Evangelical Approaches to Christian Participation in War: An Inquiry and a Proposal [*]

Part One

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One of the most difficult moral dilemmas Christians face is the problem of their response to war. The social and political exigencies of life in an unjust and inhumane world, the seemingly intractable problems posed by tyrannical nation-states, and the human struggle for emancipation from structural evil are persistent problems of human history that demand a response. Indeed, given the reality that Christians live among, and as citizens of nation-states that employ the institutionalized violence of war as a normative principle of international relations, there is little choice but to face the questions: Under what circumstances is it morally permissible for Christians to use lethal force in war? Is it, in fact, a moral imperative for them to do so? Or is it altogether wrong under any circumstances for Christians to participate in war's violence?

Evangelical Christians who uphold the primacy and authority of Scripture over against church tradition must grapple with issues underlying their response to such questions—issues and questions that are fundamental to any account of evangelical identity. Problems of the nature of God, of God's manner of self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and of biblical hermeneutics cut across any Christian discussion of war and peace in the modern world. The principal problem for evangelicals, however, is Scripture. That is so because the question, "May Christians fight and kill in war?" must be for evangelicals "Does *Scripture* allow, command or condemn Christian participation in war?" Put another way, is it possible to construct a biblical ethic of Christian participation in war? This essay will be a reflection on that question.

In the first part, I will outline the thoughts of two evangelical scholars who maintain that participation in war is a viable moral option for Christians. I will identify how each seeks to resolve key questions that are fundamental to the issue. For example, how does one resolve the apparently discrepant portraits of the Old Testament "Warrior" God and the New Testament God of Love revealed in Jesus of Nazareth? How does one maintain the evangelical commitment to the normativity of Scripture, while acknowledging the diverse voices of Scripture on this subject? How is Jesus Christ, in his life, death and teachings, normative for Christian ethics? How do Christians resolve the tensions inherent in their dual citizenships? In the second part, I will reflect on such questions while suggesting an alternative to such approaches within the framework of biblical authority.

I. The Case for War

Loraine Boettner's *The Christian Attitude Toward War*[1] is a standard among evangelical Protestants. Boettner's methodological starting point is biblical inerrancy.[2] The Scriptures "contain one harmonious, consistent, and sufficiently complete system of doctrine," and therefore the Christian has merely to seek God's will on war by tracing out this consistency through an inductive analysis of biblical texts.

Boettner's understanding of the Bible's teaching on war may be distilled into several maxims: (1) God commanded warfare and killing in the execution of His divine purpose (Exod. 15:3, 4; 17:8-16; Num. 33:50-

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[1] Third edition, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985.

[2] Boettner, 12. Some readers may wonder if it is not first of all Boettner's commitment to covenant theology that informs his approach to the subject. While that is possible, I have tried to follow Boettner's logic as articulated in his work. Boettner insists that Christian theology and ethics must be rooted *a priori* in an inerrantist biblical hermeneutic. This necessarily would include his appropriation of covenant distinctives, which ultimately would be justified on the basis of his commitment to inerrancy. Furthermore, a careful evaluation of the structure and principal propositions of Boettner's argument makes clear that he does not approach the problem from the theological perspective of the covenant (see e.g. 19, 20). For a discussion of these terms see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, fourth ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 262-301, and Walter A. Elwell, ed., "Covenant Theology," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 279ff. For an interpretation of Boettner similar to mine, see Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 1983), 144ff.

56; Josh. 1:1-9; 5:13-6:27; Judg. 4:1-23; 6-7; 1 Sam. 15:1-33; 17:1-54), and war and victory in war are celebrated in the Psalms (68:1, 2, 12, 17; 144:1-15). God never commands evil; therefore, war cannot always be evil. (2) Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus condemned the military vocation; hence Christians may join the military and fight in a war (Luke 3:14; Matt. 8:5-13; Acts 10). (3) Romans 13:1-7 teaches "the divinely established authority" of the state. God ordained government to execute justice and maintain order in society, and that requires the "sword."[3] God commands Christians to obey the "authorities." Christians may therefore employ lethal force in behalf of a just cause when called upon by the state to do so. (4) Finally, the New Testament uses war and war symbolism as metaphors for the Christian life (Eph. 6:14-17; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3; Rom. 8:37; Rev. 19:11-15). This is hardly conceivable if war is "everywhere and always wrong."[4]

