

Church & State

- nature of the State and Christian responsibility within it

WHERE IS POWER?

We have explored what we mean by power, and powerlessness, and now we will spend this session reflecting on where we might find power and how we should relate to it. We will look at what the church's, and individual Christians' relationship to power has been, and ought to be, in different areas of common life. We will end with a reflection on how a different way of understanding power and powerlessness, in the context of Shalom, affects how we live and act in the world.

Suggested group exercise: Mapping power

Using a flipchart/ whiteboard/ overhead screen, create a spidagram or mind map of all the different types and locations of power in society. This could include local, societal and global levels. It would include different kinds of power, e.g. political power, physical force, peer pressure, cultural norms, spiritual power.....

You may want to get students to do this in groups and then feed back, or just do it altogether. The aim is simply to get students to think about power in as diverse a way as possible, and to understand something of the pervasiveness of power.

Power is everywhere – in different forms and locations. We now turn to look in detail at power in practice – and the church's relation to it – in two key areas: the state and the economy.

CHURCH AND STATE IN PRACTICE

CASE STUDY 1: STATE AND POWER

Over the centuries Christian attitudes towards political power & the state have been an issue of argument and polemic within the church:

- Is there a divine right of kings?
- Can a Christian be a magistrate?
- Is there such a thing as a Christian country?
- Should a Christian vote?

Scripture and the State¹

▪ **Culture and community**

Human beings are not only created by God, but also made in the divine image and likeness. We know that God's being has stability and form and that it is to be understood

¹ These notes, from the beginning of this section to page 77, have been taken from an unpublished paper by Nigel Wright entitled 'Radical perspectives on Church and State (1): Biblical and Historical Orientation.



as a community of persons. This being so, we should assume that it was his intention from the beginning that those whom he had created would begin to reflect those characteristics in the way in which they organised their lives together. We should expect them:

- To live in mutually organised communities
- To express themselves in cultural patterns by developing institutional forms
- To develop regional and national identity
- To have 'dominion'; being productive, creative and responsible
- To fulfill all this as part of a divinely given 'cultural mandate'

The strong impression given by scripture is that an obedient humanity, living in harmony with God, would nonetheless express all the diversity to be found between tribes, nations and languages. In a redeemed community they will also remain. But there is, however, a human duty before God to maintain a morally acceptable social order under God.

Is all this the beginnings of the state? Not necessarily. You can have autonomous local communities that relate cooperatively with others without the emergence of a state.

▪ **What is the state?**

The state grows out from within the structures of human existence, but is a particular and distinctive form of human organisation. The primary characteristics of the state are that:

- It involves the centralisation of power
- It has a central ruler or system of government
- It exists within a roughly definable geographical area
- It guarantees order within that area by the use of force

This being so it is not an easy task to trace the clear emergence of the state within the biblical text.

▪ **God's compassion, human rebellion**

In Genesis 4 we see the earliest biblical traditions, following the Fall, presenting a form of political order within humanity which has God himself as the focus of authority. He is the one who is the just and compassionate guarantor of justice:

- Able's blood 'cries out' to be avenged (v10): a technical term used later as a legal appeal to rectify an injustice
- Cain is judged by God (v12): but at the same time protected by God who will avenge him 'sevenfold' (perfect justice not excessive vengeance)

However, in contrast to this, there is rebellion, corruption and violence in organised human society, the emerging social-political state. Which stands against God's righteous order:

- Lamech refuses God's justice and replaces it with revenge (4:23-24)
- Before the Flood 'there is only evil continually' (6:5)
- Babel was an arrogant attempt 'to make a name' for themselves (11:4)



These themes of revenge and human arrogance are what essentially make up the story of the human state in the biblical record.

In contrast to this account of the emerging state, as organised human society in rebellion against God, there is the story of a counter social-political community unfolding. This was a community with an identity, destiny and values given by God, characterised 'by doing righteousness and justice' (Gen 18:19); quite different from the dominant civilisation. The story of Abraham stands in stark contrast to the story of Babel. Salvation is not to be found in the state; which at best is treated with indifference but is essentially viewed as negative. It is not that God is renouncing the social-political process; it is simply that he is developing in quite a different way. The people of God find themselves within states, but themselves become a sign of hope to humanity of God's wider and final salvation.

▪ **Theocracy, monarchy, exile**

The Exodus story presents us with an oppressive state. God is set against Pharaoh and is the one from whom he liberates his people. However, they are set free to serve God under his direct rule as a result of the covenant relationship forged at Sinai. Israel was to be different from all other nations, she was not a state; but nevertheless, she had social institutions with charismatic leaders and deliverers. In the Exodus / Conquest stories the state (eg Egypt and Canaan) is something idolatrous; it is under judgment and something to be opposed. Yahweh is king in a way that *excluded* human kingship; he was victorious in war and established justice.² The state is an alternative to and a rejection of God's rule.

The Israelite monarchy was an act of treachery (1Sam 8:7). They were unwilling to trust God as protector and provider, and felt burdened by the insecurity of faith required of an alternative people. They wanted 'a king like other nations' (v5) in spite of the clear warnings about royal oppression and exploitation (v10-18); all of which came true all too soon.

Hebrew kingship was a paradox; it was both a rejection of God and yet also a gift of God. But it was not God's kingship. It was rather a limited constitutional monarchy, which had:

- Written regulations about its exercise (1Sam 10:25)
- Clear distinction between office of king and prophet or priest

God, remarkably and graciously, takes the institution of the monarchy, which was a clear rejection of him, and moulds it to suit his purpose. Ultimately it is God who is always king, and at very best the ruler is simply his agent. Nevertheless, the Israelite monarchy, including David, is not seen as a success. It is a period of judgment in which the fault-lines in the system are quite obvious. Solomon is a clear reversal of Sinai. However, Hebrew kingship is neither totally rejected nor is it firmly sanctioned. The people of God are never wholly identified with the state; there is always some conscious distinction between the two. At best, like slavery and divorce, the state is a concession to human 'hardness of heart'; it is permitted but it is transient.

² The two major functions of a king in the ancient world



In the exile the Jews ceased to have a monarchy and no longer functioned as a separate state. They had to learn to live as a religious minority within a pagan state. Nevertheless, it proved to be a time of great spiritual fertility:

- Jeremiah tells the exiles to seek the peace and pray for the prosperity of the pagan city (29:7), even though it was clearly facing impending judgment (Ch 50-51)
- Daniel reveals the dangers and opportunities of serving the pagan state; the demands of being faithful in a 'bestial' empire and challenging it in Yahweh's name
- Isaiah (Ch 46-47) deliberately mocks and dismisses Babylon's imperial pantheon in the light of Yahweh's power; they were a people in the world but not of the world

All these facts are vitally important for laying the groundwork for a Christian understanding of the state.

