

Divided Loyalties? Christian Identity in Wartime America

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full text at <http://www.westmont.edu/~work/articles/patriotism.pdf>

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The subject for this talk is "patriotism and Christian identity." What is the relationship between our identity as followers of Jesus Christ, and the devotion we show to our countries? What should it be?

At one point I had suggested the title, "patriotism *and/or/as* Christian identity." Fortunately the marketers of this event shot down *that* trial balloon. It doesn't exactly "preach." But it does address a serious question: What word should come between "patriotism" and "Christian identity"? Is our allegiance to Jesus *expressed as* allegiance to our countries? Are we faced with allegiance to Jesus *or* allegiance to our countries? Or is the relationship more complex?

My presentation comes in two parts. The first part is a diagnosis of how this relationship is typically understood in America. It is worked out in many ways, which usually fall into two camps I will dub "Constantinianism" and "counter-Constantinianism." The second part is a prescription of how Christian communities should understand their relationships with civil communities. While it resembles both Constantinianism and counter-Constantinianism, it is identical to neither. It sees no tension between qualified Christian loyalty to human communities and their rulers, and unqualified Christian loyalty to God. But the faithful expression of those two loyalties cannot help but raise tensions between the Church and those rulers.

Diagnosis: Patriotism *as* Christian Identity

The first position is "patriotism *as* Christian identity." Here a Christian expresses faith through allegiance to his or her country. We call its institutional form "Constantinianism."

Now classical Constantinianism describes a formal alliance between civil institutions and Christian institutions, or even a fusion of the two. In the U.K., Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, and the head of the Church. This makes London the capital of women in Christian leadership, and an ideal example of Constantinianism. The interests of state are the interests of the established Church – by definition.

America has a constitutional prohibition on such a relationship, so you might think we are not a Constantinian nation. But the First Amendment merely states that “Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The courts has interpreted that clause to allow a Pledge of Allegiance, a currency, oaths in court, and other national symbols to appeal to a “God” under whom the nation lives, in whom it trusts, and to whom it swears. So how is America Constantinian, and how is it not?

Let me speak from experience. I inherited from my parents a respect for “God and country” that really equated faithful service to God and faithful service to country. The purest form of this influence in my life was the Boy Scouts, in which my whole family was involved. In fact, the Boy Scouts serves such a useful purpose in exposing the nuances of these positions that my diagnosis will center on it. We take life most seriously when it involves our children. This is as true of our national commitments as it is of our spiritual commitments. The Boy Scouts is a microcosm of the way this generation teaches the next generation how to be like us, if not better. To dismiss it as kids’ stuff is to forget how important children are both to our national identities and to our Christian identities.

I can still remember taking the Scout Oath at every meeting: “On my honor, I will do my best, *to do my duty, to God and my country*, to obey the Scout Law. To help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.”

There is room in the Boy Scouts of America for most every religious faith: Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, various flavors of Protestant, Unitarian, Mormon. The Scouts understand all these confessions to converge neatly with duty to the United States. When you think about that, it is a staggering claim. But it is accepted everyday in this country. (In fact, the Scouts' "God and my country" echoes the motto of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps, "For God and Country," another juxtaposition that is accepted uncritically by most Americans, and most American Christian communities.) Furthermore, it is accepted in every nation-state in which the Scouts operate, even those that go to war against each other.

As a Scout you can earn a special award, called "God and Country," in association with your church. (The God and Country program actually operates at every age level in Scouting: "God and Me" for Tiger Cubs and Cub Scouts from grades 1-3, "God and Family" for Cubs and Webelos in grades 4-5, "God and Church" for Boy Scouts in grades 6-8, "God and Life" for older Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts, and the "God and Country" program for adult mentoring of children.)

Muslim Scouts have a parallel set of programs: The "Bismallah" or "In the Name of God" program, and the "Allaho Akber" program. Buddhist programs train Scouts in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Mormon Cubs can earn the "Faith in God" award, and Boy Scouts the "On My Honor" award. (Mormonism has become the most influential religious group in the BSA. Mormon Wards sponsor more Scout Troops than any other organization except for public schools.)

But is the Scouts' religious pluralism simply an expression of American-style pluralism? Actually, no – because the overtly theistic Scout Oath makes it impossible for *atheists* to participate in Scouting. The Scouts are happy to juxtapose loyalty to America and loyalty to God

defined in terms of Protestant or Catholic Christianity *or* Judaism *or* Islam *or* Mormonism (which is poly- or henotheistic) *or even* Hinduism *or* Buddhism (at least some forms of which deny God), *or even a God left undefined*, who presumably is the One mentioned on America's money and its Declaration of Independence. But not a loyalty to America independent of loyalty to *any* of the Known and Unknown Gods. For the Scouts, Christian identity (like other forms of acceptable religious identity) is a form of patriotism. They are not two different loyalties, but one loyalty expressed in two necessarily compatible ways (and, when we include Scouts of other religions, many more than two). As the *Scout Handbook* has said since 1911, "The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God.... The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members." Religious observance is a form of civic observance. Scout religion is civil religion.

This relationship is duplicated *exactly* in the youth and adult branches of the Masonic Service Organization. The Order of DeMolay (for boys), International Order of the Rainbow for Girls, and International Order of Job's Daughters all demand both patriotism and religion (of the member's choice). If the Church of England is the Conservative Party at prayer, the Scouts are the Masons toasting marshmallows around a campfire.

This is the dominant vision of the relationship of patriotism to Christian identity in my own family. Scouting has been a proud family tradition. I am an Eagle Scout, brother of an Eagle Scout, son of an Eagle Scout, nephew of an Eagle Scout, and grandson of an Eagle Scout. It comes as something of a shock to discover that my teenage Monday nights and weekend camping trips were a catechism in Masonic American Constantinianism!

Patriotism *or* Christian Identity

The second position on the relationship sees the two loyalties as “either/or”. We are faced with a choice between patriotism *or* Christian identity. This vision considers love and devotion to one’s nation-state to be incompatible with devotion to Jesus Christ. God and Caesar seem to be competitors rather than partners.

People who live this way are automatically marginal to any practice that significantly involves the practice of patriotism. So the groups that truly dispute Scouting’s vision of God and country occupy the margins of American public life: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, and atheists who might otherwise support the Scouts. Their marginal status testifies to the dominance of this vision of patriotism as Christian identity. (“Marginal” does not mean “unimportant”: All three of these groups have been deeply influential in American history. But they have exercised their cultural influence from American cultural margins. It would be hard to appreciate this in Boston or Salt Lake City, but easy in Omaha.)

The deep differences among the first two groups reveal how differently the word “or” can operate in this vision. However, there is a pattern in the chaos: The “or”-ness of the relationship leaves the fundamental idea of patriotism intact.

Unitarians are enthusiastically participatory in American public life: In (usually liberal to radical) politics, in local, national, and global activism, in culture, and in public service. This has been a feature of Unitarian culture since its American ascendancy in the eighteenth century. Especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Unitarians were prominent in American politics (Thomas Jefferson, for instance, is an honorary and perhaps unofficial Unitarian), American education (Harvard University), and American culture (the Transcendentalists). These people seem *made* for the Boy Scouts. And for decades the two cooperated harmoniously.