Boettner takes up the issue of war in the Bible in narrative sequence. Beginning with the Old Testament he develops a theology of war. In line with inerrancy's hermeneutical mechanism of harmonization, NT materials must then agree in every detail with the position he has developed from the OT. The profound effect of this hermeneutical move becomes clear when Boettner discusses the ramifications Jesus' teachings have for Christian participation in war. He begins his inquiry, not with the Sermon on the Mount, but instead with Jesus' view of biblical authority. He complains that pacifists misinterpret NT teaching on war because they fail to appreciate that Jesus held the OT to be fully inspired and authoritative (John 10:35; Matt. 22:29). It is here that Boettner's unsophisticated use of the inerrantist hermeneutic becomes clear. He makes the assumption that Jesus read and interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures in precisely the same manner and with the same presuppositions as Boettner himself does. Therefore, in Boettner's view, Jesus' teachings could not be pacifist, for Yahweh in the OT commanded war. This hermeneutical framework utterly controls Boettner's reading of the Sermon on the Mount. If Jesus accepted the authority of the OT, and the OT sanctions war, then Jesus' teachings on nonresistance in the Sermon must not be taken literally (Matt. 5:39; cf. John 18:22,23). They are ethics for the interpersonal rather than the social sphere. The Scriptures are thus flattened and the radical message of Jesus is relativized. The NT may

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

[4] Boettner, 12-33.

possess different emphases or objectives—but the Bible, OT and NT, speaks with a single voice on any subject it addresses.

Boettner thus solves the problem of constructing a biblical ethic of Christian participation in war by denying that any exists. He insists that the question must be answered biblically: "The question at issue is simply this: What do the Scriptures teach concerning war?"[5] Yet his use of the Bible is highly tendentious. First, it is not at all clear that the hermeneutical mechanism of inerrancy requires that the biblical materials be read as Boettner posits. Why, for example, should Jesus' life and teachings be read in the light of the OT and not the reverse, especially since it is exegetically certain that the earliest Christians did precisely that?[6] How would such a move endanger biblical authority or inerrancy? Furthermore, what exegetical or theological justification exists for relegating the Sermon on the Mount to the realm of interpersonal ethics? Still further, why should we consider Romans 13 an unqualified word on the Christian's relation to the state? What of Revelation 13 and other theological emphases of Scripture? For example, Boettner acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible was "written to and about a nation, while the [NT] was written to individuals and to a nonpolitical body"— the church.[7] Such a statement should have revolutionary implications both for his attempt to construct Christian ethics out of OT materials and for his account of the Christian's relation to the state. Yet Boettner seems unable to reflect on the profound theological and ethical consequences of this shift in emphasis.

Second, Boettner's hermeneutic is a hermeneutic unhinged from history. Historical exegesis and theological exegesis are fused into a naïve literalism and the propositional character of biblical revelation is pressed to the neglect of history. Whether a text was written during the age of the patriarchs, during the divided monarchy, during the exile, or after Jesus' resurrection is unimportant; all alike are harmonized into a single unified pattern of doctrine and ethics. The historical character of revelation is suppressed or ignored. Finally, Boettner's approach does not rest, as he asserts, on a particular view of the nature of Scripture. It is the product of tradition, particularly his commitment to the Reformed wing of Fundamentalism, with its high view of the state as a divine institution.

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[5] *Ibid*., 13.

[6] See, for example, Matt. 1:23; 2:15; 21:5; 26:31; 27:46; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:23, 24 *et al*.

[7] Boettner, 18.

Thus, on the basis of his own methodological principles, Boettner fails to make his case for Christian participation in war.

A much more theologically reflective approach to the problem is that of Peter Craigie.[8] Craigie is very sensitive to the difficulties that OT warrior images of God pose for Christian concepts of God, revelation and ethics.

Craigie stresses that the theme of God the Warrior is an essential aspect of OT theology. He cites numerous texts, as did Boettner, as evidence that God's law commanded the Israelites to fight and kill their enemies in war.[9] Craigie, however, does not proceed uncritically from citation to application. Although biblical language about God is true, it is contingent and incomplete; it is incapable of exhausting the reality of God. The meaning of God as Warrior is accessible not in the bare fact of warfare in the OT, but in that warfare's underlying theological significance.

