel
- 4     For the sake of<sup>33</sup> my servant Jacob  
And Israel my chosen<sup>34</sup>  
I called to you, by your name.  
*I will title<sup>35</sup> you, and<sup>36</sup> you knew me not*

---

<sup>30</sup> Clearly פתח in Hiphil “loose” (ESV, NAS) or “loosen” (Oswalt) stands as the opposite activity of ‘girding one’s loins,’ which often is employed for arming oneself for battle. Hence, “ungird” (RSV, Delitzsch, Westermann agree) and not “strip kings of their armor” (NIV), nor at all “strip kings of their robes” (NRS).

<sup>31</sup> הדרים lit. “swellings”—many translations follow the LXX “mountains,” a translation which also proceeds from support in second temple literature. Yet all other usages of *hdr* in Isaiah refer to splendor and exaltation (2:10, 19:21; 5:14; 35:2; 53:2; 63:1), alluding to places of splendor, such as perhaps fortified cities, palaces, or temples. Thus, although it *may* refer to mountains, ‘exalted places’ (ESV) is better, fitting present context – certainly not “crooked places” (NKJ) or “rough places” (NAS)

<sup>32</sup> These two lines almost directly follow Oswalt.

<sup>33</sup> למען “in order that / for the sake of” starts verses 3, 4, and 6, all indicating purpose of YHWH’s activity.

<sup>34</sup> בחר “chosen” is “always the *chosen* or *elect* of Yahweh.” BDB 104.

<sup>35</sup> It came as a delight to see Oswalt also use ‘title,’ which seems to fit best with YHWH’s titling that already occurred, calling Cyrus “shepherd” (44:28) and “anointed” (45:1). Also, the imperfect here, as with all of verses 1-3, reminds the reader that the Cyrus conquest has not yet taken place. Arguments which place the prophecy in the sixth century BCE or later must explain the purpose of consistently employing the imperfect in 45:1-8.

<sup>36</sup> Concessive conjunction (“though”), yet this translation retains like words as much as possible (so, “and”). See translation method at the start of this translation section.

- 5 I am YHWH, and there is not another.  
 Besides me, there is no God.  
*I will gird you, and you knew me not* [Italics highlight repetition]
- 6 In order that they will know  
 From sun's rising-place and from its setting-place  
 There is none except me.
- I am YHWH, and there is not another
- 7 I form light and create darkness  
 I make well-being<sup>37</sup> and create calamity<sup>38</sup>  
 I am YHWH who does<sup>39</sup> all these things
- 8 Drip down, (O) heavens from above  
 and clouds, let righteousness<sup>40</sup> stream down  
 let the earth open  
 and let salvation and righteousness<sup>41</sup> bear fruit  
 Let her cause<sup>42</sup> [them] to grow together  
 I YHWH have created it."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> שלום "peace" (NKJ, Delitzsch, Watts) or "well-being" (ESV, NAS, NAB, Oswalt) the word indicates a sense of wholeness or completion, a lack of disturbance or disequilibrium. "Prosperity" (NIV) misleads.

<sup>38</sup> רע "evil" (NKJ, Delitzsch) or "calamity/misfortune" (ESV, NAS, Oswalt) communicates bad present conditions, not God's infusion of morally evil decisions into man. Here, "the point is that everything which exists, whether positive or negative from our perspective, does so because of the creative will of God." Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 204. Delitzsch may step too far outside the present text when he engages the reader to remember man's endowed "freedom" as causal to (moral) evil. 444-445.

<sup>39</sup> Whereas in 44:24 "makes" applied over "does" because of the exclusively creational content around it, here עשה, also surrounded by creational language, by calling it "these" things, looks back and reflects both creation and the terrestrial activity of Cyrus. "Does" or "works" (Delitzsch) thus applies.

<sup>40</sup> Despite arguments to the contrary, in Isaiah, the masculine צדק carries no essential difference from the feminine צדקה five Hebrew words later. Elizabeth Hartley Pruitt, "A Lexical Analysis of sdq in Isaiah 40-55," (master's thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2007), 91. The best that can be asserted is that the feminine version may communicate something more "abstract." C.F. Whitley, "Deutero-Isaiah's Interpretation of Sedeq," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972): 475.

<sup>41</sup> For good reason, Pruitt claims that "salvation" and "righteousness" here are "nearly synonymous" in meaning. 93.

<sup>42</sup> The feminine verb must take "earth" (two lines above) as its subject.

<sup>43</sup> In all this stanza, cf. Isaiah 61:11, a summary word of confidence which follows the anointed servant prophecy of 61:1-3: "For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations" (ESV).



...

- 13     *"I*<sup>44</sup> have roused him in righteousness<sup>45</sup>  
           and all his ways I will straighten  
       *He* will build my city  
           And my exiles he will send back  
       Not for money and not for reward," says YHWH of hosts.

**1-3b.** Isaiah 45 opens to explain just how YHWH will move his shepherd Cyrus to perform "all my will" (44:28). The route will involve YHWH, broadly, "strengthening" (1a) Cyrus militarily. The strengthening, however, is not simply a broad assurance, but will employ particular activity: nations made impotent by YHWH will fall before Cyrus (1b), and barriers eliminated by YHWH will pave a clear way for Cyrus (1c). No obstacle will ultimately impede Cyrus, so that honored places will be made low (2b), and formidable gates and security barriers will crumble by YHWH before him (2c-d), paving an open highway to conquest. Persia's own pursuits will not go unnoticed: Cyrus will discover treasuries of riches buried in hidden places, gifted by YHWH (3a-b), and will thereby bless Persia with the provision to both run his empire and sustain his imperial expansion. All of Cyrus' success will show itself to be the leadership (3a), strengthening (1a), and gift (3a-b) of the one God, YHWH. Thus, in conquest, discovery and the

---

<sup>44</sup> Italics indicate emphasis present in the Hebrew. "It is/was I who..." (Oswalt, NAB) and "I, I have..." (Delitzsch) bring out the emphasis semantically. Few consulted translations reflect it (NJB uses "I myself"). Just as in Hebrew, two Spanish versions (CAB, LBA) use the normally unneeded subjects, *yo* and *él* to emphasize.

<sup>45</sup> This "righteousness" clearly must refer back to the sphere of God's salvific action in creation, which Whitley identifies with the "divine plan" of YHWH. "The notion of Yahweh rousing Cyrus in accordance with *sedeq* or 'divine plan' is evident again in xlv 13." 473. Calling יְדֵי יְהוָה YHWH's "divine plan" is misleading, however, since the term, as Pruitt has argued (see n. 57), refers not simply to a "divine plan," but specifically to the activity of salvation.

incipience of Cyrus' government, Cyrus finds himself to be powerless but for the permission and provision of YHWH.

But YHWH does not strengthen Cyrus without reason. That is, Cyrus' conquest will require some particular governing priorities, as detailed by YHWH. For as YHWH promised, "all my will he will perform" (44:28). YHWH thus subdues, ungirds, opens, straightens, shatters, *hews down, and gives, for the explicit reasons which follow.*

(3c-e) ...In order that you will know that I am YHWH  
The one who calls by your name,  
The God of Israel...

**3c-e.** The first purpose for Cyrus is that he himself, addressed directly, will acknowledge YHWH as the one who straightens his paths and leads his conquests. Many have argued whether Cyrus (salvifically) believed in YHWH.<sup>46</sup> The present text, however, makes no claim either way, since the object of "know" is not "YHWH," but "*that I am YHWH, the one who calls*" (3c-d) – in fact the just the opposite, since the two following verses say that Cyrus "knew me not" (45:4-5).<sup>47</sup> Even though he calls Cyrus "by name" (3d), reading a NT theology of calling and election (e.g. Romans 8:30) into this passage would overreach, since the OT word "call" (קרא) did not carry the same precise theology

---

<sup>46</sup> Several reasons are given. YHWH's anointing of Cyrus (45:1) indicates a special relationship to YHWH, wherein YHWH also sets on Cyrus "Spirit of the Lord" in an animating (not regenerative) sense, as Young clarifies. 195. Also, this verse indicates some sort of "knowing" of YHWH, and although few commentators have pointed this out, Cyrus's salvific faith would stand well where it is in Isaiah as a foreshadowing of the Gentile expansion of God's kingdom, since this hope prevails in Isaiah 40-66. But as n.39 shows, salvific knowledge is not in play.

<sup>47</sup> ידע "know" here in 45:4-5 likely refers *not* to some sort of personally salvific knowledge, but to an awareness or realization, a knowledge attained through observation and reflection. That is, Cyrus had not previously made himself aware of YHWH. Thus, "acknowledge" (Goldingay and Payne) functions appropriately in 45:4-5 for ידע.

its Greek counterpart took in the NT with Paul. For instance אק is often employed for naming a child (e.g. Is 8:3) or summoning someone to authority (e.g. Is 22:20-21). The probability of both Cyrus' assent to YHWH's authority and his lack of faith stands on firm extra-biblical ground. Archaeological and historical evidence reveal a conquering king who possessed a universal respect for divinity, such that it would not be historically improbable for Cyrus to acknowledge YHWH just as he did other gods, like Marduk.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the expectation here was not that the civil leader Cyrus would *believe* in YHWH, but that Cyrus, pagan as he was, would acknowledge *the source from where his power derived*, and perhaps thereby *do YHWH's will* (44:28).<sup>49</sup> Cyrus fully depended upon YHWH for his power, as verses 1-3 made abundantly clear, and he was ultimately accountable to YHWH this "Sole Energizer."<sup>50</sup> From another view, Cyrus thus could not assume he himself was the final authority or his object to serve. He answered to YHWH.

- 4        For the sake of my servant Jacob  
              And Israel my chosen  
              I called to you, by your name.  
              *I will title you, and you knew me not*  
 5        I am YHWH, and there is not another.

---

<sup>48</sup> The Cyrus cylinder, sometimes argued to be a document upon which Isaiah 45 is dependent or vice-versa, recounts within about a thousand words (in English) how it was the god Marduk who enabled Cyrus to conquer Babylon. John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 261. Because as Goldingay argues, "neither the inscription nor this oracle in Isa. 45 seems likely to be dependent on the other," the cylinder better serves as archaeological corroboration of the bible's record: a conquering leader who submitted to divinity everywhere he went, without fully placing himself within the boundaries or exclusive control of God's people.

<sup>49</sup> This accords well with e.g. Ezra 1, where Cyrus' comments about YHWH repeatedly locate him with Israel and not necessarily with himself. Cyrus says of the Israel, "may his God be with him" and of YHWH, "He is the God who is in Jerusalem" (1:3).

<sup>50</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 286.

Besides me, there is no God.

*I will gird you, and you knew me not...* [Italics highlight repetition]

**4-5.** Secondly, Cyrus' conquering and the commencement of his government take place not simply so that Cyrus may acknowledge the preeminence of YHWH, but also for the sake of God's people. As 44:26 promised, Cyrus will in fact govern specifically for God's people, since Jerusalem, their principle city, "will be inhabited" and Judah's cities "will be built," begun by Cyrus, who will also return the exiles (45:13). The establishment of Cyrus' authority, again, is not to serve Cyrus, or to serve his political factions and benefactors. It is to assent to YHWH's supreme authority, and so that he serves YHWH's people. Therefore, there is a sense in which Cyrus, while he rules all the people of his Persian empire and seeks the best for it, firstly serves the people of God, whether he is aware of it or not. This explains why in other portions of scripture God's wrath kindles when other nations, albeit mysteriously by YHWH's permission, are held accountable for oppressing or warring against his people. Pharaoh's chariots which pursued the Israelites were "cast into the sea" (Ex 15:4), and Edom is punished "because he pursued his brother [Jacob, that is, God's people] with the sword" (Am 1:11).

This second declaration of the purpose of Cyrus' national conquests follows with a restatement on YHWH's solitary position, recalling the YHWH-strengthening of verses 1-3 and finishing in something of poetic cadence with the previous verse: "I will gird you, and you knew me not." In view of Cyrus' paganism, which we established above through the exegesis of verse 3, verse 5b makes something of a confusing pronouncement: "Besides me there is no God." Herein the reader remembers that the present text,

although addressed above to Cyrus, is ultimately for Israel in Babylon. Although Cyrus apparently read and responded to this text,<sup>51</sup> Israel receives the promise, so that Israel would put her confidence in YHWH during her exile. It is after the promise that “Israel my chosen” would stand as the purpose of Cyrus’ conquests that YHWH speaks, “Besides me there is no God.” It is thus Israel (not Cyrus) who forsakes the temptations to idolatry.

- 6      ...In order that they will know  
             From sun’s rising-place and from its setting-place  
             There is none except me
- 7      I am YHWH, and there is not another  
             I form light and create darkness  
             I make well-being and create calamity  
             I am YHWH who does all these things...

**6-7.** Isaiah reveals the final purpose for which YHWH empowered Cyrus, the final purpose that will guide Cyrus’ conquest and multinational government. Empowered by YHWH, Cyrus the pagan’s third purpose is to open YHWH to the nations. “They will know” (6a) shows no explicit subject, until the following line, which explains where “they” will be located: *from everywhere on earth*. Here is where the grand themes of Isaiah and this section’s place in the literary argument derive its greatest importance. A resounding focus on the nations flourishes in Isaiah more than any other prophet, from 2:2 when “all nations will stream to [Zion],” to 66:18, when YHWH pronounces that “the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues,” so that here, “the sun’s rising place

---

<sup>51</sup> See p. 13n1.

[east] and its setting-place [west]" (6b) indicate limitless boundary to the knowledge of God on earth – an expansiveness guaranteed by Cyrus' conquest and government. One cannot miss, too, that by the end of Isaiah 45, two of the most assertive declarations of worldwide conversion are proclaimed. YHWH declares, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" in 22, and in 23 shouts, "To me every knee shall bow, [and] every tongue confess to God."<sup>52</sup> Thus, God's third reason for appointing Cyrus is "that the whole world might know the Lord, the only God."<sup>53</sup> Recalling Isaiah's grand themes, Oswalt appeals that "this is at the heart of Isaiah's, and God's, recurring insistence on Israel's, and the world's, recognizing God's uniqueness. Until they, and we, have come to that understanding, it will be impossible for us to be redeemed."<sup>54</sup> Cyrus the pagan (unwittingly?) delivers YHWH to the world. Celebration is in order.

But before celebration, Isaiah reiterates the same fundamental position of YHWH: "I am YHWH and there is not another" (6d). YHWH's solitary creational position returns – "I form light and create darkness" (7a). And every subjective circumstance a people experience falls under YHWH's government, both that of well-being and calamity (7b), such that by the end, Isaiah can conclusively assert: "I am YHWH who does all these things" (7c). Again, everyone (Cyrus and Israel) stands stand accountable to the creator, redeemer and ultimate governor. Isaiah breaks into song.

## 8 Drip down, (O) heavens from above

---

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Psalm 72.17, where all nations would be blessed "in" Solomon. Cf. Rom 14:11 and Phil 2:10.

<sup>53</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 203.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

and clouds, let righteousness stream down  
 let the earth open  
 and let salvation and righteousness bear fruit  
 Let her cause [them] to grow together  
 I YHWH have created it.”

8. Much as Moses’s hymn in Ex 15 rejoiced in the surprising Red Sea redemption of Ex 14, so Isaiah 45:8 flows out of Isaiah 44:24-45:7 in celebration. But a question must be solved: Is 45:8 a “pictorial” summary of the preceding 44:24-45:7 (Motyer)<sup>55</sup>, or does it describe the fruitful *result* of the same verses (Delitzsch, Oswalt)?<sup>56</sup> Clearly it is both. The “salvation” (8d) of Israel has just taken place in this prophecy – it will not take place again following this historical event – thus the song replays the events in song. The “righteousness” (8b,d) (God’s righteous activity, here with reference to deliverance)<sup>57</sup> and the rain shower from the “clouds” (8b) refer to this very deliverance of 44:24-45:7. And this righteousness flows down from YHWH like rain pouring from the clouds onto the earth and causing the earth to burst with fruitfulness. The rain is thus the aforementioned deliverance (44:24-45:7); and the fruitfulness is the *result*.

---

<sup>55</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 287.

<sup>56</sup> Delitzsch writes that heaven and earth are “now” being summoned to bring forth... “spiritual blessings.” 445; Cf. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 205.

<sup>57</sup> Motyer’s summary leaves some explanation to be desired. He describes righteousness as “the Lord’s absolutely right purpose for the world and his people as executed by Cyrus.” Motyer *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 287. Elizabeth Hartley Pruitt adds more color to this definition by considering this righteousness as being nearly synonymous with salvation terminology. She qualifies ‘salvation’ as being more than spiritual redemption, summarizing “righteousness” as a whole in Is 40-55: “צדק is not perfectly synonymous with salvation... However [if we widen the scope of salvation to include] physical and corporate redemption... and spiritual and individual redemption...punitive retribution, and...continual and eternal restoration and jubilee, then the sense of צדק does in fact overlap a great deal with salvation terminology.” 94.

An important point about Cyrus emerges from this song not yet explicitly presented in the prophecy so far. By acknowledging YHWH (45:3), providing for God's people (45:4), and opening knowledge of YHWH throughout the world (45:6), he will thereby produce another result. Cyrus the pagan political leader's submission to the will of YHWH causes fruitfulness to sprout on the earth.

**9-12.** After verse 8, the next several verses (9-11) turn to chide anyone who would complain about YHWH's unexpected plan of deliverance, returning the prophecy toward God's people. These verses remind the reader that the prophecy, as it was in the beginning (44:24-28), addresses and concerns Israel foremost, even though it broke to speak to Cyrus directly (45:1-8). Thus, although Cyrus evidently read the prophecy himself in history, the prophecy to Cyrus was still for Israel, serving as a declaration of YHWH into which Israel could peer, for their comfort, preparation, and devotion to YHWH. In verse 12, the sustained creational theme makes a final appearance – "I made the earth and created man on it" – before returning to reassert YHWH's chosen, albeit unexpected, plan of redemption for Israel and the world through the person of Cyrus. Indeed, a summary for verses 9-12 could safely be titled, "God's right to use whom he chooses."<sup>58</sup> But a final statement is made.

13     *"I have roused him in righteousness  
          and all his ways I will straighten  
          He will build my city  
          And my exiles he will send back*

---

<sup>58</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 206.



Not for money and not for reward,” says YHWH of hosts.

Delitzsch points out that at the time of this prophecy, Israel was well aware of the rising Persian conqueror to their east. Delitzsch deftly identifies Israel’s errant response to this powerful man. Failing to see that Cyrus was raised by YHWH, Israel’s creator, Israel sadly misinterpreted the movements of history. The conqueror’s “victorious career had increased the anxieties and fears of the exiles, instead of leading them to lift up their heads, because their redemption was drawing nigh.”<sup>59</sup> This last verse completes the will of YHWH that Cyrus would complete: to send build YHWH’s city (Jerusalem), and the return his exiles. Even though YHWH provided for Cyrus with hoards of treasures in his conquests (45:1), Cyrus would perform this task out of his own desire, much like the nations would voluntarily stream up the mountain of Zion (Is 2:2) and bring YHWH their riches (60:11).

*Summary Points.* Again, as before, the primary purpose of this entire Cyrus prophecy is comfort to a long-expecting, long-suffering Israel, awaiting their deliverance from YHWH and wondering if the said deliverance would actually come. Such a focus on *Israel* is reinforced in verses 9-12, where Isaiah turns to chide anyone among Israel who would complain about the specifics of his plan. Why would he chide them? One reason is certainly the fact that words used for the Davidic Messiah are applied to this pagan person, causing potentially great consternation to a *longing* people. Those most biblically aware, not seeing any tie to the house of David, would realize this would only

---

<sup>59</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 446.

be a foretaste of the Messianic reign, and not the real thing. Israel's comfort must not be lost as the primary focus of Isaiah 44.24-45.13. Yet, other implications for political theology quite unmistakably spill out of this prophecy.

(I) **YHWH's preeminence over political states.** Again, as in 44.24-28, here with Cyrus, (a) *YHWH is history's overseer*. YHWH's historical primacy sustains itself with every verb. Each active verb finds its source not in Cyrus or Israel, but ultimately in YHWH. What does YHWH do? YHWH speaks, strengthens, subdues, ungirds, opens doors, and goes before (45:1), straightens, shatters, and hews down (2), gives and calls (3), calls and titles Cyrus (4), proclaims his uniqueness and girds Cyrus (5), purposes for the world to know him and proclaims his uniqueness (6), forms light and creates darkness, makes well-being and creates calamity, and declares his singular historical control (7), and finally, creates (8). What does Cyrus do? The political leader *listens*, *is* strengthened, *beholds* nations and kings subdued by YHWH before him (1), *receives* treasures from YHWH (3), *is* given purpose by YHWH (3c,4,6), *is* titled (4) and girded (5) by YHWH, and broadly, *is* commissioned by YHWH to do his will in specific ways. Virtually everything Cyrus does is receptive. Finally, what do God's people do? They simply receive YHWH's deliverance. Political leaders and people receive. YHWH is the provider. Here YHWH appears to come closer to active manipulation of a historical figure – strengthening (1), ungirding (1), girding (5), and rousing (13) – yet these verbs show YHWH's infusion of ability into the historical figure and *not* explicit manipulation of Cyrus' will or decision making. Intimate, this activity is orchestration most of all.

Also as before, (b) *YHWH sometimes permits the civil powers of the world to govern his own people*. Like before, it is not a prominent theme, but in this section, YHWH is said to “make well-being and create calamity” (45:7). Isaiah here doubtlessly alludes to the present political circumstances of Israel situated in Babylon. Finally, as before, (c) *YHWH performs his will regardless of the faith of the political figure*. In the last section, God’s will for Cyrus was announced, but in the present section, that will was given description. In both, the object (Cyrus) remained the same.

(II) **The nature of political leaders.** As before, so here: (a) *The civil authority performs God’s will*. Here, Isaiah 44:28 (“all my will he will perform”) is given detail. For this reason, (b) *the power of civil authorities is derived*.

(III) **The meaning of redemption and the nature of political states.** First, (a) *God labors to redeem specific political and civil structures*. Previously we noted redemption involved the rebuilding of a particular, physical city. Again here, Cyrus will “build my city” (45:13). But also, Cyrus will “send back my exiles” (45:13) – Redemption (44:24) also involves freeing from captivity and/or oppression. (b) *God acknowledges the redemptive capacity of political government – even without a believer among its magistrates*. This represents itself again.

But some new elements emerge in these verses. First, (c) *by doing YHWH’s will* (defined in point IV below), *the civil political figure can generally expect to be sustained by YHWH*. This derives from 45:3. Even though the political leader here served God’s people “not for money or reward” (45:13), nevertheless YHWH not only provided for his people’s needs but promised to give him secret stashes of “treasuries” and “hidden

treasures.” This may overreach with the passage, but the precedent may communicate a general truth that may not always work out equally. And second, *By doing YHWH’s will* (defined in point (4) below), *the civil political figure can produce the fruit of God’s salvation and righteousness*. 45:8 sung, “Let the earth open and let salvation and righteousness bear fruit; let her cause [them] to grow together.” It is unclear exactly what this would mean for Cyrus or any political leader, except to say that government in keeping with YHWH’s will can allow for God’s people to flourish.

(IV) **Purposes for Rule.** In 45:1-13, one discovers the purposes for this political figure’s leadership: (a) *To recognize and assent to YHWH’s authority* (45:3). Inferentially, this involves doing YHWH’s will (44:28). Also inferentially, this along with vv. 2 and 3 implies that the ruler at the very least does not rule with himself in mind. (b) *To preserve God’s people* (45:4). And (c) *To (allow YHWH to) bless the nations with knowledge of YHWH* (45:6). The political leader here simply is not to stand in the way of YHWH’s redemptive work. Thus, political structures exist also to allow God to redeem the world, just as later in the same chapter, Isaiah announces, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!”<sup>60</sup> One could easily infer that such redemption of the nations of the world could not have taken place (with the proviso that YHWH can of course do whatever he pleases) with Israel in Babylon as captives.

(V) **Form of government.** One curiosity that started this project was whether the Bible commended any particular form of government. From Isaiah 44:24-45:13, we can glean two observations about the form of government advised in it: (a) *Isaiah 44:24-*

---

<sup>60</sup> 45:22.

*45:13 gives no explicit commendation for a particular form of government.* No statement in these verses *explicitly* endorses one form of government over another. One might conclude from this that the Bible is disinterested in the form that governments take, but asserts an interest only in that they follow YHWH's will. Theoretically possible, in this way the bible's political voice may reach its limits, where history and political science would step in to teach. But, building conclusions and doctrines over an absence of comment, however, is not preferred, unless, I would argue, such absence is the norm in every pertinent passage. (b) *If a preferred form of government was commended, Isaiah 44:24-45:13 might support one with a high executive authority.* One might quickly remember the monarchy of OT Israel to acknowledge at the very least YHWH's permission of such a type of government. This says nothing about counsel-led leadership, or leadership with separation of powers<sup>61</sup>, even constitutional monarchy, only that in this passage, YHWH empowers a government with a high executive authority to do his will (Cf. 44:28-45:7), which bears the fruit of righteousness and salvation (45:8). Thus, monarchy is supported by YHWH in this passage, although, and I confess only because history stands before me, that this may be a capitulation to the extant political structures of the day and not a direct commendation.

---

<sup>61</sup> In fact, there is notable scholarly dispute in the present air on a biblical support for the concept of a 'separation of powers.' Oliver O'Donovan has significant reservations about it (*Desire*, 39-42). This led to a dispute from Jonathan Chaplin ["Political Eschatology and Responsible Government," in Bartholomew et al. *A Royal Priesthood?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 292-95] and J.Gordon McConville ["Law and Monarchy in the Old Testament" in Bartholomew et al., 76-79], the latter more firmly on biblical grounds. McConville makes a fuller case on the separation of powers in Deuteronomy, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis-Kings* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

(VI) **Foreign Policy.** YHWH supports the political leader here in many ways – with conquering potency (45:1-2) and rich financial support (45:3a) – a leader whose foreign policy includes military conquest. At one extreme, one might conclude that YHWH blesses war and imperialism, even by civil governments. Because one knows the Bible has much more to say, safest would follow the same reservation as point V-b above. That is, the best that can be gleaned is simply that *military conquest of a political leader is positively supported by YHWH in 44:24-45:13* (insofar in this case as it ultimately leads to the triple purposes of 45:3-6 found above in IV), *yet this also may be a capitulation to the extant political structures of the day.*

### 3 / Cyrus – Special or Representative?

We must turn to an important interpretive question before deriving contemporary import from Isaiah 44-45. The question: Is Cyrus' position before YHWH special or representative? If special, then broad conclusions on the nature of politics and government are limited. If Cyrus stands representatively for civil government, then conclusions can more easily be made. On first view, Cyrus is special, because for one, he is a biblical rarity: a non-Yahwist political leader coming to the aid of Israel and supporting the will of YHWH, even though he himself does not become a monolatrous<sup>62</sup> member of God's people. Secondly, he is called YHWH's "shepherd" (44:28) and "anointed" (45:1), unlike other political leaders in the Bible, and therefore Cyrus stands

---

<sup>62</sup> One-God-worshipping. Derived from Richard Bauckham's coining of "monolatry" as preferable to "monotheism" to describe the Jewish religion.

in a league of his own. However, for the same latter reason, I would argue for his representativeness. The very fact that Cyrus is “anointed” and YHWH’s “shepherd” gives him specialty in order to make him representative, after whom others should be modeled. This stands similar to how the “anointed” David became the example both for Israel and for the kings who followed him (e.g. Ps 89)<sup>63</sup> – and how the “anointed” Saul failed as Israel’s representative (1 Sam 17). One might even consider the “anointed” priests of Israel, who mirror the estate of God’s people: “and it shall be like people, like priest” (Hos 4:9; Cf 4:6). Cyrus is representative for civil leaders *because* he is special.

Before compiling observations, this paper consults other passages in the Bible.

#### 4 / Soundings<sup>64</sup> from Scripture

Some glances at other portions of scripture may undergird or refine the above observations. Before stepping outside Isaiah, a brief look inside will aid.

*Israel and Babylon · Isaiah 47.* This paper analyzed Persia, a political state that ultimately delivered and blessed Israel. But what of governments that oppress God’s people? Does YHWH, for instance, also expect them “to know that I am YHWH?” Two chapters later, Isaiah 47 confirms that at least for those nations who govern over God’s people (and thereby all nations today?), God expects them to acknowledge God and to demonstrate

---

<sup>63</sup> Psalm 89 artistically brings this out, communicating David’s uniqueness, with promises of support in battle similar to the present text (21-23), and declaring him to be the standard of kingship (“the highest of earthly kings” 28).

<sup>64</sup> This title comes from Tom Schreiner, in *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

this by preserving his people. Instead, Babylon found her authority in herself, failing to acknowledge YHWH:

[You] say in your heart, 'I am and there is no one besides me'...  
 You felt secure in your wickedness and said, 'No one sees me'...  
 For you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me' (47:8, 10 NRSV).<sup>65</sup>

And she failed to preserve YHWH's people, whom he placed under her care:

I was angry with My people,  
 I profaned my heritage  
 And gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy;  
 On the aged, you made your yoke exceedingly heavy (47:6 NRSV).

In this brief view, the reader finds in Isaiah 47 that among the observations above from the Cyrus prophecy, most (but not all) are represented. YHWH's absolute preeminence, for example, in all three forms is represented,<sup>66</sup> so that nations must acknowledge YHWH whether they believe in him or not. Whereas nothing about redemption or form of government is present, one might take mental note that regarding 'foreign policy,' violent retribution is promised (47:9-11).<sup>67</sup> Two of the three "purposes for rule" can be fairly derived from the passage, but what Isaiah 47 contributes is even greater

---

<sup>65</sup> On this note, the reader may immediately find the chorus from chapter 45 – "I am YHWH, and there is not another." – became in chapter 47, "I am Babylon. Besides me is no other."

<sup>66</sup> "YHWH as history's overseer" (I-a) is represented in three ways: YHWH expects Babylon to acknowledge him (47:8-10), YHWH interprets Babylon's conquest of Israel as YHWH "giving" Israel into Babylon's hand (47:6), and YHWH judges Babylon for her failures (47:3,9,11-15). In this section, YHWH clearly *permits powers of the world to govern his own people*, and doing so even *through oppression* (I-b). Finally, here YHWH *performs his will regardless of the faith of the political figure* (I-c), even though no individual leader is explicitly present.

