The New Testament and the 'state'[1]

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Introduction

In September 1974, Archbishop Michael Ramsey visited Chile under its new right-wing régime. While he preached in church, an armed guard waited outside, and asked the *Observer's* correspondent as he left: 'Was there any politics in it? He must stay with things of the soul, because politics is for us' — the last remark accompanied by a pat on the gun under his arm.[2] Ramsey was not afraid to speak out on political issues but among the disturbing features of the soldier's remark is the fact that a large number of practising Christians (including the Anglican Bishop in Chile) agreed with him then, and probably still do. The Western church in general has bought heavily into the Enlightenment belief that 'sacred' and 'secular' are divided by a great and more or less unbridgeable gulf. And when we try to read the NT we are already doing battle with such presuppositions. The working title of this article was 'The New Testament doctrine of the state'; but on reflection I have decided that this simply will not do. Explaining why will serve as an introduction to the subject as a whole.

What is the set of questions that such a working title presents? Traditionally, it suggests that the NT contains 'doctrines', clear statements about things that Christians should believe. The central doctrines concern God, human nature, sin, salvation in Christ, the Holy Spirit; then come church, sacraments, worship; somewhere near the bottom of the list comes ethics; and perhaps in a sub-category of ethics we find the question of the state. The question will be variously put. What political responsibility has the Christian individual? Should he or she bear arms if asked to by the government? Are legitimate rulers agents of God, and if so to what extent? And somewhere in the midst of all of this one may expect to find, in a biblical theology at least, an exegesis of certain passages: 'Render unto Caesar' (Mk. 12:13-17 and parallels), the notorious Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, and (if we are lucky) some of the Revelation of St John. The 'doctrine' is then treated as these passages are usually treated: as a footnote to more important things, an aside, almost an irrelevance in a modern democracy where Christians are quite happy with things as they are and are free to preach the gospel and save souls.

The problem should be clear to anyone who knows the world of the first century — or for that matter any century until the eighteenth, and any country outside so-called Western civilization. It is simply this: the implicit split between 'religion' and 'politics' is a rank anachronism, and we read it into the NT only if we wish not to hear anything the NT is saying, not only about what we call 'the state' but about a great many other things as well. No first-century Jew (and no twentieth-century Arab, or Pole, or Sri Lankan) could imagine that the worship of their god and the organization of human society were matters that related only at a tangent. If we are to hear what the NT has to say on what *we* call 'the state', we must be prepared to put our categories back into the melting-pot and have them stirred around a little. We cannot read a few 'timeless truths' about the 'state' off the surface of the NT and hope to escape with our world view unscathed. Hence the revision of the title of this article, and the inverted commas around the suspect word, which belongs precisely in the eighteenth century. What would a first-century Jew or Christian have made of the modern notion of 'state'? Not a lot, I suspect.[3]

We are therefore committed to a more complex task than bringing our comfortably isolated category to the NT and asking what this book has to say about it. We are bound to re-enter the rough-and-tumble world of the Middle East (that phrase is loaded, too, but one cannot guard all flanks at once) in the first century and try to see, in the writings of the early Christians, what categories emerge to handle what we think of as the relation between Christian belief and practice and political allegiance and obligation. And, since this involves unthinking a good deal of our normal ideas on the subject, we must then engage in the complex hermeneutical task: how to get from the first century back into the twentieth. We are not first-century Jews, living under the *pax Romana*. We live in a world where a great deal has already been done for good and ill in the name of Christ, the world of crusades and inquisitions as well as the world of William Wilberforce, Mother Theresa and St Francis. We cannot naïvely pretend that we are innocent of all that, and go back to a 'pure' Christian faith unsullied by social involvement, under the impression that following the NT means living as though the last 2,000 years had not happened. History, then, and hermeneutics: these are the tasks; exegesis must be the tool they use, and theology the air they breathe.

Jews, Greeks and Romans

We must begin with a brief look at the world views within which Christianity was born and nurtured. They, after all, set the agendas, even if the church claimed the responsibility to write up the minutes.

The Romans had inherited the role of superpower (at least as far as Palestine was concerned) from a long line of nations: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Egypt again, Syria. Arguably, Roman government was better for the Jews than many of its predecessors. Taxation was a problem, but things had been worse. Foreign and idolatrous symbols (the two epithets sometimes approached synonymity) were a continual offence, but the Romans were not the first to introduce such things; Greek culture had been a fact of life in Palestine for a couple of centuries at least by the time of Jesus, and many had learnt to live with it, while others, though still resenting it, were nevertheless influenced by it in a variety of ways. There was no invisible checkpoint at the borders of the Holy Land, confiscating 'Hellenistic' ideas or exchanging them for 'Palestinian' ones.[4] The Romans at least, after a puzzled early period, allowed the Jews, uniquely among their subject peoples, to practise their own religion. From an outsider's point of view, then, the Jews were quite well off. They, of course, saw it differently. Their forefathers had been exiled to Babylon because of their own idolatry and wickedness; now that they, the descendants, had sharpened up their observation of the covenant documents, why were they still being ruled by foreign idolaters? From some points of view, the exile was still continuing: as long as the Herods and the Pilates ruled Palestine, the great prophecies of Isaiah or Ezekiel were still awaiting fulfilment. The period which historians call 'post-exilic' was seen at the time as semi-exilic. Not until Israel's God, the God of all the earth, demonstrated that he was both of those things by liberating Israel from this internal exile would Jews be satisfied that the covenant had been kept.