▪ **Jesus and the state**

A central fact to the whole of the New Testament is that Jesus, the Messiah, was crucified by the power of the state. The creed states it clearly, 'suffered under Pontius Pilate'; this stark fact is a continual reminder to the church of the true relationship of the state to the people of God.

Within the New Testament we see God's salvation purposes taking place outside of the state. Luke dates the start of John the Baptist's ministry by naming the power structures of the day; but adds that the word of God came to him 'in the wilderness' (3:1-3). As a consequence a people are again gathered on the basis of their allegiance to God; but this time it is in terms of their recognition of Jesus as Messiah: the biblical pattern continues. The purposes of God simply cannot be forwarded by the powers of the state, only by the power of God's word activated through a community that responds to its demands.

There are three key passages in the Gospels, which present Jesus in confrontation with power, which laid the foundations for our understanding of the relationship between the church and the state.

- **All the kingdoms of the world..** (Lk 4:5-7). In confrontation with demonic power Satan presents Jesus with a very real temptation; to fulfil his messianic mission by gaining and using political worldly power. So much lies behind this encounter. Was the 'authority and splendour' of the kingdoms given to him by God or by humanity? Notice that Jesus does not contest the claim; instead the offer is simply but fiercely rejected. The way of the Messiah stands in opposition to the wisdom of the world; it follows the path of serving God alone.
- **"My kingdom is not of this world.."** (Jn 18:36). In confrontation with political power, in the person of Pilate, Jesus represents a completely different order of rule. Jesus is not saying that God's kingdom is simply otherworldly and spiritual, as some have tried to suggest. On the contrary, his kingdom clearly impacts the real social-political world, but it is quite unlike the kingdoms of this world because it operates by totally different values; a major characteristic of which is that it is non-violent.
- **"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.."** (Mk 12:13-17). In confrontation with religious power Jesus reveals the extent to which the Jews had in fact bought into



the Roman state. The ease with which the Pharisees and Herodians could provide him with a coin which carried Caesar's idolatrous imprint showed that Israel had simply become a nation like other nations. She had 'no king but Caesar' (Jn 19:15). Her complicity with pagan power prevented her 'giving to God the things that are God's', and would ultimately involve her in rejecting the Messiah.

▪ **Servant and beast**

To conclude our examination of the biblical teaching on the state, we compare and contrast two important scriptures. They may appear to be contradictory, but in fact illustrate clearly the important paradox of a biblical understanding of political power.

- **Romans 13:1-7:** This scripture, which has become central to every discussion about the Christian understanding of the state. How these verses are interpreted is usually seen to have a binding effect upon all other biblical references on the subject. The first verse reads:

'Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God'.

These words, and the rest of the passage, are usually read in a very dogmatic way: the state is ordained by God to punish evildoers and therefore it should be obeyed. However, this rather narrow and simplistic reading of the text fails to take account of the wider context in which it is set. A few verses before, 12:14-21, Paul has been speaking about loving your enemies and blessing those who persecute you. The Roman state was the enemy and persecutor of the church. Paul is encouraging Christians to follow the example of Jesus and not to rebel against the state; as say the Jews at Masada were doing. They could be confident that the state was under God's control and even being used by him to preserve order in pagan society. God permits and overrules the flawed system of the state for the benefit of humanity; it is unwittingly his servant [v4]. Yet his ideal is that they come to accept the freedom of his rule.

- **Revelation 13:1-18:** This scripture is the important counter-balance to Romans 13. Here the true character of the state and all human power systems is revealed. The first verse reads:

'And I saw a beast rising out of the sea; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names'

The state is a beast. While these words are particularly referring to Rome, the persecutor of the church, they are, by the very nature of the apocalyptic style in which they are written, potentially true of all states and human power systems.

There is then a paradox within the New Testament attitude towards the state because while it temporarily serves God's purposes, it also displays that tendency within all powers



structures towards deification, which leads it to become demonic.³ So while statements are made about rulers and the state, which may appear to contradict each other (as is also the case in 2 Thessalonians 2) they are in fact both true, and when held side by side give us the correct biblical perspective:

THE STATE

Romans 13	Revelation 13
authority from God servant of God	empowered by dragon beast from abyss
2 Th 2:7	2 Th 2:4
restrains lawlessness (sets limits)	calls himself God (oversteps limits)

While the state has a function in God's economy, the church must recognise it for what it is and never be seduced by its basic antichrist character. There is need for real insight, wisdom and understanding.

▪ Defining the state

In the light of everything that has been said so far in this unit it seems possible to distinguish six important propositions about the state from a Christian point of view.⁴

- **The state is to be secular:** which is not the same as being pagan; rather to be seen for what it really is, the fact that it belongs to this world and this age. Throughout history rulers have claimed deity and demanded devotion and saw their people as their servants. Paul says that the reverse is true; the ruler is 'God's servant' and thus the people's servant also. He is tearing away the arrogance and delusion and revealing the truth. It is hard to imagine the impact this radical teaching first made. The gospel is a secularising force when it reveals the truth; so a 'secular state' is far from unchristian when understood in these terms.
- **The state is merely permitted:** which means it is not God's best; the ideal is direct rule from God as illustrated among the early Hebrews and will find fulfillment in the kingdom of God. God allowed kingship in Israel though it was an act of betrayal against him. Christians, likewise, are to respect rulers, but to have no illusions about the fact that

³ The whole idea of the state is found within a biblical understanding of the domination system and demonic strongholds as an expression of principalities and powers; this is developed further in Workshop notes on 'Church and World' p6-9; see also below.

⁴ These are adapted from an unpublished paper by Nigel Wright entitled 'Radical Perspectives on Church and State (2) : A true Church in a Free State.



they are ultimately illegitimate in terms of God's ideal. They simply serve a temporary role.

- **The state is essentially relative:** which means that there is no such thing as 'the state' in any sense of it having some sort of independent existence. Each particular state has simply developed out of the human ability to live cooperatively. A state is simply the ability to live like that under the conditions of sin and rebellion against God. It also means that any two states are likely to be quite different and are quite able to be reshaped and restructured. Because those sub-structures that give rise to states [ie cooperative ability] have been created they will also be able to be redeemed and reconciled to God, but that the states themselves will cease to exist at the coming of the kingdom of God.
- **The state is intrinsically flawed:** which means that all states, however stable and peaceful they appear, have their origins in violence and a lust for power which can only be maintained by the use of violence. In Luke 22:25 Jesus makes this quite clear, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves". The implications are clear:
 - All governments are domination systems
 - All try to mask the truth about their struggle for power
 - All Christians are to live in an entirely different way

The state⁵ also needs to be understood from the perspective of the biblical understanding of 'principalities and powers'.⁶ These refer to those powers spiritual and political, invisible and structural, which determine our existence and which have largely become demonised. According to Colosians (1:15-20) they are created, fallen but will be redeemed. The state is a significant way in which the powers are expressed. There is therefore a tension between the state's God-createdness, and its fallen nature, which seems to express itself in a multiplication of fallenness. This is illustrated by the apparently contrasting views expressed about the state we saw earlier between Romans 13 and Revelation 13; servant yet beast.