But then the Culture Wars of the last thirty-something years split the country ideologically between “conservative” and “liberal.” The late sixties brought a twist to the notion of patriotism that became vastly influential. One mode of patriotism became associated with the culture and family structures of the generations born before 1945; with the Republican Party of Goldwater, then Nixon, then Reagan; with support for the Vietnam and Cold Wars; with opposition to affirmative action; with economic deregulation, free trade, and low taxation, and high growth; and so on. Another mode of patriotism became associated with sixties youth culture and non-nuclear family structures; with the Democratic Party of McGovern, then Mondale; with national pacifism and disarmament; with support for affirmative action and the extension of antidiscrimination measures to other than ethnic groups; with government intervention in the economy and trade; with environmentalism; and so on.

It is important to recognize that *both* of these political cultures were essentially patriotic, even when they called themselves (and each other) revolutionary. It is easy to see the “conservative” side in the Culture Wars as patriotic. It is less obvious, but no less true, that the “liberal” camp is essentially patriotic, even in its so-called “anti-patriotism.” Both sides have often seen public activism as the measure of social and individual identity – including religious identity. The “Christian right” has been more visible in the former camp than the “religious left” in the latter, but in both camps were plenty of people who understood their lives of faith in terms of the struggle over true patriotism. Here the “or” between nationalism and religious identity is really just another form of “as”.

On Sept. 13’s *700 Club*, Jerry Falwell offered a receptive Pat Robertson an interpretation of the attacks of September 11: “I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle,

the ACLU, People for the American Way – all of them who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, ‘You helped this happen.’” This claim, which called down wrath from the center and left and (public) disavowal from the right, and forced retractions from both televangelists over the next several days, is both patriotic and subversive – an affirmation of American public life only as a call for its thorough transformation.

In Sept. 25’s *San Francisco Chronicle*, Barbara Kingsolver responded from the other side of the Culture Wars, alleging that

patriotism threatens free speech with death. It is infuriated by thoughtful hesitation, constructive criticism of our leaders and pleas for peace. It despises people of foreign birth who’ve spent years learning our culture and contributing their talents to our economy. It has specifically blamed homosexuals, feminists and the American Civil Liberties Union. In other words, the American flag stands for intimidation, censorship, violence, bigotry, sexism, homophobia, and shoving the Constitution through a paper shredder?

No one is accusing Kingsolver of being a patriot (though many have accused her of taking leave of her rationality). But reading further yields a different picture:

... my patriotic duty is to recapture my flag from the men now waving it in the name of jingoism and censorship. ... I would like to stand up for my flag and wave it over a few things I believe in, including but not limited to the protection of dissenting points of view. After 225 years, I vote to retire the rocket’s red glare and the bullet wound as obsolete symbols of Old Glory. We desperately need a new iconography of patriotism. I propose we rip stripes of cloth from the uniforms of public servants who rescued the injured and panic-stricken, remaining at their post until it fell down on them. The red glare of candles held in vigils everywhere as peace-loving people pray for the bereaved, and plead for compassion and restraint. The blood donated to the Red Cross. The stars of film and theater and music who are using their influence to raise money for recovery. The small hands of schoolchildren collecting pennies, toothpaste, teddy bears, anything they think might help the kids who’ve lost their moms and dads.

This is anti-patriotism as a form of patriotism, an affirmation of America only as a call for its transformation. Barbara Kingsolver and Jerry Falwell are feathers in the left and right wings of the same eagle.

The split between Unitarians and Scouts occurred because the two organizations took different sides in the Culture Wars. Unitarian Universalists are radically inclusivist, allowing people to join their “church” whether they believe in one God, many, or none at all. Furthermore, they have taken a strong position against discrimination in all forms – including discrimination on the basis of sexual practice.

Meanwhile, the Scouts has slowly moved from its place in the American mainline to occupy the conservative side of the Culture Wars, without cutting its ties to the organizations in the American mainline that have moved to the liberal side. This has meant that Unitarian commitments to God and country now conflict with Scouting’s commitments to God and country. Unitarians now have a strained relationship with Scouting not because they are unpatriotic, but because their position on homosexuality conflicts with the Scouts’. One group discriminates against homosexuals, the other rejects discrimination against homosexuals. The God of exclusion battles the God of inclusion in the American public square. (UUA churches still give out “Religion in Life” awards to Unitarian Scouts, but now over the BSA’s own objections.)

By the way, the Scouts have won the Supreme Court battle over this one, but they are bound to lose the war, because their strategy of defining God in terms of American public life plays entirely on the Unitarians’ terms. The fact that homosexuality, not the absurdity of Mormons and Hindus and Buddhists and Unitarians all swearing duty to “God,” sparks the greatest cultural battle in the history of Scouting shows that the Culture Wars are not a battle between Christian faith and secular humanism, but a granddaughter of the ideological contest between the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Much anti-patriotism, at least

most of what makes it into the papers and onto the evening news, is really just shadow patriotism.

This is how the relationship of patriotism and Christian identity is usually debated in our culture. Should we be patriotic patriots, or anti-patriotic patriots? American Revolutionaries, or French Revolutionaries? The problem is that both answers leave patriotism in control in setting the agenda for Christian communities. And that means that we are answering the wrong question.

On grounds such as these, Jehovah's Witnesses answer, "Neither." They see symbols of American civil religion in much the way that early Christians saw the Roman civil religion that required sacrifice to images of the emperor as evidence of political loyalty. Thus Witnesses practice *withdrawal* from civic involvements they consider incompatible with following Jehovah. This is not because America in particular is a government with sinful features, but because all worldly governments are instituted by Satan. Here the "or" operates as a stark choice between membership in the Christian community and full participation in the civil community. The former is orthodoxy, the latter idolatry. Allegiance to the flag and other nationalistic practices make participation in Scouting and many other impure forms of life strictly forbidden. Against both the American Revolution and the French Revolution, Jehovah's Witnesses wait for apocalyptic deliverance.

As the Unitarians and Scouts who face each other in the Culture Wars look like opposites but turn out to be half-brothers, so the Jehovah's Witnesses that look unlike both turn out to have more in common than we might think. Against the hyper-patriotism of Mormons and the Moral Majority, and the shadow patriotism of Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses are the true anti-patriots. They offer no contribution whatsoever to American governmental authority.

The wider society has found the Witnesses helpful in exposing contradictions between the imagined religious freedoms of all Americans, and the actual constraints placed upon Americans by institutions such as flag salutes, public oaths, compulsory public and military service, and so on; but Witnesses have not *set out* to protect these freedoms.

In withdrawing from the public sphere, Witnesses leave its claims unchallenged. Where Mormons are Constantinians and Unitarians are shadow Constantinians, Witnesses are “counter-Constantinians.” The connection comes in that all three accept the nation-state’s monopoly on American public life. All three respect the rules placed on them by their wider democratic society, and agree to contribute or not to contribute according to those rules.

Patriotism *and* Christian Identity

The third group I mentioned that disputes the vision of the Boy Scouts is atheists and agnostics, both of whom are prohibited both from leadership and from membership in Scouts. Many of these would like to participate in everything about Scouts besides the civil religion. But the Scout Oath ties their hands. Their argument is that the “God” of the Boy Scouts is irrelevant to the organization’s mission and inconsistent with its character as a quasi-public institution. The Scouts’ insistence on belief, they argue, is “un-American.” The Scouts argue that religion is a personal matter with public consequences; agnostics argue that religion is a personal matter with private consequences, and thus unimportant to both citizenship and Scouting.