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Israel's theological aspirations thus had an inescapably historical and political referent. If someone had offered a first-century Palestinian Jew the consolation of pie in the sky, it would have been refused, no matter how kosher the pie. One of the great myths of twentieth-century scholarship is that most first-century Jews expected the space-time universe to end immediately. They did not: they expected their God to act dramatically *within* history, with effects that they could only describe with metaphorical end-of-the-world language.[5] We might well describe the fall of the Berlin Wall as an 'earth-shattering event'; 2,000 years hence, no doubt, some pedantic literalist will argue, in the *Martian Journal of Early European Studies*, that the wall fell because of a large earthquake, and we will all turn in our graves at the misreading of our everyday metaphors.

The cultural symbols of Greece, then, and the political and military might of Rome both superimposed themselves on the daily world of the Palestinian Jew, as well as on his or her cousin in Alexandria, Tarsus, or Philippi. And the bulk of the Jewish literature of the period, whether it be the Wisdom writings, the Maccabaean historical hagiographies, the Qumran scrolls, the fierce and Pharisaic Psalms of Solomon, or the apocalyptic visions of the Sibylline Oracles, Jubilees, 1 Enoch or 4 Ezra, proclaims that a time will come when the God of all the earth, who is in covenant with Israel, will call a halt to the present order of the world, reward idolaters as they deserve, and rescue Israel, or at least those who have remained faithful.

The exceptions to this rule are instructive. Philo carves out a mystical compromise between the God of Moses and the god of the philosophers that allows him to articulate his Jewishness in a way less threatening to his Alexandrian culture. The Sadducees hold a precarious but advantageous political position under the Romans, and are not interested in a change that might leave them exposed to the anger of the lower orders; that, arguably, and not a proto-liberalism, was why they rejected that most revolutionary of doctrines, the resurrection. Josephus, by the time he is writing, has decided, for an interestingly mixed set of reasons, that Israel's God is now on the side of the Romans. The first-century proto-Rabbis, whose words we reconstruct with some difficulty from much later written documents, were arguably as fanatical about Israel's socio-political fate as those Pharisees who incited the young hotheads to pull down Herod's blasphemous eagle from the temple gate.[6] Rabbi Akiba, no less, hailed Simeon Ben-Kosiba as Messiah as late as the early second century, and those who disagreed with him did so on the grounds of chronology, not because they had exchanged politics for piety.[7] It is the later documents that reflect the filtering out of dangerous ideas in the light of the events of AD 70 and AD 135. As the focus of Jewish identity moved, inevitably, away from the Holy Land and more towards the Holy Book, so, in a kind of ironic displacement, the idea of the ghetto was born: a safe place where one could worship Israel's God in private while the world went on its own way.

Exceptions apart, then, Jews of the first century looked for their God to act within history to liberate his people. It was into this world that there came Jesus the Galilean teacher, and Paul the fanatical Pharisee. Did they ignore the hope of the people, radically alter it, or reaffirm it — or what?

Jesus and the kingdom of God

Writing about Jesus without a long methodological introduction is risky, even in these days of the 'third quest'.[8] What I have to say can, I think, be justified by rigorous historical argument, though there is no space for it here, and I shall therefore be open to objection from all quarters. It is a situation one learns to live with in NT studies.[9]

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First-century Jews had a slogan which encapsulated their aspiration for a new order in which Israel would be liberated. Their God, already sovereign of the world *de jure*, would become so *de facto*. The rightful King would become King indeed. There would be, in their phrase, 'no King but God'. God's kingship was a key idea in the Zealot philosophy, and Josephus, when less guarded, indicates that the Pharisees' ideology was not far away.[10] When, therefore, a prophetic figure down by the Jordan declared that God's kingdom was at hand (Mt. 3:2), and when this cry was taken up by a contemporary who travelled the villages and lanes of Galilee, the immediate reaction could not have been that an apolitical religious revival was taking place. If that was the impression John and Jesus wanted to make, they chose a disastrous way of going about it. The proclamation and invitation of Jesus must have looked uncommonly like the founding of a political movement. When large crowds followed Jesus up a hillside or to the seashore, they did not leave their homes and jobs for the day in order to be told about pie in the sky, or to be instructed in how to be nice to each other. They went because they sensed that Jesus was inaugurating the new day for which, with double taxation and political turmoil, they had longed. When Jesus called some followers up into the hills, and arranged them into a group of twelve, the analogues pointed, not to a primitive ordination ceremony for a church with minimal ties to socio-political reality, but to the groups of desperate men who went off into the wilderness to prepare for God's action in restoring Israel. The Galilean hills were a favourite haunt of *lestai* — not 'robbers' in the sense of early highwaymen, but holy brigands, living a life of desperate obedience to God as the only King and frantic hope in the coming kingdom as the only way out of the present awful situation.[11] When Jesus took the twelve up north to Caesarea Philippi, the source of the (politically symbolic) Jordan, elicited from them the acknowledgment (however ambiguous) that he was Messiah, and told them that they were going to march on Jerusalem, where the Son of Man would suffer and be vindicated, they are almost bound to have heard him invite them to come with him on a desperate mission, which might involve some of them being hurt or killed, but in which they would be victorious. Peter objected, naturally, to the idea that Jesus himself would die in the process; the disciples as a whole never, before the resurrection, worked out the double meaning, but continued blithely to regard Jesus' words as indicating what as ordinary Palestinian Jews they were conditioned to expect and want: a socio-political revolution, leading to a new world order.