Craigie finds the clue to war's significance in the Exodus (Exod. 15). God's self-revelation takes place in two principal ways: First, through the spoken word, and second, by means of God's participation in human history.[10] This, in Craigie's view, is the most important theological affirmation of the Hebrew religion: the living God is immanent in human history. Warfare is a product of human history; it is an expression of the nations' struggle for survival and dominance in history. The language of God as Warrior is anthropomorphic. It is a metaphor that describes God's participation through the "normal," sinful relationships of human history, including the institution of war, to bring about the divine purpose. God participates as Warrior in human history for the purposes of judgment and, ultimately, redemption. As God judged the evil of the Canaanites, so God judged the iniquity of the chosen people in Judah's defeat and Jerusalem's fall. God's judgment is always linked to the purpose of redemption, yet because that redemption lies still in the future, God's activity in history takes place through sinful human beings and activities. The language of God as Warrior, then, is neither a normative description of God's moral being, nor does it legitimize warfare—it points beyond itself to the reality of the transcendent God who acts in the midst of human history *as it is*.[11] God as Warrior is the language of immanence.

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[8] *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

[9] Craigie, 35.

[10] *Ibid*., 39.

[11] *Ibid*., 35-41.

The pervasive presence of war narratives in a book held to be divine revelation remains a problem, however. Again, Craigie insists that revelation is rooted in fallen human history—including the history of warfare with all its grisly particularities. A holistic reading of the OT does not glorify warfare, for the OT contains not only conquest narratives but also defeat narratives. Christians may therefore derive two primary principles from the war narratives of the OT. First, warfare in the OT can be read as a parable of the reality of international relations in human history. Nation-states are established by violence and their survival depends upon their ability to utilize violence effectively to defend against aggressors or extend their territory. The profound realism of OT war narratives "forces us to face up to the reality of our own world."[12]

Second, the promise of the Kingdom of God failed to be realized through the temporal, earthly kingdom of Israel. The failure of Israel demonstrated that God's salvation was not to be found in or through a nation. Instead, God entered human history directly and established a new covenant and a new Kingdom in Jesus Christ. As Craigie asserts, "The old kingdom was established by the *use* of violence, the new Kingdom was established in the *receipt* of violence. God the warrior becomes the Crucified God, the one who receives in Himself the full force of human violence."[13] Craigie avers that the death of Jesus opens before humans the new option to transcend the order of violence, yet he does not infer from this the necessity of Christian pacifism. He rejects both pacifism and just war, and turns finally to the paradox of Christians' dual citizenship to resolve the quandary of Christian participation in war.

Although Christians are citizens of the Kingdom, they continue to live as members of nation-states whose fundamental principle of existence is violence. Because of their existence in the state, they share, directly or indirectly, in its violence. This in Craigie's view is a paradox without possibility of resolution. Thus Craigie feels forced to render a highly qualified Yes to Christian participation in war, simply because he cannot say No.

Craigie's approach is very helpful and instructive. He finds the clue to OT warfare's normative significance in the category of revelation in history. He is thus able to build a bridge between the Old and New Testaments and maintain the normativity and revelatory character of both. It is unfortunate that Craigie does not further draw out the implications of his theology. If God’s self-revelation in the reality of human history took the form of God as Warrior, and if that metaphor is a necessary consequence of history, what are the theological and ethical consequences of the revelation of the crucified Son of God? Is God in Jesus Christ conferring a new meaning upon history? Is God overturning the “order of necessity” inherent in human history and replacing it with a history ordered along different lines?

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[12] *Ibid*., 100.

[13] *Ibid*., 99, 100. Italics in original.

II. An Eschatological Ethic of War

Christian ethics are eschatological ethics. They are the ethics of the inbreaking future already present. In what follows, I will briefly outline three intersecting themes that are central to the question of Christian participation in war: (1) The normativity of Jesus for a Christian ethic of participation in war. (2) The Christian community’s nature, and how its calling and vocation shape its interaction with the state. (3) How Christian appropriation of OT themes requires a hermeneutical shift in our reading of OT war narratives.