The agnostics who would decouple Scouting’s religion from Scouting’s patriotism give us the third word to describe this relationship: “and”. We should talk not of patriotism *as* Christian identity, or of patriotism *or* Christian identity, but simply of patriotism *and* Christian identity, of two things that sometimes happen to find themselves together. I may be a Scout who happens to be agnostic, while you may be a Scout who happens to be a believer. Patriotism and religious identity are two different things, indifferent to each other, each operating in its own

sphere. The analogous claims that “I am an American who happens to be a Christian” and “I am a Christian who happens to be American” express mutual indifference between political practice and religious practice. Politics and religion pass each other in the night – or at least they should, for the border between them is the border between public and private. (Being the philosophical society that you are, you will recognize this boundary as a feature of modernism.)

The Scouts turn out to be fellow travelers with the Masons as proponents of American-style Constantinianism. Unitarians, the Moral Majority, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are counter-Constantinians. Who are the fellow travelers of the agnostics?

Evangelicals, that’s who – many of us, anyway. Evangelicals spent fifty years in the American cultural wilderness, retreating from wider American society after the Scopes trial and, with a few exceptions like Billy Graham, re-emerging only in the seventies. Mid-century evangelicals developed a host of parallel organizations: Specifically evangelical denominations, schools and colleges (such as Westmont), bookstore chains, media outlets – and, as we shall see, versions of Scouting. They retreated from their nineteenth-century American style of Constantinianism, in which they waged campaigns against evils like slavery and alcohol abuse, into a twentieth-century “non-Constantinianism” which viewed the American establishment with relative indifference.

Unlike Jehovah’s Witnesses, evangelical organizations have not been *hostile* to patriotism and even nationalism. Evangelicals participate in elected office, especially since Jimmy Carter’s election in 1976. Evangelicals tend to be enthusiastic participants in the U.S. military. Yet these involvements are seen as secondary to the real mission of evangelicalism, which is evangelistic and missionary. Jimmy Carter is a parable of this hierarchy of loyalties. After he retired from the presidency, he returned to teaching Sunday School, and worked tirelessly on behalf of Habitat for

Humanity – giving the impression that he saw this as a promotion. (Carter stands in absolute contrast with Bill Clinton, who quite obviously does not know what to do himself now that he is no longer president.)

Scouting has traditionally been reluctant to allow awards from evangelical groups, not because it sees them as threatening, but because it does not see these groups as “traditional.” (This suspicion gets especially ugly when the unrecognized traditions are historic African-American denominations such as the AME Zion Church.) The suspicion has often been mutual: Evangelicals who were already unhappy with liberal Protestantism were happy to create their own evangelical versions of Scouting such as Pioneer Clubs, Royal Ambassadors, and the Christian Service Brigade. These ersatz Scouts have evangelical statements of faith that resemble Westmont’s, seeking to ensure that the institutional identity and mission of these organizations stays distinctively evangelical. The web sites of these three youth organizations make no appeals to patriotic loyalty as intrinsic to their own missions. They are focused on evangelism, mission, and discipleship, not on “duty to country.”

An exception to this rule is the “Royal Rangers” program of the Assemblies of God. Like the others, it mimics Boy Scouts without including the Scouts’ religious pluralism. Yet the Royal Rangers duplicate Scouting’s vision of patriotism as a form of Christian faithfulness. The Royal Rangers say three “pledges of allegiance”: To the American flag, the so-called “Christian flag” (“I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag and to the Savior for Whose Kingdom it stands; one brotherhood, uniting all true Christians in service and in love”), and the Holy Bible (“I pledge allegiance to the Bible, God’s Holy Word. I will make it a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, and will hide its words in my heart that I may not sin against God”). The Royal Rangers

website pictures two rangers, one holding the American flag and the other holding the Christian flag. (The American flag is higher.)

You may sense an imperfect fit between the evangelicalism I am describing and the evangelicalism you may have grown up in. That is because the last fifty years have seen evangelicalism transformed from an isolationist, Jehovah's Witness-style abandonment of American public life, to a parallel, Pentecostal-style duplication of American public life, to a participatory, Mormon-like argument with American public life, and now to an integrated, Episcopal assimilation into American public life. We evangelicals are becoming the new mainline, and it shows. Our counter-Constantinianism has been morphing into classical American Constantinianism.

Prescription: Jeremiah or Constantine?

Lest this come across as an smug dismissal of everyone else from the heights of my ivory tower, I want to be clear that I am sympathetic to all these visions. My Scout sash and uniform still sit in my closet. I love my deceased mainline father, who was a Scoutmaster; my traditionalist Episcopal mother, who as a latter-day culture warrior now supports the BSA more vociferously than ever; my postmodern Episcopal sister, who admires Kingsolver; and my ultramodern Unitarian brother, who teaches world religions in his Sunday School. Furthermore, I feel nostalgia for the old days when I was a naïve Boy Scout, then a Hal Lindsey-era premillennial conspiracy theorist, then a Pat Robertson admirer and Christian activist, then an apolitical evangelist and mission-supporter. Either I or someone in my nuclear family has occupied every one of these visions of patriotism and/or/as Christian identity.

Nevertheless, something leaves me dissatisfied with all of them. Something drives me back to the drawing board, back upon the Christian tradition to revisit the question. Furthermore,

my dissatisfaction becomes increasingly urgent with every passing year, as my family is faced with the concrete questions of how to raise my growing children first as Christians, and second as citizens. My diagnosis must give way to a prescription.

Mainline Christian ethicists might predict that I will next appeal to H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, with its typology of five relationships between "Christ" and "culture" (or, better, between "Christianity" and "civilization"). But that is not where I am going. Synthesizing these visions, or preferring one to the others, will not solve Niebuhr's "enduring problem," because each vision, like each of Niebuhr's types, lacks a robust account of *the Christian community as indispensable agent of world transformation*. Our culture's ecclesiologies are as underdetermined as Niebuhr's. Combining compounds the problem rather than alleviating it. Having played according to the rules of the Enlightenment and its grand American experiment, they have become captives, unable to describe themselves as much more than "religions," "denominations," "core values," "worldviews," or "interest groups." These categories are both culturally sensible, and theologically unintelligible. We can only escape their shortcomings by overthrowing them.

Niebuhr is more helpful than critics like John Howard Yoder suggest (Stassen, ed., 1996). His analysis can be rescued from its own weaknesses. But the more thoroughly one corrects Niebuhr's categories, the more his typology recedes.

Let us start with nationhood. Those of you who know me may think this is premature: Shouldn't the Church come first and last? The answer depends on how one defines "Church". If we define the Church to have begun with Adam and Eve, or even with Abel the Just, then yes. But if instead we consider the Church of Jesus Christ as the eschatological restoration of the people of God promised to Abraham in Gen. 12, the answer is no. For Gen. 10 has already displayed a "table of nations" spreading out to the postdiluvian earth in fulfillment of Noah's blessing (10:32). These nations are part of God's plan; the text makes this clear by putting the table of nations *before* the story of the *dispersal* of nations after Babel, in Gen. 11:9. Nations – discrete peoples with their own economies, governance, and even languages! (10:31) – are protologically significant.

Nations are eschatologically significant as well. In its closing scenes, the book of Revelation shows us nations entering the New Jerusalem to walk by its light, and their kings entering with their glory and honor (Rev. 21:22-27), and the tree of life offering its leaves for the nations' healing (Rev. 22:2). Coming after the beasts and dragons and false prophets and whores of the preceding chapters, this is a stunning reversal. We expect the kings of the earth to be shut out forever, yet here they are!

