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MODERATING THE CHRISTIAN PASSION FOR POLITICS

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One of the more striking features of twentieth-century Christianity is the extent to which Christians from across the spectrum - evangelical and liberal, conservative and progressive - have come to embrace the view that politics is an appropriate instrument for pursuing Christian concerns.¹ This trend appears to be noticeable even among Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists, who have traditionally favoured a rather strict separation of Church and state.² The very pervasiveness of the trend towards the politicization of Christianity seems to suggest that it is an indisputably good thing. For surely a view that so many Christians with otherwise divergent outlooks have come to share must be solidly rooted in the Christian mandate. However, before rushing to embrace politics even more heartily, Christians would be well advised to re-examine just how congenial such an embrace might be. Such a re-examination, I will argue, would severely moderate the growing Christian passion for political action.

The re-examination of the question of the Christian's relationship with politics offered here is not intended to challenge either the view that the Bible calls on believers to reach out to others or the view that Christians are obliged to undertake this kind of outreach both individually and through collective organizations. Its intention, rather, is to raise unsettling questions about only that form of collective Christian outreach which aims at expressing itself through political institutions. These questions arise because of the distinctive character of political authority. Unlike other human authorities, political authorities have (or claim) a right not only to issue commands, but also to back up those commands with the use of force, including the penalties of imprisonment and death. As Luther said of this "Kingdom of the world," [i]ts tool is not a wreath of roses or a flower of love, but a naked sword, and a sword is a symbol of wrath, severity and punishment.³ This distinctive characteristic of political authority, the enforcement of commands by the use of the sword, makes Christian involvement in politics problematical in a way that involvement in other aspects of social life is not.

Nor is it the intention of this re-examination to conclude that Christians must avoid politics entirely. Its purpose is not to eradicate the Christian passion for politics, but rather, as I mentioned at the outset, to moderate it. It seeks to do so by drawing attention to the serious limitations and dangers, spiritual and otherwise, of politics. These limitations and dangers are developed in the context of five arguments: (1) that politics is not in itself a good thing, but a necessary evil at best; (2) that salvation cannot be achieved through political means; (3) that the knowledge Christians have of God does not necessarily entail knowledge of his political agenda; (4) that Christians can be a harmful influence in politics; and (5) that politics is a danger to Christianity.

1. Politics as a Necessary Evil

In Rom 12:17-19 Paul calls on believers never to avenge themselves, but to leave vengeance to the Lord. He continues by recalling the injunction of Prov 25:21-22 to treat our enemies well, feeding them if they are hungry and giving them drink if they are thirsty, thereby heaping burning coals on their heads. The underlying reason for this overcoming of evil with good is spelt out more fully in 1 Pet 2:19-23. Believers are to endure the pain of unjust suffering, because:

Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example..."He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.⁴

These injunctions are in sharp contrast to the characteristic behaviour of a state when faced with what it perceives to be wrong-doing by one of its subjects or by another state. For the characteristic response of a state is, as I suggested earlier, with the sword (as Paul himself goes on to imply in Rom 13:3, 4). It reacts to its enemies not with the healing power of love, but with the punishing use of counterforce. It does not feed its enemies, but starves them into submission. It heaps burning coals on their heads not in the figurative or spiritual, but in the literal sense. When the order it maintains is insulted or injured, the state threatens in return. In short, the state can hardly be said to adhere to the injunctions Christians are expected to follow in responding to injuries inflicted by wrong-doers.

In responding to perceived wrong-doing with the sword, political authorities appear to imitate God's role as judge and avenger. In fact, they might be suspected to have not merely imitated but usurped that role, a suspicion which is echoed in hints in the Scriptures that political authority is satanic.⁵ But the dominant view in the Bible is that political authority has been instituted by God.⁶ God's purpose in instituting political authority is to encourage good conduct and discourage bad conduct [Rom 13:3-4] in a world where people, including believers, are unable completely to avoid sinful and injurious behaviour. In short, the state departs from Christ's example of suffering and patient love in order to prevent evil from getting entirely out of hand in this world. In so far as it performs this divinely ordained function, the state may be described as a necessary evil at best.