1. ***Jesus of Nazareth in his concrete historical existence—in his teachings, life, death and resurrection, incarnates and authenticates a model of radical political action.***[14] ***Jesus the Logos of God is God’s revelator and the definitive criterion for Christian existence in the world.***

If a truly Christian response to participation in war is possible, it must be founded upon Jesus Christ. In the man Jesus of Nazareth, God reveals Himself fully, finally, definitively (John 1:1, 18; 14:9; Col. 2:9). Jesus Christ not only proclaims the truth, *he is the truth* (John 14:6; 1:9, 14; Eph. 4:21; cf. 2 Cor. 1:19, 20). He is God in self-revelation—the concrete embodiment of God’s will for humans. In his person, teachings, attitudes and redemptive work, he is the pattern and groundwork for all our ethical reflection, including our response to war.

The Jesus of history who is God’s Messiah entered the arena of human history as a Jew during a period marked by political and socio-economic violence. “The first century was one of the most violent epochs of Jewish

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[14] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 12-23.

[15] Joel B. Green *et al*, eds., “Revolutionary Movements,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 688-98.

history.”[15] The political subjugation of Israel by Imperial Rome elicited diverse responses among Jews—from the collaboration of the Sadducean high priestly aristocracy, to the Zealot’s revolutionary determination to throw off Roman oppression, to the quietistic withdrawal of the religiously rigoristic Essene community. In this context the ministry and teachings of Jesus take on radical political overtones. Jesus rejected all these political options—collaboration, revolution, apolitical quietism—and instead incarnated a manner of living and acting in the world that led to the cross.[16] The way of Jesus is the way of love, servanthood and forgiveness (Phil. 2:3-14; Matt. 20:27, 28).

Politically, the cross is God’s judgment against a human history dominated by the order of enmity and violence—the “order of necessity.” God inaugurated the Kingdom, not with violence, but with a life that led to the cross: it is the slain Lamb of God who receives power (Rev. 5:12).[17] If we appropriate the significance of this fact for our social existence, we understand that it is not the calculus of effectiveness that determines ultimate good, but rather, simple faithfulness. It is only when we accept the human criterion of the instrumental efficacy of violence as primary for our political existence that we are forced to accept the corollary assumption that participation in war is an inevitable consequence of social responsibility.[18] Christian nonviolence is not based on the so-called “order of necessity”; it finds its locus in the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus’ ethics are eschatological ethics: In Jesus Christ the reign of God is inaugurated (Luke 17:20, 21; 12:32). With the death and resurrection of Christ a new epoch—a new creation—has broken into human history (2 Cor. 5:17).[19]

2. ***The Christian church is the “new creation” community—the community of the reconciled. It is the eschatological community of the Spirit called to proclaim and incarnate the Kingdom of God in the world.***

The call to the new community is the call to reconciliation. God’s character as revealed in reconciliation, redemption and the call to new community, provide a powerful foundation for a Christian response to war: While humans were yet sinners, enemies, and alienated from God, fully deserving the death sentence decreed by God's own law, God, in an act of utter grace, pardoned them in Christ Jesus. God took the initiative and made peace with His enemies in the death of Jesus Christ, reconciled them, and granted them the gift of life (Col. 1:20-22; Rom. 5:6-8, 10). In Jesus Christ, God calls humans to die to their old history—the "fleshly" sphere characterized by violence, division, enmity and strife—a mode of existence that bears within itself the seeds of war (Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:28; 3:15-17; Col. 3:5-8), and calls them to a new history, a new life in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-3; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12). They are "born from above" by God's Spirit and become part of the Body of Christ, God's Movement in the world.[20] This Movement is a transnational family, a "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9) in which national enmity is a thing of the past: "From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view" because all members are "one in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 5:16; Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:11-18; Col. 3:11). Its members live "in the Spirit" and are called to a new ethic, one of peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, other-regarding love—even of enemies (Rom. 8:9-17; Gal. 5:22, 23; Rom. 12:9-17; 13:8-10; Matt. 5:44-48). As God holds out His hand to humanity in forgiving, reconciling love, so Jesus appeals to his disciples to imitate God, to reject retaliation and revenge, to love their enemies: "You must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to His" (Matt. 5:48 NJB). The peace of God in Jesus Christ leads to peace between people formerly at enmity with one another. The ethical coefficient of the new history of the reconciled community is nonviolence.