<sup>67</sup> In return for their maltreatment of God's people, "These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure.... But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you...and ruin..." (47:9-11).



imperative to the purposes of rule: Babylon is judged for her failure to comply. Thus, in Isaiah 47, the basic foundation is reinforced: *civil governments must rule with a fear of God founded in implementing his purposes*. Not with respect to this passage, one political theologian takes this “basic” foundation a step further, insisting that governments must not simply defer to YHWH/God in their functional dealings, but also adopt a public confession of faith.<sup>68</sup>

#### *Joseph, Israel and Egypt · Genesis 45*

In one text (Isa 44-45), a non-Yahwist state and leader redeem Israel. In another (Isa 47), a non-Yahwist state is to rule harshly. But in Genesis 45, the variables change. The state is not intervening into Israel’s politics: it is independent and treats Israel ambivalently, except for another changed variable. The leader is not a pagan: it is Joseph, an Israelite turned Egyptian slave turned Egyptian magistrate.<sup>69</sup> Will the above political implications still hold? In a moving scene, Egypt’s leading magistrate reveals his identity to his fearful brothers, who years ago sold him into slavery. It is the narrative’s powerful climax. Joseph’s words tell Israel’s readers of the greater purposes behind his fall and rise:

---

<sup>68</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 195, 294. Critiqued in articles by Jonathan Chaplin [“Political Eschatology and Responsible Government: Oliver O’Donovan’s ‘Christian Liberalism’” in Bartholomew et al., 265-308] and James Skillen [“Acting Politically in Biblical Obedience?” in Bartholomew et al., 398-417]. Cf. also Lesslie Newbigin’s notion of the “Christian State” in *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in ‘Secular’ Britain* (London: SPCK, 1998).

<sup>69</sup> One might recall the unexpected nature of redemption alluded to in an earlier footnote, when Israel found YHWH titling Cyrus his “shepherd” and “anointed.” See n.29.

(4) And Joseph said to his brothers, “Draw near, I pray, to me.” And they drew near. And he said, “I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. (5) And now, do not be in pain, and do not burn in your eyes [be angry with yourselves<sup>70</sup>] because you sold me here. For God sent me before you<sup>71</sup> to preserve life. (6) For these two years the famine [has been] in the midst of the land, and there are five years still in which there will be no plowing and harvesting. (7) And God sent me before you to set a remnant for you in the land, and to preserve for you a great deliverance. (8) And now, *you*<sup>72</sup> did not send me here but God. And he set me as a father<sup>73</sup> to Pharaoh and as a lord over all his house, and in all the land of Egypt.

Several recognizable political themes appear in this section, and several important new ones arise, too. Significant analysis will be saved for a fuller study. Briefly, all the observations of YHWH’s preeminence stand, particularly that of God as historical overseer. Three times Joseph claims, despite his unusual setbacks, “God sent me” (5, 7, 8).<sup>74</sup> Observations on the nature of political leaders are easily represented, since Joseph is both a member of God’s people and a governor in a non-Yahwist nation, fully cognizant he performs God’s will (“God sent me to preserve...” v5, v7). Form of government, again, receives no *explicit* commendation, and ‘foreign policy’ may in contrast to previous findings take a redemptive angle: to bless the nations around that state. But besides the preeminence and providence of YHWH, what rises most

---

<sup>70</sup> ESV, NAS, NRS, NIV.

<sup>71</sup> לִפְנֵי lit. “to the face of” is often a spatial phrase, not a chronological one (BDB 815-819). Thus, Joseph says he was sent not *ahead* of his brothers, but in their presence, so that the (unexpected) preserving of life would take place in their presence.

<sup>72</sup> Italics perform the same function that translations do semantically – “it was not you who...” (ESV, NRS, NAS, NIV) to place the force on the second person pronoun.

<sup>73</sup> In this sense a ‘counselor.’ BDB, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Also, very much implicitly in view, YHWH permitted Egypt to govern over this member of God’s people ... even in an oppressive way, in slavery and jail (I-b). And YHWH performs his will regardless of the faith of the political figure, since both Joseph and Pharaoh (45:8) are in view (I-c).

prominent in Genesis 45 is the redemptive capacity of politics. Joseph was sent “to preserve life” (5) and “to preserve...a great deliverance” (7), being in the middle of that process already (6-7).<sup>75</sup>

### *Israelite Leadership and King Lemuel of Massa · Proverbs 31*

Proverbs 31:1-9 receives fuller comment in the next chapter. But one element worth highlighting here is specifically the thematic tie to Genesis 45 above. In Proverbs 31, which is addressed to rulers, the purpose for avoiding a self-pleasuring lifestyle is for the unimpaired justice of the weak and poor (6-9), that is, *the preservation of life*: “Open your mouth for the mute, for the justice of everyone fading away. Open your mouth. Decide justice. And do right to the poor and needy...” (31:8-9). Such an approach may leads to a flourishing kingdom (Joseph, Egypt), and sometimes the economic result of such obedience is simply not the point (Lemuel).

### *The Church, Political Leaders and the Roman Empire · Romans 13*

Romans 13 also receives fuller study later, in chapter four. But three elements are worth clarifying: First, the preeminence of YHWH, which here leads to the concomitant need for citizens to come willingly under the earthly authorities he himself assigns. Citizenly submission is the principal contribution of Romans 13 to political theology. The

---

<sup>75</sup> Ruling in Egypt as a Hebrew stranger, awareness of YHWH among the nations will certainly emerge! Curiously, though, the name YHWH is not mentioned, where the author instead elected to use the more general אֱלֹהִים. This may carry some import for a politician’s “diplomatic” deportment in a non-Yahwist state, but only if it were repeatedly found in other texts, or the present text was manifestly driven toward a political point, which it is not.

redemptive capacity of government is evident when it says the state's power is to be exercised "for good" (13.4). But most explicit perhaps in the entire Bible is in Romans 13 the *derived* authority of civil governments: "For there is no authority except by God, and those that are, by God are they established" (13:1).

## 5 / Driving Home

What does this mean for political thinking today? Here we reach a place to pull out the pieces of coal from the exegesis, brush them off, hope for diamonds, and put them to use. This is the aim toward which the paper has driven. The running enumerated list of observations will provide the organization, adding a fourth point in (IV) - "to preserve life generally" - found in Genesis 45 and again in Proverbs 31 and Romans 13.

**(I) YHWH Preeminent.** "I am YHWH and there is not another" trumpets YHWH in Isaiah 44:24-45:13. Every active verb in that prophecy belonged to YHWH, even though the great Cyrus stood at the center. The conqueror's triumphs only served to display YHWH's historical oversight. Politicians and political activists must be careful to keep the power of political force at arm's length. It is easy to unconsciously – and consciously – elevate the influence of politics well beyond its station. This can be understood on ground level, too. One award-winning history professor in South Carolina would in every class he taught explain the range of historical causation, only one of which was political: economic, social, religious, geographic, cultural, technological, and philosophical causes, immediate causes, environmental causes, and individual personalities all served to put

political causation in its place – particularly as studying history manifested the intimate coordination of them all.<sup>76</sup> These various sources of causation portray the many means through which YHWH, master of heaven and earth (44:25), can disturb one's trust in political power. The politically minded must keep political power at arm's length.

Ultimately, one does not trust in politics, but instead in YHWH, the preeminent one who performs his will regardless of the faith of the political figure.<sup>77</sup> Just as the Bible has shown through Cyrus and then Joseph, a non-believing president, e.g., may unwittingly (or with intent) perform the biblical will of God better than a pastor-turned-politician would, as well as vice-versa (the many failures of Israel's and Judah's kings comes to mind, along with the successful ones). To any jaded believers, the opposite is also true: a member of God's people can greatly redeem politically (Moses, Joseph, Esther and Mordecai). We must therefore search for what God wishes in government and proceed politically from there, standing critical of a politician's faith only wherein his or her actions or decisions clearly defy the authority of God/Christ over the ruler.

**(II) Political Leaders.** Alternatively, politicians should seek to rule increasingly by God's will and thus, for example, should be but informed by public opinion and not captive to it. Sometimes a public view, to be sure, may reveal God's will. Cyrus, Josephus tells us, responded to the counsel of the Isaiah passage he read. Christopher Bryan

---

<sup>76</sup> Dr Jim Leavell, now professor emeritus, taught Japanese history for many years at Furman University (South Carolina, United States).

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Bryan, whose book *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* makes it very clear of Isaiah 45 that "what God chooses to do 'for the sake of my servant Israel...' God chooses to do *though pagan emperor and pagan empire.*" (New York: Oxford, 2005), 24.

explains the Bible's interaction with politics. He writes, "I think the biblical tradition challenges human power structures not by attempting to dismantle them or replace them with other human power structures but by consistently confronting them with *the truth about their origin and purpose*. Their origin is that God permits them. Their purpose is to serve God's glory by promoting God's peace and God's justice."<sup>78</sup>

The origin in political leadership is that "God permits them." Just as politicians and political activists must keep political ability at arm's length, so they must also soberly position the politician's own human ability. Political power is derived (Romans 13:1).

**(III) Redemption.** God's people who are vocationally on the fence should not be swayed away from politics by an erroneous view of redemption which locates deliverance and restoration exclusively in the "spiritual" realm. In other words, God's people who consider a vocation in government should not think that pastor and missionary, e.g., are greater vocations than politician, forgetting that vital aspects of redemption took place through Cyrus and Joseph, Moses, and many other political leaders ancient *and* modern. The fact that a pagan politician redeems in Isaiah 44-45 unquestionably stamps the redemptive capacity of politics in general as "able to redeem." Politicians should thereby endeavor to perform God's will in their context, local or broad, and not *simply* live to, for example, establish an adoring constituency. Their goal should be to move up in position insofar as it permits them to truly exert

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 9.

redemption toward life preservation and biblical justice and righteousness. The politician might redeem within their sphere of influence, even their office, maintaining a standard of integrity, although that drifts off course here. One worthy vocational focus for a politician would center on *enabling* citizens (yet preventing dependency) to become positive contributors – redeemers themselves – in the same society. This may lead the politician to work toward new or maybe simply to *preserve existing* equitable government structures, always with the poorest in mind – never aiming to *enable* them out of good work; always endeavoring to rescue them – even by simply preserving a good structure – foremost from oppression. God’s people outside the political sphere in return might do better to acknowledge such silent contributions more often.

To make one point clear, in case it was missed, for people young and old who may be jolted by or are apathetic toward government and are looking for reason to care, and for those who assert that redemption only takes place when sinners convert to Christ, all must see that the Bible calls political deliverance “righteousness” and “salvation” (45:8), even though it is the deliverance of *God’s people* that is in view. One may also remember that YHWH, “your redeemer” (44:24), did everything. N.T. Wright argues, “We must recognize that the modern western separation of theology and society, religion and politics, would have made no sense either to Paul or to any of his contemporaries, whether Jewish, Greek, or Roman.”<sup>79</sup> God’s people must jettison the (understandable) cynicism about politics and seek to fill the political leadership with men and women willing to manifest the features of the rule of Christ through the state.

---

<sup>79</sup> Paul: *In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 60.

Why? Because: good government is intimately connected to kingdom expansion, since life preservation and justice stand as values of God's kingdom.

Politically inclined persons will remember still to position "spiritual redemption" (if I may separate it out as I do) as equal to or perhaps slightly ahead of the redemptive deliverance politics may bring, keeping Christ's kingdom expansion ever as the ultimate objective. Cyrus' redemption rescued his people from bondage, and it also bought YHWH (again, YHWH was the architect) world evangelization – one which YHWH perhaps intended Israel to begin carrying out after Cyrus even before the coming of Jesus. In this way, God's believing political leaders must pray for and seek the conversion of the nations while they do politics. It is part of their job description (see IV below).

Lastly with redemption, politicians who implement God's will should expect *in general* for that government to be blessed and/or financially sustained by him.

**(IV) Why rule?** Politicians should rule, again, to please God (44:24), eager to obey his will. They should keep God's people in mind when they rule, too, in order to preserve them, setting up laws and structures that prevent God's people from oppression, a failure of Israel that garnered YHWH's judgment.

Also, Christians should realize that good operating governments are intimately connected to world evangelization. Oliver O'Donovan dances around a chicken-and-egg question within this implication. Do God's people direct their mission at the state leading to the people (e.g. much of the conversion of tribal Europe), or do they direct



their mission at individuals of society leading to the redeemed state (e.g. early Christian history leading to Constantine)? Ultimately, O'Donovan simply holds them equally together: "The Gentile mission had two frontiers: social and political."<sup>80</sup> This paper provides no better answer, since both strategies have biblical, and historical, support. The point is that the two "frontiers" are intimately connected. This is illustrated by missiologist Nelson Jennings, who notes that the center of world missions changed following World War II, when among other things, the country with the highest geopolitical influence also changed.<sup>81</sup> Missionaries, once spilling out of Britain with its never-setting sun, after a century began to pour out of the United States, where both the highest GDP and the primary issue of missionaries exist today. Although the miracle of Cyrus' deliverance was in Isaiah the theater for the universal knowledge of YHWH "that they may know" (45:6), it may also be interpreted as historical cause-and-effect. God-fearing politics permits the expansion of the fear of God, "from the sun's rising-place to its setting-place" (ibid.).

**(V) Form of Government.** Politicians, political activists and street-level voters must avoid believing a perfect form of government can be achieved, but seeking to rebuild specific structures and even sometimes to liberate people in various forms of captivity, they choose the form of government that would best satisfy these ends. The

---

<sup>80</sup> *Desire*, 243. Cf. "two frontiers within the Gentile mission" (193) and "there are two mission frontiers" (231).

<sup>81</sup> Nelson Jennings, from class lectures on "God's world mission." (Covenant Theological Seminary, September 3, 2008).

findings of Koyzis, a Christian political philosopher (see chapter one), neatly correlate with the findings of this paper. He also finds that the extant political frameworks do not perfectly represent a proper government, claiming that “those phenomena normally classified as ideologies do indeed originate in idolatrous religions.”

Along these lines, the left-right continuum also must be held at arm’s length, being understood as both a historical confusion<sup>82</sup> and biblical disconnect.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, someone being more politically right or left does not make them God’s politician. We will likely never shed this continuum in any near future, so we must learn to operate within it creatively. This conclusion does not mean a Moderate represents a true Christian, either, especially insofar as they avoid taking a stand on issues. The point simply is that we need to learn to seek the truth from God (what this study endeavors to begin) on political stances and beliefs. We therefore must, as many do and many don’t, consider why our very godly political opponents take the stances they do as believers.

As to a high executive government that seemed to reappear in OT texts, such a find may carry some wisdom. In this respect, I do find it intriguing that in American history, the newly formed American government ultimately failed under the Articles of Confederation (1781-1788). Deletion of the executive branch ultimately led to its reinsertion in 1789. At least some degree of executive authority is essential.

---

<sup>82</sup> Koyzis, 34-38.

<sup>83</sup> “Since we come equipped with this sliding scale, it has been normal for readers of Paul to glance at Romans 13 and assume that Paul’s emphatic insistence on obedience to the ruling authorities places him at least in a centre-right positions on our spectrum. But of course Paul doesn’t belong on our spectrum. He belongs, if anywhere, on the map of political opinion formed by the peculiar circumstances of second-Temple Judaism.” Wright, *Paul*, 60.

**(VI) Foreign Policy.** The discovery of a militaristic “okay” currently befuddles me, and conclusions on the acknowledgement and support of violent foreign policy await another study and the counsel of the Gospels, where Jesus both surprised Israel by redeeming without sword and shield, yet also sent off his disciples with at least a personal defense policy, armed with sword at their side (Luke 22:26). From Isaiah 44-45 one can gather that at one time at least YHWH supported militaristic foreign policy of a non-Yahwist state – albeit for the redemption of Israel. Isaiah 44-45 might at least arrest a pacifist. In the meantime, Christopher Bryan helps: “We are, or ought to be, appalled by violence. All violence is assault upon God’s creation. Yet the Exodus story is in many respects a violent image... In the long run, however, so long as we are given a measure of power (and we are), we shall be forced to ask how, when, and (on any given occasion) *whether* we are supposed to use it. No doubt even the best decision we can make must, like the Exodus itself, be grievous and sinful, especially when it involves the deaths of those who are also the work of God’s hands.”<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Originally this project began during a presidential election year as an attempt to develop a political framework in order to better inform voters like myself, because I found equally godly and informed Christians on both sides of the table basing their political views on anything but the Bible. And only once in decades of churchgoing did I hear a cogent argument for political views in the church. “Did the Bible concern politics

---

<sup>84</sup> Bryan, *Render*, 128-29.

at all?" I wondered. By the *practice* of churches I attended, one would have to interpret: *it does not*. So originally, I endeavored to find out if the Bible would tell me to be politically left or politically right, or at least which way to lean. But much like most studies of the Bible, on a given topic, the inquisitor's priorities are exchanged for the Bible's before questions can be answered.

Thus, this paper sought to lay some stakes in the ground biblically with respect to politics, using Isaiah 44:24-45:13 as a focal text. It translated the text,<sup>85</sup> which served the interpretation of it. These building blocks led to broad observations, which were then tested by the wider witness of scripture. And finally, the study reached its temporary destination, drawing conclusions from this study to inform contemporary political thinking. These conclusions found that YHWH as history's overseer, preeminent over politics, that the power of political leaders and states is fundamentally *derived*, that "redemption" involves the political sphere. It found that the purpose of government was that governments rule with acknowledgement of YHWH, that they preserve God's people, that they govern in such a way as to usher the nations may know YHWH, and preserve life generally, even with a focus on their constituency's poorest members. It noted no explicit endorsement of a form of government, and it pondered violent foreign policy. Transparently, the paper's breadth may leave the reader wondering what to do with it all. For the Bible thus has much to say about politics. But one conclusion is worth reasserting because it stands highest above the rest: the pacifying reassurance of the

---

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps for the sake of quickly getting to political theology, translation is something I rarely found in political books listed in the bibliography.

ultimate nature of political processes: “I am YHWH, who does all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).

### 3

#### A MOTHER INSTRUCTS HER KING

#### PROVERBS 31:1-9

Our study now turns to the wisdom books, where traditionally in the Ancient Near East, such books were written exclusively for kings and the court. They were the rulers' wisdom books. Proverbs in large measure departs from that tradition to provide something much more democratic. Interestingly, though, the end of Proverbs does not avoid the wisdom tradition altogether, showing the book to be fully democratic after all, addressing all types of people, including kings. Proverbs 31.1-9 is the wisdom of a non-Yahwist mother to her son, Lemuel the king, and adopted by Solomon into his book of wisdom. The passage supplies much for the study of political theory, since it offers one of the few direct biblical addresses to rulers.<sup>1</sup>

#### **1 / Translation** (Italics not for emphasis, but to highlight inner structures)<sup>2</sup>.

1 The words of Lemuel,<sup>3</sup> King of Massa,<sup>4</sup> which his mother instructed<sup>5</sup> him:

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 17.14-20 is an excellent example of another, addressed to (future) kings of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> See translation method at the beginning of the Isaiah translation in chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lemuel's non-Israelite name denotes that "Lemuel was no king of Israel." Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), 182.

- 2 What,<sup>6</sup> my son?<sup>7</sup>  
 And what, son of my womb?  
 And what, son of my vows?<sup>8</sup>
- 3 Do not give to women<sup>9</sup> your strength,<sup>10</sup>  
 and your ways<sup>11</sup> to destroyers of kings.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> A number of foreign markers in this poem point מַשָּׁא away from “oracle” (ESV NAS NRS NIV Waltke) and “utterance” (Delitzsch in heading) toward Lemuel’s region of governance, “Massa” in North Arabia (Dell, Clifford, Murphy, Reyburn-Fry, Delitzsch in exposition 473, Kitchen). Delitzsch writes, “Whether it be a name of a tribe or a country... [it] is the region ruled over by Lemuel, and since this proper name throws back the determination which it has in itself on מַלְכֵּה , the phrase is to be translated: ‘Words of Lemuel, the king of Massa.’” *Proverbs*, 473. Admittedly, הַמַּשָּׂא “The oracle” prefaces Agur’s poem (Pr 30), however, that, too has been contested to depict the region of Agur. Archaeologist K.A. Kitchen comments on Massa’s historicity: “A district in NW is externally attested externally for the early to middle 1st millennium BC in Assyrian texts ranging from Tiglath-Pileser III to Assurbanipal (i.e. within c.745-630 BC). Thus, descended from forbears of the 2nd millennium, a tribal principedom of Massa seems to have emerged and become established during the first half of the 1st millennium BC on this Assyrian evidence. This general date would sufficiently suit for both Agur and Lemuel.” “Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of a Literary Form,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977): 101-102.

<sup>5</sup> Rendered either “taught” (ESV NAS NRS NIV, Waltke) or “instructed” (Clifford, Murphy), this word must be understood as a word of “discipline” or “correction” (BDB 415, Bratcher-Fry). Delitzsch’s rendering suffices for meaning, but twists the tongue: “The utterance wherewith his mother warned him.” 473.

<sup>6</sup> Ink spills on the meaning of this interjection. Rendered “What” (NAS, Delitzsch, Murphy, Bridges), “What are you doing?” (ESV, Clifford), “No” (NRS), “O my son” (NIV), even “What ails you?” (Dahood, found in Whybray). It is best to follow Delitzsch and leave it as stark as it appears: “What.” Because of its rarity of form (independent, carrying no following verb), we might conclude two interconnected possibilities: 1. Its sharpness carries rhetorical effect, to command an ear (“for the purpose of exciting attention” Delitzsch 474. Cf. Murphy 239). On this possibility, note: “Listen” (Waltke) e.g. communicates the *intent* of the interjection, but omits art. Also, 2. It may reveal a speech custom local to Lemuel’s region or even family.

<sup>7</sup> All three uses of “son” בֶּן are an Aramaic equivalent. The intimacy of this mother to her son is highlighted: not only will she point out that she carried him in her womb, but she will also remind Lemuel: “You are my son. I made a vow for you.” Allen Ross, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 1127.

<sup>8</sup> “Refers to a vow the mother promised if God were to give her a son.” Cf. Hannah, 1 Sam 1:11. Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1999), 270; R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs, Based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 423.

<sup>9</sup> “Women” are women of the harem. Clifford, 270.

<sup>10</sup> “Strength” (ESV, NIV, NRS, NAS, Whybray, Waltke), “vigor” (Clifford), and “power” (Murphy) all get at the influential capacity and excellence that הִילֵּל evokes. הִילֵּל is also the heroine of the second poem (31:10).

<sup>11</sup> “Drk means ‘might,’” Waltke argues, quoting the HALOT, leading his translation: “your sovereign power.” But he concedes, “if drk means ‘ways,’ it refers to his whole way of life” Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 504. “Your power” (Murphy) is an





- 6 Give strong drink *to the one who is perishing*<sup>20</sup>  
     And wine<sup>21</sup> *to those bitter of soul*<sup>22</sup>
- 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty<sup>23</sup>  
     And let his misery not be remembered.
- 8 Open your mouth for the mute<sup>24</sup>  
     For the justice of everyone fading away.<sup>25</sup>
- 9 Open your mouth. Decide justice.<sup>26</sup>

afflicted. 2) The idiom identifying the destitute is thought-provoking, both here and in verse 8. "Sons-of" often depicts tribal, familial, or national identity. But here, the only state these souls are born into is the 'state' of destitution. בְּנֵי-עֹרִי "are those who are, as it were, born to oppression and suffering" Delitzsch, 477.

<sup>20</sup> Wine was given to "malefactors condemned to die." Cf. crucified Jesus, who refused it. Mk 15:23. Delitzsch, 478.

<sup>21</sup> The avowed chiasm here (wine, strong drink, strong drink, wine) seems too weak to be worth much interpretive merit. From M. Lichtenstein, found in Murphy, 240.

<sup>22</sup> Is this a hypothetical/rhetorical usage, or a "bold and singular recommendation?" (Murphy, 241). In other words, is the king really to hand out intoxicators to those in misery? It may be possible, and many commentators suggest so. Regardless, the point is that if the inebriation of wine were sought, inducing forgetfulness, *may it not be sought by the king*. If it served a good thing, let that good thing be in the hands of the destitute. Delitzsch helps: "Wine rejoices the heart of man, Ps. 104:15, and at the same time raises it for the time above oppression and want, and out of anxious sorrow, wherefore it is soonest granted to them, and in sympathizing love ought to be presented to them by whom this its beneficent influence is to be wished for."

<sup>23</sup> "The noun rendered... poverty is found only in Proverbs." Reyburn-Fry, 650.

<sup>24</sup> Kidner: "*Dumb* refers to those who cannot get a fair hearing." *Proverbs*, 183. Bauckham suggests that it need not be metaphorical, though, in that the truly mute are an actual instance of "the *most* disadvantaged people in society, and ... stand for all who find it hard to get a hearing," "Wisdom for the Powerful: Proverbs 31.1-9," in *The Bible and Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1999), 45. Clifford's comment is memorable: "Verses 8-9... urge the king to open his mouth not to drink but to speak for the voiceless and poor." 270.

<sup>25</sup> Waltke. Many potential translations. Against Delitzsch's "all the children of leaving," which insists on orphaned children, the verb's family of Hebrew forms does not seem to permit such a translation. Cf. sweeping through of eagles (Job 9:26), a flood (Is 8:8), wind (Is 21:1), clothes that are put on and taken off (Ps 102:27), and wages that are repeatedly changed (Gen 31:41). Transience and change is in view, not fatherlessness. With every image, this group is a forgotten lot, without anything to establish permanence or remembrance. They are not only in need, they are born into it, and while they may long for someone else to advocate for them, to everyone they are a passing wind, unremembered, forgotten. Such a translation matches "mute" of the parallelism. Kidner places more emphasis on their instability: "Lit. 'sons of change' = 'the insecure'" *Proverbs* 183.

<sup>26</sup> As an accusative, as at Zech. 8:16, "it is not equivalent to בִּצְדָק." It is justice, "i.e. so that justice is the result of they judicial act" Delitzsch, 479.

And do right for the poor and needy.<sup>27</sup>

## 2 / Paragraph cohesion.

Some arguments suggest the entire chapter falls under the authorship of Lemuel's mother, which makes a good case,<sup>28</sup> despite its opponents.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of its broad unit, though, after following a heading verse, 31:2-9 is clearly a complete unit, set apart from chapter 30 and from the alphabetized ode that follows. By Knut Heim's rubric for judging paragraph structure in Proverbs, this poem coheres, as the following illustrates.<sup>30</sup> **First**, the main protagonists are consistent, coreferential: 1. The directly addressed royal reader prevails (2-3, 6, 8-9), 2. The poor and needy reappear in different ways (5a, 6a, 6b, 8, 9), and 3. "King," "ruler" and "son" are alike in verses 1-4, after which the king exists within the second person addresses that follow. Only one character set does not carry through the whole poem: after verse 3, the seductive women do not reappear. **Second**, coherence between the sayings stands. דין "rights / justice" is a repeated concern (5, 8, and 9), along with similar subjects, like שפט־צדק to "decide justice" (9) and its opposite, שכח מחקק to "forget decrees" (5). The sad estate of the poor is impossible to miss, addressed in the כל־בני־עני lit. "all the sons of

---

<sup>27</sup> Surely a hendiadys. Waltke, 506.

<sup>28</sup> Waltke, 501-502. Kitchen, 100-101.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Kidner, *Wisdom*, 45.

<sup>30</sup> "(1) Coreferentiality of the main protagonists (or some of them); (2) coherence between the sayings (through semantic links and inferences); (3) coreferentiality and coherence should coincide; (4) if the first three conditions are met, the expected result is that the individual sayings give a context to one another and thus mutually influence their meaning." Summary by C. John Collins, *A Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom Books*, unpublished class guide (Covenant Theological Seminary, 2005), 105-106.

affliction" (5), the אֹרֶב "perishing" (6), the מֵרִי נֶפֶשׁ "bitter of soul" (6), and the חֲלוּף "all the sons of the fading away" (8). Finally, influences that delude or anesthetize make up all of Lemuel's choice avoidances, from נְשִׁים "women" and מַלְכִּין "destroyers [fem.] of kings" (3), to יַיִן "wine" and שֵׁכָר "strong drink" (4-5), the latter of which are ultimately commended for those, unlike a king, who would be served by some forgetfulness (6-7). **Third**, the coreferentiality and coherence fit together. These do not refer to opposing subjects, but one and the same subject from beginning to end. The situations, the things to avoid, the protagonists: all the elements fill the stage for Lemuel's mother to give a very direct statement on proper ruling. **Fourth**, the result is mutual influence among the parts of the poem, which comprises the message below.

### 3 / Message

"These verses take away the glamour from loose living (3-7) to exalt the glory of a king who is his people's protector (8,9)."<sup>31</sup> The poem broadly admonishes ruling as service to the people, especially with the weakest and worst off in mind, those who have no voice, who sweep through people's lives like a wind that brushes the skin one moment and disappears the next. The ruler's use of the mouth, as Clifford pointed out, is not for drinking but for speaking on behalf of the poor. Forgetfulness (through inebriation) is for the poor to forget their miserable estate, not for the ruler to forget his purpose as champion of the poor. Taken alone, this poem says everything of the king's

---

<sup>31</sup> Kidner, *Proverbs*, 182.

rule has one object in mind: prudence and temperance for the sake of the poor. Why not drink? Because of the afflicted. Why not carouse? Because the destitute need their champion. Indeed, “the underlying subject of the poem is a king’s duty to effect justice for the poor.”<sup>32</sup> The timelessness of the truth is unmistakable. From ancient King David to late medieval Henry VIII to American President Bill Clinton, vulnerability to women has severely clouded the purity of justice. But this poem counsels these leaders and others with a message more than simply that they lament the fact that justice was blurred, which is verse 5a. It moves to 5b. The greatest injury in a ruler getting lost in the supposed privileges that power brings is not the impairment of the leader’s judgment, or even that justice was lost, but that the poor had no voice, and the afflicted had no champion. “Hence a self-indulgent life must be eschewed, not on grounds of private morality, but as likely to impair the king’s exercise of his public responsibilities (vv. 3-5).”<sup>33</sup> And further, “Lemuel’s policy is not to be, ‘The king helps those who help themselves,’ so much as, ‘The king helps those who cannot help themselves.’”<sup>34</sup>

#### **4 / For Israel**

Kings are to listen to the instruction. They are instructed to eschew a life of self-pleasure, so easy to obtain when great influence is in a ruler’s grip. In no ambiguous language they are instructed to think not on themselves, but on behalf of the least in

---

<sup>32</sup> Clifford, 270

<sup>33</sup> Bauckham, 44

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 45

their kingdom. They may also be reminded of the wisdom of their own mothers during times they are tempted to rule for their own benefit.

The people of Israel “listen in” as it were to this instruction, which leaves them with (at least) three messages for their own benefit. First, they find comfort and hope that their ruler is subject to a higher law, a law that instructs kings, one that even promotes the defense of the poorest and most afflicted. In this, those who are poorest and most afflicted in Israel especially find hope. When Moses, the closest biblical resemblance of an all-powerful political leader in the Bible, died, his succession went in three directions: to Joshua, to institutions (judicial institutions, priesthood, and prophecy), and also to the law. J. G. McConville, who points this out, writes, “It is the supremacy of the *torah* above all that mitigates the concentration of power in any person or agency.”<sup>35</sup> Second, they have a ground for holding the ruler accountable because of that higher law standing over the king. Whether they have the *means* to do so is another matter, but the practice of prophetic resistance did grow following Solomon’s reign (when evil also increased), coming from both a man of the royal court (Daniel 1) and the grazing field (Amos 1.1). Such prophetic accountability may find its root in Deuteronomy 17.18-20, for example, where kings are sent to the regular reading of Torah. Third, they are also “listening in” on their representative Israelite, and thereby the people of Israel also “listen in” to the same instruction given to them. They eschew a life of intoxication, too, to take responsibility for the poorest in their land.