What then was the double meaning? For some interpreters, it is precisely here that Jesus differed radically from the Jewish expectations of the time. They argue that we must do with this political language what Bultmann wanted to do with Jesus' eschatological language, and say that while Jesus accommodated himself to the language of his day, what he *meant* by it was something quite different. In both cases — the Bultmannian demythologization of apocalyptic, and the normal ecclesiastical domestication of Jesus' revolutionary call — the scholar who wants to make such a move has to say that Jesus sailed close to the wind; but that is a small price to pay for the twentieth-century luxury of knowing that he 'really' preached a message about individual 'decision', not about the end of the world, or that he 'really' summoned individuals into a spiritual kingdom, in which politics become irrelevant and the hope of an other-worldly heaven all-important.[12] (As an aside, I think that one of the reasons the latter route has been so easy to take in the modern Western world is because of the astonishing but regular misreading of 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew as 'a place, called heaven, which is God's special country, to which his people go after death'; this view, because of the place of Matthew at the start of the NT canon, is then read into 'kingdom of God' in Mark and Luke.)

The double meaning, I think, was far more subtle than such reductionisms have allowed. Jesus' message was after all inescapably political. He denounced rulers, real and self-appointed. He spoke of good news for the poor. He led large groups of people off into the wilderness, a sure sign of revolutionary intent. He announced the imminent destruction of the Jerusalem temple. At the start of a festival celebrating Israel's liberation, he organized around himself what could only have looked like a royal procession. And he deliberately and dramatically acted out a parable of the temple's destruction, thus drawing on to himself the anger of the authorities in a way which he could never have done by healing lepers and forgiving prostitutes (though we should not miss the revolutionary note in his offer of forgiveness, whose real offence lay in its bypassing of the temple cult). The temple was, after all, the centre of Judaism in every sense. It was not like a church, even a cathedral, which housed the religious business while politics and economics went on elsewhere. For the first-century Jew, the

temple was the equivalent, for twentieth-century Britain, of the Houses of Parliament, the City, the Butcher's Guild, Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey, all rolled into one. And it was against this central and vital institution that Jesus spoke and acted. He died the death of the *lestai*, the political insurrectionists (Barabbas, and the two crucified with Jesus, were *lestai*). How could he not have been 'political'?

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This is not to say, of course, that he was actually advocating military violence. The equation 'non-violent = apolitical' is of course absurd, as we who know about Gandhi must realize; but it is frequently made none the less. To a nation bent on violence, anyone who claims to be speaking for God's kingdom and who advocates non-violent means as the way to it is making a very deep and dangerous political statement. He is likely to be caught in crossfire. That, in a sense, is what happened: on the level of historical explanation that deals with the intentions of Herod, Pilate, the chief priests and those who advised them, Jesus' death was a mixture of convenience and political necessity. But what about the level that deals with Jesus' intentionality?

Jesus, I have argued elsewhere, believed two things which gave him an interpretative grid for understanding his own vocation as leading to a violent and untimely death.[13] First, he believed himself called to announce to Israel that her present way of life, whose focal point was resistance against Rome and whose greatest symbol was the temple, was heading in exactly the wrong direction. Down that road lay ruin – the wrath of Rome, the wrath of God. Second, he believed himself called to take Israel's destiny upon himself, to *be* Israel-in-God's-plan. What happens as the story reaches its climax, and Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives looking across at the temple, and beyond it to an ugly hill just outside the city wall to the west, is that the two beliefs fuse into one. He will be Israel – by taking Israel's destiny, her ruin, her destruction, the devastation of the temple, on to himself. He will be the point where the exile reaches its climax, as the pagan authorities execute Israel's rightful King. Only so can the kingdom come on earth (in socio-political reality) as it is in heaven (in the perfect will and plan of the Father). From this perspective, to say that Jesus' death itself was a 'political' act cannot be to divorce it (against the grain of all first-century Judaism) from its 'theological' implications. On the cross politics and religion, as well as love and justice and a host of other abstractions, meet and merge. Only from the perspective of the cross, shattering as it was to Jesus' followers then as it should be now, can any view of politics, and hence of the 'state', claim to be Christian.

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What then might Jesus have meant by those words, 'my kingdom is not of this world' (Jn. 18:36)? And what was the distinction he drew between what belonged to Caesar and what belonged to God? Leaving aside the critical questions once again, both of these passages in their contexts resonate well with the scenario I have sketched. The claim before Pilate is that the kingdom Jesus is inaugurating is not worldly in its methods: 'if my kingdom were of this world, my followers would fight to prevent me being handed over'. Kingdoms of the world fight; physical power, strategic, revolutionary or military power is the rule of the game. Jesus' kingdom has a different *modus operandi*. The sentence should not be read as referring to an other-worldly, Platonic, non-physical kingdom. It designates Jesus' kingdom as the breaking into the worldly order of a rule which comes from elsewhere, from Israel's God, the creator God. It does not mean the abandonment of the created order and the escape into a private or 'spiritual' sphere. On to the scene of worldly power – precisely there, or it is meaningless! – has come a new order of sovereignty, which wins its victories by a new method.