This image is what drives St. Augustine's grand political vision in the *City of God*: Cain and Abel each father a city, the "City of Man" and the "City of God." The two can be reconciled only at the final consummation.

We know the beginning of nationhood, and we know the ending. What about the middle, particularly *today's* middle? We live in a "between times" in which the old creation and new creation collide. Theological categories from both ages apply to the relationship between national identity and Christian identity.

John Howard Yoder characterizes two figures as paradigmatic for our understanding of Christian identity and national identity in the present age (Yoder 1997, 8-9). One of them is Constantine, whom you have met at length in the diagnostic part of this analysis. We have already seen what patriotism looks like in various Constantinian visions: It is any formal alliance or fusion between civil institutions and Christian institutions. Yoder's other figure is Jeremiah, prophet of Israel's exile, whom God tells to "seek the peace of the city" of Babylon (Jer. 29:7). "Jeremian" patriotism honors the emperor, or any king of the earth, from its location of dispersion among the nations, a dispersion it has found to be its calling as a faith community (Yoder 1997, 52, 56).

How does Jeremian patriotism show such honor? By choosing the way of Jesus Christ and his disciples who follow Jeremiah's vision (Yoder 1997, 68-69), over the ways of the political visions that opposed him in the first century. For Yoder, this means that

The good news of God's original revolution is not, as the Zealots of right or left would say, that violence is only wrong when the bad guys use it or that enmity is only wrong when it is violent. It does not say, with the emigrant to the desert, that you can cop out and do your own thing unmolested. It is not concerned with the inner-worldly emigration of the Pharisees, to refuse cooperation only at the point of personal complicity. It does not promise, with the Herodians and Sadducees, that if enough morally concerned people sign up to work for Dow, Du Pont, and General Motors, we can beat the communists yet at feeding the world. All four of these classical strategies have in common that they dodge the duty of beginning now, first, with the creation of a new, voluntary, covenanting community in which the rejection of the Old is accredited by the reality of the New which has already begun (Yoder 1997, 178-179).

The public face of this new, voluntary, covenanting community called the Church is described in

1 Peter 2:13-17 (RSV):

Beloved, I beseech you [all] as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as free people, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

This passage paints a picture of Rev. 21-22 in the making. Christian communities are "aliens and exiles," dispersed Jews who now seek the peace of new Babylons. Their captors might slander and even persecute them, but they do so out of ignorance. While they are not named as God's agents for justice, they are still described as sent to punish evildoers and praise the righteous.

This is why the good works of Christians are effective: They defuse accusers and steer authorities towards their eschatological end of bringing the nations' glories into the city of God. They teach governments to see resources for keeping the peace that rulers do not themselves possess.

Peter does not envision Constantinian states that learn to glorify God *before* the day of visitation. Many may take this as a limitation on Scripture's foreknowledge, an canonical oversight that leaves us on our own to navigate Constantine's brave new world. But we can also take this as a future refused, unforeseen because it is would be an eschatological wrong turn. Today's faithful disciples will silence today's pagan fools and move them to praise, but only at Christ's return will the praise go to the *Lord* of these disciples.

Why not earlier? Let me count the ways we could arrive at our answer: The tenacity of sin. The King's setting his servants in charge of only *his* household, commanding that they *wait* for his return. The otherworldliness of the Johannine Christ's kingdom. The embarrassment of disciples trying to image their Lord with swords in their hands. The dilution of Christian distinctiveness when Christianity becomes an imperial religion over against others. The mixed results of seventeen centuries of Constantinianism. The taming of the Church under the social constraints of democratic pluralism. The intrinsic difference between consummation and all that must come beforehand (cf. Rev. 1:19).

Alien Citizens: Christian Identity in Wartime America

Yoder follows Jeremiah over Constantine (Yoder 1997, 51-78), and it is hard to blame him if we restrict ourselves to these two alternatives. But these are not the only two towards which the New Testament Church points us.

Jesus, by living a representative, penitent, corrective life of Israel that ends in victory rather than exile, shows that Israel's history is not ultimately failed history, but *redeemed* history. The New Testament appropriates every age of Israel's history: the patriarchs (at Jesus' annunciation and his calling of the Twelve), the exodus (in Jesus' return from Egypt and his crucifixion and resurrection), Sinai (in the Sermon on the Mount and at Pentecost), wilderness

wanderings (in Jesus' temptations and Johannine crucifixion), Conquest of Palestine (in Jesus' baptism and subsequent entry into the land as its restorer), Davidic Monarchy (in Jesus' ministry, Triumphal Entry, and crucifixion), exile (in the Church's dispersion and perhaps even in Jesus' ascension), and Messianic Age (in the Kingdom present in Jesus and his Church and in the promise of Jesus' return). All of these chapters in Israel's history are paradigmatic for Christians, especially the last.

In this spirit, the New Testament writers appeal to an astonishing variety of events in Israel's history as types for the life of the Church: (1) In Matthew, wise men from the East pay homage at Jesus' birth, fulfilling Isa. 60:6 and Ps. 72:10-11. Furthermore, Jesus' disciples will be dragged before governors and kings, "as a testimony to them and to the nations" (Matt. 10:18). (2) In Luke, the beginning of Jesus' ministry at the Jordan, in the wilderness, and back in Galilee is, in Yoder's language, "the original revolution" that restores Israel's fortunes (Luke 1; Luke 4:1-13, reading Deut. 6 and 8; Luke 4:18-19, reading Isa. 61:1-2). (3) In John (often read as apolitical because of all the spiritual language), Jesus is immediately proclaimed as *king* by the disciples (1:49). This is no spiritualization of the royal office: Crowds seek to make him king by force (6:15). Jesus goes along with their acclamation at the Triumphal Entry (12:13-15). He has overcome the world (16:33), whose rulers are judged (12:31, 16:11). Greeks come to him already, a sign of his glorification (12:20-23), and the narrator hints at Jesus' going to the Diaspora and to the Greeks (7:35). His *basileia* is not *ek tou kosmou toutou*, which means only that its power is not military power (18:36). The crowds understand that Jesus' rule sets them *against* Caesar's and vice versa (19:12-15). Jesus is crucified *as* King of the Jews (19:19-20). Pilate names him such in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, announcing his worldwide royal authority, and not merely as an allegation, but as a fact (19:22). (4) In Acts, the Church's birth at Pentecost is the beginning of God's judgment of the nations and restoration of Israel (cf. Joel 3:1, "at that time..."). This theme followed through as imprisoned evangelists are freed. Also in Acts, Paul is God's chosen messenger "to carry my name before the nations and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15), to testify to "the hope of Israel" (28:20), fulfilling promises delivered to Isaiah. (5) In Romans and 1 Corinthians, the Church is experiencing the prophesied coming of the nations to the rescue of the current Jerusalem (Rom. 15, 1 Cor. 16). (6) In Galatians, Paul includes Gentiles and Jews alike in "the *Israel* of God" (Gal. 6:16). (7) In Ephesians, Gentiles are *no longer* "strangers" and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," but "fellow citizens" (Eph. 2:19), the tension between Jews and Gentiles having been resolved. (8) Hebrews, addressed apparently to Jewish Christians (1:1), leads by establishing Jesus' kingship (1:3, 1:8, 1:13). Jesus' Moses-like ministry is directed to "God's house" (3:3-5). Jeremiah 31's new covenant is explicitly with the "house of Israel" (Heb. 8:8-10). God's judgment over Israel is still held out (Deut. 32:35-36) in a way that refuses to spiritualize or depoliticize Israel (2:7-9). Furthermore, its

readers “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22-23), meaning a Jerusalem that has already been rebuilt. Yet here Christians “have no lasting city” here, but “seek the city which is to come” (13:14). (9) For the writer of James, sounding like his namesake in Acts 15’s Council of Jerusalem, Christians in Palestine and Syria are “aliens in the land.” (10) In 1 Peter, as we have seen, (Jewish?) Christians abroad are “exiles of the Dispersion” (1 Pet. 1) and “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet. 2). (11) In Jude, the *agape* feasts of wayward ones participate in Cain’s and Balaam’s and Korah’s sins, fulfilling Enoch’s prophecy (11-16). (12) In Revelation, the Church’s persecutions are evidence of God’s judgment on ancient Rome and a coming millennial respite (Rev. 18:21ff, 20:4-6) by the One who rules (present participle) the kings of the earth (1:5, echoing Isa. 55:4?) and “has made us a kingdom, priests” (1:6, echoing Ex. 19:6 and Isa. 61:6). These things signify the gathering of nations before the God of Israel (Rev. 7).