---

<sup>35</sup> *God and Earthly Power*, 96-7.

## 5 / For Political Theology

In chapter two, Isaiah 44.24-45.13 spilled out a number of implications for political theology, some very strong and others suggestive at best. But all of its political implications were just that: implications. Differently, political theology is not an implication of Proverbs 31.1-9. It is the focal point. Among the many political implications we derived from the Cyrus oracle, the wisdom of Lemuel's mother speaks only implicitly to most of them, but explicitly to two. Little is said, e.g., about the absolute monergism and authority of God. Yet it is derivable. Lascivious and intoxicated living betrays a *decided* ignorance toward these very commands, which, falling within Proverbs, clearly reveal the absence of a "fear of the Lord" which "is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1.7; 9.10; 15.33) in the one who neglects them. In this way, it is no stretch to maintain Proverbs 31:3-4 indirectly argues for a leadership which acknowledges YHWH as their higher authority.

But far more explicitly, Proverbs 31.1-9 instructs on the **person** and **purpose** of the ruler, which are intimately intertwined (a notion that is itself theologically suggestive!). First, personally, the ruler avoids intemperate living. He lives, inferentially, a righteous life. But curiously in Proverbs 31, this intemperance is not expressly for the purpose of maintaining a role-model image in the land (which would certainly serve the people as their representative). Instead, shunning the self-indulgent life is intimately connected to the purpose: of preserving the poorest life, directed especially in this passage upon uprightness in the court. Furthermore, being one of the only direct political directives outside the Torah, Proverbs 31.1-9 makes a strong suggestion that

*the focus of government should be on its poorest members.* Perhaps this serves as a focal aim to ensure justice for the wider populous.

One reason I do not hesitate to infer the (or a primary) focus of government should be on the poorest citizens is that another passage echoes the same focus. In fact, both two points above emerge in Psalm 72, another work by Solomon (v1).<sup>36</sup> First is the king's uprightness. An ode to "The Perfect King" (Derek Kidner's fitting title), the Psalm speaks of a "righteousness" (*ṣdqh* 1, *ṣdq* 2) invoked of YHWH to be bestowed upon the king. Although it speaks fundamentally to the king's uprightness and justice in ruling and judging, it seems the general uprightness of the king personally is not out of view with the use of *ṣdqh/ṣdq*. Second and more abundant, a comprehensive focus on the poor rises to the surface of this ideal ruler for Israel. Courtly justice for the people (2a) turns to focus upon the poor (2b, 4). And deliverance of the poor is one of four central themes to the psalm (4, 12, 13, 14).<sup>37</sup> The editor, then, of both the Psalms and Proverbs found reason to highlight a focus on the poor as central among the priorities of rule. With its parallel to the perfect king of Psalm 72, then, it is not ungrounded that C. John Collins

---

<sup>36</sup> The Psalm speaks fundamentally about the Messianic king, to be sure, so that proper interpretation of it must first apply it to the Messianic hope before adopting it for political theology. Some also question the use of Israelite texts for political theology, since Israel of the OT is properly represented by the church in the NT, not 'secular' governments. A short and reduced answer to this problem is that there is no ultimate problem. Israel was plainly both spiritual community and political entity, and can (and should) thereby be interpreted along both lines, but not without taking into account essential cultural and redemptive-historical differences to the present day.

<sup>37</sup> The other three prominent themes of the ideal king are: righteous and just rule (1-7), universal kingship (8-11) and endless blessing (15-17), with a little interweaving of the themes.

would write of Proverbs 31, “We have here the picture of an ideal human ruler – and thus of the ideal Israelite ruler, since Israel is God’s renewed humanity.”<sup>38</sup>

Collins summarizes the passage’s political theology:

This picture runs clean contrary to the normal model of a powerful person: one who seeks power for his own gain, who indulges himself in the fruits of his power, and who allows the ruthless to take advantage over the weak. Each Israelite should pray for his own ruler to fulfill this picture – even when Israel is in exile.

Since it is likely that Lemuel is a Gentile (and we have no knowledge whether he was a proselyte), we have here a contribution to a kind of “natural law” picture of human rulers – that is, even if a ruler is not himself a “defender of the faith” or a “nursing father” ... he is still answerable for his conduct under generally accessible notions of justice.<sup>39</sup>

Interlaced with this study’s sustained observation of a divine authority over human rulers, the concept of “natural law” here fits naturally into the argument. But a detailed explanation of the natural law as I see it described in the Bible is outside the parameters of this work. It is sufficient to say for the present purposes that Collins’s point lifts divine authority above the rulers, the authority to whom the rulers give account. Collins also highlights Proverbs 31’s chief contributions to political theology: personal uprightness with respect to temperance, and a pointed focus on defending the poor.

Finally, the very presence of a text addressed squarely at kings, and one which adjures kings to keep their concerns upon the justice of the poor, demonstrates a law

---

<sup>38</sup> C. John Collins. “Proverbs 31.1-9 Translation and Discussion.” Unpublished work, in possession of author, from *OT340 Psalms and Wisdom Literature*. (Covenant Theological Seminary, 2009), 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



not that kings decree for their own control (and benefit), but a law that governs kings.

What Proverbs 31 suggests is the control of a paradigmatic law that oversees kings. This could be understood as natural law, since it was a law accessed by a Gentile king's mother. But it is also simply law found in the holy writings of Israel to her kings, to govern them.

### *Political Appropriations*

**Political Leaders: Uprightness.** Political leaders should be men and women of moral uprightness, people whom Christians might otherwise be inclined to label "righteous" (cf. Psalm 72.1-2) whether the politician actually *be* "righteous" (unto salvation) before God or not. Commenting on Psalm 72, Kidner helps our study of Proverbs 31 by aptly positioning the primacy of righteousness in civil government – "even before compassion." He writes, "Righteousness dominates this opening, since in Scripture, it is the first virtue of government, even before compassion (which will be the theme of verses 12-14)."<sup>40</sup> Proverbs 31 makes clear: a ruler's life is not for *his gain*, be it his pleasure (as easy as it is to come by) or career. A king's position is fundamentally for the sake of *those he rules*. Herein is righteousness, not simply moral virtue, but moral uprightness with a redemptive purpose.

The abysmal morality of political leaders sadly taints both sides of the party aisle in the United States, so that members of both parties would be foolish to vilify the opposing party's morality. Both parties carry blame. This is biblically tragic, but not only

---

<sup>40</sup> Kidner, *Proverbs*, 255.

for the deplorable model leaders are setting for the country. A professor once told me that morality in fact leads philosophy, so that it is moral decisions that often dictate where philosophical choices will go. This is not always the case to be sure, but perhaps two couple examples may help. A neighbor of mine announced to his pregnant partner that he was bringing in a second woman into his household, to his partner's horror. Subsequently, he began to adjust not only his ethical views (not surprisingly) but also his theology to accommodate his moral choice, so that what once was an unquestionable respect for the biblical God that he received from his verse-memorizing mother was becoming increasingly blurry and full of doubt and questions. Addiction is most evident to have this effect. A one-time zealous Christian student I led in ministry had fallen so deeply into drug addiction that when I took him to the hospital following a (drug-induced) car accident, I insisted he had little hope if he did not give his problem over to God for help, and far from his original zeal, with that his unceasing excuses came to an end. "I cannot do that," he insisted. His religious (philosophical) framework had changed. The tragedy in our political world is that those who wield the highest levels of responsibility often allow their morality to devolve into (in the year of writing this chapter) entertaining party-paid visits to strip clubs (Republicans) or committing adultery while their wife is pregnant in the hospital (a Democrat). Hence, they leave their people wondering where their philosophy is also headed. They leave their people wondering whether their concern will truly be for the constituents who elected them to lead, and for others with Proverbs 31 in mind, whether they will truly care for the poor.

**Purpose of Rule: Comprehensive Focus on the Poor.** Why rule? From modern standards, one might expect more language about maintaining a fruitful economy (not out of view in Psalm 72), or a perfect standard for taxation. Instead, first, and perhaps most personally striking to this author, in this rare word directly addressing governmental priorities, the priority is the preservation of justice to the poor. Psalm 72 helps to expand this observation outside of courtroom justice, alluding to “deliverance” and even internal (emotive) concern for the poor from the ruler. Thus, what is found is a comprehensive focus on the poor. In my study of Psalm 72, which as the above work has shown intersects significantly with the present passage (same author, e.g.) and expands some of the present notions, I summarized some implications of the passage for current politicians, implications which dovetail the present study.

Sadly in the United States, for whatever reason, major conservative politicians offer the least public language of concern for the poor, perhaps leaving it up to their political adversaries to keep in view for them. This is biblically tragic and must be reversed, because even if they do care for the poor and work privately behind the scenes to that end, their silence educates their constituency on what is (not) important to them. Alternatively, while concern for the poor commendably underlines more liberal politicians’ rhetoric, yet some plans or strategies toward such ‘deliverance’ (‘social justice’ is the buzz word today) have served to do anything *but* “deliver” the poor and weak. Deliverance must truly ‘deliver’ (72:4,12,13), else it, too, is unbiblical. It certainly cannot further sustain poverty. Because this author is a theologian and not a politician, economist, or sociologist, principles are offered firmly (what is above), but suggestions (what follows) humbly. Practically, safety ‘nets’ of sorts should be set, with fixed structures in place for the poor to easily step out *and stay out* of poverty (by God’s grace). But in addition to this, support measures should be attached to address intangible barriers – ‘structural sin’ as it has been called, within cultures and families – structures that prevent the poor from taking advantage of the structures in place or believing in their own capacity to escape. Support measures would include education certainly, but also greater attention to social

work and counseling services, and perhaps micro-loans, which appear to be strong assistance measures. More pointedly, I do believe there is a place for temporary handouts, particularly for the *recently-impooverished*, but handout-type of poverty relief can be dangerous by its effect of ultimately sustaining what it seeks to solve. In other words, welfare is simply not coterminous with deliverance.<sup>41</sup>

**Nature of Government: A Program of Law.** But for Proverbs 31.1-9, the above focus on the poor is targeted particularly at the courts (not unlike Psalm 72), on ensuring that the full voice of the poor and voiceless is never overpowered by the strong (including the king). To be sure, true justice is never biased toward the poor, either (cf. Lev 19.17 and Ex 23.3-6). But such a strong and specific application of the ruler's attention on the poor in the court raises the courts to a place of prominence politically, an elevation of (the rule of) law that is, for example, fundamental to Oliver O'Donovan's political theology throughout *The Desire of the Nations*, where he maintains, "The court is the central paradigm of government."<sup>42</sup> The elevation of the court also raises lawyers and all who handle and enforce the law to a place calling for immense need for moral uprightness. Because this political passage focuses on the courts, it is no stretch to expand its instructive scope not only to kings but all leaders responsible in any way for societal law, be it federal or local. On a similar note, the attention on the courts also elevates the local and supreme courts of civil governments as an area never to be shelved within the concept of political redemption. Without strong courts, redemptive activity in the larger government is often rendered futile.

---

<sup>41</sup> Jeff Zehnder, "Two Papers on Psalm 72" (unpublished work, in possession of author), 2010.

<sup>42</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 39.

## A SOCIETY SUBMITS

## ROMANS 13.1-7

From Proverbs 31, we jump some 1000 years to the early Christian church, leaping over Jesus' famous "Render to Caesar"<sup>1</sup> statement to settle into a very prominent political text, the Apostle Paul's Romans 13, which, like the Proverbs text before it, is rare in its sustained argument on civil government. But unlike the Proverbs text, Paul here addresses citizens, not rulers. Like Jesus' "Render to Caesar" rebuttal to the Pharisees, even likely constructed *from* it, the passage both addresses taxation and portrays government from the citizen's point of view. It is a classic and often central text on civil government, unfortunately elevated to some authors.<sup>2</sup> As before, a translation, verse by verse exegesis, and consideration of the passage's main burden(s) will be argued before political import is taken from it for the present study. But some questions about the integrity of Romans 13.1-7 call for comment before the paper proceeds into translation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jesus' "Render to Caesar" rebuttal receives effective assessment by Richard Bauckham (*The Bible in Politics*), Oliver O'Donovan (*Desire*), and Christopher Bryan (*Render to Caesar*).

<sup>2</sup> O'Donovan explains, "Older traditions of political theology grew weaker as their exegetical foundations shrank, dwindling to a few cherished passages (Paul on the authorities, for example) which appeared to have lost any connexion with the messages of the prophets, evangelists, and apostles." 22.

### Authenticity of 13.1-7 in the Book of Romans

On first view, Paul's series of exhortations to the Roman believers hits a disjointed turn. Some three paragraphs centering on the Roman church managing her internal relationships is followed seemingly abruptly with a statement on subjection to government, leading some scholars to question the authorship and original presence of Romans 13.1-7 inside the book as a whole. Yet many other scholars, while acknowledging something seemingly disjointed here, counter to argue for its substantiated inclusion. It must be acknowledged: disjointedness is unmistakable. 13.1 opens into a very different subject without any transitional words or phrases common to Pauline discourse (e.g. καὶ, δὲ, γὰρ, διὸ, διὰ τοῦτο, etc.).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, I maintain the almost unquestionable inclusion of 13.1-7, for two reasons. First, broadly, the passage is found in Paul's paraenetic section (chapters 12-16, where imperatives abound), not his largely argumentative section (1-11). Second, locally, the language and concepts of 13.1-7 are found in both prior *and* subsequent material, so that it clearly can be seen as a substantiated flow of thought. Two brief examples will spell this out. *Before* the said section, 12.19 bears a number of words found in 13.1-7, yet they are not all found in the same grammatical form, perhaps escaping automated word searches: "*Beloved, do not avenge* (ἐκδικοῦντες) *yourselves, but rather give place to wrath* (ὀργῇ); *for it is written, 'Vengeance* (ἐκδίκησις) *is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.*"<sup>4</sup> Two verses later the

---

<sup>3</sup> On this and the question of 13.1-7's integrity, see Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 790ff.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, it is O'Donovan who picks up on the ἐκδικο- word string in *Desire* where many Romans commentators leave it out: "ἐκδικοῦντες in 12.19 anticipates the governmental ἐκδικος in 13.4." 149.

concepts of good (ἀγαθός) and evil (here κακός) are in view, after which begins 13.1-7, where the controlling of good and evil by civil governments is addressed, and all four root words highlighted in the parentheses above take center stage.<sup>5</sup> Conceptually, too, according to Bruce, it is “natural” that material on Christians’ relation to outsiders would turn to address governmental authority in particular.<sup>6</sup> Also, J. D. G. Dunn connects the language here to the broader book of Romans.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the movement of thought continues quite manifestly *after* the section, too, as Paul moves from saying “Pay to all what is owed (ὀφειλάς)” (13.7) to “Owe (ὀφείλετε) nothing to anyone” (13.8). Conceptually, the movement flows from godly respect to outsiders in authority (13.1-7) to godly respect to outsiders in general (13.8-9), invoking Jesus’ greatest commandment. For these reasons, something more than apparent internal witness is needed to verify 13.1-7 did not belong to Romans. The alien origin of 13.1-7 is certainly *possible* theoretically, but not *probable*. There is not textual support for its absence. Likely is simply that Paul included 13.1-7 into his argument where it currently stands. To the verses we now turn.

---

<sup>5</sup> Moo suggests the connection, suggesting that 12.19 marked a “specific contextual trigger” for the following statements on government. But he does not explicitly highlight the word similarities themselves. 790-91.

<sup>6</sup> “When guide-lines are laid down for the behavior of Christians towards those who are outside the fellowship, it is natural that something should be said about the Christian’s relation to the secular authorities – municipal, provincial or imperial.” F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 218.

<sup>7</sup> *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 758.

## 1 / Translation<sup>8</sup>

(1) Let every life<sup>9</sup> be in subjection<sup>10</sup> to higher<sup>11</sup> authorities. For there is no authority<sup>12</sup> except by<sup>13</sup> God. But (δὲ) those that are<sup>14</sup>, by God are they established<sup>15</sup>. (2) So that<sup>16</sup>: The one who resists<sup>17</sup> the authority has

---

<sup>8</sup> See an explanation of my translation method, which precedes the Isaiah translation in chapter two.

<sup>9</sup> Ψυχὴ can mean “life” or “soul” (NKJ, Moo), leading many to translate the full phrase as “every person” (NRS ESV NAS NAB NET *toda persona* LBA R95, Cranfield, Schreiner, Dunn) or simply “everyone” (NJB NIV *todos* CAB NVI, Barrett, Newman-Nida, Morris). Functionally, these options suffice. But *ceteris paribus*, I prefer retaining more common renderings for words, in order to connect it to their wider examples in the NT. Hence, “life.”

<sup>10</sup> Gk. ὑποτασσέσθω: Virtually all consulted translations are acceptable except two. To “obey” (NJB, Newman-Nida) Cranfield effectively discredits on account of its wider Greek usage: the word indicates simply “that one is placed below the authority by God” and does not imply strict obedience. Cranfield, 662. For this reason, to “be subject” (NRS ESV NET NKJ Cranfield Schreiner Dunn Käsemann) “be in subjection” (NAS Barrett Calvin), or “be subordinate” (NAB) all communicate this recognition of subordination. But “be submissive” (Moo), while tolerable, suggests more blind obedience than the word informs. The rest of the NT (e.g. Rev 13, 17-18) would not support blind obedience, to note. Upon Cranfield’s word study, “acknowledge [one’s] subjection” may be best. The above translation simply makes the word’s passivity transparent.

<sup>11</sup> Although context explains the phrase to clearly mean “governing” authorities (NRS ESV NAS NIV NJB NKJ *las autoridades que gobiernan* LBA; Cranfield, Moo, Dunn), which some have also called “state” (Newman-Nida), “public” (*públicas* NVI), or “ruling” (Käsemann), “higher” authorities (NAB) reflects the Greek word. The participle ὑπερχούσας indicates superiority, something “rising above” or “surpassing”. Cf. LS §43537 and Gingrich, 206. “Supreme” (Barrett) dangerously overshoots, without comment. Bruce has written: “It is plain from the immediate context, as from the general context of the apostolic writings, that the state can rightly command obedience only within the limits of the purposes for which it has been divinely instituted - ... it must be resisted when it demands the allegiance due to God alone.” 223-24.

<sup>12</sup> Lit. “there is not an authority” (negation is on the verb, not the noun). But “there is no authority” (VVV) suffices.

<sup>13</sup> The word ὑπο, “by” (Schreiner, *par* CAB), is also used several words later in the same verse and, unlike many translations, should be rendered the same in both places: “by God...by God”. Some translations add words to help communicate the meaning: e.g. “by God’s appointment” (NET, Cranfield), “given by God” (Dunn), and “that which God has established” (NIV and NVI, Morris).

<sup>14</sup> Gk. αἱ...οὕσαι: “Those that exist” (ESV NAS NAB *Las que existen* CAB LBA NVI, Schreiner) or “those existing” (Witherington) is probably better for readability. But “those that are” (*Las que hay* R95) transparently reflects the Greek. See translation method, n7. To help, a number of translations re-insert the subject “authorities” (NRS NIV NET NKJ). “The authorities which in fact exist” (Barrett) is too wordy when other acceptable options exist.

<sup>15</sup> Present aspect. Many translations, however, render it in English past tense.



opposed<sup>18</sup> the ordinance of God. But (δὲ) those having opposed will receive judgment for themselves<sup>19</sup>. (3) For rulers are not a cause of fear<sup>20</sup> for good work<sup>21</sup> but (ἀλλὰ) for evil. But are you wanting to not fear authority? Do good. And you will have its<sup>22</sup> praise. (4) For it is a servant (δῦλον) of God to

<sup>16</sup> Gk. ὥστε, commonly “so that.” Most translations render it as an inferential turn, using e.g. “therefore” (NRS ESV NAS NAB NKJ), “consequently” (NIV), “so” (NET NJB Cranfield) or “it follows that” (Barrett). Only a handful find a way to keep “so that” (Moo, Witherington, *de modo que* CAB R95), which communicates the following sentence as properly the *result* or *purpose* (more than simply an inference) of the previous statement. In this way, the causal truth (God established the authorities) leads necessarily to its result (opposing authorities is opposing God’s decree). In the end, it is simply a stronger statement of the logical turn.

<sup>17</sup> A present substantive participle: ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος. For the article, some translations read “whoever” (NRS ESV NAS NAB NKJ, Newman-Nida) or “anyone who” (NJB), a choice that reflects the idea here, but overshoots the simple article. Thus “the one who” (*el que resiste* LBA; Moo, Schreiner) or “he who...” (NIV, Dunn). Interesting are two Spanish versions which simply open the verse almost like a proverb, with “who resists” (*quien resiste* CAB; cf. R95).

<sup>18</sup> Two notes: **(1)** Ἀνθέστηκεν is perfect, thus “has opposed” (NAS *se ha opuesto* LBA) or “has resisted” (Dunn), against present tense formulations (VVV), which emphasize the action’s enduring presence. **(2)** Some translations fail to distinguish this word from the preceding verb (ἀντιτασσόμενος), which, though synonymous, is different.

<sup>19</sup> Many translation variations exist, but they all circle around the same idea of judgment coming as a result of the person’s failure to be subject to the higher authorities. It seems only the bland “will incur judgment” (NRS ESV NET) fails to emphasize the reciprocity communicated by the Greek word ἐαυτοῖς (“to/for/upon themselves”).

<sup>20</sup> **(1)** The word φόβος is not a verb (NET NJB CAB NVI R95, Newman-Nida). **(2)** Many translations use the word “terror” (NRS ESV NKJ KJB Barrett Bruce). But “terror” is understood chiefly today as “extreme fear” used “to intimidate” or more informally, as “especially a child that causes trouble or annoyance.” Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 1822. Neither of these match the Greek concept here properly. Better is simply to spell out the concept as “fear,” “cause of fear” (NAS NAB *motive de temor* LBA Schreiner Dunn) or “a fearful thing” (Witherington).

<sup>21</sup> τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ is singular (VVV), not plural (NKJ). It indicates an action produced by a person, and not the persons themselves who do good (NIV, NJB, Newman-Nida), the latter based on a “slenderly supported” reading that fuses the two words together. Bruce, 224. Some translations morph the phrase into “good conduct” (NRS ESV NAB NET, Bruce) or “good behavior” (NAS). But in keeping with this translation’s focus (see n1), best is to simply render it as “good work” (Schreiner, Cranfield, Moo) and nothing more. Creatively, I wonder if the modifier ἀγαθός ties these works to creation, where God created a world that was repeatedly judged “good” (טוב) even with a different Greek word by the LXX’s translators (καλός).

<sup>22</sup> Αὐτῆς, being feminine, ties to “authority” (ἐξουσίαν).

you for good. But if you do evil, fear<sup>23</sup>. For it does not bear the sword without cause. For it is a servant (διδάκονος) of God, a requiter<sup>24</sup> unto wrath<sup>25</sup> to the evildoer.

(5) Therefore it is necessary<sup>26</sup> to be in subjection not only because of<sup>26</sup> wrath but (ἀλλὰ) also because of<sup>27</sup> conscience<sup>28</sup>. (6) For because of this also you pay tributes<sup>29</sup>. For they<sup>30</sup> are servants (λειτουργοὶ)<sup>31</sup> of God, busily

---

<sup>23</sup> “Then you may well be afraid” (NJB) misses the imperative here. It simply charges, “be afraid” (Newman-Nida, Dunn) or “fear” (Cranfield, Moo, Shreiner).

<sup>24</sup> The word δίδωμι in the NT refers to an agent of retributive justice, hence often rendered “avenger” (ESV NAS NKJ, Schreiner, Dunn, Moo). Cf. LS §12978 and “an instrument of vengeance” (Barrett). It means “one who executes God’s wrath” (Calvin, 283). Note: it is not a verb, although it is often adjusted into a verb to smoothen out the phrase (NRS NAB NET NJB CAB).

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, some translations omit “wrath” (ὀργήν) altogether, following the witness of the Western text. Others render it as “God’s wrath” (e.g. Barrett, Newman-Nida), leading interpretation for the reader. But it is unclear just whose wrath is being communicated. See *Comment* section below.

<sup>26</sup> VVV (including four Spanish versions), except “one must” (NRS ESV NJB NKJ). Lit. it may be “it is a necessity,” since ἀναγκή is “necessity.”

<sup>27</sup> To reflect the Greek construction, these two phrases, “because of...because of...,” simply need to be in parallel (διὰ τὴν + accusative twice). Many translations render them differently (e.g. “to avoid” ... “for the sake of” ESV).

<sup>28</sup> The word communicates “moral consciousness” and is a word that arises especially in the epistles and Paul’s speeches in Acts (23.1; 24.16). συνέειδσις never appears in the Gospels or Revelation.

<sup>29</sup> φόρος can mean “taxes” (VVV, Moo), but is customarily found when referring to those monies that are paid to a protectorate nation, like Rome (1 Macc 8.2,4,7). Hence, “tributes” (KJV, Dunn, Cranfield, Witherington). Cf. LS §45290 “that which is brought in, tribute” (tying to its root, φέρω). See also Josephus *War* 2.403, 1 Macc. 8 and 2 Macc 8. And Dunn, 766.

<sup>30</sup> That is, the authorities.

<sup>31</sup> Like δακόνος, this word also means “servant” or “minister,” but with a different aspect. Although it has strong cultic association through the OT (See BAGD, 471, Cf. λειτουργέω BAGD, 470-71), and thus is the word from which “liturgist” is derived, Dunn helps to show that the word better points not to cultic ministry but to the service of public office. 766, cf. BAGD 471, def. 2. Hence, “civil servants” (*funcionarios* CAB) and “public servants” (Barrett).

engaged<sup>32</sup> in this very thing. (7) Render to all what is due: to whom tribute, tribute;<sup>33</sup> to whom tax, tax; to whom fear<sup>34</sup>, fear; to whom honor, honor.

## 2 / Exegesis

**(1) *Be in subjection.*** Immediately Paul opens his seven-verse burden with his overarching point: believers must acknowledge they live in subordination terrestrially to *higher authorities*, which in context clearly refers to “governing authorities” (e.g. NRS), and only suggestively at best to the angelic order.<sup>35</sup> Many commentators are right to qualify: this is not blind obedience commended.<sup>36</sup> But few of them offer persuasive rationale from the text itself. Cranfield, however, examines the wider first century usage of the verb in question, *hypotassō* (passive in 13.1), showing it is best understood here not as “obey” (NJB, Newman-Nida), but rather of a general recognition of subordination,

---

<sup>32</sup> Rendered many ways yet circling around the same meaning, this participle identifies those who are actively involved in a task. Hence “busily engaged in” (Gingrich, 171), “devoted to” (NET, Moo) or many others options.

<sup>33</sup> These phrases are all rendered as they appear in the Greek. Most translations smoothen the word order for the reader’s benefit by shifting forward one of the terminal double nouns: e.g. “tax to whom tax....”

<sup>34</sup> Some soften φόβος here to “reverence.” Although reverence is understood, the word indicates “fear” or “cause of fear.” When some translations render it “reverence” (Barrett) or “respect” (NRS ESV NIV NAB NET NJB *el respeto* CAB NVI R95; Newman-Nida, Moo), they help to properly dissuade any interpretations of slavish fear to the state, something that is not present. But in so doing they also distract from the obvious tie to the same word used in verse 3. So, Dunn: “‘Respect’ is too weak a translation.” 768.

<sup>35</sup> Paul’s use of ἐξουσία to refer to the heavenly order is certainly present in his writing (e.g. Eph 3.10), over which Christ has established victory (6.12). I believe using ἐξουσία over comparable words (e.g. “rulers” or “kings”) does place civil government within the arena of Christ’s triumph (O’Donovan’s insight, 147), yet the word cannot be pressed into angelic meaning. Fifteen noteworthy scholars argue the phrase simply refers here to governing authorities, listed in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 681n12. Most notable is C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans 9-16* (New York: T&T Clark, 1979), 656-59.

<sup>36</sup> Romans 13.1-7 has been used as a tool of governmental control. For example, see *passim* Winsome Munro, “Romans 13.1-7: Apartheid’s Last Biblical Refuge” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 20:4 (1990), 161-68.

“that one is placed below the authority by God.”<sup>37</sup> Hence many translations keep *be subject* or *be in subjection*.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, to heighten the priority of this particular command, Paul speaks of judgment for the disobedient (below), and here he also clarifies the scope: Emphatically, *every life* (πᾶσα ψυχὴ) means “no Christian is to imagine himself exempt.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps most startling, though, is the subsequent claim: *There is no authority, except by God*. This theological foundation grounds Paul’s subsequent exhortations, and it also aligns with a cosmic Biblical theme: the preeminence of God in all earthly matters. It is God who gives authority to earthly rulers, so much so that historically, they *have been established* by God. Such a truth carries notable implications, some of which Paul will provide. But two are worth highlighting, which will arise again later in this study: (a) the authority of rulers is derived.<sup>40</sup> Government’s divine derivation will reemerge when it is called God’s servant (4, 6). Divine derivation of authority results in two further implications, clarified by Christopher Bryan.<sup>41</sup> First, positively, perhaps to the surprise of some first century Christians (and students of the Roman Empire), it legitimizes Roman authority (when it does not overreach).<sup>42</sup> Negatively, it invites

---

<sup>37</sup> 662.

<sup>38</sup> Hardest to be sure is to apply this command in countries whose *higher authorities* are wicked regimes (Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, etc.), This will be analyzed below, with an eye to John Calvin.

<sup>39</sup> Cranfield, 656. Also, John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 280.

<sup>40</sup> Schreiner, 682.

<sup>41</sup> *Render to Caesar*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

prophetic response: it “leaves Roman authority in principle open to prophetic challenge wherever and whenever it has claimed too much for itself or betrayed the purposes for which it was instituted.”<sup>43</sup> The second of these implications is particularly essential where the passage has been used to justify totalitarianism in government.<sup>44</sup> And interestingly, for all the caricatures placed upon him with respect to God’s sovereignty, Calvin holds that totalitarian governments “are not ordained” by God.<sup>45</sup> Also, (b) resisting the civil authorities is tantamount to “resisting God himself.”<sup>46</sup> Only a handful of scholars tease out these implications.

Introducing the entire paragraph’s approach, *those that are* (Gk. *hai...ousai*) shows Paul is explaining government from a citizen’s point of view: Governmental structures exist, and God’s people live within them. Why do they exist? What is their purpose? How shall we relate to them? These are questions that Paul is addressing.

(2) *The one who resists has opposed the ordinance of God.* This higher scope of human resistance (against God) has already been anticipated. Again here Calvin shines:

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Biblically analogous to this (as it uses similar terminology), which some commentators have also pointed out, are attempts by domineering husbands to demand submission from their wives to their totalitarian control upon Ephesians 5.22ff. The passage there employs the same command to “be in subjection/subordination” in its command to the wife. But it in no way insists upon absolute obedience, rather a recognition of subordination, since the husband is also to “be subject” to the wife (5.21) and both stand under the super-authority of Christ (5.21, 23-24).