So too with the saying about Caesar (Mk. 12:13-17 and parallels). Within the sharp polemical context, and underneath the shrewd epigram that turns the challenge and threat back on its proposers, there lies a fundamental perception of the socio-political reality of the day. Israel has bought into Roman rule; she has accepted her own secularization. And this is how God now intends to keep it. Israel has become a nation like all the others: she has 'no king but Caesar' (Jn. 19:15). The kingdom is therefore taken away from her and given to others (Mk. 12:9, coming just before our passage). From now on, as even Josephus saw, Israel has forfeited her right to be a theocracy, and must take her place among the nations of the world, giving allegiance to Caesar and to God. We cannot press this passage further, as though this were Jesus' considered systematic statement for the benefit of future generations in a church as yet unborn, for details about 'church and state'. What we can suggest is that any analysis of such matters must include this epigram as a fixed point in its hermeneutical line. And with that we are pointed towards Paul.

Paul and the justice of God

(i) *God's covenant faithfulness*

The starting-point of Paul's Christian theological reflection was the realization, on the road to Damascus, that the crucified Jesus was indeed the Messiah.[14] Central to this was the recognition that *God had done for Jesus what Paul had expected him to do for Israel on the last day.* Jesus, as an individual, had been executed by the pagans and raised from the dead; but that was what God was supposed to do for Israel at the end of time; therefore Jesus had indeed enacted Israel's destiny, and his claim to be Israel's Messiah, her anointed representative, was thereby vindicated.

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Paul, as a direct result, believed that all God's promises had now come true in Jesus as Messiah (2 Cor. 1:20). In particular, as he sets out at length in Romans, God's covenant faithfulness, his 'righteousness', has been revealed at last. And, in fulfilling his covenant promises to Abraham, God has thus acted as the righteous, 'just', judge: he has dealt with evil, he has been true to the law, he has acted impartially, and he has rescued the helpless from their plight.[15] But the revelation of God's covenant faithfulness, his justice, cannot be simply a matter of the private experience of Christians. The whole Jewish background out of which Paul writes militates against this, and nothing he says detracts from this thrust: the God of Israel is precisely the creator, the God of the whole world, and when he acts to redeem his people this will be the means of blessing for the whole world.[16] Though I do not agree with Käsemann in his assertion that 'the righteousness of God' *means* his 'victory over the world', Käsemann has, I think, erred in the right direction:[17] because of what the phrase *does* mean, which I take to be 'God's covenant faithfulness', Paul cannot but see the realization of that idea as involving the new world order predicted in the prophets (here is the line that leads to Romans 8). The Jewish particularism is not abandoned in the revelation in Christ; rather, the specificity of the covenant is the means of the creator's intended blessing for the whole world.

But how can the blessing come to a world where idolatry still rules? That question is at the heart of the missionary theology by which Paul articulates his motivation and method in announcing to the world that the crucified Jesus is Lord of the world; and it is in his answers to that question that we may locate properly (and not as a footnote or appendix) his reflections on what we have come to call the 'state'. We may begin away from Romans, in order to work our way back to it, not least to chapter 13, with some hope of exegetical success.

(ii) *Proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord*

Let us first go to Philippi, a proud Roman colony. It is to the young church in precisely that city that Paul emphasizes the call of his Christological monotheism: at the name of Jesus every knee shall

bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Kyrios*, to the glory of God the Father (2:10f.). Though modern exegetes may sometimes be more interested in the question of whether this implies universalism, for the original recipients there would be a far more pressing concern. Jesus is 'Lord', therefore Caesar is not. Not surprising, then, that Acts records (against what some think is the 'grain' of the book) that Paul and Silas are charged in nearby Thessalonica with proclaiming Jesus as an alternative king, a rival to Caesar (Acts 17:7). This suggests a new way into that puzzling text, Philippians 1:15-18. There Paul speaks of those who 'proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry', who do it 'not sincerely, but with the intention of stirring up trouble for me in my bonds'. It has been thought often enough that these were Christians with whom Paul disagreed. I suggest that this is a misreading of the phrase *Christon kataggelein*, to 'preach Christ'. The verb is much wider than the English verb 'preach', something done by Christians in a church or at most in an open-air rally. It denotes a royal proclamation, something done by a herald. In the light of 2:11 and Acts 17:7, I suggest that Paul's idea of 'proclaiming Christ' had little to do with offering people a new religious option, a new private experience of the love of God, and far more to do with the announcement to the world at large that the crucified and risen Jesus was its Lord and King, the one before whom every knee must bow. This is fighting talk, the sort of thing that gets you in trouble with the authorities, and that is exactly what we find in Acts and the letters. Who, then, are these strange announcers of Christ? They are, I suggest, people in the local pagan (and quite possibly Jewish) communities who are telling people about this ridiculous fellow, Paul, and his wild claims: he is saying that Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean preacher, is the Lord of the world! Paul's response is simple: as long as people hear the news that Jesus is Lord of the world, I am content to stay in jail. This is the message which is invested with the power of God, whether, by implication, the announcers know it or not.

(iii) *Confronting the powers*

This idea of the proclamation of Jesus as Lord sends us on, therefore, to the confrontation with the powers (it is scarcely surprising that the prison epistles show a particular awareness of this dimension of the gospel). The powers have long been marginalized within studies of Paul, despite heroic efforts in some quarters, but it is high time that they were put back where they belong, well within the main lines of his world view.[18] Paul's theology is not simply about human sin and how people get saved by Christ. It is about God, the creator, about his covenant and how he has been faithful to it, *thereby* delivering the world from the grip of sin and corruption. Salvation falls within Paul's theology at this point, and his teaching about it can only be fully understood there. He is thus a fully Jewish theologian, focusing attention on the doctrines of monotheism and election and working out, in practice as well as theory, the radical revision of those doctrines necessitated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, and the gift of the Spirit. And from this Jewish basis we can understand his language about the powers.