- **The state is to maintain order:** which is something that by its very nature it will only do imperfectly. As a consequence it must be constantly reminded that it has a God-given responsibility to uphold justice, peace and freedom. Of course, because it is a fallen, and often demonised structure, it will at best provide only a relative peace or relative justice. Only God can bring the full reality into being.
- **The state is to be impartial in religion:** which means it is to provide the framework within which religious faiths may express themselves freely and in which they may argue and persuade. Religious liberty for all is a duty of the state before God. However, this does not mean that the state becomes indifferent to religious faith, quite the reverse. It must actively sponsor the freedom of faith without favour or bias. The gospel

⁵ This draws on material from an unpublished paper by David Nussbaum entitled '*Israel, Church and State*'; see also note 11.

⁶ This is developed in much more detail in Workshop notes 'Church and World' p 6-9; see also p 6 above



can only be responded to freely, the church is an uncoerced community. The state has a responsibility to create and maintain such an environment for all its' people.

Distorting the state⁷

It is popular for Christians to argue that our understanding of the relationship between church and state should be based on the biblical example of Israel. Here we have both the 'people of God' and the 'nation'. It is said that Christians should respond to the state as the Jews were expected to do within Israel, where the ruler had God's authority. Where national rulers are ungodly Christians should use every opportunity to bring changes to their society, working to apply the moral principles God gave to Israel. The expectation is that ultimately all peoples and nations will come under God's law (eg Ps 72:11). This way of thinking, however, is fundamentally flawed:

- Instructions to Israel start from a covenant relationship with God, something the state does not have; any attempt to turn the decalogue or deuteronomic demands into secular civil law is wrong.
- Attempts to apply Hebrew law to modern society is never done consistently; what about Levitical requirements, stoning blasphemers, Jubilee legislation, interest on loans?
- Nowhere does the New Testament speak about applying Hebrew law on the civil authorities of the day, nor does it anticipate such action in the future.
- The teaching of Jesus shows that the Torah points to a new covenant which fulfils and supersedes it; the idea of Christians working to legally impose on others something that only shadows the truth is bizarre.

▪ The Church and the state

Israel does in fact provide some useful parallels for the church's understanding of how it should relate to the state, in her relationship with foreign nations. There were four possibilities as to the kind of relationship Israel could have with the nations. The question is which of them are valid? As we shall see the church faces the same options and the same question:

- **Subordinate:** for Israel this was always to be avoided (Dt 28:15,25; 30:1-5). If the nations overran them and controlled them it was an act of God's judgment with the aim of punishment leading to repentance. If it happened they were to seek God faithfully as Daniel and Esther did. The church also faces tribulation and often suffers under totalitarian regimes. But they are always to be a community of 'overcomers', they never submit. If the church allows itself to be controlled or licensed it ceases to be the church and faces extinction. This has been the story since the earliest years of persecution.
- **Superior:** for Israel it was always a picture of the future age (sa 60:10-22). Even the greatness of David's kingdom was only a sign of what God could accomplish, not a mandate for political domination and empire building. Israel is simply a nation among nations. It is the truth of her covenant which will ultimately embrace all nations under God's hand, but not politically; cosmically. Nothing in scripture suggests that the church

⁷ The notes in this section, through to those at the top of p14, draw very heavily from material in an unpublished paper by David Nussbaum entitled 'Israel, Church and State'.



could or should ever control the state or exercise political coercion. The notion of a 'Christian country' is completely unbiblical. In fact the opposite is true. Yet since the time of Constantine and the birth of the idea of 'Christendom', it has been a path pursued with tragic results.

- **Syndicated:** for Israel this was always forbidden (Lv 20:22-23; Isa 31:1; Ps 20:7). Alliances with other nations presented two major dangers. Israel would rely on military treaties for security rather than Yahweh. Affiliation with pagan powers made the nation open to moral and spiritual corruption. The historical legacy of 'Christendom' and the events of the Reformation has often resulted in a 'mutuality' between church and state. The church becomes 'established', a part of the fabric of the society. Such a concordat must inevitably be at the price of compromise. The New Testament does not present us with any ideas that could ever suggest the emergence of a 'state church'.
- **Separate:** for Israel this was always demanded (Ex 19:6; Dt 7:6; 26:19). They were to be a 'holy nation', distinct and unique. Exclusive loyalty, serving Yahweh alone. This demand was the centre of Hebrew identity, and has been at the heart of the Jewish faith as it has endeavoured to express itself in alien environments during the centuries of the 'Diaspora'. The 'nations' are the antithesis of Israel's identity. The church is also to be a free uncompromising and uncoerced community. There can be no patronage. As we have already seen its members are 'citizens of heaven' with alien status within the world; this continues until the end.

LIVING IN THE STATE

Independence from the State

Christians recognise that the church must always stand and operate independent of the state. The state uses means unlawful for the church to use. Notice the contrast Paul gives in his letter to the Romans:

Ch 12:17-21

Christian
reject vengeance (v19)

Ch 13:1-7

State
execute vengeance (v4)

The state can therefore never be Christian. The church and the state have radically different natures and roles within the world (cf Rm 12:17; 13:10).

Involvement with the State

Christians recognise that the state is necessary for sinful humanity but not for the church. They understand that the state is willed by God and so respect that fact. They recognise state rulers are unwittingly God's servants and so deserve respect, prayer and everything they require to carry out their work (Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25; Rm 13:1, 6-7; 1Tm 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1Pt 2:13-17).

Christians keep the civil law out of love and respect for God, not out of fear of legal punishment. They would live like they do irrespective of what the law demanded. They



obey the law but are free from the law both at the same time. However, if the demands of the state conflict with Christian commitment, respect will remain, but obedience will be withdrawn (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29); civil disobedience must at times be a Christian requirement.

Danger of compromise

This balance between 'independence from' and yet 'involvement in' the state, has created much conflict within the church. As we have seen, since the time of Constantine, when Christians have found themselves in positions of power or believed themselves to be in the majority, they have fallen prey to the temptation of trying to create a 'Christian state' or some kind of state-church alliance. They have argued that the state is a divine institution in which Christians must play a part. Christians in high office have then tried to enforce Christian standards on a secular population or have supported actions that are incompatible with the demands of Jesus. They seem blind to what they are doing, or unprepared to listen to the whole witness of scripture.