<sup>45</sup> Calvin appears to take a step away here from specificity, arguing more broadly on the “right” of civil government for Rom 13. He writes, “Although dictatorships and unjust authorities are not ordained governments, yet the right of government is ordained by God for the well-being of mankind.” The Christian’s task thus is to “respect and honor the right and authority of magistrates as being useful for mankind.” 281.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin: “If it is the will of God to govern in this manner, any who despise His power are striving to overturn the order of God and therefore resisting God himself, since to despise the providence of the One who is the Author of civil government is to wage war against Him.” 281.

“Because no one can resist God without causing his own ruin, Paul warns... [opposing] the providence of God will not go unpunished” (281). *Those having opposed will receive judgment for themselves.* The result of judgment naturally follows in the argument.

Resisting Authorities → Resisting God’s Ordinances → Judgment

What is noteworthy is that Paul makes judgment explicit here. This is God’s law, he points out, not a guide or suggestion, and violation of it invites judgment. In highlighting judgment, Paul emphasizes the command. Besides Calvin, few of the consulted scholars address the language of judgment present here.

**(3-4)** Verses three and four should be taken together, referring in whole to the state’s work of retributive justice. Paul weaves two interactive commands (imperatives plus a sort of dialogical interaction) into four objective statements (see chart below) to both interactively and declaratively demonstrate that law-keeping is what Paul meant by showing subjection to government.

3a	Rulers are not a fear for good work but for bad.	ASSERTION
b	<i>But are you wishing to not fear authority?</i>	INTERACTIVE COMMAND
c	<i>Do good. And you will have its praise.</i>	
4a	For (γὰρ) it is a servant of God to you for good.	ASSERTION
b	<i>But if you do evil, fear.</i>	INTERACTIVE COMMAND
c	For (γὰρ) it does not bear the sword without cause.	ASSERTION
d	For (γὰρ) it is a servant of God, a requiter unto wrath to the evildoer.	ASSERTION

Paul begins with his topical point: a ruler's job is to deter evildoing. They are a *cause of fear* (Gk. *phobos*) for *evil*.<sup>47</sup> Again, this verse does not support totalitarianism in this case through a program of building fear of the state. It is simply a statement on a central role of the ruler, that of retributive justice: rulers (and fear of them) rebuff *evil*, not *good work*.<sup>48</sup> So Paul interacts with his addressees, asking them, "*Are you wishing to not fear authority?*" and answering his own question, "*Do good. And you will have its praise.*"<sup>49</sup> Bruce Winter's work<sup>50</sup> that points the combination of "do good" and receiving "its praise" to the commendation for public benefaction (erecting buildings, supporting public services) has found its way through many commentators here.<sup>51</sup> But because the main thrust of this verse concerns retributive justice, benefaction can only be suggestive, and not the main point.<sup>52</sup> O'Donovan, however, implicitly disagrees, arguing that the 'praise' here is a judicial praise, the subtle sort received when a court decision is

---

<sup>47</sup> The word is not best translated "terror" (e.g. NRS, ESV; see n13).

<sup>48</sup> Calvin deftly sees this statement as further grounding Paul's initial appeal to "be subject" to government, claiming that an antiauthoritarian disposition betrays an evil heart: "Indeed, [Paul] says, the very desire to shake off or remove this yoke from oneself is tacit proof of an evil conscience that is plotting some mischief." 282.

<sup>49</sup> Dunn writes, "More clearly than in anything else so far said, Paul appeals to the general sense that good citizenship and moral caliber are to be commended." 763.

<sup>50</sup> "The Public Honouring of Christian Benefactors: Romans 13.3-4 and 1 Peter 2.14-15" *JSNT* 34 (1988), 87-103.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Bryan, *Render to Caesar*, 80.

<sup>52</sup> Even though he adds *its praise* (ἐπαίνον) at the end, Paul's question is not positive: "Do you seek government's praise?" It is negative: "*Do you wish to not fear?*" Retributive justice, not praise from the government, is the primary force of the passage. The "good" thus is good citizenship, comprised of lawfulness, and only secondarily something more, like benefaction. Winter's work is helpful, and pan-biblical ('seek the *shalom* of the city' Jeremiah 29.7), and should not be discarded wholesale. But Moo helps to situate its contribution: "While public benefaction should not be eliminated from the reference, the broader context of Rom. 12-13 suggests that it cannot be limited to this either." 801n50.

made in one's favor.<sup>53</sup> In this way, "do good" here simply denotes abiding by the prevailing law. If God's people are to subject themselves to the state and duly fear its retributive punishment, how then should they understand the nature of government?

*It is a servant of God.* Earlier the 'higher authorities' are said to have (generally) derived their authority from God and (historically) been established by Him. Now, they are God's *servant* (Gk. *diakonos*)<sup>54</sup> as something of a mediator, answering to God and employing his wishes.<sup>55</sup> Not a theological point local to Romans 13, God's use of non-Yahwist governments is found e.g. in Isaiah 44.28 with the pagan Cyrus, called "My shepherd" by YHWH, the one who "shall carry out all my purpose." But with Cyrus, YHWH's use of him was one of militaristic triumph and deliverance. Cyrus was God's shepherd historically, freeing God's people from captivity to Babylon (and ironically, since they would remain in protectorate subjection). Here, however, the state is God's *servant* (*diakonos*, v4) in its implementation of retributive justice. The point is clear: whether it acknowledges it or not, the state answers to God.

*It does not bear the sword in vain.* What do we make of *bearing the sword*? This verse has invited extensive discussion. Some possibilities follow. (1) Broadly, *bearing the sword* indicated the capacity to punish wrongdoers by use of force, a forceful retributive

---

<sup>53</sup> 147-48.

<sup>54</sup> Bryan, citing his debt to John N. Collins, maintains that *diakonos* here is better understood not as table-waiting (as it is frequently explained) but as "going-between," an agent. *Diakonos* here thus reflects a role of mediator. 79. With this in view, government in Rom 13 enters a broadly biblical perspective, drawing back to the "perfect king" (Derek Kidner's psalm title) of Psalm 72, who as a mediator received "righteousness" and "justice" from God (v1) in order to implement them into his realm (v2).

<sup>55</sup> For whatever reason, "authority" alternates between being plural (authorities, v1 and rulers, v3) and singular (authority, v1, 2). Here it is singular again.



justice. Upon this scholars generally agree. Indeed, the verb *phoreō* is the iterative form of *pherō* (bear, carry), indicating a “bearing” of something for a considerable time or regularly” (BAGD, Morris, Dunn). Calvin writes: “A second part of the function of magistrates is their duty to repress by force the insolent behavior of the wicked, who do not willingly allow themselves to be governed by laws, and to inflict punishment on their offences as God’s judgment requires.”<sup>56</sup> Even Witherington, who strongly elevates nonviolence, admits the *sword* denotes the “right to use force” (314). (2) Does *bear the sword* permit capital punishment? Calvin suggests it does.<sup>57</sup> Morris abstains from a position, claiming it is “far from certain.”<sup>58</sup> Cranfield doubts it.<sup>59</sup> Witherington, too: it is “unlikely,” adding further that force in general is something manifestly prohibited for individual Christians (See Rom 12.19).<sup>60</sup> It appears misguided, though, to abstain from a position, or to rub away the violence suggested here.<sup>61</sup> While many appeal to two

---

<sup>56</sup> 282-83.

<sup>57</sup> “Paul explicitly declares that magistrates are armed with the sword not just for empty show, but in order to smite evildoers” (282-83).

<sup>58</sup> “This certainly means that the government is armed and can use force, but whether it means more than this is far from certain.” 464..

<sup>59</sup> Cranfield’s defense lies upon the claim that the *sword* is less probably a “particular reference to the dagger worn by the Emperor as *Imperator* [a dagger that indicates the Emperor’s possession of military power and/or his powers over life and death].” 667.

<sup>60</sup> “Whatever force is in view, Paul is saying that the state is charged with doing what Christians have just been prohibited from doing” (314). Cf. also Jesus, who when Peter struck the slave’s ear, told him to sheathe it and warned, “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt 26.52).

<sup>61</sup> Witherington’s chapter on Rom 13 ends with such a lengthy appeal for nonviolence that the passage ends up being qualified out of its point entirely. Even if the Bible’s greater stress was on nonviolence, one must leave it to other texts to prove this and let Rom 13 be Rom 13.

historical backgrounds (the *ius gladii* law<sup>62</sup> and the “symbol of a Roman magistrate’s *imperium*”<sup>63</sup>), I am unconvinced by the strength of these potential allusions, and instead am more convinced by the general question simply why and how people used swords. For example, Paul does not refer to *jails* or *fines* as the threat. He refers to the *sword*, which kills. That said, three qualifications follow: (a) it is a lamentable state of affairs that one would have to use the sword, or that another would violate law to such a heinous degree as to invite their own death for the greater protection of the state. Also, (b) the sword is the maximum penalty, to include all lesser penalties. It is a maximum penalty ideally *rarely* employed, since it is a means of justice that is irreversible, and its distressing converse – a mistake of justice – is also irreversible. Paul thereby cites the maximum penalty because he is writing to encourage a proper degree of fear to the state (for good citizenship). And (c) perhaps to our great surprise, Paul himself is aware the sword can be employed in error, when he uses “the sword” as shorthand for violent death (either in war or more probably, persecution) of Christians in Rom 8.35, the “sword” that, he assures, cannot separate them from the love of Jesus Christ. For this reason, *sword* by its context primarily refers to retributive justice, alluding to its maximum degree (death), but offering nothing concrete on corporal punishment. Dunn picks up several of these arguments, summarizing:

The full phrase most obviously has in view the power of life and death which was then, as for most of human civilization, the ultimate sanction for government.

---

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. C.K. Barrett.

<sup>63</sup> Bryan, 79; and Bruce, 224. Bruce takes this from e.g. Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.25.2, where Philostratus refers to “a judge bearing the sword.”

Cranfield...seems justified in calling into question the older assumption (Lagrange, Michel, Barrett, Leenhardt) of an allusion to the *ius gladii* (the right of the sword) as such, since during the first two centuries it referred only to the power of provincial governors in connection with Roman citizens under their command.... But he is probably less so in doubting a reference to capital punishment (the sword represents capital not corporal punishment) (cf. Murray).<sup>64</sup>

Finally, (3) Does *bear the sword* support war? Some scholars extend this retributive justice to include war. But context prohibits the move: it is unsupportable, because “the one who resists the authority” (v2) is a rebellious citizen, not a warring foreign nation. This is proven when Paul addresses individual Romans (“you” in second person singular, v3), “being subject” (v1, 5) to the higher authorities. While *sword* suggests a use of violence by the state, perhaps a foundation upon which a philosophy of just war might theoretically extend, *it does not here support just war*. As Witherington asserts, “This passage does not speak to the issue of international conflict and so neither raises nor answers questions about a just war” (308). Strictly, Romans 13.4-5 defends domestic (retributive) justice.<sup>65</sup>

In the end, the language of Paul’s argument in 13.3-4 paints retributive justice as something proper, even *definitional*, to a state, in order to rebuff antiauthoritarian

---

<sup>64</sup> 764.

<sup>65</sup> Additional support may come from Paul’s word choice for *sword*. He here uses μάχαιρα (*machaira*: large knife, short sword, dagger: LS §26950), a word different from Christ’s judgment ρομφαία (*rhomphaia*: Rev 19.15; large sword, scimitar LS §3787421) which is sometimes in the hands of angelic figures (Gen 3.24; Josh 5.13;) and also used to “make war” (Rev 2.16; cf. 21 occurrences in Judges). Thus, it appears the *rhomphaia* would find its place more clearly in war than the *machaira*, a weapon the disciples kept at their side for their personal protection (Mt 26.51; Lk 22.36), and which was used to arrest bandits (Mk 14.48=Lk 22.52) and provide defense for a prison warden (Ac 16.27). The distinction cannot be pressed too far, since the smaller *machaira* was also used in national conquest (Lk 21.24), and Paul not once speaks of the larger version.

dispositions among God's people.<sup>66</sup> The state's employment of retributive justice mediates *God's* wrath against lawlessness,<sup>67</sup> and will sometimes require violence.<sup>68</sup> And God's people are told to "do good" in general (meaning esp. to keep the prevailing law) and to "fear" the authorities as is expected when in a state of lawlessness. Lawkeeping is one example of what it means for a person to "be in subjection" (v1) to the higher authorities. Alternatively, lawkeeping is also evidence that a state is being used as God's servant.

(5) *Therefore*. Paul has now said that the higher authorities receive authority from God, are established by God, are God's servant, mediate God's wrath, requite evildoing with (a sometimes violent) penalty for good. Upon these reasons, Paul returns to point one: *it is necessary to be in subjection*. But he points it directly again upon the addressees, to urge willing subjection *not only because of wrath...* Wrath (Gk. *orgē*) is chiefly located with God, not with people, in Paul's writing (at least eight times in Romans: 1.18; 2.5, 8; 3.5; 4.15; 5.9; 9.22; 12.19<sup>69</sup>). However, wrath is also man's

---

<sup>66</sup> What was the Christians' problem in Rome? A number of scholars have speculated on the precise nature of the problem in Rome, why the Christians there would be refusing to pay taxes and lead Paul to exhort them otherwise. Historical background has been invoked, namely a tax revolt in AD 58, via Tacitus (*Annals* 13.50ff.). Speculation may get us somewhere, but taxpaying alone says enough. Following proof of extensive interaction with historical backgrounds and these speculations, Moo finishes by saying we must simply take the word as it is – "Nor do we need to posit a situation in Rome to explain Paul's exhortation to pay taxes. The paying of taxes was then, as now, the most pervasive and universal expression of subservience to the state" – and see Paul most manifestly reiterating Jesus' teaching when he responded to a taxation question with "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's": "More important, Paul is probably in this paragraph continuing his allusions to the teaching of Jesus." 793.

<sup>67</sup> A "requiter" or "avenger" (ἐκδίκος) unto wrath (εἰς ὀργήν) could mean that (1) the state mediates the wrath of God (hence translated as "God's wrath" by ESV, Barrett and Newman-Nida) (2) the state applies its own wrath that motivates its retribution, or (3) both.

<sup>68</sup> BAGD defines *machaira* for Rom 8.35 as figuratively a symbol that "stands for violent death." 496.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. also Eph 2.3; 5.6; Col 3.6; 1 Thess 1.10; 2.16; 5.9.

possession (Eph 4.31; Col 3.8; 1 Tim 2.8), so that BAGD lists *orgē* first “as a human emotion” (578-79). Without specific reference to God’s wrath here (Cf. wrath “of God” in Col 3.6) it seems proper to understand this as the wrath of the state authority (Cf. “wrath of the authorities” NET). But because of the abundance of references to God’s wrath in Romans (above), it would be unreasonable to silence a loudly *divine* element resounding enormously not only in surrounding chapters, but in a long prophetic history of the word.<sup>70</sup> It is thus divine wrath<sup>71</sup> “mediated”<sup>72</sup> through the wrath of the civil government, so that final wrath of God in large measure saved (graciously) for the end of history comes even in today’s time through everyday civil governments: “the final eschatological outpouring of God’s wrath on sin is even now, in the course of human history, finding expression.”<sup>73</sup>

It is now loudly asserted: the threat of wrath deters wrongdoing. But Paul also urges a more personal reason: *but also because of conscience*<sup>74</sup>. Of the many

---

<sup>70</sup> “Part of the background for Paul’s concept is the widespread OT teaching about God’s use of pagan nations for executing wrath (often on Israel); cf. Isa. 5.26-29; 7.18-20; 8.7-8; 10.5-6; etc.” Moo, 802 n57.

<sup>71</sup> BAGD defines *orgē* second as pertaining to the wrath of God: “as the divine reaction toward evil, it is thought of not so much as an emotion as in terms of the outcome of an angry frame of mind (*judgment*) already well known to OT history, where it sometimes runs its course in the present, but more often is to be expected in the future, as God’s final reckoning with evil (ὀργή is a legitimate feeling on the part of a judge...).” 578-79.

<sup>72</sup> O’Donovan, 148. Cf. Bryan in n. 54 above on *servant* as “mediator” not “table-waiter”. BAGD specifically identifies Rom 13.4 under this understanding of mediation: “Of God’s wrath against evildoers as revealed in the judgments of earthly governing authorities 13.4f.” 579.

<sup>73</sup> Moo, 802. Cf. Schreiner, 685, and Cranfield, 666. Cranfield helps to prioritize that “the good” is the state’s first occupation, and the “avenger for wrath” second. 666.

<sup>74</sup> Gk. *suneidēsis*, “moral consciousness, conscience, scruples” (Gingrich, 191), is found especially in the epistles, and in two of Paul’s speeches in Acts (23.1, 24.16). Otherwise, the word is absent in all NT narrative works, including Revelation.

commentators on the subject, suggesting that conscience is either chiefly retrospective or proscriptive in nature, Moo offers the best summary to cut between and include the two directions: “Conscience refers here to the believer’s knowledge of God’s will and purposes.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, here Paul urges Christians in Rome to consider God’s will and refrain from resisting authority, so that they would not suffer later the “painful” knowledge that they have violated God’s will.<sup>76</sup>

(6) *For because of this* shows verse 5 to be a bridge, as it summed up the previous five verses and also serves as the ground for the following argument. Indeed, v1 and v5 comprise the two foundational assertions from which all responsive actions radiate in Rom 13.1-7. Here the action that demonstrates proper subjection to government is that *you also pay tributes*. (1) *Tribute* is the normal understanding of *phoros*<sup>77</sup>, and suggests that Jews may have been paying taxes in Rome that Romans did not have to pay. Also, (2) it says something about the *degree* of respect commanded by Paul for earthly governing authority. What Christian would delight in handing money to the Godless Roman overlord? In context, *tribute* can fitly be generalized to depicts monies paid to government for its services in administration and protection. Paul will pick up on wider taxes (*teloi*) in the following verse.

---

<sup>75</sup> Moo, 803n62.

<sup>76</sup> Moo, 803. Dunn also points out that this conscience, according to Paul, is a universal possession, and not the private ownership of Christians: “It is to be noted here as in 2.15 Paul does not conceive the operation of conscience as something distinctively Christian.” 765.

<sup>77</sup> “That which is brought in, *tribute*, such as is paid by subjects to a ruling state, as the Asiatic Greeks to Athens, Thuc.” LS §45290. See also 1 Macc 8; 2 Macc 8; Josephus *War* 2.403; also, Dunn 766.

Paul also calls the higher authorities by a different form of *servant* (Gk. *leitourgos*), a word that has some cultic (later it becomes the origin for 'liturgist'; see BAGD 498 def. 1) and administrative (BAGD def. 2) background to it. Although it may be more cultic, Dunn shows that historical background in combination with the word's present context leads *leitourgoi* to refer instead simply to public and civil servants. Therefore, whatever "solemnity and dignity" (Cranfield, 668) is suggested, it is not from the word's allusion to religious ceremonies: it is from the one who in 13.6 is the possessor of these servants, that is, God. Conscientious administrators and politicians who steward resources entrusted to them from the people are also stewarding the resources entrusted to them by God. Tax authorities are *God's* civil servants.

(7) *Render* (or 'pay back;' Gk. *apodote*) *what is due* clearly ties to Jesus' "Render [*apodote*] to Caesar" (Mt 22.21=Mk12.17=Lk 20.25), where the imperative verb appears in the same tense and number, and shows Paul's construction here to have found its ground in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>78</sup> To *tribute* (*phoros*, addressed above) is added *tax* (Gk. *telos*), so that one can understand Paul commending the paying of any various taxes that are demanded by the state. Newman and Nida tell Bible translators that an appropriate equivalent is "the various kinds of taxes," arguing that "it is doubtful that Paul makes any real distinction" (248). Despite the ink spilled to distinguish these two words,<sup>79</sup> Newman and Nida seem to get the point.

---

<sup>78</sup> Schreiner, 686; Cranfield, 669.

<sup>79</sup> One good example is Dunn, who maintains "tribute" for *phoros*, a tax that Roman citizens would not have had to pay: "The distinction between φόρος and τέλος (v7) corresponds to the difference between *tributum* (direct taxes from which Roman citizens would have been exempt in Rome) and *vectigalia* (direct taxes [of a broader scope by Paul's day])." 766.

As to *fear* (Gk. *phobos*) and *honor* (Gk. *timē*), Newman and Nida argue for coalescing these two words, too (248), which may not be a good idea. For one thing, *fear* clearly ties back to *cause of fear* in v3, the same word (*phobos*), and thus should be made explicit. In this, fear of authority's retributive justice leading to law-keeping returns here at the close of the verses. Cranfield suggests, by the verse's connection to 1 Peter 2.17, that the word may apply to God ('fear of God') and honor thus to the civil ruler, something for which he finds support in his "survey" of the use of *phobos* and its verbal cousin *phobeisthai*. He argues, *phobos* "is not characteristically used of what is due to an earthly ruler" (671). Nevertheless, because immediate context supercedes wider context, verse three points directly to the civil ruler (so, Dunn 768). Otherwise, by Cranfield's rule, *phobos* in verse 3 would have to mean *fear of God*, too, which is impossible, since it plainly attaches that "*cause of fear*" to "*rulers*." I am convinced that *phobos* in one word is meant to reiterate what came before (v3): retributive justice. Added to this is *timē*, an internal "honor" for whom God appointed to office. In this, *phobos* and *timē* wrap up subjectively what all of Rom. 13-1-7 are written to appeal, for these two internal dispositions will alone lead God's people to respecting the law and paying their taxes, in the same manner internal love (13.9) leads to the fulfillment of every command of God.

### 3 / Literary Context

In exegesis, a word must be said about local and wider literary context, as larger and local themes also serve to broaden and also control interpretation of the passage.



Literary context for Romans 13 offers four essential contributions to the passage's interpretation.

*Local Context: Different Personal and Public Ethics*

Prior to 13.1-7, Romans 12.14-21 in no uncertain language teaches God's people to withhold vengeance: "Bless those who persecute you" (14), "do not repay anyone evil for evil" (17), and "never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God" (19). How does this square with the 'higher authorities' which 'executes wrath' to evil (13.3-4)? This juxtaposition is meant to expressly underline an ethical distinction: People love enemies; the state limits their error. This means the state has the *expectation* to punish evil, whereas nothing of the sort is permitted for God's people, whose chief debt is to "love one another" (13.8).

*Local Context: Submission as an Act of Love*

Locally, a resounding appeal for love characterizes all the material surrounding Rom 13.1-7, so that one can assume that these commands by Paul in vv 1-7 can also be considered not only actions of proper *fear* and *honor* (v7), but also actions subsumed under and driven by the first commandments, *love* of God and neighbor. The subsequent verse especially makes the connection plain, when it picks up a catchword from the previous argument, "what is owed" (Gk. *tas opheilias*), admonishing: "Owe [Gk.

*opheiletes*] no one anything except to love one another, for the one loving the other has fulfilled the law" (13.8).<sup>80</sup>

*Larger Context and Mission: Submission as Act of Mission and Hope*

Larger literary context, however, has another point to make. Four verses after 13.1-7, and before taking up a new thought in chapter 14, Paul writes, "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (13.11). In Paul, who was writing with great eagerness to visit the city of Rome (1.11-13) on his way to expanding Christ's world mission (1.5, 8) to Spain (15.24, 28), one finds not an ivory tower professor coolly asserting philosophy on government, but rather a theologian-missionary, for whom truth and mission were inseparable. Within larger literary context, then, Rom 13.1-7 is a passage about mission. For this reason, being subject to government, that is, respecting the state and her leaders (7), keeping prevailing laws (3-4), and paying taxes (6-7), are all acts of mission. It is not difficult to see why this is good for mission<sup>81</sup>: it prevents extraneous and useless distractions, such as unnecessary lawsuits, arrest, imprisonment, and simple unwanted attention, etc. Many stories in world missions, positive and negative, have reinforced this fact. It may go without saying, but

---

<sup>80</sup> Acknowledged by Cranfield: "The context of Romans 13.1-7 suggests a further reason. This passage is both preceded and followed by exhortations to love (12.9ff and 13.8-10), and it is no erratic boulder in its context. Since the State serves both the ordinary temporal good of our fellow men and also their eternal salvation, the right service of the State is an integral part of our debt of love to our neighbours." "The Christian's Political Responsibility according to the New Testament." In *The Service of God* (London: Epworth, 1965), 53.

<sup>81</sup> Dunn simply adds, "That this was also good missionary strategy (cf. 12.21) should not be forgotten." *Romans*, 768.

denigrating or tossing aside the need to be legally above rebuke can easily crumble an effective mission. Practically, believers must discern which battles with the state are necessary to fight, and which would unnecessarily distract from the church's mission of making disciples of all nations. In addition, "doing good" in the public square places the church as the city on a hill, and not as the forgettable town in the valley. Bryan summarizes the eschatological element present in this mission not heretofore cited. He writes, "The laws of the Empire are to be obeyed and Christians are to seek to be good citizens, *not* because life never changes and God's kingdom is only a dream but precisely *because* the new age is already beginning."<sup>82</sup>

#### *Larger Context and Grace: Submission as Grateful Response to God's Work*

The larger literary context situates all of chapters 12-16 upon the weighty foundation of Romans 1-11, upon the work of God in Christ, confronting humanity with an external moral law, declaring humanity categorically at fault for not meeting it, and providing not only a means of escaping it, but providing the gift of life through the Holy Spirit to engender sanctification, in all this reminding ultimately "all things" are "from him and through him and to him" (11.36). It is this foundation of action streaming forth from God that humbles the reader and undergirds the long and detailed set of imperatives that complete the book. Submitting to the governing authorities is an act of glad response to all of God's work for God's people as a whole. Why obey government? Why pay taxes? Because it is God in Christ, who saved mankind from all their spiritual

---

<sup>82</sup> *Render to Caesar*, 81.

and practical futility, who invites the response. Grace leads. Demonstrated respect for government follows.

#### **4 / Excursus: Retributive Justice and the Law of Love**

Does this passage on retributive justice, one which features the bearing of the (violent) sword, contradict Jesus' law of love? Indeed, a concern for loving the other sits around Rom 13.1-7 like a circular pillow. Do we subsume Rom 13.1-7's sanctions underneath Christ's law of love, or perhaps soften the implications of the 'sword' invoked in verse four?

Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt conclude their chapter on the whole of Romans 13 (304-318) with a lengthy appeal for nonviolence (318-324), drawing on Miroslav Volf and Henri Nouwen. Their general approach is favorable in four ways: (1) They allow wider NT theology to broaden and control interpretation on particular passages, particularly where the passages themselves use catchwords or catch-concepts found in other NT writers, thus (2) they make important qualifications where necessary; (3) they apply the passage to its most critical situations in order to test its appeal (in this case, applying it to autocratic regimes); and (4) they advocate that violence is not the Christian's regular duty or means of justice. Love of neighbor is. Witherington and Hyatt are also justified in critically questioning Christian-endorsed tolerance for violence, since arguments permitting or endorsing violence must take aim to interact with passages like Matthew 26.52. When Peter, for instance, struck the slave's ear, Jesus immediately

responded, “Put your sword back into its place,” warning Peter, “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt 26.52).<sup>83</sup>

That said, however, although their exegesis is fairly sound, Witherington’s and Hyatt’s lengthy ultimate aside on nonviolence serves to silence verses 1-7 of its own voice by allowing virtually nothing to the godly need for retributive justice from the state (wherein deductively, Christians as state workers might be permitted the decree of some violence for the greater good). Better would simply let Rom 13 be Rom 13, with a handful of qualifications if need be. Ultimately, however, Witherington’s unease about the perceived contradiction between violence and love is unfounded. There is only even a perceived paradox between love and violence. A.R. Vidler writes,

The sanction that the Bible, here and elsewhere, gives to the forcible restraint of evil puzzles many modern Christians, because of its apparent contradiction to Christ’s way of love and His precept of non-resistance to evil. But this comes from failing to distinguish the preservation of the world from the salvation of the world. The truth is that the Bible affirms both the Law ‘which worketh wrath’ (Rom. 4.15) and the “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5.6): both Christ’s strange work and His proper work.<sup>84</sup>

In the end, although requiring a certain degree of serious pondering, I find little paradox in the thought of love including violence, philosophically and also textually. Is it desired? No. But complete and violent refusal to obey the law is also not desired. This is what the threat of violence seeks to eliminate. *And it is the threat most of all*, and not

---

<sup>83</sup> Admittedly, Jesus’ statement here ultimately says little about nonviolence. It simply states an aphorism in such a way to portray Jesus’ concern for Peter, who by committing acts like this will anticipate a bitter end.

<sup>84</sup> From *Christ’s Strange Work* (1944), as quoted in F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, 225.

retribution's implementation, that establishes domestic peace, a threat, which truly sometimes demands its implementation to remain a threat. Eschatologically, God's end-time violence is also a sure threat for the purpose of conversion from rebellion. There it is promised in no gentle language that the fate of the lawless is a series of bitter judgments (Revelation 6, 8-9, 16-19) leading to a lake of fire (20.15) and communicated as an act (6.1) and triumph (17.14) of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. The promise of violence as an ultimate consequence is also meant to repel lawlessness.

## **5 / Conclusions of Romans 13.1-7: Christian Citizenship**

Romans 13.1-7 primary contribution addresses the role of the citizen, which it explains in three points, the second two deriving from the first.

**(1) Christians submit to the authorities.** Two commands along this line (1, 5), with all other statements radiating from those commands, center submission to state authority as the central point of Romans 13.1-7. It is a subjective statement first and foremost: that *God's people willingly view government with a sense of subjection to it* (and not e.g. that government demands it). It is (a) not blind subjection. This is a theological point especially proven outside of Romans 13.1-7, although the passage in question has some hints along those lines, since for example, it is *God* who authorizes this state and thus welcomes the ancient tolerance of prophetic resistance from His people (tolerably manifested today in freedom of speech laws). It is (b) acknowledged subjection. Willful submission carries a number of demonstrations of it: fearing the sword (obeying the law, 3), doing good (3), paying taxes (6-7), having internal honor for

the state (7), particularly by praying for leaders (1 Tim 2.1-2), and not to mention, even submission to the consequences of unjust laws in cases of civil disobedience.

**(2) Christians obey state law.** One must let qualifications proceed from other texts in the NT. But for now, in Romans 13.1-7, a person with an antiauthoritarian streak must allow other texts to guide her in it. Here, the Scriptures teach that God's people are not to resist the authorities, but rather to be in subjection to them, for the sake of God's greater mission.

**(3) Christians pay taxes.** Dunn magnifies that verse 6 "is evidently the climax of the discussion (as Furnish) and not just an illustration (as Gaugler, Barrett, Kasemann) or third argument (as Wilckens)."<sup>85</sup> While Dunn's argument lacks explicit support and for this reason sounds overstated, nevertheless, the summons to pay taxes is unquestionable. Recently, in a church local to where I live, I have heard of a church elder who refuses to pay taxes for (to him) godly reasons. In light of *the many nations* who receive highly compromised law enforcement, little public defense, lamentable roads, and poor schools (if any), and corrupted by massive political bribery, *to refuse taxpaying in the United States* (a country undoubtedly harboring its own swaths of corruption to be sure) *is simply unthinkable*. A year ago where I live, an Indian neighbor smiled to express to me how happy he was to pay taxes in the United States, because in his words, "when you pay taxes here, you get something for it!" That same year, I welcomed perhaps the most patriotic American I have met into my home: a Romanian

---

<sup>85</sup> I suppose it is "evidently" the climax on account of the διὰ τοῦτο? Otherwise, Dunn provides no rationale as to why it is the climax of the discussion. *Romans*, 766.

repairman, who suffered under Communism for years with his family. In view of the apostle Paul himself, who endured pernicious abuse from *the very nation to whom he commends taxpaying*, refusing to pay taxes is all the more lamentable. Christians must pay taxes. Refusal to do so invites shame to the Christian religion and impairs the proclamation of the gospel. Let Christians stand on pedestals for 'doing good,' not tax evasion.