The fundamental question which emerges from this is whether Paul's and Peter's injunctions about responding to evil with a suffering love prohibit Christians personally from participating in this necessary evil. Are Christians obliged to avoid direct involvement in governing others? If Christians answer this question with a "yes," as many have done in the past, then they must face the upsetting possibility that they are shirking their responsibility for a divinely ordained undertaking and leaving the necessary dirty work to non-believers. If they answer with a "no" and look on politics as a permissible activity, as most twentieth-century Christians appear to be doing, they may well be able to tell themselves that they are doing no more than meeting their scripturally warranted responsibilities. But the Apostles' injunctions surely ought to dampen their eagerness and enthusiasm for it. For those injunctions must mean, at the very least, that political life falls far short of the ideal Christian life: although necessary, it is still an evil. Thus, solemn sadness, not abounding joy or eager applause, should characterize the Christian approach to the political arena.

2. *Salvation by Political Means?*

The Scriptures make it clear that our justification before God is not by works of law but by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the external conformity of our behaviour to rules but by a genuine commitment within. As Paul puts it, "circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" [Rom 2:29]. Such circumcision is by God's grace alone; we cannot put ourselves or others right with God by our own efforts.

One important consequence of the doctrine that salvation is by faith through grace is that souls cannot be saved by political means. For if external obedience to religious law cannot make man right with God, then neither can external obedience to a law imposed by political authorities. Or to put it more dramatically, the cold steel of the sword cannot warm hearts. Salvation is God's business, not

the business of political authorities. Luther saw this quite clearly in his *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*:⁷

Worldly government has laws which extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth. For over the soul God can and will let no one rule but Himself. Therefore, where temporal power presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads and destroys the soul. We desire to make this so clear that every one shall grasp it, and that our junkers, the princes and bishops, may see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing one thing or another.

Few Christians, at least few in the Reformed tradition, would consciously hold to the belief that people can be saved by political means. But the intensity with which many evangelical Protestants support political projects designed to preserve or reconstruct what they believe to be a "Christian society" and many liberal Protestants pursue political agendas designed to transform society into a "just" or "non-exploitive" one suggests that such a belief may be lurking somewhere below the level of conscious awareness. Recalling the basic teaching of salvation by faith through God's grace should help exorcise this belief and moderate our political passions accordingly. For it means recognizing that the most that can be achieved through politics is a kind of civil righteousness, that is, the external conformity of our behaviour with God's will, not spiritual righteousness. And while civil righteousness is of some importance, it must pale, like the moon beside the sun, when compared with spiritual righteousness. For Christians, then, the aims attainable by politics must be regarded as strictly secondary or subordinate; they are not the heart of the matter.

3. *The Absence of Certain Knowledge of God's Political Agenda*

It might be objected to the preceding line of argument that although salvation is a matter of a transformed heart and is essentially God's business, God may nonetheless use human instrumentalities, including political institutions, to bring about such salvation. Accordingly, it might be thought that believers need only carefully tune their political agenda to God's will for the political realm in order to act as willing political instruments in his plan for redemption.

There is, on the surface, a certain plausibility to this objection. Christians may claim to have revealed to them a general knowledge of God's will for mankind. He seeks, despite our fundamental flaws, to reconcile us to him in eternal life. Christians may also claim to have revealed knowledge of the means God has chosen for attaining this aim. He loves us with such a passion that he sent his only Son to suffer for our sins, so that through belief in him we might be justified and cleansed in God's sight. Christians may further claim to have revealed knowledge that God will use people as instruments to carry out his design of salvation. The Great Commission [Matt 28:18-20], amongst other things, teaches Christians that they have both the obligation and privilege to share the good news of God's plan with others. Finally, Christians may claim to have revealed knowledge that God uses political authorities as part of the means for carrying out his design. Jesus was crucified by the Roman state to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Thus, not all of God's ways are mysterious. Nor are they all non-political.