Paul is a robust monotheist, and there is no suggestion that the powers are really alternative gods. They are only 'so-called' gods and lords (1 Cor. 8:5). They are, rather (and perhaps initially surprisingly), part of the good creation made by the Father through his agent, the pre-existent one who became human and was known as Jesus (Col. 1:15-17). The powers have, nevertheless, rebelled, and have wreaked much havoc in the world by shutting up humans under their own power; it is at this point, perhaps, that we realize what Paul is talking about. The *stoicheia*, which are dealt with in Galatians 4:1-11 and Colossians 2:8-15, include at least the national and/or territorial gods, which insist upon racial, ethnic or geographical loyalty. They include the idols by whose worship humans are reinforced in prejudice about race, gender, class. They include the 'forces', as we would call them, which operate through the Herods and Pilates of this world, so that sometimes it is impossible to tell whether Paul is actually referring to the human agents of power or the powers that work through human agents, or, more likely, both (1 Cor. 2:8). They thus include the 'forces' that put Jesus to death, and that were thereby duped, shown to have overreached themselves, defeated and led away in the divine triumphal procession (Col. 2:14f.).

The result of this débâcle is not, as one might have imagined, the abolition of the 'powers', so that they would have no place in the renewed world order. On the contrary, they are thereby 'reconciled' to the creator, again through Jesus the Messiah (Col. 1:18-20). Apparently, with the reaffirmation of creation in the resurrection of Jesus there goes the reaffirmation of the essential created goodness even of the 'powers' that had rebelled. Only so is dualism avoided. The powers only became demons when they (falsely) became gods; and they only became gods when humans gave them the worship which they did not deserve.[19]

Paul is therefore living, and knows himself to be living, in a situation whose multiple ambiguities would be intellectually fascinating were they not so politically and personally pressing and uncomfortable. The ambiguity is reflected in the contrast of two passages, Ephesians 6:10-20 and Romans 13:1-7.

On the one hand, the battle continues: as humans are still worshipping the principalities and powers, they are still powerful *de facto* even though *de jure* defeated on the cross; the old illustration of the time-lag between D-day and V-day comes again to mind. The power still wielded by the 'powers' is undeniable: Ephesians is written from prison, where the powers seem to have won a temporary victory over the ambassador of the new king, and battle must be maintained unrelentingly by those who, like David's supporters in the reign of Saul, are backing the anointed one against the present establishment. The gospel Paul announced is always going to confront those who have a vested interest in the worship of Athene, Roma, Diana, Aphrodite, Mars, Mammon or any other of the defeated rabble who are dethroned by the cross. And such confrontations, which are bound to be 'political' in that they meet such rebel powers with the news that their time is up, that they must bow before one whose kingdom inaugurates a different order, will inevitably produce trouble for the announcer.

(iv) *Romans 13*

On the other hand, there is Romans 13.[20] We may shake off from the start the voices that tell us that the relevant section (vv. 1-7) is an interpolation.[21] It is far more important to look at the background to such ideas in the Judaism of the period, and to see the flow of thought whereby Paul has reached this point in the letter. History of religions and exegesis together will contribute to theology, and, I hope, to hermeneutics.

For a start, we may note that already in this period there had been voices among Diaspora Jews advocating a quiescent attitude towards the ruling authorities. Since the exile, and the resultant dispersion of Jews in much of the then known world, Jewish communities had had to come to terms with living in countries where the writ of Israel's God did not even run in theory. Though they might still look for the liberation of Palestine as their real homeland, when it came to living in Alexandria or Tarsus, Rome or Athens, Jews would be content if they were allowed to study their ancestral Torah and practise their ancestral taboos. The Wisdom of Solomon declares that the kings and rulers of the earth have their dominion given them by the Lord, and that they are his servants (6:1-4) — even though it then continues at once to declare that the Lord will therefore judge them for abusing their trust, something that Paul does not mention in this passage (however much later interpreters may wish that he had).[22] There is always the old Jewish idea that the nations were assigned tutelary guardians, while Israel was the creator's special preserve;[23] and there is the emerging Diaspora viewpoint according to which the study of Torah can substitute for the temple as the locus of the divine presence (a convenient Diaspora doctrine, this, which did not undercut allegiance to the temple but made the practice of the presence of God more readily possible).[24] All of these combine to give the Pharisee that Paul had been a sense of a range of possible attitudes *vis-à-vis* ruling authorities. Whereas the Sadducees believed in free will, *i.e.* (translating Josephus' euphemistic categories into their more likely political meanings) in God helping those who helped themselves, and the Essenes in determinism, *i.e.* waiting for God to act without human effort involved, the Pharisees, who believed in a mixture of the two, seem to have been ready for action and also ready for God to act independently of human action.[25] This gave them the leeway which they exploited in various ways: sometimes for revolution, as in the case of Akiba, sometimes for quiescence, as in the Diaspora. The Pharisaic attitude to the ruling authorities, therefore — a new position granted the new situation of a Jew living away from the Holy Land — was on a par with the idea of 'spiritual sacrifices', developed precisely when Jews could not get to the temple on a regular basis. Paul picks up both ideas: the latter in Romans 12:1-2, the former in our present passage.