This adaptation to the status quo has very disturbing consequences:

- It leads Christians to separate their personal faith from their public personae; it privatises faith, creates a sacred/secular divide, and involves compromise in a way that denies the biblical experience of true discipleship.
- It sets Christian against Christian, if Christians are holding positions of authority in which they are supporting unbiblical policies or behaviour. The witness and impact of the church is blunted.

This insidious path of compromise must be seen for what it is and strenuously avoided at all costs.

IMPACTING THE STATE

Politics and possibility

New Testament teaching on 'separatism' has led some Christians to withdraw from any involvement with the state, but this is as much an aberration of biblical truth as attempts to 'Christianise' the state. It is obvious that Christians must walk circumspectly in their relationship with the state, but this does not mean we forfeit our right to be heard; on the contrary we must make the full impact of both salt and light.

While Christians must not fall into the trap of either compromise or isolation, they are to have major impact on their society through their interface with politics. Politics have been described as 'the art of the possible'; there is a great deal that is possible for a Christian to do while still keeping their witness true.

Practical implications

When Christians support the making of civil legislation they will recognise that laws have a relative nature in a secular world; they meet particular needs, reflect current understanding and popular opinion. Biblical values are absolute and eternal while civil law is relative and



changeable. They must also remember that civil law does not make people good; it simply provides protection and justice to the vulnerable. Christian influence in society will be beyond just legislation; it will be in education, the media and so much more. It will all be aimed at enriching people's experience of life, whether or not they ever make a commitment to God's kingdom. Christians will encourage and use the democratic process to bring policies that are seen by the majority as reasoned, good and just.

As Christians we must regularly remind ourselves:⁸

- To distinguish between the church and the world;
- To make God as revealed in Jesus our first concern;
- To recognise that the cause of Christ will never be advanced by worldly power;
- To reject form of alignment with political or governmental authorities;
- To remember that the separation of church and state does not mean separation of church from society;
- To hope for real improvement in the social order;
- To be a source of inspiration, values and innovation in human society;
- To keep in mind that the political sphere is important; but no more so than any other sphere of life;
- To obey God and conscience whenever society makes demands that are at variance with our discipleship to Jesus;
- To work at all times for the reduction of every form of violence and coercion.

Practical applications

There are two clear biblical pictures that help us to understand the kind of work the church should be doing in the political arena:

- **Prophet:** Proclamation and protest by lifestyle and word. They will proclaim what they believe to be right for society; being open about their Christian commitment but requesting policies that all should be able to endorse. They will be protest when there is sectional interest rather than concern for society as a whole, when the vulnerable are in danger of being exploited or forgotten.
- **Priest:** Praying and teaching in church and world. They will pray for wisdom and understanding for the leaders of the state (cf 1Tim 2:1-2). They will teach and establish foundations in the thinking of society using every media form, creating discussion in a way that encourages the discovery of truth.

There are three broad areas in which we would expect to find Christians involved in political action:

- **Within:** Christians should play an important part inside the political system; representing and decision making. This is a most difficult area because compromise is so easy. Every political group presents problems for a Christian; often they will have to

⁸ These are listed by Nigel Wright in 'Radical perspectives on Church and State (2) : A true Church in a Free State; see note 9



refuse to follow the 'party line'. But their integrity, wisdom and character will mark them out and make their contribution sought after; like Joseph and Daniel who were statesmen in a pagan political environment and did not compromise. God will honour their witness and use their contribution.

- **Outside:** Christians should play an important part in pressure groups working on the edge of the political system. They will be taking up issues, which are being neglected or ignored on behalf of the weak, and the vulnerable. Shouting to make those in authority hear; acting as a social conscience. This work will often involve standing in common cause alongside people with quite different beliefs and motivation; co-belligerent for justice and truth. It will show the secular activist that many of their concerns are God's concerns also.
- **Beneath:** Christians should play an important part in meeting the needs of those people who find themselves trapped at the bottom of society, the poor and the helpless that have been discarded by the system. Those who have no voice may seem to have little to offer and yet need resources. In getting beside and serving them we meet their needs and incarnate Jesus within the political arena. Politics is primarily concerned with power; the church shows that God is primarily concerned with the powerless.

These three areas are not alternative options for the church. We must be involved in each of these areas simultaneously. Our aim is to glorify God. We play our part in this dangerous political arena 'as wise as serpents and harmless as doves' [Mt 10:16]. Everything we do is to be charged with the gospel of the kingdom, we are looking to see 'the world turned upside down' and we will do it fearlessly and without compromise because we serve 'that other king, Jesus' (Acts 17:6-7).

CASE STUDY 2: CHURCH & WEALTH

Similarly to debates about the State, there have been long centuries of debate, argument, and differences of practice between Christians in regard to economic power, i.e. wealth, and Christians' relationship to it.

SCRIPTURE AND THE ECONOMY

In God's likeness

As was stated in the Church & State section, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. God as Trinity is a community, and God as Creator is a Being who values productivity. As humans we reflect his characteristics in the way we organise our lives together. This should include living in mutually organised communities, and being productive, creative and responsible. There will also be diversity in humanity, and not everyone will have the same skills or be able to produce or create in the same way or with the same resources. At the same time we understand that God's will, and the vision of Shalom, is for humanity to thrive and enjoy well-being and plenty in relationship with one another. Economic activity, rooted in rudimentary systems of production and relationships of exchange, has evolved as the major way in which human societies have attempted to meet these goals.



This vision differs substantially from the economy we see around us, however. Globally and nationally the kind of economic system that dominates today has in fact brought with it huge problems, of unaccountable multinational companies, irresponsible financiers, exploitation of peoples and of the Earth, and huge disparities of wealth. Recent economic crises have highlighted the volatility of the system that has been created, and the potential it has to cause harm.

So what should the relationship be between the Church and this economic system? What should Christians think and do about the accumulation of wealth? This case study cannot do justice to these big questions. Much of this issue is covered in other Workshop sessions, including the session Good News for the Poor, however we will attempt to look at some of the aspects of this issue here, and look at some examples of where economic power has been abused, and what Christians have done, and could do, about it.

Tracing ideas about the economy and wealth in the Bible

The Bible has a great deal to say about economic power and wealth, and in Jesus' teaching, there is a massive amount of material in the gospels on wealth. Economic justice is a key component of his teachings about the kingdom of God, as we have already seen. Rather than condemning wealth per se, Scripture recognises the greed and exploitation that are often consequences of wealth.