However, while it may be readily acknowledged that God can use political institutions as part of his plan to turn people towards him, it is by no means evident that he reveals enough of the details of his political plans in advance or, even if he did, that believers would understand that revelation

clearly enough to enable them to assist in promoting his purpose through a deliberately designed political program. In short, the kind of general knowledge Christians have of God does not necessarily bring with it a detailed advance knowledge of the political dimensions of his plan for redemption.

Two examples will illustrate the difficulty. The first is Christ's death at the hands of the Roman state itself. It will be recalled that when Jesus predicted his death on the cross, Peter was reluctant to believe him [see Matt 16:21-23]. If we put ourselves in Peter's place, we may readily sympathize with him. Jesus' announcement in those circumstances would strain our human capacity for understanding. How could God possibly let his Son be crucified? How could the painful, physical destruction of the One without sin at the hands of a state that was corrupt, tyrannical, and pagan possibly serve God's purpose? Surely God would choose a more just, less violent, more "godly" means to achieve his aim. The other example is from Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul says that the Israelites failed to obtain the salvation they sought because "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear" [Rom 11:8]. How could a loving God, concerned with reconciling his loved ones to him, make them stumble? How could this be just? Paul explains later that it is through Israel's trespass that salvation has come to the Gentiles, thus making Israel jealous (and possibly more eager for salvation) [see Rom 11:11-12]. The justice of the matter remains obscure apparently even to Paul who exclaims: "How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" [Rom 11:33]. So the ways, including the political ways, God uses to achieve his ends are often beyond our human capacity for understanding and our instinctive sense of justice. The upshot of this is that even given a general knowledge of God's purposes, Christians will not be able to presume with any certainty that they know enough of the details of God's ways to construct a political agenda that would enable them to act as God's political instruments for man's salvation.

The conclusion, again, is that the most Christians might hope for from a Christian political agenda is the attainment of civil, not spiritual, righteousness. In fact, the recognition that there is a significant degree of inscrutability to the specific ways God uses for redemption should also alter the way we entertain the hope for civil righteousness. For that inscrutability leaves the possibility that even in situations where the conditions of civil righteousness are visibly and indisputably violated, as they were in the case of Jesus' crucifixion, God may be operating to bring about some spiritual good. In short, Christians must remain ever prepared to be surprised by God's will. Although this should not wholly undermine a Christian's willingness to see the conditions of civil righteousness preserved, it must moderate the intensity with which we hold the hope for civil righteousness, for it balances that hope against the recognition that even out of evil situations God can bring the superior good of spiritual redemption.

4. Christians as a Harmful Influence in Politics

In Rom 8:2 Paul says that "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." Paul is not claiming that those who receive the gift of the Spirit of life no longer sin. Rather, he means that they have been given a power, which they had not before, to resist sin and are thus no longer unavoidably compelled to sin. But no man, with the exception of the "Son of Man," manages fully to resist all sin. To paraphrase Luther, where grace abounds, so too does sin. If it is true that believers will sin, and sin abundantly, then their plans and agendas, including their political ones, will likewise be tinged with sin. They will continue to see political things, to draw on a fine expression in the King James Version, "through a glass, darkly" and not yet "face to face" [1 Cor 13:12]. Given this, Christians must be on guard against presuming their political agendas to be accurate expressions of God's will. They must be no less on guard against the prideful conclusions to which such a presumption can lead, namely, that their political agenda, being ostensibly ordained by God, is automatically superior to the political agendas of others and is

unquestionably worthy of imitation and enforcement. Political pride, no less than spiritual pride, is not a posture becoming to Christians. Yet it is a posture, and this is something we may not wish to face, that has all too often characterized Christian involvement in politics. And when Christian involvement in politics does assume this prideful posture, it becomes destructive of political order and the civil righteousness which depends on that order.

Why a prideful political posture does have destructive consequences is not difficult to see. If Christians take the first crucial step towards political pride by beginning to believe that their own political agendas are those of God, then those agendas become things which cannot possibly be compromised. If they cannot be compromised, then when faced with people who disagree with them, Christians will dig in their heels and battle it out rather than work out an agreement which will permit social peace to prevail. The impasse caused by such an uncompromising attitude can be resolved only if the politically prideful Christian party comes to dominate its opponents (in which case it runs the risk of practicing tyranny), or if its opponents succeed in acquiring political dominance over the Christian party (in which case it becomes the tyrannized). Of course, the impasse need not be resolved; the struggle can fester on in the form of a protracted conflict bordering on warfare. These unwelcome consequences are all the more likely if the political groups who disagree with Christians also invest their political agenda with the sanctifying claim that it is God's agenda.