In a sense, then, the question had already been faced and decided to some extent. What should the people of God do when they find themselves off their own turf? Obey the rulers of the place where they happen to be, because the creator has given them for the benefit of all. But, in another sense, the situation that faced Paul in the early church had both sharpened up the need for such advice and given a new edge to the advice itself.

Christians came to believe very early that the promises about sacred turf had been widened to include the whole world as the inheritance of the people of God. The whole world is claimed for the risen Lord.

On the one hand, the church believed itself from very early on to be a distinct community, different from Jews on the one hand and Gentiles on the other. It did not even *look* like an ordinary first-century religious movement, which one would have expected to be either racially-based or a private religious club for the benefit of the 'enlightenment' of its members. It claimed less, and more, than these: an open society, claiming to be the human race in embryo.[24] They were neither Jews nor Greeks, but 'the church of God' (1 Cor. 10:32). In particular, it came to believe very early that the promises about sacred turf had been widened to include the whole world as the inheritance of the people of God: Paul in Romans 4:13 makes this move as if it were already commonplace. No one nation, racially or geographically, is 'special' in that sense any more. The whole world is claimed for the risen Lord. What more natural, then, than that the church should regard itself as above obedience to mere earthly rulers? Already worshipping the one to whom Caesar would bow, why should it bow to Caesar as well? This prospect of holy anarchy, which in its Jewish form was brewing up towards a terrible war as Paul was writing Romans, would not commend itself as serving the gospel. More natural was the line which would occur readily, we may suppose, to a Pharisee now rethinking his world view in the light of Jesus and the Spirit. The major section of Romans (chapters 1–11) is given over to an exposition of the covenant faithfulness of the creator God, as a result of which the motley rabble that made up the church were to be assured that they, no matter what their moral or racial background, were the true covenant people, heirs to the promises made to the patriarchs. They were, in other words, a different version of what Diaspora Pharisaism had held itself to be — the people of God, spread abroad in the world. Learning to live with the 'powers that be' was therefore the appropriate mode of existence for this Israel redivivus.

We should note carefully what is being said, and what is not being said. What is here ruled out is an attitude which would flout magistrates and police; which would speak and act as though it were above or outside all law and social restraint. What is enjoined is not a meek submission to whatever an authority wishes, but a recognition that, by being Christian, one has not thereby ceased to be human, and that, being human, one remains bound in ties of obligation to one's fellow-humans, and beyond that to the God who, as creator, has called his human creatures to live in harmony with each other — and such obligations are, to a lesser or greater extent, enshrined in the laws which governments make from time to time. Paul's point is not the maximalist one that whatever governments do must be right and that whatever they enact must be obeyed, but the solid if minimalist one that God wants human society to be ordered; that being Christian does not release one from the complex obligations of this order; and that one must therefore submit, at least in general, to those entrusted with enforcing this order.

This implies, I think, neither quiescence before, nor acquiescence in, totalitarianism. The history-of-religions background to Paul's thinking is instructive: Jews holding views broadly analogous to his were quite capable of political activity in the Empire, and of reminding governments of their business. What Paul says is clearly anathema to the totalitarian: the point about totalitarianism is that the ruling power has taken the place of God; that is why it is always *de facto*, and frequently *de jure*, atheist. For Paul, the 'state' is not God. God is God, and the state is thus relativized, as are the powers precisely in Colossians 1:15-20, where they are created and reconciled but not divine.

I have indicated hereby the position I currently take, with a fair degree of caution, on the two major issues that face the interpreter of Romans 13:1: (a) are the 'powers' here the double-referent 'powers' that we find elsewhere in Paul, or are they merely the earthly rulers, without their 'spiritual' counterparts? and (b) what sort of 'submission' is required to those 'powers'? By following those who understand 'submission' as considerably less than 'unquestioning obedience', and who see it rather as a matter of humbly understanding one's place within the divinely ordered human world, it becomes easier, I think, to follow also the minority who still hold to the double, or perhaps better bipolar, referent behind the 'powers'.[27] Indeed, it is odd to see the consensus on the matter shifting towards a single, this-worldly, reference at the same time as we are being made aware, by writers like Ellul and Wink in their different ways, of the 'forces' which, as we so readily acknowledge in everyday speech, stand behind, and are greater than the sum total of, the humans involved in the political and economic processes. It is of course true that the advice which follows in Romans 13 refers to one's behaviour *vis-à-vis* the actual office-holders. But Paul's other references to the powers, and the ubiquitous double reference in the ancient world, make it (I think) far more likely that he would not have excluded from his mind the extra or spiritual dimension of the powers, however we may like to refer to it. But this raises the final and perhaps the most important question: what difference does the death and resurrection of Jesus make to the powers to whom one must (in this sense) submit?

(v) *The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ*

At one level, the answer is 'nothing at all'. In Cranfield's image (which may not be altogether to the point, but serves this limited purpose), a warrant can be served for someone's arrest, and until it is acted on the criminal can pursue his course unhindered. Calvary and Easter serve the warrant on the powers, but they still need to be brought into line, and (as Paul knew only too well) can still wreak evil in the world.[28] At another level, all the difference in the world: by the same image, the situation of the powers has radically changed *de jure*, and those who know of this change — *i.e.* Christians — know that the submission they offer to earthly institutions is neither absolute nor final, neither dehumanizing nor constricting to those called to announce the absolute Lordship of the crucified and risen Messiah. Underneath the call for submission in Romans 13 we should, I think, place the astonishing words attributed to Jesus in John 19:11: faced with a false charge, a skewed trial, an ineffective judge, Jesus says 'you could have no power over me if it were not given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin'. If Jesus and/or John can affirm the God-givenness even of Pilate's power, and even at that precise moment, it is perhaps right to go on looking for the solution to Romans 13 within the multiple ambiguities of reading 'powers' in its full Pauline sense, rather than cutting the knot and making Paul superficially easier.