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[16] Yoder, 58-63. See also note 44 [in Part Two, next issue].

[17] *Ibid*., 61, 238.

[18] *Ibid*., 245-48. See also Yoder’s *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel,* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 91-101.

[19] On the interpretation that the “new creation” (καινὴ κτίσις) of 2 Cor. 5:17 refers to the eschatological new order inaugurated by the Christ-event, and not to the

How is the Christian community to embody its ethic of nonviolence in relation to war? It is not possible to suggest answers to the question without first reflecting upon the nature of the church's engagement of the political sphere and more fundamentally upon the nature of its relationship to the state. For war is not an autonomous phenomenon independent of politics—*it is itself a political activity*. As Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) asserted, ". . . [W]ar cannot be divorced

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regeneration of the individual believer, see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 44-49, and Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco: Word, 1986), Vol. 40, 134-59.

[20] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1986, Vol. 1, 306.

from political life;" on the contrary, "war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."[21] War is an instrument of politics among states, and the violence of war is instrumental to the political objective it seeks to obtain. Both the choice to go to war as well as the conduct of war are governed by war's political objectives, and the costs and consequences of war—whether weighed in human, economic, or social terms—are deemed acceptable or unacceptable by reference to a war's overarching political purpose. It is therefore crucial for Christians who struggle with the question of participation in war to formulate an ethical and theological response within the broader framework of reflection upon the church's place in the political order.

What is the Christian's relationship to the state? The biblical-theological response to this question traditionally has developed along two lines, as exemplified by two key NT passages, Romans 13:1-7 and Revelation 13:1-8. These or similar texts have served as organizing principles around which have coalesced two ideal types of the state's role and function in the divine economy. There are, of course, varying levels of accommodation to these "types." Yet as the history of the church attests, Christian political theology in its diverse manifestations ultimately will develop its approach from variations on these options.[22] If, for example, Romans 13 receives priority, the Christian relation to the state is held to be one of submissive obedience. In this approach the state is accorded an overwhelmingly positive role: it is an institution divinely ordained for the establishment of justice and the maintenance of order in human society. Obedience to the state is then a *prima facie* duty of Christians which may be overridden only in the most extreme circumstances. If, conversely, the trajectory of approach emerges from Revelation 13, a different relationship appears. Here the tension between church and state is intensified to the point of collision. The state, like the world as a whole, is the realm of Satan's activity: it idolatrously absolutizes itself over against God and Christ, persecutes the church, and maintains and expands its influence, both internally and externally, by violence. It is acknowledged that within the providential control of God the state has the legitimate vocation of punishing evil and promoting good, and hence Christians are enjoined to submit to its authority (Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14). Nonetheless, the state is irremediably evil. It is a manifestation of the sovereignty of Satan on earth (cf. Matt. 4:8, 9; Luke 4:5-7). Out of this approach has developed a tradition of radical separation from the political sphere.

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[21] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976, 1984, book eight, chapter six, 606. The abiding relevance of Clausewitz' work is universally recognized among military theorists and scholars. This is especially true of Clausewitz' famous maxim, "[W]ar is simply the continuation of policy by other means," which is possibly his most enduring and original contribution to military thought. See e.g., Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, "Reflections on Strategy in the Present and Future," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 863-71; Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12; H.G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy II* (New York: Dell, 1992), 127 and *passim*. For a detailed discussion of the philosophical aspects of Clausewitz' thought and a critical analysis of modern interpretations, see Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 155-263.

[22] The vast majority of evangelicals have developed their position toward the state out of Romans 13. Only a small minority, primarily those of Adventist and Anabaptist traditions (whose inclusion within the orbit of evangelicalism would doubtless be disputed both by many from within and without such movements), have developed their approach from Revelation 13. Nonetheless, their view is important both

A political theology that rests upon the insights of either option to the exclusion of the other, or that seeks to comprehend the insights of one in a manner that subordinates it to the other, is wholly unsatisfactory. The history of the church is replete with tragic episodes which testify that uncritical submission to the state effectively denies Christ's lordship. On the other hand, total separation from the political sphere too easily ignores the Pauline insight that political authority is derived from God, and accordingly exercises a positive, stabilizing function in human existence. The sharp contrast between these two options invites a dualistic solution to resolve the tension. Thus Romans 13 is the "good state" which Christians must obey, while Revelation 13 is the "fallen state" that Christians must resist. However attractive such an approach may at first glance appear, it begs the question of precisely what constitutes a "good state"—a definition that the Scriptures do not supply. Indeed, although