This is not a hypothetical scenario, as reflection on the various religious conflicts in Britain and Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or the predicament of Northern Ireland and Lebanon today will show. Or, if distant struggles are not convincing, then it might be worthwhile to reflect on how often disputes within local churches and denominations have come to be characterized by a startling degree of acrimony between disputants, both of whom claim faithfully to be following Christ's Spirit.

This is not to suggest that Christians cannot exercise a constructive influence in politics. They can and have. Nor is it to suggest that the avoidance of conflict is always desirable. The preservation of life and social peace are hardly the only things of value. But it is to suggest that if Christians enter the political arena, they must do so not only with an awareness of the positive message they may bring to it, but also a blunt assessment of the distinctive dangers to the political and social order they can pose.

5. *The Dangers of Politics For Christianity*

If Christians pose a potential danger to politics, politics also poses a danger to Christians. To understand the nature of that danger it is useful to recall Paul's warning that those who "are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" [Rom 8:5-6, KJV]. The political world is the world *par excellence* of the flesh. For although political authorities occasionally aim at higher goals, they far more often act as protectors of, or facilitators for, the interests of the flesh: the pursuit of power over nature and people, the acquisition of property and social status, the pursuit of commerce, and the freedom to seek this-worldly "happiness," and the like. Moreover, the political arena is one in which these interests of the flesh manifest themselves as large, organized and powerful interests: as the interests of political parties and organizations, of governmental bureaucracies, of business corporations, of labour unions, of consumer associations, of various oppressed or affronted minority groups, and countless others. Any Christian organization venturing into this political arena with the intention of having its own political agenda taken seriously will need the co-operation of more than one of these powerful interests. Their co-operation will come at a price, which will normally include the acceptance and approval (wholly or in part) of the co-operating groups' interests and political agenda. This will shift the politicized Christian group's understanding of the world (and, conceivably, also its theology) in the direction of the prevailing world's definition

of itself. And since the "interests" whose co-operation the Christian group must seek are usually more powerful (in a worldly sense) and often more adept at skillful political bargaining, then it is highly likely that these worldly "interests" will exercise a greater influence on the Christian group than vice versa. From a community which is in, but not of, the world the politicized Christian organization becomes one which is both in and of the world.

This is not an illusory fear. In his *The Subversion of Christianity*, Jacques Ellul draws attention to how effective this seduction by the prevailing world has been. Complaining that "Christianity imbibes cultures like a sponge," he points out that:⁸

It became territorial and feudal...in the feudal world with all the beliefs...that back it. It then became bourgeois, urban, and argentiferous with the capitalist system. It is now becoming socialist with the diffusion of socialism. It helped spread Western culture throughout the world when the West was conquering and subjugating the world. Today it is letting itself be permeated by the values of African, Oriental, and American Indian cultures....Tomorrow we might have adjustment to Islam as today we have adjustment to Marxism. We now have a rationalist or liberal Christianity as we used to have an Aristotelian or Platonic Christianity in a mockery of being "all things to all men."

But the dangers politics poses for Christianity lie not simply in the changes of doctrine and understanding of the world which political involvement brings about. They also lie in the capacity politics has for accentuating the differences between Christians and lining them up on opposite sides of a battlefield. An extreme example of this is provided by the recent alignment of liberation theology with the revolution of the oppressed in Latin America and of conservative Christianity with the political Right in the United States. Here the politicization of Christians has created a situation where they may be quite literally on opposite sides of a battlefield. Although such a situation visibly violates Christ's call for love, unity, and reconciliation, it is not at all surprising that even well-meaning and reflective Christians should find themselves enveloped in it once they have decided to pursue a political agenda.