From Paul's perspective, Calvary and Easter were the occasions when the whole cosmos died and was reborn.

What, then, has happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and how has it brought a new state of affairs into being? From Paul's perspective, Calvary and Easter were the occasions when the whole cosmos died and was reborn (Gal. 6:14-16). This dying and rising needed, of course, to be worked out as individuals and groups went through it (Gal. 2:16-21; 4:19); we have here, not unusually in Paul, the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. What we do have 'already', though, is a community of people called and equipped to live by the worship of the crucified and risen Jesus, instead of by the worship of this or that idol, and so to discover, and to announce to the world, a new way of being human, a kingdom 'not of this world' in the sense that it cannot be reduced to the power plays and power struggles of ordinary human society. The narrative of Acts shows Paul quite clearly reminding authorities, both Roman, Hellenistic and Jewish, of just what their God-given responsibilities consist in. What we have, supplementing as always the death of Jesus in Paul's theology, is the gift of the Spirit — the Spirit given to the renewed people of God to enable them to *be* the renewed people of God, and so to bring to human affairs the transcendent and transcending vision and

message of the true God. This does not absolve men and women from social and political responsibilities, any more than it renders unnecessary the acts of eating and drinking (it is interesting that in Romans 14 Paul is concerned with precisely those things, and once again rejects any dualism that would assign part of the created order to a sphere in which the creator's writ does not run). It gives them a new reason for engaging with the world, for announcing in all ways open to them that Jesus is Lord.

Conclusion

I have had no space to discuss the rest of the NT, and I think that to add Luke/Acts and Revelation, at least, would have been illuminating, would have filled out the picture more than a little. But I have said enough, perhaps, to indicate the ways in which I think the historical end of the picture ought to be appreciated. What about the hermeneutical question?

We in the twentieth-century church are neither Galilean villagers nor citizens of the Roman and Mediterranean world of the first century. The specific concerns which Jesus addressed are not ours; the agenda which Paul believed himself called to address is not ours either. We do well to respect our distance from the NT and its world, and should not, in our eagerness to make it relevant and so demonstrate our Protestant orthodoxy, flatten out the territory that separates it from us. We need it to be where it is, at the beginning of that historical movement which we confess in the creed to be under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and which is known rather flatly as Church History. As I have argued elsewhere,[2a] I believe that the means by which the Bible, and particularly the NT, can today carry the authority which is so often glibly claimed for it is by the resolute working out of the essential *story* or drama of God's dealings with humankind which we find written up, prophetically, in Scripture. In the Bible we find a drama in several acts. The life and death of Jesus are the penultimate act, the moment when the drama reaches its height. The resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, and the birth of the church are the beginning of the final act, in which the climactic moment of the previous act is worked out. But the drama is not over. The way the NT is written is precisely open-ended — with clues as to how the final scene will look (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21–22), no doubt, but with a large blank to be filled in by those who, as the heirs of the first scene in the fifth act, are seeking to advocate the drama, by means of Spirit-led improvisation, towards its appropriate conclusion. The authority of the NT, then, consists not least in this: that it calls us back to this story, this story of Jesus and Paul, as our story, as the non-negotiable point through which our pre-history runs, and which gives our present history its shape and direction.

In particular, the story of Jesus compels us to work out, better than we normally do, the hermeneutical principle by which we get from the penultimate act — his life and death — to the final one, in which we find ourselves still. The whole world view of Israel provides the clue: when Israel's hopes are fulfilled, then the world will be blessed, or at least ruled properly at last. If Jesus is bringing to its climax the destiny of the people of God, then this is bound to have earth-shattering implications for the whole world. The hermeneutical rule of thumb, then, is that Jesus' mission to Israel becomes the basis, and the model, for the church's mission to the world. His call to Israel to repent, his summons to her to join him in a new way of being Israel, is to be translated into the church's call to the world to a new way of being human.

Romans 13 enunciates the minimal position: being a Christian does not mean being an anarchist.

Within that responsibility, there emerge different levels of interaction between the church, *qua* church, and the official rulers. Romans 13 enunciates the minimal position: being a Christian does not mean being an anarchist. The Creator intends his human creatures to live in social relations, which need order, stability and structure; Christians are not exempt from these. But, just as no one would think that Romans 14 had said the last Christian word about what one was allowed to eat or drink, or that Romans 12 had said the last word about behaviour in general, so Romans 13 must not be taken as the sum total of all that Paul might have thought, or could or should have thought, about what we call 'the state'. The minimalist position is basic, corresponding to the equally generalized Romans 12:9 ('hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good'). Beyond that, one is free to develop and explore the implications of Christian theology and ethics, responsibility and vocation, in all sorts of ways.