## 6 / For Political Theology

**(I) God is history's overseer.** It is God who is the initiating and sustaining agent. Romans 13.1-7 simply names what has long stood for Judeo-Christianity. Through the previous chapters and other studies on politics in the Bible, it is repeatedly clear that in historical events, God is not only the one to whom nations and people answer to, but he is also the one who orchestrates history. In Romans 13, one discovers that it is God who *authorizes*, it is God who *establishes*, and it is God who is *master* of the governing state, which is called three times *the servant of God*. In every way, the state answers to and is ordered by God. Politicians of all (non)religious stripes would do well to maintain a fitting fear of God. Believers would do well to believe that He has political states under his authority control. "It is God," writes Cranfield, "who sets up (and overthrows) rulers."<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> "The Christian's Political Responsibility According to the New Testament," in *The Service of God* (London: Epworth, 1965), 52.



In particular, God gives judicial authority over to the political state. Whereas God gave Cyrus executive authority to defeat Babylon and shepherd God's people back to Israel in Isa 44.24-45.8, in Romans 13.1-7 he hands judicial authority over to the state. This point is not private to Romans 13. In Psalm 72, YHWH is invoked to give "righteousness" (*šdq*) and "justice" (*mšpt*) to the king (1), who deploys it in his realm (2). And even in the end of the ages, they are humans occupying royal-judicial thrones (Rev 4.4) in the shadow of the iridescent One occupying the central throne (4.2-3).

**(II) Political leaders together work as God's servant.** Politicians and the politically inclined must defer authority to God, and those who take a position of leadership within the 'higher authorities' (which in addition to political leaders and tax workers by its generality might also suggest school principals, fire marshals, nursing supervisors, and anyone with a level of judicial authority over others<sup>87</sup>) must treat their job seriously, not simply as a position of leadership over people, but as among *God's servants* on earth. A politician's and leader's accountability thus extends not in the direction of one's constituency. Their accountability is before God.

Some form of redemption is taking place through this government, too, a notion taken up in the next enumerated implication. But Philip Towner locates this redemption in the hands of the people, too. In allowing "theological, literary, and cultural backgrounds to converge," Towner asserts that the responsibility to redeem also falls on

---

<sup>87</sup> Although, strictly speaking, reference to the paying of taxes (vv6-7) limits these 'higher authorities' to government officials. Nevertheless, its pattern of one's leadership reflecting God's leadership with all the implications therein, hearkens back to Genesis 1.26-27, where man, created in God's image who had carefully created the world, is told to have dominion over the earth.

God's people in Romans 13:1-7, a redemption which he defines in part as "participat[ing] in the public life of society through humble service."<sup>88</sup>

**(III) Government is a theater "for good."** Earlier it was put objectively, that God has given authority, established, and actively directs civil government as his servant (*diakonos*) in retributive justice. But the point turns the opposite direction as well. Government also has the opportunity to implement and preserve God's justice, for the good (*eis to agathon*) of the people it governs, and to allow the expansion of Christ's kingdom on earth. Although few might wish to be the channel of the wrath of God, the conscientious may consider it an honor to mediate his wrath as a courageous and often thankless means of bringing sinners to the knowledge of their sin, preserving peace for the people they serve, and initiating reform in a person or groups through penalty. Redemption through government has now been manifested in a variety of ways, including direct political deliverance (Cyrus, Isaiah 44-45), the "preservation of life" through wise management and food disbursement (Joseph, Gen 45), the preservation of justice for the poor (Prov 31; Ps 72); and here, the preservation of political order through the prudent administration of retributive justice.

**(IV) Governmental Priorities: Retributive Justice.** One of the state's definitional roles is to be a fear against evil, that is, to maintain the surety of retributive justice. It was said above that the language of Romans 13.1-7, particularly verses 3-4 speak of retributive justice as something natural or definitional to governing authorities. That the

---

<sup>88</sup> P. Towner, "Romans 13.1-7 and Paul's Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?" In *Romans and the People of God*, ed. S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 168.

state must be a “fear” requires that its judicial systems be pure, fair, and free from corruption, so that wrongdoers have something to truly fear. Sometimes this fear requires the use of force, even force that in extreme cases may remove life. But capital punishment is rare, and corporal punishment is not defensible from this text. Also, although some scholars propose it, there is nothing in this text to fully defend an argument for just war. Finally, yet fundamental to the passage, neglecting the state’s role in retributive justice, disparaging it, or simply rebelling against its authority is, according to Calvin, “contending against God” (283).

**(V) Form of Government.** There is nothing in Romans 13.1-7 to commend a particular form of government. It only speaks generally of ‘rulers’ (and probably if anything has kings and emperors in mind) and the proper implementation of retributive justice. O’Donovan concludes: “[Romans 13] offers no empirical observation about the way in which the limited authority was used or exceeded, for its concern is ecclesiological and, more indirectly, Christological” (152). Dunn adds that one must simply respect the state into which she finds herself (see the simple “those that are” in authority, above, v1), be it democratic, monarchic, or any other various political species.

## **Conclusion**

Romans 13, a classic verse on government with special attention on the citizen’s role, also has much to say about government itself indirectly as well. While it appeals for citizens to acknowledge their subjection to government’s leadership by obeying its laws, doing good, and paying taxes, it also in reverse treats retributive justice and tax

management as definitional roles of the state, dignifying them by calling government “the servant of God” in both. A variety of implications extend from there, as well as a handful of qualifications in view of wider New Testament witness. Nevertheless, the unmistakable primary point of Romans 13.1-7 is a general one: God’s people are to come willingly under the leadership of the state. This is an act of love to God and neighbor. It is also an act of world mission. But God’s people are to oppose that government where it has assumed the level of authority due God alone, an overreach of authority that Revelation 13 will clarify.

## JOHN OF PATMOS RESISTS

## THE BEASTS OF REVELATION 13

The best stories are not those which entertain, offering sugar with no nutrition. Those have their place, perhaps after a bewildering day. Great stories tease out questions and response. With some argument, one might reasonably place the book of Revelation in the company of some of the finest literature. It simultaneously carries a remarkable number of themes and characters throughout the book, departs from the customary penmanship of its day (both Greco-Roman and Jewish), crosses three genres,<sup>1</sup> and it refers to many other books in almost innumerable allusions.<sup>2</sup> But certainly it is no stranger to inviting response, either, one of the most common being the desire to solve its riddles. Along its various scenes abound many puzzling recurrent characters, like twenty-four angelic elders alongside four mythic beasts, a victorious lamb and a malicious dragon, fallen saints and a fallen angel, a seductive whore and two

---

<sup>1</sup> Apocalypse (a once purely Jewish genre of literature that has widened into many spheres, including the recent film, *Knowing*, with Nicholas Cage, 2009), Prophecy (1:3), and Epistle (1:4).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bauckham particularly praises another element, its theology: "The method and conceptuality of the theology of Revelation are relatively different from the rest of the New Testament, but once they are appreciated in their own right, Revelation can be seen to be not only one of the finest literary works in the New Testament, but also one of the greatest theological achievements of early Christianity." *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge, 1993), 22.

terrifying beasts. The two beasts in particular have received perhaps the widest range of interpretations,<sup>3</sup> along with their mysterious “mark ... six-hundred sixty six” (13.18). Responsively, then, this project answers the invitation to understand its images.<sup>4</sup> But ultimately it seeks to understand and to ride alongside the scenes, as it were, in order to receive the chapter’s instructions in context and transfer them to the modern age. The contention of this paper holds that not only is there a meaning to be had for Revelation 13, but its meaning and significance beg for its utmost display for Christians today as they seek to worship God within an oppressive world and understand the nature and limits of civil government. The ultimate aim, as before, is political theology, something to which Revelation has much to offer. A special and necessary departure from the paper’s general exegetical method for this chapter will be a survey of the Beast’s various interpretations through history, so that conclusions have some history behind them.

## 1 / Always Interpreting: The Beasts in History

*“And I saw from the sea a beast rising, having ten horns and seven heads... And the whole earth marveled .... And to it was given a mouth speaking great and blasphemous things.... And to it was given to make war with the holy ones and to*

---

<sup>3</sup> Even a half century ago, William Barclay wrote, “It may well be that more ink has been spilled over this chapter than over any other chapter in the New Testament. For all that, it still exercises the fascination of the mysterious.” “Great Themes of the New Testament: V. Revelation xiii,” *Expository Times* 70 (1958): 260.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 1:20 gives something of a paradigm at the start of the book by providing an answer key to its first vision, not unlike Christ who explained his first parable to his disciples, beckoning listeners to seek understanding from them. In Revelation 13, even, the wise one is instructed to “calculate” the number of the beast. A long time ago, I heard that great art has one foot in the present and one in the future: too many feet in either makes for a poor product. Revelation is like that, and if anything its feet, planted in the future, invite the reader to know.

*conquer them. And to it was given authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation....*

*"Here is the place for the endurance and faith of the holy ones." (Rev 13.1-10)*

Twenty-first century readers are not the first to interpret Revelation, nor its thirteenth chapter. Christians for ages have interpreted. And not just Irenaeus and the Church Fathers, but everyone seemed to write on it, through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Renaissance, the eighteenth all the way through the twenty-first centuries. It has lifted the persecuted from their misery and brought mystics to God, teased the logician's demand for certainty and offered wind for the poet's sails. Indeed, scores of imaginative people have flocked to the book's fantastic scenes for artistic inspiration, in visual art, music, even motion pictures. This section's historical survey will depend heavily on a valuable commentary by Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland that traces the book's reception throughout history and art.<sup>5</sup> I will shape their work into charts, and adjust some wording.<sup>6</sup> Additions not noted in their work will receive an asterisk (\*) and a footnote (e.g. Tim LaHaye).

---

<sup>5</sup> *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Their breadth of study is stunning. But while their organization at first appears compelling, in detail one wonders how Kovacs and Rowland placed some interpretations in the categories they provide. One discovers the confusion stems from the distracting use of two words: (1) "Eschatological" (page 11, 150-151) to them seems to refer to chronologically *future* fulfillment, yet the word simply refers to the "last days" which could also represent a contemporary view of fulfillment, if one views the "last days" as including the present day. (2) By "contemporary" they refer to those who seek "the book's meaning for the present," that is, with a view to its timeless applicability (11). The problem is that many interpreters *did* seek to derive the book's meaning for the present, but with historical exclusivity: they believed the book's predictions were presently (historically) taking place.

Before proceeding, some synonyms require clarification. The brief key below shows the “Beast from the Land/Earth” or its shortened form, the “Land Beast,” and the “False Prophet” each refer to the Second Beast. Other titles refer to the First Beast.

**First Beast** (Rev 13.1-10) = “Beast from the Sea” (13.1); “The Beast” alone (19.19); “Antichrist” (1 Jn 4.3)<sup>7</sup>

**Second Beast** (Rev 13.11-18) = “Beast from the Land” (13.11); “False Prophet” (19.20).

### *The Beasts as General Symbol of Evil*<sup>8</sup>

Many throughout history have interpreted the Beasts as a symbol of general evil against God’s people throughout history, with different manifestations of what that evil looks like. For some, the beast is persecution against the church (Bunyan), or the carnal wolves within the church seeking to undo it (Tyconius), or some form of devilish sinful resistance (Rossetti). The following chart shows some of these views through history. One will notice the majority of these communicate timeless or universal fulfillment to the chapter.

<u>Time of fulfillment</u>		<u>Explanation</u>
<i>Universal</i>	Tyconius (4 <sup>th</sup> c.) <sup>9</sup>	The Beast: the <b>evil inside the church</b> . The horns are power or pride, the heads are princes, and the crown the name of Christianity.

---

<sup>7</sup> Also in 1 Jn 2.18. Admittedly, this equivalency may require more defense, but it has largely been agreed these are the same characters throughout historical interpretation. “You have heard” (1 John 2.18a) reveals that the prediction of the coming antichrist was already widely understood in the first century. The same verse acknowledges both an “antichrist” (singular) and “antichrists” (plural) which appear to be resemblances of the former.

<sup>8</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 149-50.



<i>Universal</i>	Augustine (4 <sup>th</sup> )	<b>Non-Christians</b> represent the earthly city, which is the Sea Beast. <sup>10</sup>
<i>Historical-Past</i>	Rupert of Deutz (11 <sup>th</sup> )	The seven heads of the dragon and sea beast were <b>seven kingdoms</b> through which gradual dominion of the antichrist will be established.
<i>Universal</i>	John of the Cross (16 <sup>th</sup> )	The seven heads of the beast “make war against the soul as it climbs the seven steps of love, freeing itself from ‘sensual things’ and entering into ‘purity of spirit.’” <sup>11</sup>
<i>Universal</i>	John Bunyan (17 <sup>th</sup> )	The Beast is the <b>agent of persecution</b> against the church, which Bunyan called Giant Maul.
<i>Universal</i>	Christina Rossetti (19 <sup>th</sup> )	The seven heads are the <b>seven deadly sins</b> . <sup>12</sup>

### *Future (Eschatological) Fulfillment*

Many through history have also interpreted the symbols of Revelation as characteristic of the end of the age, many seeming to refer to a near future fulfillment. For example, Peter John Olivi ‘s interpretation sees Christ returning with the structures of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Catholic church still in place.<sup>13</sup> The following are examples of those who view the events of Revelation 13 as taking place in the eschatological future. Because for some the end of time included the present day along with the future (*Contemp./Future*) and others strictly the future (*Future*), differences are noted.

---

<sup>9</sup> Tyconius wrote an influential commentary on Revelation, “which emphasizes the contemporary more than the eschatological import of the visions.” His commentary is only found quoted by later commentators. Ibid., 261.

<sup>10</sup> *City of God* viii.24; xiii.16; xv. 1,7; xx.9; from Kovacs and Rowland, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 150.

<sup>12</sup> Here we find tradition of doctrine influencing biblical interpretation, since the “seven deadly sins” are nowhere attested in the Scriptures, by any list or verbiage.

<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, though, it is understandable that Olivi would see his church structure *not* being overturned but remaining into the future. It had existed for twelve centuries.

<u>Time of Fulfillment</u>		<u>Explanation</u>
<i>Future</i>	Hippolytus (1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> c.)	The first beast is <b>Rome</b> , “fallen but eschatologically revived.” <sup>14</sup>
	Gregory IX (13 <sup>th</sup> )	The <b>Emperor</b> is the Land Beast, associate of the antichrist.
<i>Future</i>	Francisco Ribera (16 <sup>th</sup> )	(See RC interpretations below)
<i>Contemp./Future</i>	Joachim of Fiore (12 <sup>th</sup> ) <sup>15</sup>	The seven heads are a series of political manifestations, Rome being the worst. The Beast from the Sea will be a <b>political leader</b> , and the Land Beast a <b>religious leader</b> .
<i>Universal/Future</i>	Peter Olivi (13 <sup>th</sup> ) <sup>16</sup>	The Sea Beast is the <b>bestial life of carnal and secular Christians</b> . The Earth Beast: its two heads are the <b>pseudo-religious and the pseudo-prophets</b> . David Burr writes that for Olivi, the second beast will cause the “cupidity and carnality” of the first beast “to be adored by all.” <sup>17</sup>
<i>Future</i>	*Tim LaHaye (20 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> ) <sup>18</sup>	Both Beasts are <b>men</b> . <sup>19</sup> The Sea Beast will be <b>an end-time king or his kingdom</b> , <sup>20</sup> and arise of mixed nationality <b>from the people around the Mediterranean Sea</b> . <sup>21</sup> The

---

<sup>14</sup> Kovacs and Rowland 150.

<sup>15</sup> Joachim, write Kovacs and Rowland, was “arguably the most influential interpreter of the Apocalypse.... He opened up the possibility of a this-worldly application.” 257.

<sup>16</sup> Olivi’s interpretation was certainly historically informed, since he saw church leaders supported by rulers outside the church – “those who held power in the past” – as persecutors of those “committed to the new age.” The latter group included influential leaders of living spirituality, like Joachim of Fiore and Francis of Assisi. Kovacs and Rowland 150-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Not in Kovacs and Rowland. Although his interpretation refers to a future period, LaHaye does seek present response, particularly with respect to Christian conversion. “Is your name written in the Lamb’s book of life?” he asks. *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 221.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>20</sup> “Some details about this beast can apply only to an individual, whereas others apply to his kingdom.” *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

Second Beast is **his religious leader**,<sup>22</sup> and possibly, an **apostate Jew**.<sup>23</sup>

### *Specific Identifications*

Perhaps the more memorable interpretations are the seemingly plethoric specific ones. Their range differs with the range of history itself. The representatives below are those offered by Kovacs and Rowland. “*Contemp.*” indicates those interpretations that believed the prophecies of Revelation were taking place either in their day, or in the near future.

<u>Time of Fulfillment</u>		<u>Explanation</u>
<i>Contemp.</i>	Lanctantius (3 <sup>rd</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> c.)	The Beast is the <b>Roman Empire</b> . Ultimately, “there will be no end of deadly wars until kings will emerge simultaneously.”
<i>Contemp.</i>	Victorinus (3 <sup>rd</sup> c.)	Beasts symbolize the <b>kingdom of the antichrist</b> and the <b>antichrist</b> himself. The seven horns are seven kings, the sixth of which was <b>Nero</b> , who would be both <i>past</i> and <i>future</i> persecutor of the saints. The second Beast is <b>Nero’s false prophet</b> , who will set up a golden image of the antichrist in the Roman temple.
<i>Contemp.</i>	Dionysius (3 <sup>rd</sup> c.)	The Beast’s description (in Rev 13.5) suggests the <b>Emperor Valerian</b> .
<i>Contemp./Future</i>	Geneva Bible (16 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Sea Beast is the <b>Roman Empire (and RCC)</b> , that is, with “anti-Roman Catholic polemic.” <sup>24</sup> The Leopard, Lion, and Bear represent the Macedonians, Persians, and Chaldeans, who Rome triumphed over.
<i>Contemp.</i>	Franciscan <i>Breviloquium</i> (14 <sup>th</sup> c.) “Beast wounded to death” = <b>Frederick II</b>	

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 223. Interestingly, when one reads his book, LaHaye’s interpretations do not sound entirely new, but very much like Joachim of Fiore’s summary above, even slightly like Tyconius’ above, yet with greater specificity.

<sup>24</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 152.

<i>Historical-Past</i>	J.R. Herder (18 <sup>th</sup> c)	Sea Beast = the rebel leader <b>Simon ben Gurion</b> . The Land Beast = his subordinate, <b>Johannan ben Levi</b> .
<i>Contemp.</i>	Lewis Mayer (1803)	Sea Beast = <b>RCC</b> . The Land Beast = <b>Napoleon</b>
<i>Contemp.</i>	Hal Lindsey (20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Beasts = <b>Ten Nation Confederacy</b> ( <i>ten horns</i> , 13.1) represented by the European Common Market and trend toward European Unification <sup>25</sup>
<i>Contemp.</i>	North Am'n interp'ns (20 <sup>th</sup> )	Mark of Beast = "misguided programmes for social and economic betterment that are inspired by the devil." <sup>26</sup>
<i>Contemp.</i>	Adventist (19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> )	Seven heads are specific religious bodies of Western civilization, and the one with the wound that was healed is a symbol of <b>the papacy</b> , which Martin Luther wounded. The other six heads are <b>Protestantism</b> as six groups from which come all Protestant denominations.
<i>Contemp.</i>	David Koresh (20 <sup>th</sup> c)	The First Beast is an amalgamation of worldly and religious powers. And the Scarlet Beast (17.3) represents <b>America</b> , wherein it supports the whore of Babylon, the "the consummation of all religious error." <sup>27</sup>

### *Specific Identifications – RCC*

A vast number of specific attributions were given to the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). This became a customary Protestant interpretation for the time, evidenced by the dates below: largely the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>28</sup> What may come as a surprise is a Catholic who prefigured the trend.

---

<sup>25</sup> "There is no doubt in my mind that it's the forerunner of the Revived Roman Empire which the prophet Daniel spoke about.... He predicted that the number of nations in it would be limited to ten. This is the very number which the Common Market has set as its goal for inner membership!" *There is New World Coming* 186.

<sup>26</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 152.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> The exceptions simply preceded their time. Many, many more examples could be provided to add weight to the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<u>Time of Fulfillment</u>		<u>Explanation</u>
<i>Contemp.</i>	Ubertino of Casale (13 <sup>th</sup> )	The Angel of the Abyss (Rev 9.11) and the Beast from the Sea (13.1) both represent <b>Pope Boniface VIII</b> <sup>29</sup>
<i>Contemp./Univ</i>	John Wyclif (14 <sup>th</sup> )	The Antichrist on earth is the <b>Pope</b>
<i>Contemp./Univ</i>	John Calvin (16 <sup>th</sup> )	The Antichrist is not a single pope, but a <b>succession of popes</b> .
<i>Contemp./Univ.</i>	John Bale (16 <sup>th</sup> )	The Lamb-like Sea Beast is the <b>RCC</b> . The Second Beast is <b>the RC hierarchy</b> . The <i>names of blasphemy</i> are specific: "Pope, Cardinal, Patriarch, Legate, Metropolitan, Primate, Archbishop." Note, Kovacs and Rowland point out that Bale saw the RCC as the "latest manifestation" of the Beast. Bale adopted a universal fulfillment.
<i>Contemp./Univ.</i>	William Fulke (16 <sup>th</sup> ) <sup>30</sup>	The Beast is the " <b>head of the persecuting, malignant church</b> ." <sup>31</sup>
<i>Contemp./Univ</i>	John Brightman (16 <sup>th</sup> )	The First Beast is the <b>Papacy</b> . The Second <b>her political operations</b> , when the church took control of the state with Boniface VIII. <sup>32</sup>
<i>Contemp.</i>	Gerrard Winstanley (17 <sup>th</sup> ) <sup>33</sup>	The Antichrist is <b>everything that is Catholic</b> . Winstanley believed that the Beast and Babylon were <b>manifest in the monarchy, the magistracy, the army and the Church</b> . <sup>34</sup>
<i>Contemp.</i>	James Bicheno (17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> ) <sup>33</sup>	The Earth Beast is <b>Louis XIV</b> . The Antichrist is visible in the <b>papacy</b> , the <b>French Monarchy</b> , but also in <b>England</b> , sp. their slave trade and commercial greed. <sup>35</sup> The Antichrist thus could be variously visible.

---

<sup>29</sup> Pope Boniface VIII is known in history for having led the church in taking over control of the state.

<sup>30</sup> Sixteenth-century Puritan and apologist.

<sup>31</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 153

<sup>33</sup> A radical of the English Civil War

<sup>34</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 262.

<sup>35</sup> "While the papacy and the French monarchy were the fullest expression of evil, he thought that the Antichrist was also evident in British society," e.g. their slave trade and commercial greed. Ibid., 154.

### *Specific Identification – by the RCC*

Some Catholics have offered their own specific interpretations of the beasts.

<i>Future</i>	Francisco Ribera (16 <sup>th</sup> c)	Not the RCC of his day, but a <b>future Rome</b> under the power of the Antichrist. Pope-hopeful: “In those days the church will commit apostasy, but the pope will not lose faith even though the forces of the antichrist will drive him from Rome.” <sup>36</sup>
<i>Future</i>	Douay Bible (1809)	First Beast is <b>the whole company of infidels</b> . The seven heads are the seven kings representing a <b>succession of world empires</b> through history. <sup>37</sup>

### *Implications of Historical Interpretations*

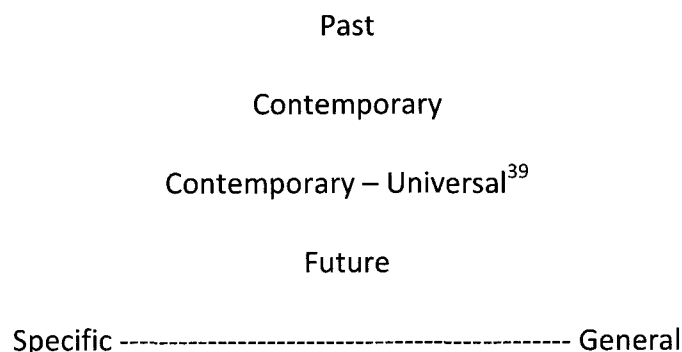
The above historical sketches have shown variations along two planes. First, they have displayed a range of specificity: from very specific persons (e.g. Pope Boniface VII) to broader specific powers (e.g. the RCC or America), to even broader general powers (e.g. government through which the Antichrist will rise to dominance), to the most general adversaries of all (e.g. Olivi’s carnality of the church). Second, the many interpretations yield chronological variety, some exclusively fulfilled in the past (e.g. two pre-Christ Jewish rebels), some contemporary or imminent (Bicheno’s Louis XIV), and some strictly future. Chronologically, for others the interpretation was both contemporary *and* universal fulfillment (many of the Roman Catholic polemics). To theological students of Revelation, this variety of chronological fulfillment will come as no surprise (cf. preterist, historicist and futurist approaches), except to reveal the *long*

---

<sup>36</sup> Kovacs and Rowland, 154.

<sup>37</sup> Those empires: Egyptian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, and Greece. Rome was the sixth, and the seventh is the antichrist’s empire to come (unspecified). Ibid. 154.

*heritage* of the differences, of which many are flatly unaware. To illustrate these two planes of interpretation, I will adjust a chart offered by Kovacs and Rowland:<sup>38</sup>



Every interpretation yields both a specific time of fulfillment (vertical plane) and a degree of specificity (horizontal).

This broad survey of Revelation 13 in history is perhaps more bewildering than majestic. But it reveals a handful of insights. **First**, history reveals that all *specific* interpretations repeatedly remain limited to the interpreter's historical situation and are by extension thus Western in nature. Rarely are specific interpretations applied to a future time (because certainty is more elusive!).<sup>40</sup> Also, the Western characteristic may say more about the geographic concentration of writing Christians in church history, and should not necessarily be wholesale criticized. Nevertheless Western characterizations

---

<sup>38</sup> Their chart has vertically in a line, "Past, Present, Future" and horizontally they offer the two planes of interpretation: "Decoding" (interpreting *specific* representations) to "Repeated Actualizations." "Decoding" is historical, either in the past or the present day. The latter title suggests timeless fulfillment, which to me lies more appropriately along the vertical, temporal, plane.

<sup>39</sup> Note: These took two forms. The first, like Bale's, sees fulfillment as being historically repeatable. The second is similar, but is confined to the papacy.

<sup>40</sup> Rarely does one hear a prediction of the end of the world that does not take place within the remaining years of the interpreter.

should be more carefully applied, especially at the dawn of a geographically shifting and globalizing church.

**Second**, history teaches the ancient proverb of Ecclesiastes: “*there is nothing new under the sun*” (Eccl. 1.9). Interpretations repeat themselves; they die and return, and only the characters differ. In this view, Hal Lindsey of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is John Bale of the 16<sup>th</sup>, except that Bale saw his manifestation of the Beast (the RCC) as the *latest* manifestation, and not the only one. Humility must lead, which leads to the next implication. **Third**, history advises that any interpretation which does not humbly permit the possibility of other theories distorts the nature of predictive prophecy, which is selectively specific and exists to offer hope and reform to God’s people in the present. Earlier I alluded to the ancient prophecy of the Messiah, a prediction which produced general outlines of what would be expected, and whose specificity (come to find out) was to be taken carefully. Many Jews were convinced, for instance, that the Messiah would wield the sword and set up a visible political government, which became (according to Christians) untrue. And even John the Baptist, “greatest among those born of women” and whose hands baptized Jesus Christ, had second thoughts. Through repeated failure, history has justified this very implication: If the Beast is a one-time historical fulfillment, then the Beast was not Rome, it was not Pope Benedict VIII, the European Common Market, Mary Tudor, Napoleon (the Second Beast strictly), Frederick II, or any other presumed manifestation. All of them died, and the end of the world did



not follow them in history. History teaches that *one cannot assert rigid contemporary equivalency*<sup>41</sup> without humility to other theories.<sup>42</sup>

**Fourth**, history suggests we could be a long time from Christ's return still. Many failed predictions remind God's people that the end of times is discernable but cannot be rigidly asserted. According to the New Testament, God's people must put more energy into being ready for those days than predicting its precise arrival.

**Finally**, history also suggests a timeless interpretation to Revelation 13. Indeed, the possibility surely exists that a very specific, visible concentration of evil may yet arrive. But failed prediction after another, even when the chapter appears *to fairly describe those predictions* (3<sup>rd</sup> century Rome is an excellent example, or the power-confused papacy of the Middle Ages), suggests the chapter is timelessly applicable. In other words, the prophecy of the Beasts is fulfilled during all the period between the two comings of Christ. To the Beasts in Revelation we now turn.

## 2 / Translation and Exegesis - The First Beast (Revelation 12.18-13.10) –

The following will translate in two large sections, and work exegesis part by part.

---

<sup>41</sup> "Contemporary equivalence metaphors" is a helpful phrase set forth by Professor Jerram Barrs of L'Abri Fellowship and Covenant Seminary to describe *specific* contemporary fulfillments of Revelation.

<sup>42</sup> Two notes: **(1)** Gladly, often these rigid specific predictions are used to persuade conversion to Christ. Sadly, though, this persuasion appears to be consistently driven to instill fear towards it. In Revelation 13, though, the impartation of hope and endurance (13.10), and the genuine exhortation to be wise (13.18) *to God's people* is the particular application. **(2)** Rigidity can be attained in interpretation, but only in the *outlines* that Rev 13 itself offers.

*Revelation 12:18-13:4*<sup>43</sup>

(12:18) "And he<sup>44</sup> stood on the sand of the sea."<sup>45</sup> (1) And I saw from the sea a beast rising,<sup>46</sup> having ten horns and seven heads, and upon his horns there were ten diadems, and upon his heads there was a name of blasphemy.<sup>47</sup> (2) And the beast that I saw was like<sup>48</sup> a leopard, and its feet like a bear's,<sup>49</sup> and its mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to it his power and his throne and great authority. (3) And one of<sup>50</sup> its heads appeared as slain<sup>51</sup> to death. But its death-

---

<sup>43</sup> See explanation of translation method, which precedes the Isaiah translation in chapter two.

<sup>44</sup> This refers to the "dragon." The sentence deftly transitions the dragon's origin and influence in chapter 12 to his scheming oversight in chapter 13. Although helpful for the reader, I omit "the dragon" (NRS NAS NIV, Mounce, Osborne) to leave the text as it is (ESV, Beasley-Murray, Aune).