A number of factors facilitate this envelopment. One is that the organized interests whose co-operation Christians need in order to acquire a share of the political power are usually intractably divided; divided between those who are more sensitive to the real or imagined interests of people who are relatively advantaged in the existing distribution of society's benefits (the rich, the propertied, the powerful, the socially accepted) and those who are more sensitive to the real or imagined interests of people who are relatively disadvantaged in that distribution (the poor, the propertyless, the impotent, the social lepers). When Christians move into this political arena with strong political ambitions, they will be inevitably drawn towards one side or the other, towards an alignment with interests which lean towards preserving the existing order or with interests which lean towards changing it to the advantage of the "under classes," towards the political Right or the political Left. Indeed, Christians, like other citizens, are likely to have bought into these divisions even before they formally move into active politics, for social and political allegiances are usually shaped by family upbringing. Thus, they inevitably become entangled in political, that is, party, strife.

The second factor lies in the Bible itself. In it the revelation of God's will is often like the first chapter of a book which develops the fundamental themes only in a general way and which leaves the reader to puzzle out the details and nuances of these themes in his or her day-to-day life. It does not contain a complete and detailed set of guidelines showing us how to respond in every aspect of life under every possible set of circumstances. This is particularly true in relation to complex political and

social issues. For example, Christians are instructed to be especially sensitive to the needs, including the material needs, of the poor. But which public policies or combination of policies will best meet the needs of the poor in Canada this year? What, precisely, are those needs? Which of these needs are more crucial? How are they best met: by the market, by political intervention, or by community associations? Which policies will best meet the needs of the poor without undermining the ability of society to take care of the legitimate needs of other groups? What are these other legitimate needs? These are questions (and there are many others) for which there are no explicit answers in the Scriptures. To answer them Christians would have to rely significantly on their (merely) human reasoning powers. The ability of human reasoning powers to issue in widely agreed-upon conclusions about social and political matters has proven singularly unimpressive thus far. This means that even reflective and conscientious Christians can be expected to come up with divergent answers. Once these divergent answers are solidified into concrete political programmes, they will promote political conflict. This problem will be compounded when Christians turn to working out the political means of meeting biblically-grounded expectations besides those in relation to the poor. The unavoidable conclusion of this is that we cannot expect a unified political agenda to emerge amongst Christians. More precisely, we cannot expect such unity prior to Christ's return and his transformation of this world into his kingdom. And then politics and political agenda making, at least in any form we know it, will hardly be necessary. What we can expect until then is that the more completely Christians move into the political world and political agenda making, the more they will be entangled in political strife with each other.

The dangers that political life present to Christians are not, of course, unique to politics itself. All living carries with it the prospect of sinning; corruption is an innate disposition of our hearts and, hence, of our lives. Consequently, there is no area of life, political or otherwise, where Christians do not run the danger of being enticed by the world's understanding of itself and of being drawn into the conflicts which a merely human understanding of the world inevitably engenders. But it must be acknowledged that politics entails special dangers. Gaining a share of political power requires - and not merely encourages, as other activities do - that Christians go some distance towards accepting the aims and agendas of organized and extremely powerful interests "of the flesh." They cannot otherwise get the co-operation they need to make their political demands effective. Moreover, acquiring a share of political power requires working out concrete policy directions for which no indisputable Scriptural guidance exists, and thus entails an increased reliance on merely human and contentious reasoning. Politics, then, is something Christians must approach not with wide-eyed hopes and great expectations, but with a heightened sense of its serious dangers.

6. Conclusion

The preceding arguments are intended, as I suggested earlier, to moderate the Christian passion for politics, not to purge it entirely. They warn of limitations and dangers that will increasingly beset Christians the more they try to move from the periphery to the center of the political stage. Thus, they warn more strongly against certain kinds of political activity than against others: more against exercising political power than against counselling those in power, more against becoming an organized political party than against being a lobby group, more against tying themselves to one organized political force than against *ad hoc* support for whichever political actor happens at any given time to best represent the example of Christ, more against formulating concrete policy solutions for social problems than against sensitizing politicians to the problems. In short, they counsel Christians to keep some distance between themselves and political life, and ultimately between their faith and their own political passions.