Therefore, while we might dismiss Constantinianism as a rehearsal of Israel’s failure to honor *God* as King, we can never dismiss the Kingdom of David and Solomon as authoritative politics for the Church and the world. We are not *just* aliens and exiles. We are spiritual children of Jeremiah and Joseph and Daniel and Esther, *and* Moses and Joshua and David and Nehemiah (cf. Yoder 1997, 57), who live in the restored Israel of Jesus the King. The life of the Church participates in all the ages of the fulfilled history of Israel in which the nations and their kings *come* to Zion, even while it awaits their consummation.

In the face of this variety, Jeremiah and Constantine both look like impoverished types for Christian life. Constantinian eschatology is too optimistic, too realized. It leaves no room for the wilderness wanderings and captivities of Christian Israel. It believes authorities to have been transformed more thoroughly by the work of Christ than they turn out to be. It sees them as having *already* brought their treasures into the New Jerusalem. It calls new what it still of the old. By contrast, Jeremian eschatology is too pessimistic, too futurist. In fact, in light of the variety of New Testament imagery, it seems to be a counter-Constantinian vision whose positions are still inordinately determined by rejected Constantinian categories. It leaves no room for the Gospel’s new conquests. It cannot accept friendly treaties between the eternal Davidic realm and

its temporal neighbors. Like the circumcision party of the first century, it refuses to consider the revolutionary transformations that bring the authorities of new nations into Israel by entire households. It appreciates the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:14), but steps back from appreciating the ramifications of that conversion for Cornelius *as a God-fearing centurion*. It is quiet about the likely impact of Paul's evangelizing of the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:12-14) and his tantalizing near-success in converting Agrippa (Acts 26:28). It calls old what is in the process of becoming new.

How is Cornelius different from Constantine? In his vision he receives the word, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (Acts 11:13-14). This is a long way from the vision of Constantine the warrior, whose message is *in hoc signo vinces*, "By this sign you shall conquer."

The concept of "treaties" between Jesus the King and the kings of the nations might point forward helpfully beyond the alternatives of Constantinianism and counter-Constantinianism – or back unhelpfully to a yet another form of Constantinianism. A fruitful line of inquiry follows Mouw's discussion of friendships between elect and non-elect children of God (Mouw 2001, 34-36). (And developing this suggestion will have to wait.)

This thing that is becoming new is the whole world, and the heavens too: "Behold, I am making all things new," says the one on the throne (Rev. 21:5). Richard Mouw thus improves upon Yoder's "seek the peace of the city" with an exhortation from Hebrews to "seek the City which is to come" (Heb. 13:14).

Seeking the Coming City: Special Grace in a World of Common Grace

For greater clarity on how to do this, we can join Mouw's "family argument" between and within the Reformed and baptist traditions (Mouw 2001, 22-24), and appropriate a very helpful distinction in the Reformed tradition between "common grace" and "special grace."

Common grace is divine favor shown to all human beings, regardless of their proximity to the

Gospel. We might even call common grace “protological” or “primal grace” (grace from the beginning) and special grace “eschatological” or “final grace” (grace toward the end).

Mouw repeats a list of three forms of common grace promulgated by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924:

(1) the bestowal of natural gifts, such as rain and sunshine, upon creatures in general, (2) the restraining of sin in human affairs, so that the unredeemed do not produce all of the evil that their depraved natures might otherwise bring about, and (3) the ability of unbelievers to perform acts of civic good (Mouw 2001, 9).

Mouw pleads that these types of common grace should not be taken as comprehensive (Mouw 2001, 80-81). Whether or not one takes his good advice, the category of common or primal grace still includes the structures of governance that characterize human communities: Families, tribes, and kingdoms. If it is right to call the restraint of sin and the practice of civic good “common graces” given even to communities that do not know the Gospel, then we can say more about how we as Christians benefit from and contribute to God’s providence of them.

First, Christians depend on them, as Christians depend upon rain and sunshine, upon the replication of our DNA, upon the natural and human economies that put food and drink on our tables. We pray and give thanks for rain and sunshine, for air and breath, for our meals, for our homes and work, for this morning’s wakefulness and tonight’s rest. Insofar as the imperfect civil peace is common grace, we ought to ask prayerfully and thank God for it too. (In this light, the otherworldliness of Jehovah’s Witnesses, like that of Gnostics, Marcionites, and Manichees, comes down to a lack of gratitude.)

Second, Christians *need not* drive the world’s economies of common grace. Humanity does not depend upon Christians for its rain, or its food – or its civil governance. Christians do not need to become farmers to feed the world. Nor do Christians need to become governors and

emperors to restrain sin and promote civic good. The peculiar cultivation of creation that images God in the world is a calling extended beyond the people of God.

Here common grace points us away from the ancient and modern “Essenes” who would withdraw from almost the whole world on account of its alleged impurity. Paul’s words in Romans 14 on food and drink, and Mark 7’s interpretation that Jesus offhandedly declared all foods clean, liberate agonized ethicists from the implications of moral contamination’s infinite regress. Depravity may indeed be communicated, but only from one *heart* to another. Christian wheat is no safer than pagan wheat, nor does it taste better. Christians may call plumbers even if no little fish decorate their ads in the Yellow Pages.

For an example of Christians who embrace this logic, consider missionaries. They depend on sheer trust in God to provide common grace: “Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. . . . I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt. 10:9-16). If they waited for Constantinian transformation (or even Jeremian accommodation) before they went out, missions would cease. Their one verbal sword is all they need (Matt. 10:34). They know God’s provision will be imperfect, for Jesus promises persecution (Matt. 10:17-23), yet even the persecution seems to be part of Jesus’ evangelistic strategy, part of the realizing of Rev. 21-22, for it brings missionaries before governors and kings to testify for Jesus’ sake (10:18).

We are not yet asking the question of whether Christians *may* or *should* participate in economies of common grace, but only stating that Christians *need not* do so in order to survive. Do churches really believe this in the same way that missionaries must? If not, is it because they have forgotten that they too are missions? And if they remembered that the Church is essentially in the position that missionaries have always been in, might the gospel then flourish again in the West as it has come to flourish in last century’s missions fields?