<sup>45</sup> So ESV, Beasley-Murray, Aune. The seashore is in view here. To clarify, "sand" is sometimes "shore" (NIV Mounce, Osborne), or the latter "sea" is sometimes "seashore" (NRS NAS, Beale).

<sup>46</sup> (1) Most switch the word order for English clarity: "a beast rising from the sea..." The above reflects Greek word order. (2) In comment, Newell calls it the *wild-beast (therion)*, connecting the word to its common NT usage. 183.

<sup>47</sup> "There was a name of blasphemy" (Osborne) helps preserve the plural of "heads" (*kephale*) with the singular "name" (*onoma*) The NIV comes close with "on each head a blasphemous name," yet "each" unnaturally translates the article.

<sup>48</sup> "Like" (ὅμοιον) seems to indicate more categorical similarity, whereas "like" (ὥς) identifies more particular similarities. Interestingly, the same pattern is repeated for the second beast (13:11).

<sup>49</sup> Οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς ἄρκου "Like those of a bear" (NIV, Aune) and "he had feet like a bear" (Osborne) overshoot the conciseness of the phrase, which can be reached by "(were) like a bear's" (ESV NRS).

<sup>50</sup> Lit. "one from..." showing itself to be a book by John. He often uses the Hebrew idiom in his gospel, e.g. John 12.4, "one from the disciples."

<sup>51</sup> Beale writes, "The conditional translation of ὥς ἐσφαγμένην in virtually all English versions ... is misleading and makes it appear as if the beast only looked slain but was not. 'As slain' is a much better translation. The phrase is an intended parody of the Lamb in 5:6." 688-89. This eliminates all translations beginning with *as if* (NAS, NKJ) and *seemed* (ESV, NRS, NIV, NJB). The Castilian Bible (CAB) reflects this exactly: *estabe como herida de muerte*, "was like a death-wound."

wound<sup>52</sup> was healed. And the whole earth marveled<sup>53</sup> after<sup>54</sup> the beast. (4) And they<sup>55</sup> worshiped the dragon, because he had given authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying,

*“Who is like the beast?<sup>56</sup> And who is able to wage war<sup>57</sup> with<sup>58</sup> it<sup>59</sup>?”*

*(5) And it was given to it<sup>60</sup> a mouth speaking great and blasphemous things. And it was given to it authority<sup>61</sup> to exercise<sup>62</sup> for forty-two months. (6)*

---

<sup>52</sup> Beale, 688. Many render as “mortal wound” or “fatal wound.” The present translation preserves the normal English appearance of θανάτος “death.”

<sup>53</sup> ESV

<sup>54</sup> Some sense of amazement which invites discipleship is in view, since ὀπίσω + genitive indicates following after someone (Cf. disciples and Jesus, Mt 4:19). Thus, many this explicit, including “followed” either plainly (ESV, NRS NIV, NKJ, NAB, NET, Aune), or via parenthesis (Osborne) or italics (NAS). Also note: “Marveled” (ESV) is both concise and synonymous to the passive renderings just mentioned.

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to vv 8, 12, and 14, “they” is understood as “all who dwell on earth.” Beasley-Murray, 211.

<sup>56</sup> This “may be meant as a parody of a similar OT expression (Ex 15:11, Ps 35:10)”. Morris, 163.

<sup>57</sup> Various translations are virtually synonymous (e.g. “is able to wage war” or “can make war”) except to “fight against” (ESV, NRS, NAB, NJB, Aune, *luchar contra* CAB, R95, LBA), which strips the word of its context in war. Even if it can mean to generally fight against an opponent, because the nominal form, πόλεμος, appears in 13:7, translated “war” by all nine consulted English translations, “fight against” is discarded for this passage.

<sup>58</sup> “With” (NAS, NKJ) reflects the (biblically) more common usage of μετά + genitive. Not “against” (ESV NRS NIV NAB NET NJB Aune “contra” CAB R95 LBA). See fn. 1 for translation approach.

<sup>59</sup> “Him” and “he” (NAS NIV NKJ NET Mounce Osborne) are often found. The impersonal “it” (ESV NRS NAB NJB Aune) is to be chosen, reflecting the beast as a creature. This is not a significant difference.

<sup>60</sup> Although confessedly awkward, this and the following three times καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ appears are translated in the order it stands in the Greek: Conjunction + passive verb + indirect object + nominative. Each of these verbs stands out by their headship in the sentences.

<sup>61</sup> Here is a great example of resisting interpretation in translation, since NET’s helpful “ruling authority” is precisely in view, yet should be kept to exegesis and not translation.

*And it opened its mouth<sup>63</sup> in blasphemies toward God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle,<sup>64</sup> those tabernacling<sup>65</sup> in the heavens. (7) And it was given to it to make<sup>66</sup> war with the holy ones and to conquer them. And it was given to it authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.<sup>67</sup> (8) And all who dwell on earth will worship him, namely<sup>68</sup> those whose name has not been written in the book of life of<sup>69</sup> the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.<sup>70</sup> (9) If anyone<sup>71</sup> has an ear, let him hear.<sup>72</sup>*

---

<sup>62</sup> “Authority to exercise” (ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι) (ESV NRS NIV Osborne) is only slightly preferred over its similar counterparts, “authority to act” (NAS NAB), “authority to be active” (Aune), and “allowed to be active” (NJB). One must reject “authority to continue” (NKJ).

<sup>63</sup> The idea is beginning to speak. “It began to utter” also suffices since ἀνοίγειν στόμα “is a Semitic idiom meaning ‘to being to speak, to start to speak, to utter’ (Louw-Nida §33.29).” Aune, 717.

<sup>64</sup> Σκηνη(ν) is often used for a tabernacle or a tent, especially by far for OT Israel’s tabernacle. Its chief reference is to God’s dwelling with man (see esp. Rev 21:3). Thus it is best to leave as “tent” or better, “tabernacle” (NAS, Osborne). The verbal form later in the same verse carries the meaning of “spreading a tent,” to dwell for an extended period of time. Thus, either “dwelling” (ESV NRS NAB) or “dwelling-place” (NIV) misleads the common rendering for the word. “Heavenly tent” (NJB) approaches the semantic “feel” of the word in the first century, but overreaches. Whatever choice is made, one should translate the similar words similarly.

<sup>65</sup> See n83

<sup>66</sup> Here “make” reflects ποιέω. Cf. the similar πολεμῆσαι “wage war,” 13.4.

<sup>67</sup> On the timeless transcendence of Rev 13 (against a preterist reading): Although Nero’s persecution hovers in historical backdrop, John’s picture here transcends Nero. “Incidentally this shows that something more than the Neronic persecution is in mind, for that was not worldwide.” Morris, 164.

<sup>68</sup> Osborne.

<sup>69</sup> “Belonging to” (Osborne) indicates how this genitive should be understood: possessively.

<sup>70</sup> Which verb does “from the foundation of the world” describe? This “should be taken with *slain* (Cf. 1 Pet 1:19-20), rather than with *written* (...this refers to election as Eph 1:4). Either way, “God’s eternal purpose is in view and is contrasted with the fleeting might of the powers of evil.” Morris, 165.

<sup>71</sup> Semantically, “If anyone” (ESV NAS NKJ NET Osborne, Beasley-Murray, Aune) translates εἴ τις more accurately than “Whoever” (NAB) and “He who” (NIV *el que* NIV).

(10) *If anyone is unto<sup>73</sup> captivity, unto captivity he goes.*

*If anyone by<sup>74</sup> sword is to be killed, he by sword is to be killed.<sup>75</sup>*

*Here is<sup>76</sup> the endurance and faith<sup>77</sup> of the holy ones.*

**12.18, 13.2.** Here John shows the dragon stands on the **sand of the sea** (12.18), indicating his position calling out to the Sea Beast.<sup>78</sup> The **dragon** (13.2b) then disappears from view temporarily, but his oversight is recognized later, when it makes plain that he

---

<sup>72</sup> Dynamic translations reflect the idea of the phrase, but not the words themselves: e.g. “listen” (NRS NJB), “had better listen!” (NET), and “ought to hear these words!” (NAB). “Let him hear,” however, exactly translates the third person imperative ἀκούσάτω. Broadly, the CAB translates the phrase’s aphoristic conciseness the best: *Quien tenga oidos, oiga* “Who has an ear, hear.”

<sup>73</sup> Similar is “If anyone for captivity...” (Aune), also translating the phrase minimalistically. Other translations help the reader see the phrase’s idea: e.g. “If anyone (is destined) for captivity” (Osborne) or “is to go” (NIV).

<sup>74</sup> Instrumental use of ἐν + dative.

<sup>75</sup> Whereas the first phrase deals with *harsh reality* – captivity may be the reader’s destiny – Morris and the RSV, e.g., believe the latter phrase is a word of support and concerns *requital* for killing. Thus they translate the phrase “if anyone slays with the sword.” Morris asserts that this means that despite the evils against him, a Christian is not to take up the sword in response. If he does, “he will not establish the faith, for the truth of Christ cannot be defended by violence.” 165. Yet ἀποκτανθῆναι “is slain” is passive, not active. Thus, the second phrase also deals with *harsh reality*, not *requital*.

<sup>76</sup> After all the fantastic prose, the passage ends to sting the memory with its sober poetry. Lit. “Here is the endurance and faith of the saints” (Morris, similar: NAS, NKJ). Alone, “here” seems to connect Christians’ faithful perseverance to the preceding in *causative* way, as though saying, “This beastly picture is what faithful perseverance looks like.” Many translations seek to prevent any such errant interpretations, rendering it as a “call for” (ESV NRS NIV Beasley-Murray) or “this demands” (Osborne). Aune’s tongue-twister – “This indicates that the endurance and faith of God’s people are involved” – strips the phrase of its memorable simplicity: Best is to render it as is, and explain its meaning. A similar phrase concludes 13:11-18.

<sup>77</sup> Πίστις could be “faith” (ESV NRS NAS Beasley-Murray, Morris, Aune), as in belief or trust, or “faithfulness” (NIV Osborne, Mounce) extending *endurance* to the realm of relationship. The spiritual realm that “faith” promotes turns *endurance* into *faithfulness*, and “faithfulness,” if it refers to God, requires *faith* by definition. In other words, both options do the same thing. *Both connect their terrestrial perseverance to their divine relationship.*

<sup>78</sup> “...as if to summon the henchman from the mighty waters.” R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 243.

gives his **power... throne...and authority** (13.2b) to the Beast. The beast's governance even leads the people to worship the dragon with the beast. Because the Beast responds to the dragon's invitation, both in structural sequence (Chap 12 to Chap 13) and by juxtaposed sentences, it is unquestionable that the beast is servant to the dragon, who is Satan (Rev 12.9; 20.2).

**13.1.** John shows that a beast will rise **from the sea**. LaHaye accurately views the sea as the Great Sea, the commercially abundant Mediterranean, and that the Beast *may* thus be characterized by mixed nationality. But he misses in concluding the Beast will therefore derive from the people around the Mediterranean. In Jewish (and wider ancient near eastern) thought, the sea, particularly in literary pieces, indicated a primordial abyss of evil.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, all four "great" beasts of Daniel 7 arise from the sea (7:3). This beast begins to comprise the nature of all four beasts.

**Horns** (13.1) commonly referred to kingdoms in apocalyptic literature, particularly in Daniel. Thus it is respectable that interpreters through history assumed ten earthly kingdoms or governments. The *ten* horns focus this beast in allusion to the Daniel's ten-horned fourth beast, "dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong" (Dan 7.7 NAS). **Seven heads** likely alludes more specifically to the political leaders of these kingdoms, since "head" (Gr. κεφαλη, Heb. ראש) in Jewish heritage (not just apocalyptic) indicated both the operative orb atop one's neck, and the "chief" or "leader" of a

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. e.g. Isaiah 45.6. By "literary pieces," I mean mythic and fantastic literature, like mythic narratives. If the rhetorician Paul, e.g., would have written about the "sea," he'd more refer to the body of water below his sailing ship than the primordial deep, unless context showed otherwise. But in John's apocalypse, a more literary range of allusion would be in view. Mounce: "The ancient world commonly associated the sea with evil." 244.

country. Rev 17.10 proves this to be true: they are the “seven kings.” Thus by these horns and heads and diadems (crowns placed upon the king), the Beast in triple view reflects *supreme political governance*. The use of the words *ten* and *seven* do not communicate specificity: e.g. this is not seven actual kings (e.g. Rupert of Deutz). They symbolize fullness.<sup>80</sup> The Beast exercises full, supreme political governance, perhaps with respect to geography, but likely regarding comprehensive power (over economy, personal morality, religion, etc.). Many in history have understood the Beast politically.<sup>81</sup> General interpretations of the beast that are not political must be discarded.<sup>82</sup> Specific attributions of ten and seven should also be dismissed.

**13.2-4. Like a leopard...bear’s feet...lion’s mouth:** Now the fusion of all four beasts of Daniel 7 takes its final form, also justifying our previous conclusion that this refers to political governance.<sup>83</sup> Because it possesses characteristics of all four Danielic beasts, Revelation’s beast will stand apart as both the final installment of the previous four, and also *characteristic* of all four. In this way, it alludes to wide and potent

---

<sup>80</sup> Many scholars point this out, especially for the number seven, which appears throughout the OT and NT with the same symbolism. E.g. Mounce 245; Bauckham *Theol.*, 16; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 58-59.

<sup>81</sup> See above for Rupert of Deutz, Joachim of Fiore, the *Breviloquium*, and LaHaye; made specific by Lactantius, Victorinus, and Dionysius for Rome, and Hal Lindsey.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Beasts as General Symbols of Evil* in the historical section above. Importantly, however, their desire to make the book and chapter presently applicable *should be esteemed and adopted*.

<sup>83</sup> The four beasts of Daniel 7 are subsequently interpreted there, to refer to four successive kingdoms (empires, really) in ensuing history, which we know to have become Babylon, Greece, Medo-Persia, and Rome.

influence.<sup>84</sup> It also suggests their inability to ultimately vanquish God's people, since all historical kingdoms in Daniel, though potent, ultimately fell. And it is likely that the mentioned body parts carry significance. The **mouth** (2x, 13.3), e.g. is an abundant theme in Revelation<sup>85</sup>, alluding to the powerful<sup>86</sup> sphere of speech, and linked to a similarly abundant theme of "testimony/witness." And it is "mentioned last because it is the main point of the figure."<sup>87</sup> *This* mouth will be like a **lion's**, however, a devouring animal. Perhaps this indicates that the political governing body will persuade by rhetoric, only also to devour by it. History has certainly proven the persuasion of silver-tongued autocrats over those looking for political deliverance. At the very least, the state which is the Beast devours the truth and people of God in a destructive (not a receptive) way, uttering "great and blasphemous things" (13.5).

**And one of its heads appeared as slain to death. But its death-wound was healed.** (13.3). The seven heads, we argued, refer to the fullness of the Beast's political authority. Here, part of the Beast's authority, perhaps one of its chief leaders, appears to be to be resurrected from the dead, so that in the most fantastic ways, the Beast will

---

<sup>84</sup> One can look at the ensuing overpowering government and discern characteristics of all the previous four. For those living under the power of Revelation's beast, they can find encouragement and guidance from the prophecies that took place while under the influence of those governments in the OT.

<sup>85</sup> Nineteen occurrences total = Three times in chapters 1-3, and sixteen times in chapters 10-19.

<sup>86</sup> Power materializes from mouths in Revelation, in the image of **the sword** (1.16; 2.16; 19.15; 19.21) and unclean spirits (16.13). Not far from the aphorism, "the pen is mightier than the sword," this sword-mouth connection communicates the power of word and tongue and rides on OT background: Isaiah writes, "*He made my mouth like a sharp sword.*" Cf. Job 5.15 for an earlier reference. Out of Jesus' mouth comes the sharp two-edged sword (1.16) which later eviscerates all of the beasts' minions (19.21). Jesus is the faithful and true witness.

<sup>87</sup> Mounce, citing W. Hendriksen, 244.



carry resemblances to the Savior of the world, even dying for the sake (perhaps) of the people. One must note that it is a *part* of the Beast that is ‘resurrected,’ and not the entire thing. Yet at the same time, it is the *beast*, and not the head, which is resurrected in Rev 13.12.<sup>88</sup> This suggests that perhaps a central part of the government’s authority, e.g. one of its leaders perhaps, suffers death and threatens the downfall of the state, which ultimately recovers from the cancerous threat. The Lamb-likeness of the Beast is here carried to its furthest degree.<sup>89</sup> Yet it only deludes others (even itself?), because although it appears to command life, it will have no ultimate power to save even itself (see Rev 19.20). For the state which is the Beast, part of its authority may possess characteristics that play deceptive counterfeit to the Lamb, Christ – and specifically, perhaps with respect to his dying-and-rising.<sup>90</sup> I say ‘may’ possess this resurrection-character because it is possible the reference is intended simply to allude to some of the claims of Rome’s imperial cult, and thereby assert its futility.

The remainder of verse 3 and 4 depict the peoples’ wholesale admiration and submission to this political governance (leader or organization). **Marveled after** (13.3)

---

<sup>88</sup> Mounce, 248.

<sup>89</sup> Commentators often rightly point this out – and through history: cf. John Bale (16<sup>th</sup> c.) above.

<sup>90</sup> Obviously, dying for others is characteristic of saints, too, who die unto God for the sake of others: “*unless a kernel of wheat dies...*” (Jn 12.24) and . Thus, just as with expectations of the Messiah, one must not take single references to their utmost degree in order to see the prophecy fulfilled in them – and fear for every leader who dies on behalf of their people. In other words, when a leader, or some organization, that one does not like dies as it were on behalf of their people, one must celebrate (“*for one will scarcely die for a righteous person...*” Rom 5.7). When this takes place in conjunction with blasphemy, miraculous signs, and in the political sphere, then God’s people have the right to begin to apply the Beast to them – and look to God to resolve any fear.

suggests a following *after* (ὀπίσω) this leader,<sup>91</sup> much like a disciple would follow after (ὀπίσω Mk 1.17<sup>92</sup>) his master: watching, learning, obeying, and imitating. Historically this is not hard to envision, as despotic leaders by their silver tongue create lemmings out of their following. But why do the people marvel? The people worship him because *they are enamored by the supreme political power of this leader*: They sing, “**who can wage war against him?**” (13.4) Individuals must keep a close watch on their devotion to their country where it is based on the nation’s power and global influence. Those who are enamored by their nation’s power reflect those who follow the malicious Beast. Thus, the beast’s appearance of sacrificial service and his illustrious global influence can be the hook by which the beast attracts his following. One’s amorous devotion is meant not for secondary “powers,” but for the one who is above every power (Eph 1.21), Jesus Christ.

**7. Authority over every tribe...** (13.7) The fourfold description here of the peoples of the earth emphasizes the complete submission of all the people of the earth to this political leader. In other words, the *supreme political governance* prophesied here is that of an empire (e.g. Roman, Ottoman, British, etc.), not a local state, which may only resemble the First Beast, and not manifest it.<sup>93</sup> Intriguingly, this

---

<sup>91</sup> Translations often make “followed” explicit in translation. See n. 61.

<sup>92</sup> Mark combines themes of marveling (θαυμάζω among other synonyms) and following after (ὀπίσω with various discipleship verbs before it), suggesting either Mark’s gospel hovers in the background or a common background in the NT milieu does for both of them. Johannine usage of ὀπίσω (Jn 1.15-30 3x; 6.66; 12.19; 18.6; 20.14; nowhere in the letters attributed to John) often refers to discipleship (e.g. 12.19) but often with reference to the *loss* of that discipleship (6.66; 18.6; 20.14). The word also refers to simple temporal sequence (1.15-30 3x).

<sup>93</sup> Note: this does not suggest a negative view of empires. It suggests a negative view of empires when their power is used for economic oppression (Rev 18) and religious supremacy (here). Consult the

characterization of the Beast fits the widely-held false conception of the Messiah in the first century – one who would conquer and visibly rule all the peoples of the world. Is this intentional irony? Regardless, Christ does rule, even politically, but not visibly.

**8. Worshiping ... those not in the book of life (13.8).** All men and women must ask themselves if they truly believe and follow the Lamb, and if they assent to the core truths of Christian faith, because the Beast's devotees are those not found in the Lamb's book of life. Spiritually, omission from the book spells eternal destruction. Terrestrially, it spells (future) participation in oppressive dictatorships fulfilling the prophecy of the Beast. Verses like this one also demonstrate that all men are unavoidably religious, even if their object of worship is human or human-constructed. **Of the Lamb who was slain (13.8)** – the Lamb is in clear contradistinction from the Beast in two ways. First, the Lamb endured a full death, not a partial one like the Beast (for whom "one of his heads" suffered death and revived). Secondly, the Lamb's salvific effect is not temporally confined like the Beast's, which ends at its death. The Lamb's influence extends to *all ages*, since he was slain **from the beginning of the world**.

In Revelation 13.5-8, though, two fundamental characteristics of the Beast surface, which supersede all others. Two phrases repeat themselves like boldfaced propaganda. The first is the Greek word, *edothē* (ἐδόθη), a passive verb translated "**it was given.**" Four times the passages declares his beast *was given* all the power and authority that he wields. That is, in every way the Beast's power is derived. In this

---

implications of this in the following piece. What results is a command to critique empire when it is the Beast and celebrate it when it produces "salvation and righteousness" (Isaiah 45.8). Christopher Bryan explores a balanced view in *Render*.

appears another likeness to the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who claimed that “all authority in heaven has been given [*edothē*] to me” (Matt 28.18). Disagreement follows over *who* is the source of that power. It is noteworthy that elsewhere in Scripture, civil power is noted as ultimately deriving from God, as for example with Cyrus in Isaiah 44.28-45.8. Some commentators argue compellingly for a divine passive here, which would follow that theme.<sup>94</sup> But the section’s adjacent proximity to chapter 12 and multiple references to the dragon lead one to see the dragon hovering, as it were, over this entire chapter, and specifically, this derived authority. In this way, 13.5-8 simply illustrates the prior claims of 13.2: “The dragon gave to it his power and his throne and great authority.”

John’s second repeated ‘propaganda’ is the Beast’s aggressive **blasphemy** (13.1,5,6). Mentioned in repetition, and being the most apparent area where the Beast departs from his Lamb-likeness, *the Beast’s blasphemy is the chief characteristic for God’s people to discern the presence of the Beast*. Again, God’s people must keep a close watch on their doctrine, this time not to discern *their* place in the book of life, but rather their leaders’, seeking to distinguish those leaders who deny the core truths of God and Jesus Christ, and their hateful conspiracy against the faith. But they must proceed with caution, since many non-believing leaders will also have redemptive political effect in

---

<sup>94</sup> Their argument extends from the nature of the various “authorities” given here: the time period, “forty-two months” (13.5b), the power to conquer God’s people (7a), and over every tribe and nation (7b). Cf. Mounce 249 and Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (New York: UBS, 1993). All of these authorities only God could have ultimately permitted. The argument holds water, and could be true. If true, providence would thus become a central theme to the chapter, and the rebellion of the Beast to God. Such arguments must explain how God gave the beast a blaspheming mouth as well (5a).

this age, too.<sup>95</sup> It will not be hard to discern, I believe, though, because of the following point. Blaspheming **his tabernacle, those tabernacling in the heavens** is a curious phrase, since for John the temple (the step-up of the tabernacle) had disappeared in AD 70. This must then refer to God's people, where God dwells<sup>96</sup>, both those on earth and in heaven. As such, the blasphemies of this supreme political leader (or government) extend not only against God's truth, but against God's people past and present, devaluing their contributions, perhaps even charging them with crimes against the state. This leads to direct persecution of Christians, as it says the Beast will **make war with the holy ones and conquer them**.<sup>97</sup> The point here is that the Beast may or may not provide every luxury and *apparent love* for his (or her) constituent people, but where the government reflects the Beast is in its hatred for Christians in particular. To further support the fact that hatred for Christians is in view, John takes a pastoral turn. He turns to soberly address his Christian readers.

(9) *If anyone has an ear, let him hear.*

(10) *If anyone is unto captivity, unto captivity he goes.*

---

<sup>95</sup> It is a fact that many civil rulers then and now will not be believers. That is expected: cf. Cyrus, Hiram, Darius, and other pagans who assist God's people. Thus, Christians are not to engage in a witch-hunt of every unbelieving political leader or even immediately distrust and/or fear avowedly non-Christian political leaders. Many, like those just mentioned, will help God's people – perhaps more than a less effective Christian leader might. The point is to wisely combine all the characteristics in Rev 13 in order to fairly discern the presence of the beast – one of whose characteristics being its hatred for God's people is clear.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. John's contemporary, the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 3.16-17; 6.19, where God's people are the "temple" (earthly dwelling-place of the Divine) of the Holy Spirit. Certainly "tabernacle" (σκηνη) is a different word, but they refer to the same earthly divine dwelling-place. Most translators simply render the word as "dwelling-place" (see n.83).

<sup>97</sup> A perfect example of this lies with Nero, who blamed Christians for the burning of Rome, which many have believed Nero himself caused. Christians were summarily persecuted.

*If anyone by sword is to be killed, he by sword is to be killed.  
Here is the endurance and faith of the holy ones.*

**9-10.** Here Revelation 13 transitions from predictive prophecy (12.18-13.8) to forth-telling prophecy (13.9-10). John addresses God's people. And he deals with a *harsh reality*: It is a fact that some of God's people will be taken **captive**. They will become prisoners of war. They will probably receive harsh treatment. They may be tortured, or enticed to deny their faith (cf. the second beast who *kills* those who will not worship the image). In this period of evil political governance where others marvel at the scintillating power of the political leader, some will pay the ultimate price: these will die **by the sword**.<sup>98</sup> **Here is the endurance and faith of the saints:** It is in the darkest hour that **endurance** and **faith** are truly manifest. It seems to say, "Nowhere else is endurance and faith more truly manifest than here." One remembers Job, whose faith was put to its bitterest test. Faith and endurance may be present in a person. But it is under (political) persecution that it makes its display.

### *The First Beast Summarized*

Revelation 12.18-13.10 clearly warns Christians of a coming future, where political resistance to Christianity is underfoot, and driven by Satan like an army general controls his captains.<sup>99</sup> John wants his readers to interpret the Beast (1-8), because he

---

<sup>98</sup> See n. 99 discrediting an alternate interpretation.

<sup>99</sup> While some might understand it to be so, I do not feel Satan is controlling the Beast like a marionette controls a puppet, where the puppet is comprehensively possessed by the puppeteer. Although he has corrupted the powerful government thoroughly, they make their own decisions, evidenced by their

has a pastoral word to tell them (9-10). How should Christians then interpret the Beast?

*The First Beast is a political force characterized by **supreme political governance**, either geographically or comprehensive over all areas of civil life, or probably both – not unlike periods of imperial Rome. Strictly, it is **a multiethnic empire** more than a local state. Its leadership arises and finds its power by means of **persuasive rhetoric** (by tongue or pen). Its characteristics have central elements **reminiscent of** the pernicious empires of **Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome**. Some part of its authority carries a **persuasive story of death and resurrection, perhaps death for the sake of its own people**, since in this **it resembles Christ**. Yet what most characterizes the Beast are these two elements: (1) This government **outright denies and/or despises the faith of Christians**, as well as Christians themselves past and present, not refraining from leading them into captivity and even to death. (2) **Its power is derived from Satan**, and against this central empowerer Christians find their principal opponent. Many governments may resemble the Beast in their parts, but strictly, all the above characteristics are necessary to fairly call a government the Beast of Revelation 13.*

### **3 / Translation and Exegesis – The Second Beast (Revelation 13.11-18)**

There is insufficient space to remark on the Second Beast in as much detail as the preceding exegesis, but the abbreviated remarks should suffice for the present purposes.

---

reception of *authority* and *power* to conquer. These are *decreed* powers. In this way, God's beautiful impartation of human choice persists, but itself is decisively corrupted. The point is made, though, that Christians' battle under oppressive governments like these is *first* with the powers of evil (chapter 12), and *not* the present government (chapter 13).

(11) *And I saw another beast rising from the earth. And he was having<sup>100</sup> two horns like a<sup>101</sup> lamb and he was speaking like a<sup>37</sup> dragon. (12) And the authority of the first beast, all of it,<sup>102</sup> he exercises in its presence, and he makes the earth and those living on it so that they would worship<sup>103</sup> the first beast, whose death-wound<sup>104</sup> was healed. (13) And he performs great signs<sup>105</sup>, so that even fire he would make<sup>106</sup> fall<sup>107</sup> from heaven to earth in the presence of men<sup>108</sup>.*

---

<sup>100</sup> It and the nearby ἐλάλει being imperfect verbs, they stress “the ongoing nature of the beast” (Osborne). Osborne does not also point out the “ongoing nature” of the *eight present-tense verbs* which follow that describe the work revolving around the second beast. These verbs could also emphasize subjective experience of the events.

<sup>101</sup> “Lamb” and “dragon” both lack articles in Greek, even though they clearly refer to previous characters here. “The” (aforementioned) lamb and “the” dragon are understood. Perhaps anarthrous nouns here emphasize the subject’s experience of the coming events, just as the imperfect verbs also do. I.e. “The horns” as it were, “remind me of a lamb’s horns.” Or by symbolic extension, “The political control of this government reminds me of Christ’s political control.”

<sup>102</sup> “All of it” is in Greek simply πᾶσαν. Most translations rightly place “all” before *authority*. The present translation reflects the word order in Greek.

<sup>103</sup> This appears to reflect a Greek formation of the Hebrew hipil: ποιέῖ + ἵνα + προσκυνήσουσιν = makes/causes + to + worship. In Hebrew this would be one word. If this is true, it would further support a Hebrew-based author (i.e. John).

<sup>104</sup> See Rev 13.3 above, n.55.

<sup>105</sup> “Impressive miracles” (Aune) and similar miracle-oriented translations indicate the translator’s biblical understanding of σημεῖα “signs”. Aune’s complete omission of “signs,” though, misleads from the significance of the diction.

<sup>106</sup> Again, here is an awkward translation, but representational of the Greek words and word order.

<sup>107</sup> Aune’s translation.

<sup>108</sup> “In the presence of men” directly represents ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων (see n.1). “In front of people” (ESV NET Osborne), “before people” (Aune) “in the sight of all/everyone” (NRS, NAB), “in full view of men” (NIV), and even “while people watched” (NJB) – these fairly communicate the idea of what is taking place but do not plainly represent the words. Moreover, the lattermost (NJB) mangles the grammar, inserting a verb where only a preposition and noun stand. The casualty of more dynamic translations is invisibility of word repetition. Most of these render the same word, ἐνώπιον as “in the presence of” only a verse later. Yet both are ἐνώπιον.



*(14) And he deceives those living upon the earth because of<sup>109</sup> the signs which was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, who says to all those dwelling upon the earth to make an image<sup>110</sup> to<sup>111</sup> the beast. It has a sword-wound, yet it lived. (15) And it was given him to give breath<sup>112</sup> to the image of the beast, with the result that<sup>113</sup> the image of the beast might speak and make as many as would not worship the image of the beast, they would be killed.*

*(16) And he makes<sup>114</sup> all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the enslaved, that they be given<sup>115</sup> a mark upon their right hand or upon their forehead, (17) and that one might not be able to buy or sell without having the mark, which is<sup>116</sup> the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

---

<sup>109</sup> διὰ + acc. Also applicable: “on account of”

<sup>110</sup> Aune defends “cult statue,” noting that “statue” is an alternative translation for εἰκών. 761. Persuasive – indeed, all of Aune’s work is massively footnoted – but I am not ultimately convinced it is worth changing the translation. BAGD’s two definitions are: “1. Image, likeness... 2. form, appearance.” 222. Perhaps “image” stands as a general category, under which a “statue” would be included.