The Bible is quite clear that material wealth is one of the many ways in which God blesses people (Gen 13:2; Ps 112:1,3; 1Tm 6:17 etc). However, riches are a very real danger. Many Bible passages indicate the ways in which riches can choke, blind, take control and lead us away from God.

In Good News to the Poor, we look in detail at a key concept with regard to economic power which has resonated with people of faith down through the centuries: Jubilee. Here we will briefly explain how this relates to understandings of economic power.

Jubilee in the Hebrew Scriptures

The idea of Jubilee is found in Leviticus 25 v 8-17. God declares that within Israel, every 50 years, there is to be a year of freedom, rest, release and liberty. Jubilee was a huge social and economic upheaval tackling some of the key factors that can generate inequality, imbalances and concentrations of power: natural resources, labour, finance and property.

Jubilee is one of the most radical ideas in the bible; so radical that some doubt if it was ever really practiced! Jubilee isn't so much about rigid set practices, which would be very difficult to apply across cultures, history, and different kinds of societies. But it proclaims some vital divine principles and divine vision for addressing social injustice, and it sets the vital environment to Jesus' work, as we see below.

In Jubilee God acknowledges that power inequalities and injustices would enter the covenant community and so built in a mechanism to put these right and make things just. We can see Jubilee as a kind of "institutionalised grace" tackling the effects of sin and greed at the structural level.



Jesus and the economy

At the opening of Jesus' public ministry he reads the words from Isaiah 61:1-2 in his home synagogue in Nazareth:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

A key to this passage is the phrase, ‘to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’. This is a clear and direct reference to the ‘year of Jubilee’. Jesus declares his Messiahship and the kingdom of God, and says that the signs of jubilee identify them: meeting the needs of the poor and tackling power inequalities and injustices.

In Jesus' ministry there are numerous examples that point to the ultimate fulfillment of Jubilee in Shalom. That is, meeting material needs, establishing social justice and the call to personal integrity. For example, telling us not to be anxious about material things in Luke 12; feeding the multitude in Luke 9; forgiving debts, freeing captives; restoring property.

What is the nature of the current economy?

Economic activity can be used for good, however, at both global and national level, the economy today is marked by inequalities of wealth and power. Some of the aspects of the economy that, in their current form, contribute to these power imbalances are:

Trade⁹

Trade is a way of overcoming local, regional and national scarcity, and can generate new livelihood and employment opportunities. Trade can therefore play an important part in contributing to poverty reduction and improving people's quality of life. But international trade rules to date have favoured the narrow commercial interests of the most powerful trading nations and the largest corporations, at the expense of the wider public interest and smaller economic enterprises.

There is an increasing gap between many of the stated objectives of the world trading regime and the global reality of growing inequalities and environmental damage. The benefits of the international trade system have gone to those who already have the most, while many of the poorest have failed to benefit fully and some have even been made poorer.

Many poor countries do not have equal access to trade negotiations and so don't have their concerns reflected in decision-making. And too often, Northern governments have failed to practice what they preach on trade issues. They argue for free trade, yet because they are more powerful; they ignore the rules and erect barriers against imports from developing countries.

The rich and powerful must change their ways, and their thinking, in order for a new and pro-poor trade regime to be created.

⁹ Information from Trade Justice Movement, website in resources section.



Debt¹⁰

Debt is one of the key sources of power inequalities between rich and poor in the world today. Lending can be a good way of providing upfront funding for all sorts of needs, but as the current economic crisis shows, irresponsible lending can have catastrophic consequences.

In terms of poor countries' debts, the rich world has contributed to a massive crisis, through decades of reckless lending, without thinking about whether the money could be paid back and what it was going to be spent on. As is so often the case, it has been the poorest people in the world who have suffered the most.

After the Second World War and the end of most colonial regimes, many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America sought their own paths to economic development. Banks sought to lend money to these governments, seeing them as a safe investment. As the Cold War deepened, governments from both East and West blocs lent increasingly recklessly as they sought to gain political influence. The situation was dramatically intensified by the oil price hikes and currency changes in the 1970s, when cheap money flooded the financial markets and banks lent it on to poor countries without regard for the consequences. The change in economic situation from the late 1970s, with rising interest rates, deflation and falling commodity prices, caught developing countries in a spiralling debt trap.

Since this time, despite many plans to reduce the debt burden, the crisis has continued to engulf many poor countries. Today developing countries' debt stocks stand at a staggering \$2.9 trillion and every day the poorest countries pay the rich world almost \$100 million in debt repayments. An estimated minimum of \$400 billion needs to be cancelled for around 100 countries if they are to be able to meet the basic needs of their people. Campaigners argue that many more debts, which arose from irresponsible loans, should be written off as illegitimate. This might include: debts on loans that the lender knowingly gave to dictators or oppressive regimes; debts on loans that the lender knew was going to be stolen through corruption; debts in payment for projects that failed because of bad advice or incompetence by the lenders; and debt on unfair terms, such as very high interest rates.

Tax and capital flight

Many multinational companies and others operating in developing countries undermine the tax base of these countries by depositing funds and assets 'offshore'. Often these flows travel through secretive structures established in 'tax havens' and end up in bank accounts in the West. Between \$500 and \$800 billion flows out of developing countries in this way every year.

The reality is that developing countries are actually giving rich countries more than they receive in aid or investment. It has been estimated that, for every dollar that goes to the developing world in aid, more than \$7 comes back to the Western world through illicit proceeds.

¹⁰ Information from Jubilee Debt Campaign



This situation makes it impossible for developing countries to raise the taxes needed to invest in their own economies and public services; makes them dependent on powerful aid donors, and more vulnerable to having to follow 'conditions' set by lenders and donors, as explained earlier.

Economic governance – the institutions

The current economic crisis is clearly showing how the economy is increasingly interdependent and complex. But whilst markets become increasingly global, the influence of political institutions required for their democratic, equitable and effective functioning decreases every day. Two central institutions are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Another is the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The IMF was created to promote stability in the international monetary system. In recent years it has come under criticism for failing to spot economic crises in advance and to provide solutions when they are needed. It is a very powerful organisation, and although 184 countries are members, decision-making power is allocated on the size of a country's economy. So the US has 17% of the vote, and an effective veto in many cases, whereas by comparison the combined vote of 47 African nations is just above 6%.

The IMF has huge power over many developing countries, particularly those that have had problems repaying their debts, as we've already discussed. They require countries to meet often harsh and undemocratic conditions when they lend money or give debt relief. They also have a so-called 'gatekeeper' role, which makes them even more powerful. This means that other donors, like rich countries or development banks, look for an IMF programme in a country before they will give aid there.