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historically and theologically, first, because it remains the principal biblicist alternative to the paradigm of mainstream evangelicalism, and second, because it continues to affect large numbers of persons, especially in North America. Furthermore, as segments of these traditions have moved sociologically from the fringes to the center of North American society, the questions of their relationship to evangelicalism and of their evangelical identity have become increasingly important. (See for example the recent book edited by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991], 57-71, 184-203.) It is perhaps even more significant that such traditions continue to gain many adherents outside North America, so that we may expect this option to become more influential and be advanced more widely and forcefully in the future.

Paul was clearly aware of the demonic capacity of the "authorities"—he himself had experienced persecution at the hands of the Romans—he nonetheless urged Christians to be obedient to them on the grounds of their establishment by God.[23] Yet the fact remains that Paul was also willing to defy civic authorities and face imprisonment in order to fulfill his divine calling (1 Cor. 4:9, 12; 2 Cor. 1:8ff.; 6:5; 11:23, 26; Acts 16:20-24). The evidence seems to suggest, then, that a single phenomenon is in view, one that simultaneously possesses a measure of divine authority and a pronounced demonic tendency. None of these solutions—submission, separation, dualism—satisfactorily resolves the tension.

The failure of these approaches to integrate adequately the diverse streams of NT thought is due at least partly to their lack of Christological moorings. Both models implicitly deny the centrality of Christology in theological reflection, either in favor of a theology of "common grace" (Rom. 13) or of the Fall (Rev. 13). Yet it is only when both approaches are developed within the framework of Christology that integration is achieved and a normative view of the Christian's relation to the "authorities" begins to emerge. The clue is found at Colossians 1:15-20, in what most scholars believe is a primitive Christian "hymn" that celebrates the primacy of Christ in creation and redemption:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

In taking up or composing this hymn, Paul proclaims the supremacy of Jesus Christ over "all things." Jesus Christ is the one in, through, and for whom "all things in heaven and on earth" were created. As the unifying principle of the cosmos, Jesus Christ is the source of the coherence and stability of the entire created order, whether in heaven or on earth: "in him all things hold together." Even the enigmatic entities or forces enumerated in this passage—"thrones" (θρονοι), "dominions" (κυριοτητες), "rulers" (αρχαι), and "powers" (alternatively, "authorities," εξουσιαι)—*were created in and for Christ*, are subject to him, and are among the "all things" that *are taken up into the redemptive act of God*

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[23] Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, 235-39, 342-48. See also Yoder, *Politics*, 202.

in him (Col. 1:20). These forces, which collectively may be referred to as "Powers," are an important motif in Paul's writings (1 Cor. 15:24; Rom. 8:38, 39; Eph. 1:20, 21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 2:10, 15). In order to grasp their identity and their relevance for the present subject, it is necessary to examine briefly three lines of evidence: (1) the semantic field of the language Paul used, (2) the conceptual background of his thought, and (3) Paul's interest in these "Powers."[24]

First, it is significant that the cluster of terms employed by Paul is part of the New Testament's *vocabulary of power*. It refers to divine and human expressions of power, whether spiritual (God and those whom God appoints), religious, or political (authorities). The semantic field of these terms includes both the source or agency of power as concretized in particular individuals, offices, and structures, as well as the more abstract conceptions of effective force, the underlying authorizations that infuse a position or office with power, the seat or locus of power abstracted from the one who occupies it, and the sphere or realm over which power extends.[25] In short, this is the language of power in all its diverse manifestations.