<sup>111</sup> Here the dative is employed for “the beast” (τῷ θηρίῳ). Osborne suggests “on behalf of” and Aune “in honor of,” indicating rarer usages of the dative.

<sup>112</sup> Again, “life” (Aune) communicates the idea of what took place, but does not represent normal use of the word, which is πνεύμα “breath” or “spirit” or “wind.”

<sup>113</sup> ἵνα of result (Osborne).

<sup>114</sup> Two notes: (1) Ποιέω is used frequently in chapter 13 (see exegesis). This appears to be another example of a potential hiphil background to the verbal form (see n.40). Putting the verbs together, we have ποιεῖ + ἵνα + δώσειν = “Makes + to + be given,” or “causes to receive.” The beast, exercising (ποιέω) authority, causes (δώσειν) all to be marked. (2) The passive aspect of the marking clarifies that the beast *but doesn’t himself mark them all*. This suggests indeed a structural governmental law or vision statement, which local authorities employ on his behalf.

<sup>115</sup> Δώσιν appears as third person active “they give.” Aune informs: “The verb δώσειν is in the indefinite 3<sup>rd</sup> plural...and is equivalent to a passive.” 721 n.16a-a. “Be given” is chosen over “receive” (e.g. Osborne) for the sake of highlighting word repetition.

<sup>116</sup> Both “mark” and “name” τὸ χάραγμα τὸ ὄνομα are neuter-accusative and stand next to each other, indicating connection. “The number” τὸν ἀριθμὸν is masculine. This suggests, strictly speaking,

*(18) Here is wisdom. The one who has understanding,<sup>117</sup> let him calculate<sup>118</sup> the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man.<sup>119</sup> And its number is six hundred sixty-six.<sup>120</sup>*

### *Exegesis of 13.11-18*

Again, John even more explicitly desires his readers to interpret his images: He offers a pastoral word – **here is wisdom** (18) – and he invites the **one with understanding** to **calculate** the number of the beast. How then are first century Christians to interpret the Second Beast?

(1) *Derivative Authority.* Again, John paints this second beast with strokes emphasizing his derived authority – “**all of [the first beast’s authority] he exercises in its presence**” (12) – and his fundamental act of imitation: his authority (**horns**) reflects

---

the *mark of the beast* is the *name of the beast*. And the *number* is an alternate branding that serves the same end. However it is decided, the either brand indicates the control of or allegiance to the beast – either by his name or number.

<sup>117</sup> “Insight” (NIV NET) and “anyone clever” (NJB) to me indicate less substantial quality than what *νοῦς* commonly communicates. Hence, “understanding” (ESV NRS NAS NKJ Aune, *who understands* NAB). Cf. Beale “Danielic” for OT background to *nous* “understanding” and *sophia* “wisdom”.

<sup>118</sup> Being a number, “calculate” (ESV NRS NAS NIV NKJ NAB NET *calcule* CAB) is indeed superior to “interpret” (NJB) or “count” (*cuenta* R95).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. LaHaye’s observation, “Humankind was created on the sixth day; therefore in Bible numerology it is used to refer to humankind.” 227.

<sup>120</sup> The many translations that read “666” suggest the text says, “six six six.” It does not. Although LaHaye is more cautious in other regards, he makes this mistake more apparent when he writes out the number: “it comprises the numbers: six, six, sx.” 227. Many authors point out the number as three-times falling short of the “perfect” number seven. This is worthwhile, because “seven” is indeed a repeated number throughout not only Revelation but much of the Bible. Those who call it the “perfect” number (e.g. LaHaye 227), though, miss the mark: strictly speaking seven refers to wholeness, completion (the absence of something unfinished), not perfection (the absence of error). 666 is certainly the number of a man (Rev 13.18), and possibly calls that man an incomplete counterfeit of something fully whole.

the **lamb**, and his speech reflects the **dragon's** (11).<sup>121</sup> Additionally, John twice remarks that this Land Beast exercises his works and authority **in the presence of the first beast** (12, 14). And *edothē* characterizes the Second Beast, too: “he was given” the ability to give life to the image of the Beast. In every way, this beast’s power is derived. It serves and is empowered by the first beast, and his words reflect the deceitfulness (“**he deceives**” v 14) of Satan.

(2) *Lamb-likeness*. Here not only his authority reflects the Lamb, but he also performs captivating **signs** (13-14), which attract a following.<sup>122</sup> It is largely agreed, e.g., that an emphasis on ‘signs’ occupies the first half of John’s gospel (chaps. 1-12).

(3) *Spiritual Powers*. This Second Beast is able to perform **signs** (above) and also to **give breath** to inanimate things, like the beast’s **image** (15).

(4) *Supreme Religious Authority – Which Points to the First Beast and Leads Worship unto It*. Just as “signs” fundamentally *point* (and hence not here called “great works,” e.g.), and just as the Holy Spirit leads others to worship the one from whom He proceeds, so the First Beast fundamentally leads people to **worship the first beast** (15). Everything the Second Beast does is aimed to elicit complete devotion to and dependence upon the state. This manifests itself in religious life, as the Second Beast

---

<sup>121</sup> In this way, he is reflective of the Holy Spirit in this “unholy trinity” (a common description of the dragon, sea beast, and land beast), always serving and proceeding from the other authority figures, yet equal in power and influence.

<sup>122</sup> Note: simply because he reflects the Holy Spirit (see previous note) does not mean he cannot also reflect Christ. Members of a family resemble one another. The Holy Spirit, e.g., sanctifies (1 Pet 1.2) just as God is petitioned to do so by Jesus (Jn 17.17).

erects images<sup>123</sup> of the first beast for all people to worship. Such religious authority is not only decreed, but enforced: *anyone* (Christians are not specifically mentioned here) who refuses to **worship the image is killed** (15). The point is: *Religious freedom does not exist in this state. Instead, religion is used to serve (devotion to) the state.*<sup>124</sup> If it was so originally for first century Christians, John's visionary piece is not so practically distant any longer: The Roman state in history performed all this supreme control, even in religion. This is unquestionably anti-Roman polemic.<sup>125</sup>

(5) *Socioeconomic Breadth of Control*. This beast is beginning to look increasingly like the ground-level political manifestation of the first beast,<sup>126</sup> and probably not its central leaders, since the seven heads ('chiefs') reside with the first beast. Here the beast **makes all, the small and great...rich and poor...free and enslaved...be given a**

---

<sup>123</sup> Aune considers these to be actual "cult statues" and appeals for translating the word that way. See n.113. First century emperor worship is quite easily in view, since statues of emperors were erected in many cities, and temples to Julius Caesar, a massive statue to Nero, and other emperors. In view of history, retaining "images" as the translations allows the text to transfer into multiple historical situations where *statues* themselves may not be as prevalent as, say, massive and ubiquitous *posters* and *banners*.

<sup>124</sup> For this reason, (1) it is not unfit whatsoever for the Governments of the Middle Ages which used the Papacy and the Church as their vassal for political control to be charged with exemplifying Revelation's Beasts. Religion used for eliciting devotion to the political state characterizes the malicious Beasts of Revelation 13 and is categorically un-Christian. For *this* reason, (2) atheists who refuse religion (in general) for its pernicious constant political manipulation must know this is not a Christian tenet – however it may have been abused through history.

<sup>125</sup> As Barclay writes, "In Revelation we come face to face with an attitude to the State which is quite different from that of any other part of the New Testament," alluding to Jesus (e.g. Mt 22.15-22) and Paul (e.g. Ac 22.25-28 in practice and Rom 13.1-6 in appeal). 260.

<sup>126</sup> "The second beast is the local authorities." Jerram Barrs, in class lectures (Covenant Theological Seminary, October, 2009). Notes in possession of author.

**mark.** No socioeconomic class escapes the control of this state. The CEO lines up for a mark beside the gardener.<sup>127</sup>

(6) *Supreme Commercial Control.* In this state **one might not be able to buy or sell without having the mark.** Commerce itself does not take place without a public expression of supreme devotion to the state.

(7) *Wisdom Navigates Economic and Religious Oppression.* Unlike the First Beast, characterized by supreme political control, where endurance and faith are admonished, here where commerce and religious oppression are highlighted, **wisdom** is too. Under these circumstances, innocence, one might infer, takes a backseat to wisdom.

#### *The Mark of the Beast (13.18)*

Many pine for explanation here, and rightly so, since the text encourages those with **understanding** to **calculate** the number.<sup>128</sup> Tim LaHaye and many others argue for a specific mark that will be used.<sup>129</sup> But by virtue of the symbolic nature of the entire apocalyptic book, one might initially wonder otherwise. Because it is also **the name of**

---

<sup>127</sup> Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and similar pieces of literature come to mind.

<sup>128</sup> However, it is noteworthy that the mark, which has received such wide attention, is but the stamp on the skin, the detail marking believers with the symbol of government, and not the government itself, which comprises all of verses 1-16.

<sup>129</sup> LaHaye associates the mark with governmental control over commerce, but to illustrate, he without disclaimer uses the example of food stamps in the United States. 227. If it is a specific physical mark (which is possible at best), this is an incomplete and potentially harmful analogy on its own. It fits okay in its *direct* analogy (the *capacity* for government to stamp its control on commerce), but without a disclaimer the analogy denigrates those who have had to use food stamps by suggesting their dependence on government help prefigures the mark of the beast – even if the dependent person carries no fundamental *devotion* to the state which supersedes their devotion to Christ. LaHaye would do well to keep the analogy, but provide better explanation. For one thing, food stamps demonstrate only a portion of the state's commercial control, whereas the Second Beast is characterized as possessing widespread commercial control, all of the people's dependence.

**the beast** or the **number of his name**, the mark signifies the Beast itself, and its employment is not unlike the name of Jesus, which suggests power by representation.<sup>130</sup> Greg Beale undergirds this spiritual (against physical or secular) nature behind the verses, when he mines the rich OT background behind the appeals for “wisdom” and “understanding.”<sup>131</sup> This begins to suggest that being marked with the name of the beast, then, is counterfeit to being marked with the Holy Spirit’s seal. It symbolizes ownership, authority, perhaps devotion, too. Thus ultimately, although I will concede the mark may be a future physical stamp (upon the skin or wherever), the mark of the beast symbolizes a stamp of devotion to the state. For this reason, *during this period of supreme, oppressive political authority, anyone who submits their fundamental allegiance to the political state bears the mark of the Beast*. By extension, it is not a stretch to deliver the same warning to people in more politically ‘safe’ contexts: *anyone who submits their fundamental devotion to the state prefigures the mark of the beast*. It is this fundamental devotion which turns free citizens, under graver circumstances, into the Beast’s eschatological minions.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> In Jesus name, “life is found” (John 20.31) and at his name, “every knee will bow and every tongue confess... that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2.10-11)

<sup>131</sup> Beale connects 13.18’s call for *nous* (“understanding”) and *sophia* (“wisdom”) as connecting the verse to Daniel 2, thereby effectively making God’s people in Rev 13.18 the *maskilim* of Daniel 2. John’s point, then, “in exhorting believers as Denielic *maskilim* is to impress on them their need to exercise their spiritual insight in order to discern true and false worship.” The OT background here thus pulls in a spiritual – and not strictly this-worldly – element to the *nous* and *sofia* present in Rev 13.18 – not unrepresented by the context. Beale “Danielic” 169.

<sup>132</sup> My point is not unlike the fundamental sins that Jesus communicates (e.g. hate) which undergird the actualized event of sin (e.g. murder).

### *The Second Beast Summarized*

*The Second Beast is best understood as the **ground-level political manifestation** of the supreme political state, taking place in local governments and their leaders. It is characterized by its **religious and commercial coercion, over all socioeconomic classes** in the state. Because it has asserted control over religion, it has moved from supreme political authority to **supreme comprehensive authority**, erecting a state that possesses **no religious freedom**. Again, like the supreme political authority in the first beast, the local governments will display **Christ-like qualities**,<sup>133</sup> even in their possession of **spiritual powers** evidenced by miraculous signs. These are its subjective, visible characteristics, but finally, for the encouragement of the saints, one is assured this government's **authority is also derived**, since ultimate authority is found in the living God. God's people are exhorted toward wisdom with this development.*

### **4 / Time of Fulfillment**

When will this prediction be fulfilled? Without being able to offer a substantial defense of my rationale, I believe these prophecies are characteristic of the whole of the age between Christ's first return and his second. It takes little research and reflection to see many governments since the first century exemplifying the same **supreme comprehensive authority** over their people, commanding supreme authority over both

---

<sup>133</sup> Since true deception possesses components of truth, Christ-like characteristics will serve to undergird its deceptive ability. As with previous comments, this should not send Christians toward finding "Christ-like" characteristics in governments they do not prefer, in order to defend its "Beast" -like characterization. Governments which *are* the beast are those which possess all the qualities heretofore highlighted.

economics and religion, by stifling religious freedom, even commandeering religion to serve the political state. These states have persecuted its own citizens who would refuse allegiance to its prescribed religion (Rome, Islamic Republics), some even setting up images (Mao) and statues (Nero, Hussein) of its leaders to propagate the people's complete surrender to their government. Many of these states have arisen through silver-tongued leaders (Hitler) and have used religion as a tool for political control (Third Reich, Catholic and some Protestant states of the Middle Ages). In this way, many of the specific contemporary characterizations we saw through history *were right*. Lactantius and Dionysius were right, when they saw in Rome the eschatological Beast. Ancient Rome possessed all of these qualities, and thus Revelation's exhortations were *for those persecuted believers*. And without knowing the history sufficiently, Ubertino of Casale was probably right if he watched Pope Boniface VIII assert both religious and political authority in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. But Hal Lindsey was wrong (at least for the time being!), because the European Common Market has not asserted the supreme economic and religious control wielded by the eschatological beasts – and in the end, his and other such predictions, where it could have exhorted discernment among God's people, instead conjured wasted and injurious fear.

But could the prediction also regard the future? It is not uncommon in New Testament theology to see certain elements of prophecy as containing a wide range of fulfillment. Prophecies from the OT which predicted the final coming of the Messiah saw its outline. But Christ would come twice, in fact, to fulfill the prediction – and the time between those appearances would characterize the end of days. Thus, while I see the



fulfillment of the Beasts as primarily being representative of all governments *in these days* between the present and future age<sup>134</sup>, yet I submit still the possibility of a final concentration of evil over the world. Since Rome (which itself was not *fully* global), no empire has again existed that has commanded supreme authority over all the people, tribes, tongues, and nations of the world. As Mounce writes, “John’s vision grew out of the details of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfillment awaits the final denouement of human history.”<sup>135</sup>

## 5 / Conclusion

Many throughout the ages have sought to understand the riddles of Revelation, particularly its widely-interpreted two Beasts. History has proven the long heritage of most various views held today, the interpretations of which fall along two lines: time-of-fulfillment and degree of specificity. History has advised against specific contemporary interpretations of the Beasts that are exclusive in nature, since one after another has proven itself unfounded by the passage of time. In the end, Revelation 13 depicts a time wherein supreme control will be in the hands of the political state, over commerce and over religion, and everything that flows from this government seeks comprehensive dependence upon it from its constituency. This state persecutes and blasphemes Christians and their religion, even subjecting individuals to pay the ultimate price. In every way, the authority of these political governments is derived, so that none of the

---

<sup>134</sup> And thus the destruction of the beasts in Revelation 19 predicts Christ’s final evisceration of all supreme comprehensive, autocratic governments on earth.

<sup>135</sup> Mounce, 246.

governments truly (ontologically) possesses ultimate authority on its own – this is a source of hope for the believer, who puts her hope, endurance, and faith in, and derives wisdom from, her highest political authority, the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world. By extension, Christians today must proceed with utmost caution when they label political leaders with the abusive label of Antichrist or Beast or False Prophet. Mistakes of this sort are ugly and unchristian. Nevertheless, on the other hand, nobody should place their ultimate devotion and dependence upon the political state at any point in history, unless they wish under God to be adopting the mark of the beast. Christ alone reigns, the lamb who was slain from the beginning of the world, and to him proceeds supreme political allegiance.

## 6 / For Political Theology

(I) **The Supremacy of God/Christ.** Whereas every other text so far has established divine supremacy over political states through its largely *positive* rhetoric, Revelation 13 underlines divine supremacy by describing it at its point of breach by human leaders. Revelation 13 condemns **supreme comprehensive authority**, particularly authority which controls religion – “*and as many as would not worship the image...would be killed*” (15) – and commerce – “*so that one might not be able to buy or sell without having the mark*” (17), making it clear just where such leadership leads: captivity and execution of its people (10). Such arrogation invited YHWH’s wrathful judgment in the past (e.g. Isaiah 47) and in no brevity of description in Revelation (over

two full chapters, 16.17-19.6; 19.20-21), the same arrogation will invite the same wrath from God, described as both judgment and the vindication of those innocent who died under her control. God/Christ will remain supreme.

**(II) Political Leaders and Citizens Beware.** Political leaders are strongly warned, that they flee from being numbered among the constituents of Babylon. Political leaders must put their might into fleeing and resisting measures that would heighten the supremacy of the state beyond its station. Specifically, political leaders must resist the state's tendency toward supreme control over commerce/economy and religion. Those authorities who seek to elevate political power above the position of God are turning the government into the beast. Practically, Revelation 13 suggests that the politically-involved should *seek to preserve religious freedom and prevent universal economic dependence* (see following conclusion).

This also applies to citizens. Other passages of Scripture call for political involvement, even a genuine redemption that can take place through the political sphere (see Joseph, Gen 45.4-8). But here, citizens are warned: Do not place your ultimate trust in redemption through politics. Political salvation for believers will come from God.

Also, Revelation's scathing critique of government is in contradistinction to more submissive descriptions of government found before in e.g. Romans 13.1-6, 1 Timothy 2.1-2 and 1 Peter 2.13-17. "This is not because John differed from the other apostles regarding church and state," writes Mounce. Instead, circumstances had vastly changed. "Only when the state continues to act within the limitations of its delegated authority

can the believer freely submit to its regulations.”<sup>136</sup> Citizens must take Mounce’s commendation to heart. They are to be generally submissive, until the state oversteps its “delegated authority,” by mandating evil, seeking universal dependency upon the state, or stripping religious freedom. At that point, God’s people are told to “come out” (Rev 18.4) from it, and “come” (22.17-19) to his holy city. At that point, prophetic resistance is called upon. And for some, martyrdom is a sober expectation.

**(III) Redemption is Prophetic Resistance.** Virtually nothing is said about redemption in Revelation 13, except the fact that not a shred of redemption is found in a passage describing overextended human authority. *The only manifestation of redemptive work is found in the activity of John the prophet-writer himself.* Earlier, Christopher Bryan inferred from Romans 13 that the state’s position under God’s authority enlists Christian prophetic resistance when state authority treads on God’s. In Revelation, this inference is in full display, John as a model for Christians. *God’s people are to participate in prophetic resistance to evil – yet with wisdom (18) and endurance in the face of persecution and possibly death (10).* What does resistance comprise? First, it resists the state’s supreme authority (12.18-13.10), specifically in its control over religion, which may eventuate into demanding Caesar-worship (13.11ff). Some implications follow. (a) Again, politicians and the politically-inclined must beware of participating in Caesar-worship by excessively positioning political influence above God, and so wear the mask of the Beast. (b) In Western contexts, where pluralism and religious tolerance are the creeds, one must resist the states’ tendencies to (ironically)

---

<sup>136</sup> Mounce, 247.

reject the Christian religion from its counsel to government.<sup>137</sup> But wisdom aids here. (i) It is wise to navigate the laws and cultural rules (contradictions) of one's country. For example, on this matter, Christians in government would be wise to use the culture's creed of religious tolerance to command also tolerance for Christianity, even exclusive Christianity, using the frequent tolerance of exclusive Islam as a prime example of the state's present contradictions. (ii) Love (genuine concern for and commitment to the other) will benefit a Christian's case unquestionably and on its own serve to diminish unnecessary opposition to Christianity. (iii) Wisdom also instructs Christians to be moral models, shining examples of the "holy city," *personally* eschewing temptations to immorality and so underlining their public voice, and *personally* behaving in a way Christ would, even *personally* attending to the poor and *personally* honoring their political opponents.<sup>138</sup> (c) Bolder churches might also consider dropping, or preparing their church for dropping, their 501(c)3 status if it frees them to prophetically resist overextensions of the civil government where they occur, without fear of government threatening the church with revocation of the status.

Second, the church is also called to prophetically resist political measures that seek to establish the state's supreme commercial control (13.16-18). While I oppose many welfare programs, I do not oppose them on the grounds of supreme economic

---

<sup>137</sup> In fact, the state should listen to Christians because it is the Bible that positions the state into the place that it was meant to be by God's design. This is truly the more foundational reason for resisting public measures that would seek to silence a Christian witness.

<sup>138</sup> It is common knowledge, e.g., that William Gladstone, prime minister of England several times around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, would to his political denigration often visit prostitutes on the street, even take them into his home, to encourage them to give up their vocation.

control by the government. Many welfare programs, while they do make the poor answerable to the state, are far from establishing supreme economic control, such as would require *all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave* (16), to be under the state's subjection. I oppose such programs because it has been well-proven that some of them provide no *effective* deliverance after all for the poor (see the perfect king of Psalm 72, where it says three times he "delivers" the poor), in fact often creating conditions worse than they were before those programs began. Lastly, because communism by system necessitates a centralized and complete commercial control, Revelation 13 makes it a contradiction in terms to be called a Christian communist.

Third, Revelation 18 adds more. There, prophetic resistance lunges against the intoxication and gross immorality of an empire imaged as a prostitute (18.3ff), and against inordinate luxury borne on the backs of resource-stripped provincial territories (18.12-19).<sup>139</sup>

**(IV) Purposes of Rule.** The only purpose for rule derivable from Revelation 13 is the need for states and state leaders to follow the will of God and internally position themselves *under* his authority.

**(V) Form of Government.** The previous study has shown that Revelation 13 unquestionably refers to Rome: Rome commanded supreme comprehensive authority,

---

<sup>139</sup> "Rome is no ordinary harlot: she is a rich courtesan, whose expensive clothes and jewellery (17.4) indicate the luxurious lifestyle she maintains at her lovers' expense. The meaning of the picture is unpacked for us when the harlot's clothing and jewels are described again, in the same terms, in 18.16." Bauckham, *Politics*, 89.

Rome required emperor worship; Rome murdered religious objectors; Rome erected statues of its emperors. But what could Revelation 13 say about form of government?

First one must decide on Rome's form of government. In the century before Christ, the Republican government of Rome gradually crumbled as individual personalities were winning favor from the people, leaving the Senate scampering for influence. In time, with Julius Caesar and subsequently Octavian, the Republic gave way to the Empire.<sup>140</sup> The Senate persisted, but its influence had greatly withered. Largely<sup>141</sup> counsel-led leadership gave way to high executive leadership.

Rome's high executive form of government may lead one to assume Revelation 13's denouncement indirectly supports libertarianism: free the government from all social and economic control, and leave the people *completely free*. But close examination of the text finds that the present critique is not upon form of government at all. Revelation 13 criticizes **supreme comprehensive authority**. Commercially, economists can easily prove the significant restriction that government intervention plays in the market. Taxation, while necessary, stifles the potential of a thriving market: this is basic economics found in common economics textbooks. However, taxation is not necessarily in view here: control is. *Economies which seek complete dependence on the government by "all" its constituency ("rich and poor" 16) show themselves to be of the*

---

<sup>140</sup> This development perhaps began with Scipio Africanus during the Punic Wars in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, but over time hit a snowball. Powerful personalities like Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Marcus Crassus, Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey), and Julius Caesar, were successively vying for dominant influence in Rome. Eventually, some leaders struck something of a bargain with two "Triumvirates," and ultimately rule became centralized with Julius Caesar and established with Octavius Augustus.

<sup>141</sup> Two consuls occupied an "executive" branch, and served one-year terms, but stood under the authority of the Senate.

*Beast*, which is in league with Satan. Religiously, the same is true. *Governments which do not allow religious freedom are also to be rejected as reflective of the beast, which is in league with Satan*. The severity of the language comes starkly indeed, but is not the only time Revelation is so incisive (cf. Rev 18).

Revelation 13 possibly identifies the Beast as an individual person – the Beast’s mark “is the number of a man” (18). And John’s Apocalypse is directed at a government controlled by an individual. Although this may *appear* to deride governments with high executive authority, such a conclusion would contradict scripture elsewhere, which finds a God-fearing and highly esteemed monarch in David, and which even finds the executive authority of the pagan King Cyrus prophesied in Isaiah 44.28-45:8 to be poetically working “righteousness” and “salvation” (45.8) for Israel through its political deliverance. These are high executive authorities. Nevertheless, those were high executive authorities controlled by the authority of Yahwist law (see chapter three, section four). For these reasons, I believe it is safe to say Revelation 13 and 18 disparage absolute executive rule, so that governments like the absolute monarchies of seventeenth century France are biblically forbidden, even if they may actually produce some good in the short run. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that Revelation 13 and 18 realistically deride *any governments* – monarchic or democratic-republican, conservative or liberal, fascist or communist – which command supreme comprehensive authority, keeping in mind that the majority (the entirety?) of these atrocious governments in history that could be called the Beast were driven by individual



autocrats. The point here is simply that theoretically, thanks to a thoroughly depraved citizenship, democratic governments can feasibly reach the same bitter end.

Thus in Revelation 13, form of government, as in much of Scripture, is simply not the central issue. The character of its leadership is. Yet if a form of government was addressed on this chapter alone, it would oppose absolute executive authority. But most accurately, it judges *any* government exercising supreme authority.

### **Citizens Under Oppressive Regimes**

Finally, God's people in lands of religious and commercial freedom must not forget the Christians who suffer under evil political regimes, say today especially in North Korea, various Islamic states like Iran, parts of Colombia, and parts of China.<sup>142</sup> Revelation 13 is principally theirs. God knows the situations they are in. May God forbid it, but if Western states were ever to devolve into the same deplorable situation, God will speak into it, too, with Revelation 13.

---

<sup>142</sup> Hebrews 13.3, which the organization, the Voice of the Martyrs, regularly cites, states, "*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body*" (ESV). [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).

**THE BIBLE AND POLITICS****RELATIONSHIP AND SYNTHESIS**

Are there *biblical* political views? By this stage, it should be clear that biblical political views do exist and occupy territory that is quite more comprehensive than one issue alone. To some this will come as no surprise. This chapter serves as a synthesis. It offers a compilation of synthesized conclusions derived from the work of the previous chapters. But before hearing those conclusions, it is important to consider just how these conclusions are intended to inform the state.

**RELATIONSHIP**

*With what stance* does Scripture inform politics? This question seeks how one applies political theology to political theory, and by extension, the stance a believer would take in applying political ethics to politics. It is a question on just how the rule of Christ relates to the contemporary world.

A handful of options exist. The first holds to what this paper will call (1) One material kingdom. This perspective has nothing to do with Christ. The universe is a

closed material space, and religious philosophizing serves to inform that kingdom helpfully, but to a lesser degree than philosophy that confines itself to the immanent world. A strident atheist, for example, who opposes religion as a pernicious invention will reject any shred of political theory stemming from a holy book. But a more measured atheist may respect religion for its imaginative departures and so critically listen to religious perspectives, in order to acquire a different perspective on the same evidence. The approach of one material kingdom fundamentally and primarily is materialistic philosophy. This project rejects the view of a single material kingdom, on grounds unable to be fully explained here, but perhaps able to be briefly summarized by affirming a claim about a dead man who rose: Jesus Christ is “king of the nations” (Jer 10.7; cf. Rev 1.5; 15.3-4).

(2) Two kingdoms. The second approach sees a distinction between the kingdom of earth and *its* politics and the kingdom of Christ and its “spiritual” politics, so that God has ordained two governments: “the spiritual...and the secular.”<sup>1</sup> This division is driven by different ethics given for disciples of Christ, to “love your enemies” (Mt 5.44) and to take no vengeance (Rom 12.19), and for rulers, who command the sword of mediated wrath against evil (Rom 13.4). The doctrine of the two kingdoms is forged most memorably by Jesus’ statement in John 18.36, where he declares and then reiterates to Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” These two kingdoms exist contemporaneously, where unbelievers occupy one kingdom alone and Christians

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed*, trans. J.J. Schindel, from *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1962), I.iv.

chiefly the other, yet the latter occupy both realms simultaneously. Although practically after Luther, some revisions were made to the doctrine, so that state authorities took up the sword forcibly for Christian reasons, in present day the net effect of this doctrine leaves Christian political theory as information for the state to heed. That is, a biblical perspective on government comes to the state not unlike that from a religious member of the king's counsel, offering advice to the king, which he is free to heed or neglect. It is an alien voice speaking into government. Because of the opposition of the two kingdoms, information travels like external counsel to a king.

(3) One cosmic kingdom of God. The third approach is most deftly argued by Oliver O'Donovan. In *The Desire of the Nations*, O'Donovan tells the story of one kingdom under YHWH's rule, established particularly in one nation, Israel, through her history (chapter 2), and which was ultimately handed over to Jesus the Messiah by way of his advent, passion, resurrection, and exaltation as described in the gospels (chapter 4). Jesus Christ's accession of kingship thereupon extended God's rule to be over all nations, which the church, "a political society" (159), carries with it wherever it goes. Thus, wherever the church goes, Christ's rule goes with it, bringing in the nations and informing their politicians of God's/Christ's rule over their state. The church in this way acts as a political society in its own right, an important concept not taken up in this project. It is a perspective that elevates biblical political theology to something more pronounced than the Two Kingdoms construct, since conclusions are not simply suggestions or demands of government from an outside voice, but truth asserted from an inside party seeking to tell the government what it (may not know it) is intended to

be. Therefore, it brings ‘secular’ government into its true, some would say “creational,” nature.<sup>2</sup>

This is an act more resembling revelation – revealing what is truly there – than an act of informing from a distant fringe. The stance is one of superstructure: The Christian ascribes to a global reign of Christ over earthly kingdoms, and so in turn *reveals* the earthly kingdom’s proper station and vocation under that reign. The stance is one of courage: it operates not unlike Paul’s evangelism to the Athenians, when he revealed to them their proper station as created beings: the God they instinctively consider is “Lord of heaven and earth...and he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17.24-26). Although both the Two Kingdoms and the One Cosmic Kingdom call for prophetic word, the lattermost view more naturally requires it.