The World Bank's role is to provide long-term lending to finance development projects and economic reform; in 2006 it provided over \$21 billion to over 100 countries. This gives the Bank enormous power in most of the world, and critics argue that some of its projects are very problematic, in terms of the affect they have on the environment, or because they displace indigenous people, for example. Again, however, decisions are made not by the countries where the Bank is operating, but on the basis of who can afford to give the most money to the Bank. So the US has 20% of votes, whereas the sub-Saharan African countries have just 7%.

The World Bank and the IMF are also criticised for the conditions they attach to their loans, which are often still based on what is known as the 'Washington Consensus', focusing on liberalisation—of trade, investment and the financial sector—, deregulation and privatisation of nationalised industries. Often the conditions are attached without regard for the borrower countries' individual circumstances and often these policies do not work. And this process means that governments in developing countries are made accountable to officials in Washington – bureaucratic power – rather than to their own people – democratic power.

Defining the economy



Having set out some aspects of the global economy, and how power is used within it, it is interesting to reflect on some of the principles about the *state* from the previous section, and see if they could also apply to the economy from a Christian point of view:¹¹

- **The economy is secular:** which is not the same as being pagan; rather it is to be seen for what it really is, the fact that it belongs to this world and this age.
- **The economy is merely permitted:** which means it is not God's best; the ideal is direct rule from God as illustrated among the early Hebrews and will find fulfilment in the kingdom of God.
- **The economy is essentially relative:** which means that there is no such thing as 'the economy' in any sense of it having some sort of independent existence. Each particular economic system has simply developed out of the human ability to live cooperatively. An economic system is simply the ability to live like that under the conditions of sin and rebellion against God. At the coming of the kingdom, while our creativity, communalism, and productivity will survive, the particular expressions of the economy we have created, will not.
- **The economy is intrinsically flawed:** which means that all economies, however stable and peaceful they appear, have their origins in violence and a lust for power which can only be maintained by the use of violence. This is perhaps a principle about states that does not always apply to economies. Nevertheless, we can see in the sinful aspects of our own, and historical expressions of economy, the use of violence and lust for wealth, which mirror the problems inherent in the state.

The economy, as much as the state, needs to be understood from the perspective of the biblical understanding of 'principalities and powers'¹². As we previously noted, these refer to those powers spiritual and political, invisible and structural, which determine our existence and which have largely become demonised.

Discussion point: Do these principles apply as well to the economy? What are the differences?

LIVING IN AND RELATING TO THE ECONOMY

Christians have engaged with economic power in different ways over the centuries. The Church has sometimes colluded with economic power, made money from stock markets in ways which have left many Christians uncomfortable, and attracted widespread criticism. One example is the Church of England who, in 2000, finally sold its £20m holding in one of Britain's biggest arms manufacturers, following years of pressure from anti-arms campaigners within the Church of England and outside it. Indeed there are a number of ways in which Christians have related to economic power:

11 These are adapted from an unpublished paper by Nigel Wright entitled 'Radical Perspectives on Church and State (2) : A true Church in a Free State.

12 This is developed in much more detail in 'Church and World' p 6-9; see also p 6 above



- **The economy has no relation to Christianity.** To many Christians, the economy is secular, whereas their faith is a separate sphere. This dualistic tendency is so prevalent in the church that many Christians work within the economy without at all connecting it, and its consequences, to the outworking of their faith and witness.
- **Economic power provides the means for Christian activity.** Some Christians recognise the economy's instrumental value, for example they might use some of their business profit for Church or mission based causes.
- **Business is the field of mission.** Some Christians may go to the workplace considering their purpose to be evangelism.
- **Economic power has gone wrong and should be challenged.** For some, the imbalances in economic power are a source of injustice, which Christians should challenge and work to change.

So how *should* we live in and relate to the economy?

- **Independence from...?** The church and the economy are clearly different. They have different purposes and practices. In order to critique the economy, and the disparities of wealth it engenders, the church must be seen to have integrity and not be compromised by overly benefiting from economic wealth.
- **Involvement with...?** Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible for the Church to completely separate itself from the benefits of economic wealth, and many would argue that this is not desirable either. It is the love of money, and not money per se, that is evil, Scripture tells us. And we have already pointed to the creation and biblical roots of economic activity, such as productivity, creativity, living communally, sharing and exchanging goods and services.
- **Danger of compromise..?** The difficulties come when the Church, and/ or Christian individuals, fall prey to the temptation of economic power, accumulating excessive wealth for their own benefit alone, failing to share with those in need, and turning a blind eye to the injustices of poverty and inequality. Where this is the case, people of faith must speak out and stand up, alongside the powerless, for justice, well-being for all, and *shalom*.

HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

The two biblical pictures of prophet and priest also help us in thinking about Christian attitudes to economic power and wealth. Much as with politics, we would expect Christians to play a role inside, outside, and beneath the economy. Remembering that everything we do is to be focused on the vision of the gospel, of Shalom, which is Good News for the poor.



Example: Jubilee Debt Campaign¹³

In the late 1990s, a group of campaigners came together under the banner of the biblical idea of Jubilee – to call for an end to unjust and unpayable debts of poor countries to mark the Millennium.

The pioneers of the Jubilee 2000 campaign brought courage, creativity, and acumen to the campaign. But rather than funding, popularity, or celebrity support, early Jubilee 2000 organisers were armed with nothing more than a powerful idea. Some had been campaigning on the issue for years, others were new to it; some were Christians, some from other faiths, or none. All sought to use the opportunity of the coming year 2000 to see a fresh start for the world's poor.

On 16 May 1998, 70,000 people from across Britain and the world took part in one of the biggest demonstrations the UK had ever seen: a human chain around the G8 summit in Birmingham, demanding an end to poor country debt.

Such was the impact of the demonstration that, extraordinarily, Prime Minister Tony Blair abandoned his G8 colleagues on the Saturday afternoon and came into Birmingham instead to meet the leaders of Jubilee 2000.

Birmingham was a tipping point for the debt cause. Petition signatures had reached 1.4 million. Organisers and activists who before might have thought the Jubilee 2000 campaign too complicated or too impractical now got a firm sense that its goals were really achievable. The media and G8 governments alike were impressed with the turnout. The world realised it had to pay attention – and it did.

By the time the following year came around, the debt campaign had grown beyond its founders' wildest imaginations. Numerous celebrities had signed on to the cause, most prominently Bono, lead singer of U2, and Bob Geldof. Pope John Paul II had publicly endorsed the idea of debt cancellation for the millennium. Politicians joined up too: Gordon Brown was the first political leader of stature to publicly declare support: at a Jubilee 2000 gathering in St Paul's Cathedral, in February 1999, he said, "the debt burden cripples the poorest countries and prevents them from tackling poverty and offering health and educational opportunity to their children... unsustainable debt is a burden imposed by the past on the present, which is depriving millions of their chance of a future".