Second, Paul's thought appears to reflect the early Jewish belief that supernatural beings influence terrestrial life, specifically its structural aspects. In the OT, princes of nations, evidently angels, stand behind human power structures. Thus Deuteronomy can speak of humanity's national divisions as "according to the number of the gods" (LXX: κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλλων Θεοῦ, "according to [the] number of God's angels")[26] and Daniel of the "prince of the kingdom of Persia," "the prince of Greece," and "Michael, [Israel's] prince," references that clearly refer to super-terrestrial beings associated with these nations (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 10:13, 20ff.; cf. 12:1). It is also possible that the concept of "angels of nations" is present in such texts as Isa. 24:21-23 and 34:5-10. These motifs were developed in elaborate detail in the intertestamental period. Angels were held to be in control of or directly involved in all the spiritual, physical and historical processes of the cosmos (*Jub.* 1:29; 15:31, 32; 49:2, 4; *1 Enoch* 75:1; 82:7-20; 89-90).[27] It is therefore significant that in writing of "thrones," "dominions," "rulers" and "powers," Paul was apparently influenced by the angelological terminology of the intertestamental writings (*2 Macc*. 3:24; *1 Enoch* 61:10, 11; *Test. Levi* 3:8).[28] Ephesians 1:21 further reinforces this impression. In that text the Powers named are identical to those of Col. 1:16, with the significant modification that δυνάμεως, a term used frequently in the LXX of the angelic hosts, replaces θρόνοι.

However, while drawing upon this rich fund of imagery, it is not Paul's intention to assert that angelic beings stand behind earthly power structures. Nor is he concerned to describe for his audience the orders and precise cosmological functions of the angelic hierarchy. And it is unlikely that this may be attributed to a fixed conception of angelology shared by Paul and the recipients of his epistle. Even a cursory survey of the intricate complex of angelological speculation in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal writings reveals how fluid and unsystematic such concepts were. It is probable that the broad, formal content of this vocabulary was shared by Paul and his audience; certainly they thought of the Powers as personal forces impacting all aspects of creaturely life. Nevertheless, in taking up these terms, Paul nuanced the language of the Powers. He reshaped these terms, redefined their boundaries, and focused their application in a new synthesis of meaning. Paul's unique contribution is his singular concentration upon the Powers as *elements or forces that are determinative of human existence*. Invariably he attends upon the manner in which the Powers *condition, regulate, structure and dominate human existence*.

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[24] On this section, see the following: Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. J.H. Yoder, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962; G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956; Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, London, New York, *et al:* Cambridge University Press, 1981; C.D. Morrison, *The Powers That Be*, London: SCM Press, 1960; Peter T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in D.A. Carson, ed., *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, 110-50; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 135-62; Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, *Unmasking the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, and *Engaging the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992.

[25] On ἀρχή, ἄρχων, ἐξουσία, θρόνος, κυρισ́της, see e.g. Matt. 5:34; 19:28; 20:25; 23:22; 25:31; Luke 1:32, 52; 12:11; 18:18; 20:20; Acts 2:30; 4:26; 7:49; 18:17; Rom. 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; Tit. 3:1. (The meaning of "rulers of this age" at 1 Cor. 2:6-8 continues to be contested by NT scholars. The majority hold that human rulers cannot successfully be made to bear the brunt of the phrase, which in their view refers both to the human agents of Christ's crucifixion and the wicked supernatural rulers who stood behind them. However, others argue that the context indicates that "rulers of this age" refers solely to human rulers.) A detailed examination of these terms in the relevant literature is found in Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 6-35, 151-64.

[26] Translation mine.

[27] Wink, *Naming*, 26-35; *Unmasking*, 87-107; Berkhof, 9-11. For a brief discussion, see David Noel Freedman *et al*, eds., "Angels," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), Vol. 1, 248-54.

[28] Less valuable because they are difficult to date with any certainty, but potentially important references are *1 Enoch* 41:9 (reading based upon the eighteenth-century Ethiopic manuscript); *Test. Sol.* 8:2; 18:2; 20:15.

In Colossians 2, for example, the powers and the στοῖχεία του κοσμου, the "elements of the world,"[29] are drawn together and linked to traditional religious observances and ethical rules, "the solid structures within which the pagan and the Jewish societies of the day lived and moved."[30] (See Col. 2:8, 10, 15ff.) At Galatians 4:3, 8-10 the στοιχεια are again associated with pagan and Jewish *religious laws and traditions* that provide the dominating spiritual and structural orientation of human life (cf. also 3:23, 24 with 4:1-3). In Romans 8:38ff. "powers" and "rulers" stand in relation to "angels" and impersonal forces—height, depth, death, life, present, future—forces that are inescapable regulative determinants of human existence. Similarly, at 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 the Powers are linked with death among the hostile forces that threaten humanity and are to be abolished by Christ.