Among these ways will be, I think, a full outworking of the implications of Philippians 2:10-11. If it is true that the church is called to announce to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord, then there will be times when the world will find this distinctly uncomfortable. The powers that be will need reminding of their responsibility, more often perhaps as the Western world moves more and more into its post-Christian phase, where, even when churchgoing remains strong, it is mixed with a variety of idolatries too large to be noticed by those who hold them, and where human rulers are more likely to acknowledge the rule of this or that 'force' than the rule of the creator. And if the church attempts this task of reminding, of calling the powers to account for their stewardship, it will face the same charges, and perhaps the same fate, as its Lord. It is at that point that decisions have to be made in all earnestness, at that point that idolatry exacts its price. But it is here, I think, that the NT's picture of the gospel and the world of political life finds one at least of its contemporary echoes.

I cannot support from the NT the separation of the gospel and politics. We cannot abandon politics to those who carry guns, or for that matter, to those who carry pocket calculators.

I cannot, in short, support from the NT the separation of the gospel and politics which is still so popular, not least in certain shrill branches of contemporary evangelicalism. We cannot abandon politics to those who carry guns, or for that matter to those who carry pocket calculators. When I pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, I cannot simply be thinking of a condition which will begin to exist for the first time after all human beings have either died or been transformed à la 1 Corinthians 15:51. If I am to be true to the giver of the prayer, and to those in the first Christian generation who prayed it and lived it, I must be envisaging, and working and praying for, a state of affairs in which the world of the 'state', of society and politics, no less than the world of my private 'religious' or 'spiritual' life, is brought under the Lordship of the King.

[1]This article, hastily written though it alas is, would have even more flaws were it not for the kindness of Professor Walter Wink and the Revd Michael Lloyd, who both read the first draft and offered careful criticism. The many remaining faults are entirely my own.

[2]Chadwick 1990, p. 229.

[3]See Wink 1984, p. 46, quoting Günther Dehn: 'no modern or "secular" view of the state was possible for Paul'.

[4]See, on this point, the work of Martin Hengel in particular (*e.g.* 1974), over against the whole drift of scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century.

[5]There is no space to argue this in the detail it deserves. A good statement of the position may be found in Caird 1980, ch. 14. Compare too Rowland 1982.

[6]Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.149-163.

[7]See Schürer 1973, pp. 543f., and Beckwith 1981, pp. 536-539.

[8]See Neill and Wright 1988, pp. 379-403.

[9]In what follows, I am drawing on my own as yet unpublished work on Jesus, in dialogue with such scholars as Sanders, Borg, Harvey, Meyer, Theissen, Freyne and Horsley; but there is no space to show the detailed workings of the necessary discussions.

[10]Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.23; contrast the earlier account of the Zealots in *War* 2.118, 433, where they are sharply distinguished from the Pharisees described in 2.162f. In the earlier work Josephus is desperately concerned to blame the Zealots and exonerate the Pharisees; in the later one the mask slips, and we see how close the two sects may in fact have been.

[11]See Josephus' account (*Antiquities* 14.420-430) of Herod's getting rid of the cave-dwelling Galilean *lestai*.

[12]On the whole debate, see particularly Borg 1984, ch. 1.

[13]See Wright 1985, 1986.

[14]I have argued for this point, and much else in this section, in forthcoming works on Pauline theology.

[15]All this, arguably, is contained within Rom. 1–4, particularly 3:21-26.

[16]Such is the argument of Gal. 3:10-14.

[17]Käsemann 1980, *passim*.

[18]See recently the work of Walter Wink, whose trilogy on the Powers (1984-) is now nearing completion.

[19]This is not to say that demons did not exist, or do not exist, until humans call them into existence; merely that the powers of which Paul speaks are to be thought of in this way.

[20]See the very full bibliographies in Dunn 1988, pp. 757f., Cranfield 1979, pp. 651-673. It is impossible here even to list the relevant items, let alone to interact with them.

[21]See O'Neill 1975, pp. 207-214, and others noted by him and by Dunn 1988, p. 758.

[22]Dunn 1988, pp. 759, 761f. His first reference somewhat misleadingly cites this passage in Wisdom as supporting 'quietism'; it could actually be construed (as Dunn sees on p. 762) as fighting talk, conceding a divine right in order to assert a divine judgment.

[23]So Dt. 32:8, Sirach 17:14, *etc.*: see the discussion in Strack-Billerbeck 3.48ff.

[24]So *Pirke Aboth* 3.2: 'if two sit together and words of the Law [are spoken] between them, the Divine Presence rests between them' (Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 450). The saying is attributed to R. Mananiah ben Teradion, a sage killed in the Bar Kochbah revolt. Interestingly, the same Mishnah passage begins with a different rabbi exhorting: 'pray for the peace of the ruling power, since but for fear of it men would have swallowed up each other alive'. The belief in the providential ordering of governments goes deep within the thinking of Judaism, despite pogroms and persecutions: see Dunn 2.761 for more references.

[25]*Cf.* Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.171-173. Josephus gives these as the views of the schools *periton anthropinon pragmaton, i.e.* concerning human affairs; this would scarcely exclude political actions.

[26]I owe this point, and much more besides, to Professor Rowan Williams.

[27]With Cranfield 2.660f. on 'submission', against him, and Dunn 2.760, on the double referent. Instead, I follow Wink 1984, pp. 45-47 (Wink is more cautious than one would realize from Dunn's summary of the issue), and, with modifications, Cullmann: other references in Dunn, *ad loc.*

[28]Cranfield 2.655.

[29]See my article, 'How Can the Bible be Authoritative?', forthcoming in *Vox Evangelica*.

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