And while there is no question that the involvement of celebrities has brought visibility to the debt cause, it has been the efforts of ordinary citizens which laid the foundation for the change wrought by the campaign. And there is no doubt that the Church has played an important role. The Guardian journalist Madeleine Bunting wrote that, "the secret of Jubilee 2000's success is simple but unfashionable: it is the Christian churches." One of the strengths of the debt campaign since that time has been the participation of a broad range of Christians and other faith groups.

Jubilee 2000 created the world's biggest petition, gathering 24,319,181 signatures from 166 countries by the time it was completed. In 1999, world leaders responded to the

¹³ Much of the information from this section is taken from *Unfinished Business: ten years of dropping the debt*, Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2008

pressure and announced “faster, deeper and broader” debt relief for poor countries. This debt cancellation package amounted to \$100 billion for 42 heavily indebted poor countries. This was by no means a full answer to the debt crisis, but the issue was firmly on the agenda in a way it had never been before.

After 2000, the ‘millennium moment’ for the debt campaign had of course passed, but despite its achievements, it was clear that the debt issue was not resolved. Responding in part to the desire of Christian and other grassroots supporters to carry on, the debt campaign was re-launched as Jubilee Debt Campaign in March 2001.

Jubilee Debt Campaign has continued to press for the cancellation of unpayable and unjust debt. Campaigning efforts have included: the Queen's Jubilee Petition in 2002-2003; thousands of people attending the meeting marking five year on from Birmingham in May 2003; and support for ‘World Debt Day’ in 2004 from the Presidents of Tanzania and Guyana, faith leaders, politicians and trade unionists.

In 2005, Jubilee Debt Campaign joined forces with campaigns for more and better aid, and for trade justice, and the Make Poverty History coalition was launched. The idea was to capitalise on the UK Chair of the G8 Presidency in 2005. The group met in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July 2005, and over 250,000 people turned out at the rally in Edinburgh - again one of the country's largest demonstrations. At the same time, intense attention was drawn to the cause around the world by the Live8 concerts, recorded as the show with the largest audience in history.

Once again, the G8 could not ignore the world's watchful eyes. They announced plans for a deal which aimed to wipe out much of the multilateral debt stock for countries that had successfully completed the first debt relief process. This represented an additional \$50 billion in debt cancellation promises for a potential 41 countries. This failed to extend debt cancellation to more countries – a major blow – but it did provide much deeper relief for some poor countries.

The debt movement continues today, with groups campaigning on debt in dozens of countries, including Jubilee Debt Campaign in the UK. Significant amounts of debt cancellation have been delivered to the world's poorest countries, over \$90 billion, making a real difference to the lives of millions of people in poor countries.

But not all of what has been promised has actually been delivered – and what was promised was far from enough. For every \$1 that poor countries receive in aid, even now they still return \$5 in debt service payments. Around \$400 billion more in debt cancellation is required, simply to meet the basic needs and rights of citizens in poor countries.

On top of this, much of the debt is unjust, originating in irresponsible lending decisions. This debt should be cancelled outright. And there are fundamental problems with the debt relief process, which needs to be changed into one that is fair and equitable, and that prevents a future debt crisis from occurring. Christians, church denominations, and parachurch organisations, remain core supporters of the call for a Jubilee for the world's poor.

SHALOM POWER

We turn finally to consider how our understanding of Shalom can provide us with an alternative way of using of power. You might want to discuss your own experiences or ideas in groups, or you can use the list below as a starting point.

Powerful Action?

Here are 198 examples of non-violent action, which Gene Sharp categories in his three volume book 'The Politics of Nonviolent Action' pub Porter Sargeant 1973. Some seem to overlap with others but each is actually distinct (see the book for details). Are there any of these options that you would think a Christian ought not to engage in; if so why? Are there any possible actions that you think Sharpe has omitted? Does the era of the Internet add other possibilities?

▪ PROTEST AND PERSUASION

• Formal Statements

- Public speeches
- Letter of opposition or support
- Declarations by organisations
- Signed public statements
- Declarations of indictment and intention
- Group or mass petitions

• Communications with a wider audience

- Slogans, caricatures and symbols
- Banners, posters and displays
- Leaflets, pamphlets and books
- Newspapers and journals
- Records, radio and television
- Skywriting and earthwriting

• Group representations

- Deputations
- Mock awards
- Group lobbying
- Picketing
- Mock elections

• Symbolic public acts

- Displays of flags or symbolic colours
- Wearing of symbols
- Prayer and worship
- Delivering symbolic objects
- Protest disrobings
- Destruction of own property
- Symbolic lights



- Displays of portraits
- Paint as protest
- New signs and names
- Symbolic sounds
- Symbolic reclamations
- Rude gestures

- **Pressures on individuals**
- 'Haunting ' officials
- Taunting officials
- Fraternization
- Vigils

- **Drama and music**
- Humorous skits and pranks
- Performances of plays and music
- Singing
- Processions
- Marches
- Parades
- Religious processions
- Pilgrimages
- Motorcades

- **Honouring the dead**
- Political mourning
- Mock funerals
- Demonstrative funerals
- Homage at burial places

- **Public assemblies**
- Assemblies of protest or support
- Protest meetings
- Camouflaged meetings of protest
- Teach-ins

- **Withdrawal and renunciation**
- Walk-outs
- Silence
- Renouncing honours
- Turning one's back

- **Social non-cooperation**
- Ostracism of persons
- Social boycott
- Selective social boycott
- Lysistratic nonaction



- Excommunication
- Interdict

- **Rejecting events, customs and institutions**
- Suspension of social and sports activities
- Boycott of social affairs
- Student strike
- Social disobedience
- Withdrawal from social institutions

- **Withdrawal from the social system**
- Stay-at-home
- Total personal non-cooperation
- 'Flight' of workers
- Sanctuary
- Collective disappearance
- Protest emigration (hijrat)

- **Economic non-cooperation (Boycott)**

- **Actions by consumers**
- Consumers' boycott
- Nonconsumption of boycotted goods
- Policy of austerity
- Rent withholding
- Refusal to rent
- National consumers' boycott
- International consumers' boycott

- **Action by workers and producers**
- Workers' boycott
- Producers' boycott

- **Action by middlemen**
- Suppliers' and handlers' boycott

- **Action by owners and management**
- Traders' boycott
- Refusal to let or sell property
- Lockout
- Refusal of industrial assistance
- Merchants' 'general strike'