This still leaves scope for Christians to engage in important, if limited, kinds of political activity. One important political role it would leave Christians is one that Socrates claimed to have performed for the Athenian people, namely, that of a gadfly stinging the consciences of his fellow

citizens by settling "here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving."⁹ This is a role which Christians will readily recognize as an aspect of Jesus' ministry as well as that of all the Old and New Testament prophets. As gadflies to society's conscience, and particularly to politicians' consciences, Christians surely have a unique and positive contribution to make. Unlike many of their fellow citizens, their faith should make them very aware of the ultimate vanity and social destructiveness of excessively indulging worldly ambitions and desires. They are thus in a position to challenge those mindsets which permit or justify, as most contemporary mindsets do, such excessive indulgence by offering a fundamentally different understanding of the world. They are in a position to counsel mercy and restraint in the face of prideful demands for vengeance against wrongdoers. They are in a position to press for generosity towards the poor in the face of the oppressive depredations of the rich and powerful. They are in a position to call for loving care for the "lepers" of the world in the face of an anxiety-driven demand to preserve life or social status. They are in a position to condemn revolutionary violence in the face of an aroused sense of injustice or counter-revolutionary violence in the face of an aroused sense of conserving the order of things. They are in a position to defend the value of vital institutions and traditions in the face of a surging inclination to be free of obligations to others. And they are in a position to warn of the inherent limitations of our fallen nature in the face of the illusory hope of creating a "new Jerusalem," secular or otherwise, in this world. Of course, gadflies of the conscience run some risks in all of this; the tail of the horse whose conscience the gadfly stings can sometimes inflict serious and fatal injury. One other kind of political activity - and it is one for which sufficient Scriptural justification can be found - may thus be called for, namely, passive disobedience.¹⁰

This call for constraining the Christian role in politics may not satisfy the desire to share our salvation with others or our need to ensure that society enforce the rules of good conduct as we understand them, but more cannot be had without the loss of important parts of the Christian faith.

¹ I am indebted to Clark Pinnock for drawing my attention to this in his presentation before the Hamilton Theological Society in March, 1989. Pinnock went on to applaud the trend towards the politicization of Christianity. Although the intention of my paper is to argue that such applause is unwarranted, it attempts to do so not by engaging Pinnock's arguments in a point by point rebuttal, but rather by laying out a more general case for an alternative response to such politicization.

² See "Disestablishing the 'Establishment Clause'?", *Christianity Today*, 34, No.16 (November 5, 1990), 62-64.

³ *An Open Letter Concerning the Hard Book Against the Peasants*, quoted William A Mueller, *Church and State in Luther and Calvin. A Comparative Study* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Anchor Books, 1965), p.41.

⁴ All references to the Bible are to the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ See, for example, 1 Sam 8:4-8, where the Lord tells Samuel that the request of the elders of Israel for a king to govern over them like "all the nations" is less a rejection of Samuel than a rejection of him as their king; Matt 4:8-10, where Jesus does not dispute Satan's claim that he can dispose of all the kingdoms of the world; 1 John 5:19, where the "whole world" is said to be "under the control of the evil one;" and John 18:33-37 and 19:10-11, where Jesus responds to Pilate with noticeable irreverence. See also Rev 13:7. For an explication of the view that the Bible points to the satanic nature of political authorities, see Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1986), p.113-136.

⁶ The classic statement of this position is, of course, Rom 13:1-2. But see also 1 Pet 2:13-15; Col 1:16; Dan 2:21; 4:17, 24-25; 5:21; Hos 13:11.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther. Selections From His Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p.382-3.

⁸ *Subversion of Christianity*, p.18.

⁹ Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), p.63.

¹⁰ For examples of passive disobedience, see the refusal of Israelite midwives to obey the Pharaoh's order to kill new-born males [Exod 1:17]; the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to abide by Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship a golden image [Dan 3:12-18]; Daniel's refusal to obey Darius' command to pray only to the king for 30 days [Dan 6:6-16]; the refusal of the three wise men to obey Herod's instructions to let him know where the Christ child was [Matt 2:7-8, 12]; and the refusal of Peter and others to obey the command of the Sanhedrin [Acts 5:27-29].