By contrast, the medieval biblical argument for Constantinianism rests on the one occasion Jesus commands his disciples to arm themselves (Luke 22:35-38). Boniface VIII, in *Unam Sanctam*, claims that

we learn from the words of the gospel that in this church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the apostles said, “Behold here” (that is, in the church, since it was the apostles who spoke) “are two swords” – the Lord did not reply, “It is too much,” but “It is enough.” ... Both are in the power of the church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the latter is to be used for the church, the former by her; the former by the priest, the latter by kings and captains but at the will and by the permission of the priest. The one sword ... should be under the other, and temporal authority subject to spiritual (Tavard 1974, 106-107, in Janz 1999, 14).

Of course, the Bible’s one recorded use of force in the name of Jesus is a fiasco. Jesus seeks to fulfill Isa. 53:12 by deliberately misleading the Romans into interpreting him as the leader of an armed insurrection, “reckoned with transgressors” (in Luke 22:37). One anonymous disciple, whose metaphorical imagination is as poor as Boniface’s, actually tries to use his sword against the crowd. His double failure – to understand Jesus and to prevail militarily – demonstrates the futility of the Church resorting to force to protect itself.

We should not expect that showing such faith will lead to quick success, or success at all.

We know that persecution can last for centuries, as it has in Muslim societies where centuries of mild persecution have eradicated Christian communities (in part by training them away from the missionary activity that Matthew’s Jesus envisions as arising from more overt persecution).

Many cities do not receive Jesus’ messengers (Matt. 10:14-15). Common grace supports the Church, but it does not guarantee every church’s survival.

Third, Christians *may* participate in the world’s economies of common grace. The wideness of common grace, which Mouw emphasizes against the narrower definitions of the Christian Reformed Church’s Three Points of 1924, make the privilege of such participation practically unavoidable (Mouw 2001, 80-81). Indeed, insofar as it fulfills the primal callings of human life, which the special callings of Christian communities do not abrogate, Christians *should*, even *must* participate: “If anyone will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

However, we may not do it in ways that compromise our prior calling and unique identity as media of special grace. Christians may be farmers, manufacturers, and merchants. Our farming must evoke the agricultural practices of the One who plants eternal seeds and harvests

eschatological crops. Our buying and selling must respect the economics of the kingdom. Our lives must obey the commandments as embodied in the life of Jesus.

This obligation means much more than just not contradicting the gospel with our deeds. As bearers of the special saving grace of Jesus Christ that is given *only* through the Church, Christians must not even let our works of primal grace *dominate* or *crowd out* our works of final grace. Jesus came to create a community with the character and purpose of being his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). No one else has the gifts to do that job. Furthermore, doing it may require leaving our primal callings, communities, and politics, and embracing new ones (Matt. 4:18-22).

Our baptismal fonts, communion tables, offering plates symbolize the eschatological transformation of primal grace that *only* the Word of God can effect. (As the *Didache* (9) prays, “As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together and became one loaf, so may your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.”) After two thousand years of failures to live up to our charter, Jesus has still not fired us and started over with a more responsible group. We bear his gospel, and only we. If we do not make disciples of all nations, no one will. If we do not pass on his traditions, they will die, and the book of life will have been closed.

We disciples engage in civic lives that participate in the common economic, cultural, and political graces of our wider contexts. All these things are good – “very good” (Gen. 1:31). They are the primal basis of our final end.

Against today’s Gnostics, Marcionites, and Manichees, we must always stress that our final end is a perfection, not a supersession, of that primal basis. The eternal sabbath rest of God’s people is anticipated in God’s first sabbath rest on the seventh day of creation.

Yet we have received an unearned, world-transforming, Spirit-empowered calling to be and bring the Kingdom of God! Sometimes – for many people, often – these two callings overlap wonderfully. In fact, it is often in our common (*i.e.*, primal) locations, such as the marketplace, where opportunities arise to glorify Jesus especially (*i.e.*, eschatologically) in and to the world. It was in such settings that Jesus saw parables of the kingdom, and it is there that discerning disciples will find the same rich resources.

Therefore our evangelism, both overt and covert, is much more than stereotypically narrow proselytizing. To choose only one example, merchants (from farmers to multinational executives) can witness to the universal lordship of Christ through the charity they show their laborers, the hospitality they show their guests, the fairness they show their competitors, the industry they show their employers, the mercy they show the poor, the justice they show the oppressed, and the faithful, hopeful, loving integrity they show everyone. These acts intersect our categories and cross the ages, bringing the kingdom's perfections to creation's civic goods.

However, here lies a critical distinction: Common grace *may* become special grace when it is brought into the final economy, but it is *not* automatically made special grace just because Christians are involved. Eucharistic bread needs to be blessed in Church whether or not the farmers who grew its grain are Christian. We give thanks for our meat whether or not it was once sacrificed to idols. Holy water receives the same blessing whether it comes out of the Jordan, off the roofs of Christian homes, or out of the tap. The decisive medium for the transformation of the old into the new is not some "Midas touch" whereby everything Christians handle becomes holy. The old is made new through the life of the Church *as Church*.

This is much more than just what the Church does for an hour every Sunday; but what the Church does every Sunday symbolizes what the Church is to do throughout the week. Eastern

Orthodoxy understands the Sunday liturgy to be a symbol for “the liturgy after the liturgy,” the specific works of the people in the world that are determined by the specific works of the people in the assembly. (Nervous evangelicals can find in the practice of *benediction* more or less the same thing.)

As a theologian with a sideline business in computer programming for the health care industry, I do not practice Essene withdrawal for the world. Nor do I understand my career as a teacher of Christian theology to be automatically privileged over a career in programming. However, neither can I accept that “being the best programmer I can be” would sufficiently incarnate the Gospel. Excellence, that buzzword of management gurus, is not one of the spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11). The common graces of my programming and the health care it facilitates are only made special when practiced on the kingdom’s terms.

Much in our world, like much in our lives, goes unredeemed. We cannot wrap the word “transformation” around everything we do, even when we do it in the Lord’s name (Matt. 7:21-23). As “all things new” excludes the dross that is burned away in the fire of judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-15), so it excludes the Babylon that has been thrown into the sea (Rev. 18:21-24), and even the sea itself (Rev. 21:1). While the Church lives in the light of the eschatological, Christ-redeemed story of Israel, it bears the baptismal marks of God’s judgment on its old (and perhaps its continuing) life. While the groaning world waits for its redemption, it lives in the shadow of both God’s primeval flood and God’s coming judgment of Israel’s enemies. Primal graces end in the flood of judgment and the lake of fire as well as the new heaven and earth.

Furthermore, the special salvation of the world’s common institutions often comes not through their transformation, but through their death and resurrection. Human institutions enter the Holy City in Rev. 21-22 (fulfilling Isaiah 60) only after being laid waste in Rev. 18. The nations’ judged kings pay tribute to Israel’s king in Rev. 21 only after all being slain by the Word of Jesus in Rev. 19. The question is not *whether* God will destroy every rule and every authority and power, but *when* (1 Cor. 15:24).

Perhaps the answer is *now*, “for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). The right question for Constantinians and post-Constantinians to ask is not whether the institutions we champion are being transformed, but whether they already been destroyed and raised. While statements like “here we have no lasting city” (Heb. 13:14) are not optimistic about today’s political institutions as such, the right answer for *all* human institutions may not always be “no.”

Mouw grew up among Reformed farmers, who both cultivated the creation *and* kept the Sabbath. He tells the story of a community whose fields were destroyed by a Sunday hailstorm. Faced with the choice of gathering their crop or keeping the Sabbath, these Calvinists chose to keep the Sabbath, to maintain their identity as Church and depend on others for their daily bread. They knew that God raises up other farmers to work the earth and feed his people, and that their first calling was to be what no one but the Church can ever be: the Church.