- **Action by holders of financial resources**
- Withdrawal of bank deposits
- Refusal to pay fees, dues and assessments
- Refusal to pay debts or interest



- Severance of funds and credit
- Revenue refusal
- Refusal of a government's money

- **Action by governments**
- Domestic embargo
- Blacklisting of traders
- International sellers embargo
- International buyers embargo
- International trade embargo

- **Economic Non-cooperation (Strike)**

- **Symbolic strikes**
- Protest strike
- Quickie walkout (lighting strike)
- Agricultural strikes
- Peasant strike
- Farm workers' strike

- **Strikes by special groups**
- Refusal of impressed labour
- Prisoners' strike
- Craft strike
- Professional strike

- **Ordinary industrial strikes**
- Establishment strike
- Industry strike
- Sympathetic strike

- **Restricted strikes**
- Detailed strike
- Bumper strike
- Slowdown strike
- Working-to-rule strike
- Reporting 'sick' (sick-in)
- Strike by resignation
- Limited strike
- Selective strike

- Multi-industry strike
- Generalized strike
- General strike

- **Combined strike and economic closure**
- Hartal



- Economic shutdown
- **Political non-cooperation**
 - **Rejection of authority**
 - Withholding or withdrawing of allegiance
 - Refusal of public support
 - Texts and speeches advocating resistance
- **Citizen's noncooperation with government**
 - Boycott of legislative bodies
 - Boycott of elections
 - Boycott of state employment and roles
 - Boycott of state departments and agencies
 - Withdrawal from state schools and colleges
 - Boycott of state supported organisations
 - Refusal to assist enforcement agents
 - Removal of own signs and placemarks
 - Refusal to accept appointed officials
 - Refusal to dissolve existing institutions
- **Citizens' alternatives to obedience**
 - Reluctant and slow compliance
 - Nonobedience in absence of supervision
 - Popular nonobedience
 - Disguised disobedience
 - Refusal of a group or meeting to disperse
 - Sit-down
 - Resistance to conscription or deportation
 - Hiding, escape and false identities
 - Civil disobedience of 'illegitimate' laws
- **Action by government personnel**
 - Selective refusal of support by state aides
 - Blocking lines of command and information
 - Stalling and obstruction
 - General administrative noncooperation
 - Judicial noncooperation
 - Deliberate inefficiency
 - Mutiny
- **Domestic governmental action**
 - Quasi-legal evasions and delays
 - Noncooperation by constituent state units
- **International government action**
 - Changes in diplomatic and other representation



- Delay and cancellation of diplomatic events
- Withholding of diplomatic recognition
- Severance of diplomatic relations
- Withdrawal of international organisations
- Refusal of membership in international bodies
- Expulsion from international organisations

- **Nonviolent intervention**

- **Psychological intervention**

- Self-exposure to the elements
- The fast
- Fast of moral pressure
- Hunger strike
- Satyagrahic fast
- Reverse trial
- Nonviolent harassment

- **Physical intervention**

- Sit-in
- Stand-in
- Ride-in
- Wade-in
- Mill-in
- Pray-in
- Nonviolent raids
- Nonviolent air raids
- Nonviolent invasion
- Nonviolent interjection
- Nonviolent obstruction
- Nonviolent occupation

- **Social intervention**

- Establishing new social patterns
- Overloading of facilities
- Stall-in
- Speak-in
- Guerrilla theatre
- Alternative social institutions
- Alternative communication system

- **Economic intervention**

- Reverse strike
- Stay-in strike
- Nonviolent land seizure
- Defence of blockades
- Politically motivated counterfeiting



- **Preclusive purchasing**
- Seizure of assets
- Dumping
- Selective patronage
- Alternative markets
- Alternative transport systems
- Alternative economic institutions
- **Political intervention**
- Overloading administrative systems
- Disclosing identity of secret agents
- Seeking imprisonment
- Civil disobedience of 'neutral' laws
- Work-on without collaboration
- Dual sovereignty and parallel government

The Church must be active at the very centre of power structures. The relationships between the nations of the world, between the rich and poor, the powerful and powerless, are Christian concerns. We recognise that at the present time it is of the nature of things that power will be abused, but nonetheless we are to be 'salt' and 'light' within that context in a way that makes a real impact. We are working for justice within structures that only God will ultimately put right; we are working together with him. As we do this we must...

- **Pray for...**

- **Righteous government:** Praying for rulers and authorities that their administration might express peace. This is to be a global concern. Government is part of God's social infrastructure within the world and is intended to be a means of blessing to society (Rm 13:1-9; 1Pt 2:13-17).

- **Work for...**

- **Just trade:** In a world where there is great inequality in the enjoyment of wealth and the distribution of natural resources and manufactured goods, Christians must encourage sharing and fair prices, and challenge exploitation and isolationism. Conflict in trade can be as savage as the battlefield;
- **Gentle lifestyle:** In a world of industrialisation we are exploiting the environment of its finite resources and polluting the biosphere. Christians must work for lifestyles that are creation sensitive. As more people want more and more of less and less of the earth's resources the outcome can only be conflict;
- **Shared ideas:** In a world so rich in diverse cultures and creative minds there is so much to be learned between nations and so much to be enjoyed. Art, science and philosophy are the wealth of nations to be shared or differences to seed conflict. The universality of the gospel can take this up creatively;
- **Reduced arms:** In a world of huge nuclear and conventional arsenals which are the products of both greed and insecurity Christians must do all they can to reduce military tension and weapons. We do not expect to remove all weapons completely, but we can stand against the arms trade and the evils it spawns.



▪ Watch for...

- **Militant ideology:** In our world there are many individuals, groups and even nations who are motivated by ideas and philosophies that have world conquest as their aim. As Christians we must recognise this and be 'as wise as serpents';
- **Aggressive nationalism:** In our world this century nationalism has been a major force, it comes from peoples' desire for identity and is a powerful force. We must recognise how it expresses itself and not be duped by it;
- **Exploiting commerce:** In our world economic power lies in the hands of a few. Multinational companies stand astride national boundaries and manipulate the media. Creating tensions that can generate conflict.

The challenge is huge, there is so much we can do, and the opportunity is unique.

Questions

1. What would you say is a Christian understanding of the state?
2. How would you advise a Christian friend who wanted to join a political party and stand for parliament?

Reading and resources

V Eller '*Christian Anarchy*' Eerdmans 1987
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C Wright '*The People of God and the State*' Grove Books 1990
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L Verduin '*The Anatomy of a Hybrid*' Eerdmans 1976
JH Yoder '*The Politics of Jesus*' Herald 1972
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Jubilee Debt Campaign, www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk
Trade Justice Movement, www.tjm.org.uk
Tax Justice Network, www.taxjustice.net