In none of these texts does exegesis demand that the Powers be understood as personal, supernatural beings. It is possible that in such contexts they are impersonal manifestations of power mediated by nature or religion. This fact has led H. Berkhof to speculate whether it is ever appropriate to maintain that Paul views the Powers as personal, supernatural entities or agencies.[31] Nonetheless, it is important to recall that the Colossian hymn identifies the Powers as both *heavenly* and *earthly*.[32] Moreover, the personal nature of the Powers is clearly asserted in Ephesians. There the church's struggle is said to be "*not* against blood and flesh, *but* against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12; cf. 2:2; 3:10). Yet the significant fact remains that Paul used the same vocabulary of what are clearly human agents and institutions of power (Rom. 13:1-3; possibly 1 Cor. 2:6-8; cf. 15:24; Titus 3:1). And it is difficult to imagine that this verbal coincidence is wholly unintentional.[33] It seems rather that these terms have become for Paul a technical vocabulary of forces that in various ways shape and regiment human existence. Thus the Powers are not solely or even primarily impersonal forces, and it is important to observe that Paul does not feel compelled to distinguish between their spiritual and material poles. The Powers are both *personal* and *impersonal*, *heavenly* and *earthly*. In one instance they may be natural forces, in another supernatural agencies, in still others political authorities or intellectual and religious laws, structures and ideologies. Nor are these various manifestations concentrated in any particular appearance of this language. Yet while the actual content of these terms varies according to the context, what is always implicit in Paul's usage is the way these forces bind together, order, regulate, and dominate human existence. They are, as H. Berkhof has observed, "the invisible weight-bearing substratum of the world . . . the underpinnings of creation."[34] It is evidently through these agencies, whether personal or impersonal, that "all things hold together."

To be concluded next issue.

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[29] Translation mine.

[30] Berkhof, 15.

[31] *Ibid*., 18.

[32] Walter Wink asserts that Col. 1:16 should accordingly be made the standard for an investigation of the Pauline language of the Powers. Many scholars, however, hold that the Powers enumerated at Col. 1:16 are an elaboration of the invisible, heavenly realm. Wink argues that the Greek syntax does not require this, and he is correct (*Naming*, 11). Yet even if the Powers of Col. 1:16 should be construed as primarily heavenly realities, it is historically anachronistic to make the theological inference from this that the Powers do not impact the impersonal structures of human existence. The first century was not dominated by a materialistic world view that rigorously dichotomized the heavenly and earthly realms; on the contrary, the interface between "worlds" was liquid and seamless; events in heaven could and did affect events on earth. "The world of the ancients was not a physical planet spinning in empty space in rotation around a nuclear reactor called the sun; it was a single continuum of heaven and earth, in which spiritual beings were as much at home as humans" (*Naming*, 15). The reciprocal, mirror image relation between heavenly and earthly events is clear in Paul's writings (1 Cor. 4:9; 6:3; Eph. 1:20, 21; cf. 2:6; 3:10).

[33] Observe the terminological parallels between (1) passages that clearly refer to super-terrestrial powers, e.g. Eph. 2:2, where "**ruler** of the **power** [or **authority**] of the air" translates **ἄρχοντα** τῆς **ἐξουσίας** τοῦ ἀέρος, Eph. 3:10, wherein "rulers" and "authorities" in the "heavenly places" translates plural forms of ἀρχή and ἐξουσία (Eph. 6:12 is similar), and, (2) passages where these terms appear to refer exclusively to earthly, human agents of power, e.g. Romans 13:1-3, where "authorities" and "authority" translate forms of ἐξουσία (four times), and "rulers" translates ἄρχων, 1 Cor. 2:6-8 where "**rulers** of this age" translates **ἀρχόντων** τοῦ αἰῶνος (twice), and Titus 3:1 wherein "rulers" and "authorities" translate forms of ἀρχή and ἐξουσία.

Finally, passages where the referent cannot be determined with certainty are 1 Cor. 15:24 where ἀρχή, ἐξουσία, and δύναμις may refer to either phenomenon, and Eph. 1:21, which appears to be a conceptual parallel to Col. 1:16, and hence may also have either or both phenomenons in view.

[34] Berkhof, 22.