That tragic day is a parable of the Constantinian temptation. We can become so habituated to our works of common grace that we *forget* the priority of our callings to offer special grace. And then the devil in us whispers: “*If it’s good to glorify God in the marketplace, then why not add glory to glory and do it seven days a week?*” Furthermore, we can become so dazzled with the enormity of the world’s economies and politics that our little Bibles and baptismal pools and bread and wine begin to look trivial. “*Surely God wants more that we influence national policy!*” Or times may come when civic life demands commitments that violate Christian identity. “*So what if it’s named ‘Infinite Justice.’ Shouldn’t we support it anyway?*” Worst of all, we can transfer the exclusivity of our callings to the sphere of common grace, and imagine that common grace *needs* us as its agents. “*What would happen to America if Christians did not drive its markets and farm its fields and run for office and join its armies and police forces and judiciaries?*” At moments like these the Constantinian temptation comes. It is the urge to make Jesus king by force (John 6:15).

Fourth, certain social roles which are primarily appropriate offer common grace, but so compromise the specific character of Christian community and witness that disciples should avoid them altogether.

We could try to list such humanly appropriate but ecclesially prohibited roles. But our concern here centers on the practice of patriotism, and such lists tend to float free of their contexts anyway (*e.g.*, moviemaking among twentieth century Pentecostals). So let us suggest a few roles whose propriety becomes an issue especially in patriotic times: Military and police who bear arms (whether enlisted or simply conscripted), and their supervisors. The trouble here is the incoherence and inherent conflict of being both God's servant for wrath (Rom. 13:4) and being God's servant for saving grace. Should a Christian policeman draw a gun and yell "Freeze!" or should he pull out a Bible and shout "Repent"?

It should be uncontroversial to claim that the peculiar gift that Christians have to offer the world is not *best* given through the barrel of a gun, the force of law, or the judicial gavel. Yet an objection will inevitably follow: "What if *all* Christians deserted the world's armies, police forces, executive offices, legislatures, and judiciaries?" This argument may be informed by a utilitarian calculus that performs cost-benefit analyses on Christian compromise ("though it is sometimes a dirty job, it is still better that America have a Christian President"). Or it may represent a surrender of trust in common grace ("a Christian nation needs a Christian President"), akin to worrying whether God will keep sending rain. However, so far there is no shortage of people willing to offer these services. After September 11, Americans are lining up to support and join them. Leave aside for the moment the question of whether Christian identity is compatible with government or military service. Are we really facing the prospect of a government or war in which no one shows up? Might the rush of secular support for American

institutions be social systems adjusting quite naturally and appropriately? Does the Church really need to put down its Word and sacraments and get in line?

Or – bracketing the historic debate between the Church’s just-war traditions and its pacifist traditions – aren’t we better off asking how the Church can contribute to the peace of its cities *by being the Church*, by doing the things God has equipped only it to do? The way God wills us to witness to the nations is not according to their civic expectations, but to the example of Jesus. What if rather than imitating common grace’s peacemakers, we pass the peace of Christ himself (Stassen 1992)? God gathers us into churches rather than Scout troops, service clubs, or special forces because churches are the communities of world transformation that the nations have always needed *most* for their healing. Our absence creates a vacuum that distorts every other organization that tries to compensate. Luther encouraged Christians to apply even for executioner when a job opening is posted. Even if it were right to do that, why would we want to?

This argument goes way beyond the economic category of “comparative advantage,” whereby every economic agent (whether it be a person, a town, or a nation) should pursue the economic practices for which it is relatively best suited. The correct economic analogy is monopoly. The Church is not the *best* at mediating the saving grace of Jesus Christ, but the *only* human community authorized to do so.

Furthermore, sometimes our presence may be less benign than it appears. Even if Christians do make better presidents, does their presence in high elected office tie the prophetic hands of the Church? American Christians have tended to divide along partisan lines. These have traded spiritual warfare for culture warfare. Is our disunity compromising our witness to the world (cf. John 17:20-21) and immobilizing a vital resource on which civil justice depends?

Fifth, some offices are simply inappropriate for anyone. We understand these in terms of the category of sin rather than common and special grace. Examples from the marketplace are plentiful: slaveholder, drug dealer, organized criminal, pornographer. But the marketplace is not

the focus of this analysis. Where patriotism is concerned, examples are harder to name, because patriotism is usually concerned with what it understands as civic good. Nevertheless, we can name any role that turns the divine call to national or civic loyalty into a satanic call to ultimate loyalty. In Roman days these would have been the staff of the imperial cult. It is probably no coincidence that these two offenses, *porneia* and *idolatria*, are the two greatest abominations in Revelation, and two sins disciplined strictly in the early Church.

Are their such positions in America? In light of my diagnosis of Constantinianism and counter-Constantinianism in America, I worry that Masons and Scoutmasters (to choose seemingly trivial examples) are unwitting accomplices in today's imperial cult. They have hearts of gold, but they demand children's loyalty to a relativized "God" while holding patriotism absolute. Their actions betray their own good intentions to restrain evil and promote civic good. Is the executive branch of civil government, both military and civilian, in a similar position?

Is Our Peculiarity Hypocritical?

Some may object: Isn't it hypocritical to rely on government protection when we don't contribute? Actually, no.

Let me suggest an analogy for the sacred from the realm of the profane. The ethics of several professions compete with or even violate American law. The law makes no distinction between a journalist withholding information and a witness withholding evidence or testimony. So, since witnesses can be compelled to testify in court, journalists can too. But since testifying against a promise of confidentiality violates journalism ethics, ethical journalists refuse to name confidential sources. Sometimes they are found in contempt of court and jailed. Yet the profession justifies its violation of the law on account of its own community ethics. The special "gift," so to speak, of journalism overrides certain common responsibilities of residency and

citizenship in America. Journalists do this out of the conviction that only journalists can do what they do, and that the very institutions that sometimes conflict with them ultimately depend on a healthy “Fourth Estate” for their own well-being. Furthermore, American society has come to understand this, at least most of the time, and support the peculiarities of the profession. No one objects: “What if everyone became a journalist? Who would defend our borders?”

The gift of journalism does not include the absurd and hypocritical claims that journalists can be “objective” or that they may not take sides in conflicts. They cannot, and they regularly do. Journalistic excellence involves *humility* and *responsibility*, not objectivity or neutrality.

The same is true of the medical community. I have yet to hear a hawk declare that doctors should put down their scalpels in times of war and do their patriotic duty to join the armed forces. This is because hawks know that what physicians do cannot be done by anyone else; that even if the canons of medical ethics do not always line up with the short-term interests of governments, in the long run it is better to have doctors; and that even if it weren’t, they could not argue physicians out of their convictions or their allegiance to the Hippocratic Oath.

The same journalists who break the law to protect their sources appeal to the law when they are victims of crime. Is that hypocritical? Not necessarily, because their conflicts and forbidden relationships with the state do not illegitimize the state itself. Likewise, doctors are not accused of being hypocrites when they practice medicine instead of military or police service, or when they join pacifist organizations like the Red Cross.