This project assumes the third approach, believing then that when Christ says “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18.36, ESV, NAS, NIV), he says “My kingdom is not *from* (ἐκ) this world” (RSV, NET), speaking therefore of the kingdom’s *origin* – from God, not from the material planet or universe – and not of its location.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the many implications derived from the preceding chapters and summarized below is

---

<sup>2</sup> Several writers desire a more pronounced creational rooting in O’Donovan’s *Desire*: J.G. McConville, “Law and Monarchy in the Old Testament,” in Bartholomew et al., 79-80; Jonathan Chaplin, “Political Eschatology and Responsible Government: Oliver O’Donovan’s Christian Liberalism,” in Bartholomew et al., 272, 302; James W. Skillen, “Acting Politically in Biblical Obedience?” in Bartholomew et al., 398-417.

<sup>3</sup> Alluding also to Jn 8.23, D. A. Carson writes, “Both expressions mean that Jesus’ reign does not have its source or origin in this world.” *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 594.

knowledge of that superstructure, revealing what is the proper nature, vocation, and ethics of civil governments.

## SYNTHESIS

We now arrive at an end product: synthesis. This project has sought to analyze one politically-oriented text after another, asking what they individually offer for political theory. For example, Proverbs 31.1-9 commended rulers to eschew a self-pleasuring life of intoxication and lasciviousness for the sake of the welfare of the poor and afflicted, where another biblical text (Psalm 72) strongly buttressed the state's priority on its poorest citizens. Specifically we considered how more economically conservative politicians are some of the quietest in matters regarding the poor, despite what they individually believe or not. In another section, Revelation 13's incisive attack on autocratic governments led us to consider the need to oppose civil government's natural tendency toward its own absolute authority. Here we will assemble all the preceding material by offering ten conclusions derived from their repeated or highly emphasized witness among the selected texts, including the counsel of other portions of Scripture where applicable. By this point, conclusions should sound familiar. They are offered in a very basic order of priority, where the rest flow (in any order) from the first.

- I. **Civil governments exist under the authority of YHWH and the rule of Jesus Christ, king of all nations.**

No element was more oft-repeated and regularly assumed than the chorus that all authority resides in YHWH-God, and political authority thereby falls intrinsically and necessarily under that authority. All sorts of secondary truths, personally, politically, and internationally, stem from this organizing center. The phrase, “king of all nations” (Rev 15.3-4) specifically comes out of one of the seven songs in Revelation that at the end of time herald the (enduring) rule and worth of God and His Lamb.<sup>4</sup>

**II. The Bible directly opposes attempts by civil government to claim the absolute authority wielded by God alone, manifested particularly when a government assumes coercive control over religion and commerce. Errors of this sort directly oppose God, dehumanize people, and are promised a certain and dreadful end, potentially while on earth, but assuredly in the wrathful judgment of the last day.**

Even when a culture’s morality floats in the seas of relativism, yet few (at least those not enchanted by the potentiality of political power) will assert totalitarianism with its frequent marriage to ruthless murder of innocent people as a fundamentally good thing. Furthermore, the Bible’s disapproval of such a type of government could have been a deductive point, stemming perhaps from the many assertions on the super-authority of YHWH-God and “You shall not murder” (Ex 20.13). But rather, the Bible makes an *explicit* prohibition against absolutist or totalitarian governments. Perhaps this comes as

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Revelation 12.5, 19.15

a surprise to believers reared in highly spiritualist Christianities that find the Bible only incidentally related to “earthly” matters like politics.<sup>5</sup> The Bible spares little detail in its description of the ultimate futility and judgment of kingdoms that oppose God in this way – to the vindication of those faithful ones such kingdoms martyr.

### **III. Believers (politicians and citizens) are enlisted to oppose arrogations of civil authority rising over commerce and religion.**

Quite often, opposing arrogations of this sort starts on the smallest level, within one’s own heart, mind, and will, and within the local areas of authority. Is the individual person internally opposed to government exceeding its bounds?

Taking the lead of John, who was not a politician, all Christians are also enlisted to oppose civil government prophetically when the government assumes an ungodly degree of control, by its acute control of commerce, when it enforces religion, or when it conspicuously ignores the commands of God by oppressing a resident people, for example, or by subsidizing industries with highly suspect morality. The political state is refined by Christian prophecy, or is at the very least it judged by it.

### **IV. Believers (politicians and citizens) are also charged to submit to this God-assigned sub-authority by paying taxes, obeying the law, praying**

---

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this also distinguishes the Bible from the programmatic holy books of other religions. Do they explicitly oppose dictatorial regimes?



**for leaders, and generally respecting and honoring the state and her leaders.**

Chapter four of this work brings out some of the practical implications of submitting to civil authority especially. “Praying for leaders” comes from 1 Timothy 2.1, where Paul calls for entreaties (δεήσεις), prayers (προσευχάς), petitions (ἐντεύξεις), and thanksgivings (εὐχαριστίας) to be made on behalf of “kings and all who are in authority.” Paul proceeds, describing two purposes of these orations. First, one prays in order that God’s people may live a “tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (2.2). But secondly, one finds an intriguing connection to a suggestion stemming from the Cyrus oracle in chapter 2, when Paul follows this prayer for the authorities with a word on the universal hope of salvation. He speaks of God “our Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2.3-4). The second purpose of the orations is for the expanding salvation and knowledge of God. This conclusion resumes in point X below on Redemption.

## **V. Law governs the state, and not the other way around.**

One persuasive element comes only subtly through the texts used for this study. It is an element that is raised chiefly by Oliver O’Donovan and J.G. McConville (see Introduction), who both elevate the running theme of a higher law that supersedes both the governors and the governed in the biblical political state. McConville (*God and Earthly Power*) bases his in creation and traces its program through OT history to the

book of Kings.<sup>6</sup> O'Donovan (*Desire*) stresses the consistent biblical supersession of law so highly that he claims the primary task of *all* branches of political authority to be that of 'judgment.' With this in mind, he named his follow-up volume on political ethics (*Desire* dwelt more with theory) *The Ways of Judgment*.<sup>7</sup> In the texts for this project, the theme of a higher law was subtle at best (including Romans 13, where while government is defined judicially and administratively, nothing is *explicit* about a higher law), except in Proverbs 31.1-9 (see end of chapter 3). There, the average Israelite hearing Proverbs 31 hears a law, originally accessed by a non-Israelite mother (suggesting a natural law) and grafted by Solomon into Proverbs, that is directed squarely at the king. Thus, to the comfort of Israel's people, the *ruler* does not promulgate and control the law. Rather, the *law* controls the ruler, in order to, e.g. prevent his own abuses of his position. While I believe O'Donovan goes too far in dispelling a separation-of-powers government in favor of a more centralized model (which he seems to base almost exclusively on its effectiveness for making judgments), his point is secure: law should be the first rule and check on government.<sup>8</sup> In my view,

---

<sup>6</sup> He finds this law (perhaps more accurately a 'moral order' summarized by the Hebrew words for "righteousness" and "justice") in creation and traces it through the OT historical books. McConville provides an insightful summary of the transition of authority in Deuteronomy for time after Moses, when authority would be split into three: institutions (priesthood, prophecy), leader (Joshua), and the law (*torah*), which the king was commanded to read aloud publicly. See Introduction, n.13 for a brief critique.

<sup>7</sup> *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). To clarify, he does not mean that all political tasks are to be subsumed underneath a 'legislative' branch of sorts. Rather, all political tasks are to be subsumed underneath the divine order of judgment, whereby it is then the task of leaders to constantly correct and prevent misdeed in every field, naming truth, and indicting wrong. He writes, "the court is the central paradigm of government." *Desire*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> In dialogue with challengers on this point, O'Donovan is given the space to clarify his stance on his preference for a "unitary" government. Responding to Jonathan Chaplin, he writes, "I don't 'advocate' unitary government, as Chaplin suggests, as though there were some other kind. I insist on it as a practical necessity of government. I am not even prepared to admit that I show a 'preference for a

the rule of law can be manifest through a handful of different governmental models, of which separation-of-powers and a hierarchical model are two. That said, because government is subordinated to law O'Donovan underlines the prominence of a constitution: The constitutional conception, he writes, "is the essence of Christendom's legacy."<sup>9</sup>

**VI. One of the chief priorities of civil government is maintaining (especially retributive) justice for the purpose of maintaining peace and order and thereby fulfilling its role as "God's servant".**

The previous conclusion on the place of law naturally flows into the consequent role of government. In chapter four, it was established that the major contribution of Romans 13 was to station retributive justice as a *definitional* role of civil government, so that a government lacking an ensured retributive justice simply does not act like a government (by definition). We remember a situation in chapter four where one of this author's neighbors, an immigrant from India, whose bureaucracy BBC news has labeled the

---

concentration rather than a dispersal of political power.' I simply dispute the theory of separate powers *as a theory*, challenging its ability to account plausibly for what really happens – in the United States or anywhere. It is a dangerous theory, not because it advocates a 'worse' form of government than unitary doctrines do, but simply because when taken literally (as political doctrines tend to be taken) it subverts government altogether. This is why I can appreciate...the concrete steps taken in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to hold sovereigns accountable.... My problem is with the doctrine that purports to explain *how* they are held accountable by positing three autonomous branches of government." "Response to Jonathan Chaplin," in Bartholomew et al., 312.

<sup>9</sup> *Desire*, 240.

“most stifling in the world,”<sup>10</sup> expressed to him his gratitude for America, saying, “When I pay taxes I actually get something for it.” By “something” the neighbor referred particularly to reliable and visible law enforcement. No better example of both the definitional role of retributive justice in government and the need for citizens taxpaying from Romans 13 could perhaps be found than this statement from my neighbor.

**VII. Another chief priority of civil government is a comprehensive focus on (establishing and defending) the poor.**

Proverbs 31.1-9 (chapter three) brought attention to the poor especially to the surface, further bolstered by the ideal ruler sung by Israel with Psalm 72. The reader will best return to the implications listed in chapter three for further detail on this point. Here it is important to simply showcase this as one of the Bible’s pronounced priorities for government. Wisdom will proceed from this implication, so that one seeking to empower the poor does not violate other biblical principles in the process, even the principle of actually empowering the poor.

Examples of this priority can be found in the nation of Israel, whose law included a variety of structural codes for the sake of the poor. Two of these codes may be worth highlighting to make a point. The first was the gleaning law (Lev 19.9-10), which *theoretically* ensured an always-available supply of food for all the nation’s destitute,

---

<sup>10</sup> Chris Morris. “India’s bureaucracy is ‘the most stifling in the world.’” *BBC News: South Asia*. From <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10227680>, 3 June 2010 (Accessed August 5, 2010).

under two intriguing arrangements: (1) personal contact, since the poor would be regularly visiting specific families' properties and could be expected to occasionally interact with the benefactor; and (2) some level of work, enough work in fact that would prohibit Ruth's older mother-in-law Naomi from accompanying Naomi to acquire it. This gleaning law also distributed the nation's intent focus on her poor to all its citizens, so that each citizen with property (theoretically) found themselves with a regular slice of *their* property assigned for *someone else*, a portion which (theoretically) may remain ungleaned altogether. The second code was the set of property redemption laws within the Jubilee (Lev 25.23-34), which carried two objectives: (1) to make immediate provision for the recently-poor in order to prevent thoroughgoing destitution *and* (2) prevent successive generations from being ruined by the poor choices of their parents by keeping land within the family, returned to that family every forty-nine years if it was sold off.<sup>11</sup>

From both of these examples, we may learn that efforts or structures to empower the poor<sup>12</sup> *must be in place and sought after / preserved by politicians*<sup>13</sup> but should also be pursued with wisdom and a structure that would serve to truly get the poor back on their feet into society. These are not simple laws. They carry a little

---

<sup>11</sup> See Jeff K. Zehnder, "Appropriating Property Redemption Laws for Today: Translation and Exegesis for Leviticus 25:23-34, and Their Implications for Economics, Politics, and Christian Living." Unpublished paper, in author's possession (2009).

<sup>12</sup> More specifically, to retain or establish the poor as contributing members of the nation.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham writes, responding to Proverbs 31.8's "Open your mouth for the dumb:" "In a morally healthy democracy political parties and governments should be judged partly by their willingness to take up the cause of such groups, and the responsibility to see that they do is widely diffused among all who have some voice in the political process." *The Bible in Politics*, 47.

complication. The point is the presence of *structural* means of ensuring the government seeks to empower her poorest and most needy.

A final point may be made. Israel's ideal king was one for whom the "blood" of the poor and afflicted "was precious in his eyes" (Psalm 72.14), one who explicitly "will have compassion on the poor and needy" (72.13). These are affective, emotive, internally oriented characteristics. In this way, it is an *internal* pity for the estate of the poor that leads the political leader to those ends listed above. Nevertheless, an internal burden for others is not something one can at all enforce. It is only something that would characterize, biblically, an ideal leader.

**VIII. The civil government's role in commerce and economy is brief in mention but insightful: markets should remain somewhere between the opposite poles of complete governmental control and unchecked freedom. Markets may be able to run freely, but they are not free from moral abuse.**

This point may be more suggestive than conclusive, but I believe it is defensible. Many will position the state's role in the economy as very high among its priorities and responsibilities. The Bible has two things to say, but for the most part appears rather silent about government's role in the economy. These two comments come from Revelation 13 and 18. First, Revelation 13 opposes the government's supreme control over the economy. Specifics elude the text, but I suppose one can reasonably assume

that civil government should not be meddling in every economic transaction (“a mark” on every hand or forehead). A person should not require the state’s approval for each and every purchase and sale. That is, some level of market freedom should exist.

But a *fully* libertarian approach to an economy (libertarianism also opposes government intervention in social issues, which is presently out of view) Revelation also does not appear to allow. Revelation 18 chides Rome for her entirely unchecked luxury-obsession. It lists twenty-eight consumption items, virtually all of which were items only the most wealthy would consume:

cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls (18.12-13).

What is this specified list meant to convey? It communicates two things: (1) Simply the great beauty of Rome, with attention paid to its impermanence and futility on account of her sins. Readers are intended to see all the great beauty of Rome (similar luxury items are found in Solomon’s Temple and in the New Jerusalem of Rev 21), and find that it is completely laid to waste for Rome when it is married to immorality. Kings, merchants, and sea captains weep (18.9-10; 14-20).

The second meaning of the cargoes is to expose (2) unchecked luxury-building, which purchased for Rome her destruction. Sometimes people of religious stripes are inclined to believe that material prosperity is a divine gift and regularly trumpet this as

one of their “blessings” from God. Rev 18 shows that material prosperity is sometimes simply incidental, even the fruit or accompaniment of wickedness (see also Psalm 73). But far more important for Rev 18, the reader is intended to see that superfluous luxury acquired in combination with immorality (Bauckham will insist that part of her sin was bearing such luxury-building on the backs of poorer satellite provinces<sup>14</sup>) is detestable in God’s eyes. The chief OT reference to Tyre (Ezekiel) exemplifies this pattern, and the ultimate inclusion of the sale of “human souls” (13) turns a list of beautiful luxuries into a laundry list of corruption.<sup>15</sup> I do not believe this denigrates wealth or luxury altogether (since again, these and similar items are also found in Solomon’s temple and the New Jerusalem). But wealth- and luxury-building *must be in check*. While in my view, generally, capitalism is simply the best man can do for an economic system, and no other extant systems I have come across have fairly accounted for biblical anthropology in particular, one would be foolish to believe that it, a human system, does not carry its own significant, intrinsic channels for sin, intrinsic fibers ready-made to amplify idolatries, e.g., of materialism, greed, individualism, backbiting competition, worker exploitation, *and the very sort of immoral and oppressive trade spelled out in Revelation*

---

<sup>14</sup> Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, 89-90.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 91-94. Cf. G. K. Beale: “All the trade products in the list in vv 12-13 are good in and of themselves, but the telltale mark of their sinful use is the reference to slaves at the end of the list.” *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 910.



18.<sup>16</sup> Unchecked consumption was one of Rome's disastrous sins for which the merchants of the ancient world would see Rome "burning" (18.9).

**IX. The Bible has more to say about the character of leadership than the form government takes. The Bible does not endorse a specific form of government, except those that are subordinated to law.**

At the beginning of this work, we noted how much of evangelicalism is double bonded to political parties (of both stripes) offering little or reductionist support from the Bible for their political views. Political parties are strange animals that reduce many issues into one creed of sorts, with variations of that creed found sometimes among the various candidates. Left and right themselves are reductionist as well, since for example the poles mean different things for economics and social issues, yet they are popularly often fused into one. A person, for example, could be left economically and right socially, or vice versa, yet popularly they are generally classed by their economic stance, or perhaps to the amorphous position of 'moderate'. The two approaches to democratic government do carry for most of their adherents a sort of base level difference of

---

<sup>16</sup> Recent to completing this section, for example, a billionaire hedge fund mogul was revealed by a number of separate girls' families to have been inviting early teenage girls to his Florida villa for massages, whereupon he would solicit their sexual favors, and then pay them a handsome sum to keep them quiet. Some of these girls are alleged to have been brought in from South America and Eastern Europe. When it was brought to court, nearly all charges became settled out of court to the tune (allegedly) of nearly a million dollars paid to each girl's families. Many, rightfully, question the cushy sentence the man *originally received* (one year of house-arrest) when these charges were brought, and as he now seeks to escape to Dubai, charges of human trafficking are alleged to be brewing against the man. Although this man's case may say more about the failure of justice to protect against financial subversions, it reveals the degree of immorality to which unchecked capitalism leads, for both victim, who chose cash over justice (worse: cash taken which potentially ensures further abuse), and predator, who used cash to purchase "human souls."

political vision that undergird them.<sup>17</sup> But the entire vociferous debate between the two parties forgets that both, for example, are variations of liberalism, in the classical sense of opposing (the conservatism of) monarchical rule.

What this project has found common to the four political texts analyzed is that the Bible never seems to fully endorse a specific form of government. (Note: A democratic form of state government, for example, never appears in Scripture.) Expanding outside the texts of this paper, this pattern appears to continue. Kingship takes place throughout Israel and defines the rule of Jesus Christ. While Deuteronomy 17 almost deterministically foreshadowed kingship, yet at the same time kingship was expressed as a lamentable concession to Israel, who were interpreted as rejecting YHWH as their king (1 Sam 8.7). Israel for a short time under Moses saw some level of representative / distributed justice or rule, yet Moses still assumed highest authority (i.e. *he chose* those elders). When Moses died, however, his authority was dispersed into something of a several office succession at the close of Deuteronomy, among institutions (priesthood, prophecy), leader (Joshua), and law (*torah*), arguing for a defensible balance of powers at that point.<sup>18</sup> And so the point stands: No one form of government is explicitly commended in the Bible. The arguments of both McConville and O'Donovan are convincing enough to me at present to say that whatever form of government exists, it must stand under the authority of a higher law or constitution

---

<sup>17</sup> Helpfully and judiciously explained in Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions*.

<sup>18</sup> J.G. McConville. *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 96-97. McConville follows to suggest Joshua's story thereafter may serve to highlight the dangers of dynasticism.

(conclusion V above) that protects the rights of the poor and weak. Theologically, the dual doctrines of *common grace* and *total depravity* together are worth examining for their own controls and suggestions for form of government. But that is outside the bounds of this project.

#### **X.      Redemption takes place through politics.**

The last conclusion is situated last as something of an appeal to readers. One subtlety in the texts mentioned is that in virtually all of them something good takes place or is said to take place *via* political processes and leaders. Isaiah 44-45 made this most explicit, when it called Cyrus's deliverance of Israel both "salvation" and "righteousness" (45.8). Cyrus being pagan highlights the *arena* of political process as possessing potential for redemption (as well as underlining the doctrine of common grace). As a magistrate of Egypt, Joseph's managerial role was meant to "preserve life" (Genesis 45.5), Lemuel's Massan kingship was instructed to "do right for the poor and needy" (Prov 31.9), Cyrus's Persian military brought "salvation" and "righteousness" to Israel (Isa 45.8), and the authority of Rome, despite her atrocious misdeeds, was in place ideally as God's servant "for good" (Rom 13.4). Political processes are not *outside* the scope or even outside the primary means of God's redeeming activity in the world. They are intrinsic to it.

How is politics intrinsic to redemption? For one, there are concrete good things that government is able to do for the benefit of God's people and the world in general, as shown in the texts above. But second may come as a surprise: *Good government is*

*intimately connected to the global expansion of Christ's kingdom.* Just above in conclusion IV, we learned that Paul's commendation for God's people to *pray* for her political leaders follows with a declaration that God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2.2). A similar turn happens in Isaiah 45, when readers learn that part of the purpose for Cyrus' deliverance of Israel was for the purpose of global knowledge of YHWH: "that they [NAS inserts "men"] may know from the sun's rising-place to its setting-place that there is none besides Me. I am YHWH, and there is not another" (45:6). The global knowledge of YHWH is one of the objectives in an ancient political deliverance. In chapter 2 of this project (see implication IV, "Why Rule?" at the chapter's end), we briefly mentioned Oliver O'Donovan, who discusses two routes for Christian mission: the conversion of political rulers leading to the conversion of the people, and vice-versa, the conversion of the people leading to the gradual improvement/conversion of the political rulers. In other words, for the church's work in conversion and evangelism, both government and people are the objective.

## FINALLY

Wondering in the beginning whether the Bible had anything to say about government, and wondering if the extant theories were biblical and biblically trustworthy, this thesis sought to derive a base level political theology by assessing one passage after another, and without avoiding some of the primary texts on political theology from the Bible. Perhaps to the surprise of more spiritualist interpreters, the

Bible has some very specific things to say about the nature of civil government, its priorities, the role of its leaders, and the opportunity (redemption) and limits (subordinated authority) of that government. Much more may be added to the conclusions above, but the list provides a compilation of textually rooted political foundations found in Isaiah 44.24-45.13, Proverbs 31.1-9, Romans 13.1-7, and Revelation 13, conclusions that are either repeated or strongly emphasized within their verses. In the end, one is assured: the political state is no sector of society closeted off from biblical instruction. Rather, the Bible does instruct civil government. In fact, it does more than instruct. It defines it. And it situates it: under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So that: Christ's followers seek to form political government into the way it was meant to be, soberly aware of government's imperfectability, but ever forming it little by little into that New Jerusalem, a political city and the envisioned destination of God's people, through the keeping of justice (Proverbs 13), through political deliverance (Isaiah 44-45), political submission (Romans 13), and prophetic resistance (Revelation 13). In her political efforts, the church reforms, preserves, and redeems, ever seeking to manifest the prayer she regularly professes to her Father: thy kingdom come.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ***Abbreviations (Primary and Exegetical Reference)***

**ASV** – American Standard Version (1901)

**BAGD** – Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of WALTER BAUER'S Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

**BDB** – Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1996.

**CAB** – Castillian Bible Version (2003)

**ESV** – English Standard Version (2001)

**Josephus. Ant.** - Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. William Whiston, transl., from *Complete Works of Josephus*, 1828.

**HALOT** – Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament

**LBA** – *La Biblia de las Americas* (1986) – A Spanish translation of the NAS

**LS** – Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. *The Abridged Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon*. Public domain, 1993.

**NIV** – New International Version (1984)

**NVI** – *La Santa Biblia, La Nueva Versión Internacional* (1999) - A Spanish translation of the NIV

**NAB** – New American Bible (1991)

**NAS** – New American Standard Bible (1995)

**NJB** – New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

**NRSV** – New Revised Standard Version (1989)

**RSV** – Revised Standard Version (1952)

**R95** – Spanish Reina Valera Update 1995. – Spanish translation that reaches back (many versions ago) to a 1569 version: *Santa Biblia, Antiguo y Nuevo Testamento, Antigua Version de Casiodoro de Reina*.

**VVV** – Virtually every (Bible) version

### ***Politics and Hermeneutics***

Bartholomew, Craig. "Introduction." In Bartholomew et al.: 1-45.

Bartholomew, Craig, Jonathan Chaplin, Robert Song, and Al Wolters, eds. *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989.

Bryan, Christopher. *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower*. New York: Oxford, 2005.

Chaplin, Jonathan. "Political Eschatology and Responsible Government: Oliver O'Donovan's 'Christian Liberalism.'" In Bartholomew et al., 265-308.

Claar, Victor V., and Robin J. Klay. *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007.

Cranfield, C.E.B. "The Christian's Political Responsibility According to the New Testament" In his *The Service of God*, 49-66. London: Epworth, 1965.

Koyzis, David T. *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003.

McConville, J.G. *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology: Genesis-Kings*. New York: T&T Clark, 2006.

McConville, J. Gordon. "Law and Monarchy in the Old Testament." In Bartholomew et al., 69-88.

Newbigin, Lesslie, Lamin Sanneh, and Jenny Taylor. *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in 'Secular' Britain*. London: SPCK, 1998.

O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan. *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Scott and Cavanaugh Scott, Peter, and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.

Skillen, James W. "Acting Politically in Biblical Obedience?" In Bartholomew et al., 398-417.

Sowell, Thomas. *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*. Revised Edition. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2007.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. s.vv. Allen Verhey, "Ethics," 196-200; R.T. France, "Kingdom of God," 420-2; and Jonathan Chaplin, "Political Theology," 597-600.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Winter, Bruce W. *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004.

Wright, N.T. *Paul*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

Yoder Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

### ***Leviticus***

De Lange, Harry M. "The Jubilee Principle: Is it Relevant for Today?" *Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986): 437-443.

Gamoran, Hillel. "The Biblical Law Against Loans on Interest." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30 (1971): 127-134.



- George A.F. Knight. *Leviticus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981.
- Levine, Baruch. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus arqyw*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- Lemche, N.P. "Manumission of Slaves – the Fallow Year – the Sabbatical Year – the Jubel Year." *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 38-59.
- Maloney, Robert P. "Usury and Restrictions on Interest-Taking in the Ancient Near East." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 1-20.
- Matthews, Kenneth A. *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.
- Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New Haven: Yale University, 2001.
- North, Robert. *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954.
- Ross, Allen. *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Westbrook, Raymond. *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*. Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic, 1991.
- Wright, Christopher J.H. "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel? Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for Land, Debts and Slaves." *Evangelical Quarterly* 56 (1984): 129-38, 193-201.
- Zehnder, Jeff K. "Appropriating Property Redemption Laws for Today: Translation and Exegesis for Leviticus 25:23-34, and Their Implications for Economics, Politics, and Christian Living." Unpublished paper, in author's possession, 2009.

### ***Psalms***

- Bratcher, Robert G., and William D. Reyburn. *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1991.

- Davidson, Robert. *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.
- Eaton, John H. *Kingship and the Psalms*. Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1986.
- Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Psalms: Part 2, and Lamentations*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Goldingay, John. *Psalms 42-89*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Hakham, Amos. *The Bible: Psalms with Jerusalem Commentary*. Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003.
- Heim, Knut. "The Perfect King of Psalm 72." In Philip E. Satterwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds. *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995): 223-248.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72: an Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973.
- Kirkpatrick, A.F. *The Book of Psalms*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1902.
- Krašovec, Jože. "God's Righteousness in the Original and in Translations." In J. Cheryl Exum and H.G.M. Williamson, Eds. *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J.A. Clines* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003): 263-274.
- Murphy, Roland E. *A Study of Psalm 72 (71)*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1948.
- Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 51-100*. Dallas: Word, 1990.
- Terrien, Samuel. *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Williams, Ronald J. *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976.
- Zehnder, Jeff. "Two Papers on Psalm 72." Unpublished work, in possession of author, 2010.

## **Proverbs**

Bauckham, Richard. "Wisdom for the Powerful: Proverbs 31:1-9." In his *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1989): 41-52.

Bridges, Charles. *Proverbs*. London: Banner of Truth, 1968.

Clifford, Richard J. *Proverbs: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

Collins, C. John. *A Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom Books*. Covenant Theological Seminary, 2005.

Delitzsch, Franz. *Proverbs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006 (series orig. published by T&T Clark, 1866-91).

Dell, Katharine J. *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context*. New York: Cambridge, 2006.

Kidner, Derek. *Proverbs*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964.

Kidner, Derek. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985.

Kitchen, K.A. "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of a Literary Form." *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977): 69-114.

Murphy, Roland E. *Proverbs*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998.

Reyburn, William and Euan McG. Fry. *A Handbook on Proverbs*. New York: UBS, 2000.

Ross, Allen. *Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

Waltke, Bruce. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Whybray, R.N. *Proverbs: Based on the Revised Standard Version*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

## **Isaiah**

Delitzsch, Franz. *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 7: Isaiah*. Translated by James Martin. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006 (series orig. published 1866-1891).

Goldingay, John. *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary*. New York: T&T Clark, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. and David Payne. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55 (Vol II)*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2006.

Hanson, Paul D. *Isaiah 40-66*. Louisville: John Knox, 1995.

Knight, George A.F. *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984 (first published, 1965).

Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999.

Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Payne, John Barton. "The Eighth Century Background of Isaiah 40-66." *Westminster Theological Journal* 29 (1967): 179-90.

Pruitt, Elizabeth Hartley. "A Lexical Analysis of *sdq* in Isaiah 40-55." M.A. Thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2007.

Van Winkle, D.W. "The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah 40-55." *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 446-458.

Watts, John D.W. *Isaiah 34-66*. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.

Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969.

Whitley, C.F. "Deutero-Isaiah's Interpretation of *Sedeq*." *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972): 469-475.

Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah Vol. 3: Chapters 40-66*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

## **Romans**

Barrett, C. K. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London: A. and C. Black Ltd, 1962.

- Bruce, F.F. *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Calvin, John. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*. Transl. Ross Mackenzie. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.
- Cranfield, C.E.B. *Romans 9-16*. International Critical Commentary. New York: T&T Clark, 1979.
- Dunn, James D.G. *Romans 9-16*. Dallas: Word, 1988.
- Horsley, Richard A. Ed. *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000.
- Jewett, Robert. "Response: Exegetical Support from Romans and Other Letters." In *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, 58-71. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000.
- Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans*. Translated and edited by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Luther, Martin. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Abridged Transl. J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962.
- Douglas J. Moo. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Munro, Winsome. "Romans 13.1-7: Apartheid's Last Biblical Refuge." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 20 (1990): 161-68.
- Newman, Barclay M., and Eugene A. Nida. *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Stuttgart: UBS, 1973.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. "Paul and Politics of Interpretation." In *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, 40-58. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.
- Towner, P. "Romans 13.1-7 and Paul's Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?" In *Romans and the People of God*, ed. S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright, 149-69. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Witherington, Ben, with Darlene Hyatt. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

### ***Revelation***

Aune, David E. *Revelation 6-16*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998.

Barclay, William. "Great Themes of the New Testament: V. Revelation xiii." *Expository Times* 70 (1958): 260-64, 202-96.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. New York: Cambridge, 1993.

Beale, G.K. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Danielic Background for Revelation 13:18 and 17:9." *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980): 163-70.

Beasley-Murray, G.R. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

Bratcher, Robert G., and Howard A. Hatton. *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*. New York: UBS, 1993.

Hanhart, K. "The Four Beasts of Daniel's Vision in the Night in the Light of Rev. 13:2." *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 576-83.

Kovacs, Judith, and Christopher Rowland, in collaboration with Rebekah Callow. *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. Blackwell Bible Commentaries. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.

LaHaye, Tim. *Revelation Unveiled*. Revised & updated edition of *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Lindsey, Hal. *There's a New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey*. Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973.

Morris, Leon. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Mounce, R. H. *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

Osborne, Grant. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1975.

Yarbro Collins, A. "The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 241-56.