Likewise, Christians who refuse to serve in police and military forces, who refuse to bear the sword, are *not* being inconsistent or hypocritical in relying for their protection on others who do bear the sword. We are being the “peculiar people” God has made us (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9 KJV). In fact, we offer an unparalleled gift: Prophetic discernment that can check the power of rulers when they become tyrants. The Church does not need to fight just wars in order to keep them just; in

fact its testimony is less clouded when it keeps its critical distance. David was Babylon's greatest seer *because* he was an outsider. When Paul is in danger of persecution, he uses his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11). He draws on common grace. Christians throughout the world are entirely right to demand that governments protect us from persecution, terrorism, and atrocities, even if it requires the threat or use of force, and then to demand that the use of force be appropriate. But Christians do not need to join armed forces or police departments to demonstrate our consistency any more than we need to make our own rain.

In America, our civil authorities understand that the Christian community has a character whose peacemaking can harm the state's short-term (and maybe even long-term) interests. They even honor some of the Church's peculiar practices – for instance, by respecting the privileged nature of conversation between penitents and priests. They usually do this out of a utilitarian calculus that judges it better to have religion (not just Christian faith) exercised freely than to have the sworn testimony of a particular witness, as well as a conviction that religious freedom is appropriate in a democracy despite its drawbacks. That's fine – as long as Christians do not justify our activities from the same moral calculus or democratic political theory. We do what Jesus has told us to do, hearing sins in secret and proclaiming their forgiveness, whether or not the authorities approve or even allow it. In fact, when we do it, we bless these authorities, because the special grace God offers the world through us is their only real hope.

Into the Breach: When Common Grace Fails

Yet times come when common grace seems to falter. In fact, such emergencies seem to be common in our fallen world: “The poor you always have with you” (Matt. 26:11). May Christians step into the breach? We all agree that the Church can and should work to relieve humanitarian needs in times of famine. When fellow Christians receive these mercies, it is ministry to Christ himself: “I was hungry and you fed me” (Matt. 25:35). When the Church feeds hungry multitudes outside the fellowship, it is a missionary witness that proclaims the coming bounty of God's Kingdom (Matt. 14:20-21). Together these moments anticipate an end-time

when common grace and special grace converge, when all those under God's sun and rain will have been justified (cf. Matt. 5:45).

Sometimes God's resources for restraining evil and promoting civic good are abused or rejected, and injustice or anarchy results. These emergencies are famines of common justice. Jesus addresses them too: "I was in prison, and you came to me" (Matt. 25:36). How should Christians intervene then?

September's atrocities make me think of two things. First, I think of the plane that was forced down in Pennsylvania, in which Wheaton graduate (and Oracle employee) Todd Beamer participated in the successful effort to foil the hijacking by force. This example is more than a good argument for just war theory; it is every ludicrous scenario of "decisionist" ethics come to life. It seems like a solid instance in which not only Christian calls for a just police action, but even participation and leadership in that action are appropriate. Like Catholic laity who can baptize in times of emergency, perhaps we lay citizens may restrain evil forcefully when no one else will.

However, lest hearers turn this exception into a new rule, let me emphasize that once the crisis has passed and normal providence is restored, the old arguments for Christians to do what only Christians can do reassert themselves. Furthermore, even here we should not be too quick to act. If God *had* provided enough "virtuous pagans" on that plane to volunteer to fight, why should Christians not have stayed back, ministered anonymously to the doomed passengers, and let others be the national heroes?

I am *not* condemning the actions of Todd Beamer; he and his mourning family deserve the Church's admiration and deep gratitude. I am affirming his decision to take the reins of worldly power in a moment of urgent need; I am emphasizing the extraordinary nature of that

passing moment and the exceptional quality of his heroic act; and I am wondering whether *even then* God might have been providing resources from outside the Church that freed God's people to do what only we can do.

I also think of the New York firefighters who gave their lives on September 11. When asked by a reporter why he was about to enter a place of extreme danger, one replied matter-of-factly, "It's my job." He is probably among the hundreds who never returned. They are stunning examples of civic good. Whether or not these heroes knew Jesus as their Lord, they did their jobs in ways that evoke nothing less than Jesus' atoning death on behalf of the world. They are unforgettable parables of grace perfecting nature. They too deserve the Church's admiration and deep gratitude. "I was in prison, and you came to me."

Passengers like Todd Beamer and public servants like that anonymous firefighter point us away from Jeremiah and towards Cornelius. But they acted in contexts of emergency, and it is important for the Church to distinguish between emergencies and non-emergencies. Recall Jesus' special (if widespread) circumstances: "I was hungry ... thirsty ... a stranger ... naked ... sick ... in prison." By contrast, feeding the nourished, visiting the free, and clothing the clothed are *merely* common graces. "Even the Gentiles do these things" (Matt. 5:47)! These primal practices are good; but disciples who pursue *only* them are goats, not sheep. They have succumbed to the Constantinian temptation not to step back after the breach is healed – not to let unbelievers back into marketplaces again after the rain returns, not to hand back the sword (not merely put it away!) after the crisis has passed. They have preferred the glory of the kings to the glory of the saints.

Of course, chronic famines of justice afflict the world along with chronic famines of daily bread. Many persecuted churches have lived under them for centuries. The best course of

treatment will still respect the distinctions between common and special grace. To draw upon another famous era of Israel's history, it is Pharaoh's job to liberate Hebrew slaves. Pharaoh's refusal will cause God to raise up prophets of justice, who are heard in the royal courts on account of the persecution. Then and there the Spirit will offer the words that take the right next step. (However, if God's people refuse to prophesy against hardened rulers at home and abroad, or if they compromise and settle for a tolerable level of persecution, trading their public testimony for a false peace, they trade the promise of Israel's deliverance for the threat of Israel's impending exile. They are presuming upon common grace, not praying for it.)

What if it doesn't work? The Church has a few final resources. First, we have God's promise: "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22). Second, we have our own feet: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next" (Matt. 10:23). Third, we have the reassurance of the one who died and lived to tell about it: "Have no fear of them" (Matt. 10:26).

Constantinianism rests on a profound truth: The Church is a fragile thing. Our treasure is in jars of clay (2 Cor. 4:7a). Its survival depends not only on God's special grace, but also on God's common grace, including the goodwill of rulers. Yet Constantinianism forgets an equally profound truth: The Church is an indestructible thing, because its power belongs to God and not to us (2 Cor. 4:7b). The Church's fragility is its greatest strength: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Conclusion: Brethren of Cornelius

We conclude by returning, now more confidently, to the text of 1 Peter. There is in fact no tension between qualified Christian loyalty to human communities and their rulers, and unqualified Christian loyalty to God. But the faithful expression of those two loyalties cannot help but raise tensions that will only truly be resolved at the Last Day. Sooner or later, our rulers will demand that we compromise our calling as an indispensable vessel of special grace. And we will inevitably offend them, if we remember who we really are.

We are brothers and sisters of Cornelius. Many of us serve civil authorities by exercising our citizenship and the influence we have gained in the public square. Yet we are held captive in the cities of man, to foolish authorities who cannot name the source of the goodness they see in us. Nevertheless, our captivity is illusory. In fact we are free, because our real master is God. We are fellow citizens in what Ephesians calls the commonwealth of Israel. Our practices depend for their justification on only the regime headed by the one at the Father's right hand. We are sworn to its ethics. And *if we are faithful*, our civil authorities will see Jesus the King reigning in what we do, and turn from rebellion to allegiance at his coming. Our deaths and resurrections are the beginning of their deaths and resurrections.

There are many ways for Americans, Canadians, and everyone else to be patriotic. But for *us* who confess Christ as Lord, the *Way* is the way.