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CHAPTER SIX

RESPONDING TO THE STATE: CHRISTIAN ANARCHISTS ON ROMANS 13, RENDERING TO CAESAR, AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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The two Bible passages most frequently cited against Christian anarchism are Paul's assertions in Romans 13 and Jesus' recommendation about "rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." Surely, the argument goes, these two passages conclusively prove, once and for all, the Christian anarchist fallacy to be mistaken. A closer look at Romans 13, however, suggests that Paul is in fact interpreting Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—perhaps the founding Bible passage for Christian anarchism—and simply applying the turning of the other cheek to the state, therefore that Paul is not actually contradicting Christian anarchism but in fact articulating the peculiarity of its forgiving response to the state. Similarly, a closer look at Jesus' saying suggests that very few things actually do belong to Caesar, and that it is just as—if not a lot more—important to also render to God what belongs to God. Christian anarchists also take note of Jesus' bizarre instruction, in Matthew 17, to seek the coin for the temple tax in the mouth of a fish, because the reason Jesus gives for doing so is to avoid causing offence. In short, for Christian anarchists, none of these passages defeats their radical political interpretation of Jesus' teachings. To the contrary, they confirm it and further elaborate it. At the same time, the question of the limits of acceptability of any civil disobedience remains somewhat unresolved: while a few Christian anarchists see civil disobedience as problematic, many others consider it unavoidable in certain circumstances. Above all,

however, all Christian anarchists tend to agree that obeying or disobeying the state is irrelevant next to the primary commitment of obedience to God.

Christian anarchists interpret the Gospel to imply a critique of the state and an invitation to make it redundant. Their response to the state's contemporary prominence likewise consists of two fairly distinguishable concerns: on the one hand, Christian anarchists seek to work out a way in which to interact with the prominent state, a *modus vivendi* that honours Jesus' teaching; and on the other, they seek to exemplify the Christian alternative to it, to embody and to thereby demonstrate the possibility of the sort of stateless community life which they understand Jesus to be calling them to. The focus of this chapter, which is based on a section of my doctoral thesis, is limited to the former. A discussion of the latter is offered in a separate chapter in my thesis (which is due to be published soon with Imprint Academic). The present chapter therefore collects a broad range of Christian anarchist writings on responding to the state in order to both summarise the current shape of Christian anarchist thinking on the topic and encourage further discussion on it in the future.

Both in that thesis and in this chapter, Christian anarchist theory is defined rather broadly to include all the writings that advance the Christian anarchist thesis. The most famous producer of such writings is undoubtedly Leo Tolstoy—he is often the *only* example of Christian anarchism cited in the academic literature on anarchism. Among the aficionados, however, Jacques Ellul is also very famous, and people usually also know about Vernard Eller and Dave Andrews. Also well known are some of the figures associated with the *Catholic Worker* movement (especially popular in the United States), in particular Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and Ammon Hennacy. The Christian anarchist literature is also enriched by contributions from thinkers at its margins, who are perhaps not the most vociferous fanatics of pure Christian anarchism, or perhaps not Christian anarchists consistently (perhaps writing anarchist texts for only a brief period of their life), or perhaps better categorised as pacifists or Christian subversives than anarchists but whose writings complement Christian anarchist ones. These include Peter Chelčický, Nicholas Berdyaev, William Lloyd Garrison, Hugh Pentecost, Adin Ballou, Ched Myers, Michael Elliott, and Jonathan Bartley among others. John H. Yoder is also cited in this chapter because, despite being a pacifist Mennonite who was keen to dissociate himself from the anarchist conclusions that his argument has been said to lead to, his writings do further reinforce certain flanks of the Christian anarchist critique. Finally,

Christian anarchism also has its anarcho-capitalists, like James Redford and James Kevin Craig.¹ This chapter does not draw on every one of these thinkers and writers, but extracts from them some of the main arguments they put forward when discussing the question at hand.

Pondering the Christian anarchist response to the state brings to the fore two important New Testament passages: Paul's instructions to the Christians in Rome that they "be subject unto higher powers," and Jesus' saying about rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Both passages are often seen as problematic for Christian anarchism since they appear to contradict its basic proposition—after all, do they not clearly instruct Christians to concentrate on spiritual matters, to submit to the authority of the state, and to let the state and its politicians deal with political affairs? Also, there are substantial disagreements among Christian anarchists on how to approach these passages—are not these disagreements further confirmation that their interpretation is false and unfounded? By bringing together a wide range of Christian anarchist writings on the subject, this chapter suggests a negative answer to of both these questions. That is, despite some real differences, a generic and not too incoherent Christian anarchist interpretation (or set of interpretations) can be sketched out, and according to this reading, it is the standard interpretation of these passages that turns out to be false and dishonest.

The first section of this chapter discusses Romans 13—more specifically: Christian anarchists' opinion of Paul, their actual exegesis of the passage, and what they make of similar passages elsewhere in the New Testament. In the second section, the two instances where Jesus is giving advice on payment of taxes are interpreted from a Christian anarchist perspective: first the "render unto Caesar" passage from Mark 12, then the curious recommendation about collecting the temple tax from the mouth of a fish, from Matthew 17. The third and final section outlines the divergent Christian anarchist positions on civil disobedience: the case against it, the case for it, and the paramount importance of obeying God whatever the case may be.

¹ Craig is the person behind the otherwise anonymous Vine and Fig Tree websites; see for instance *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://members.aol.com/VF95Theses/thesis.htm> (accessed 20 April 2007). There are also many Christian anarcho-capitalist contributors to three key websites: <http://www.lewrockwell.com>, <http://www.strike-the-root.com> and <http://www.libertariannation.org>.

Paul's Letter to Roman Christians, Chapter 13

In his study of New Testament passages relevant to the state, Archie Penner summarises the conventional view when he asserts that “The most elaborate and specific body of teaching in the New Testament on the Christian’s relation to the state is Romans 13,” where Paul writes the following:²

1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:
4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.
6. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.
7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.³

Of course, the Christian anarchist literature argues (as does Penner) that there are many other passages in the New Testament that have inherent implications for the state, but Romans 13 is probably the one with the most explicit reference to it. A few other scattered verses also refer directly to the state in a similar vein, but as noted in more detail below, what they say is largely encompassed by Romans 13. As a result, as Eller puts it, a thinker’s “handling of Romans 13 (along with Mark 12) is the litmus test” of his Christian anarchism.⁴

Mainstream theologians have made the most of this passage to legitimise the church’s support of the state. Ellul thus claims that “the official church since Constantine has consistently based almost its entire ‘theology of the state’ on Romans 13 and parallel texts in Peter’s

² Archie Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State* (Hagerstown: James Lowry/Deutsche Buchhandlung, 2000), 76.

³ Romans 13:1-7. King James Version.

⁴ Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy: Jesus’ Primacy over the Powers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1987), 114-115.

epistles.”⁵ Based on Romans 13, established theologians have argued that Christians ought to submit to state authorities, even to wield the sword when these request it, because God clearly intends the state to be His main tool to preserve social order and stability—in other words, that the state is sanctified by God, and that Christians should welcome that and collaborate with the state. For many Christian anarchists, however, such an interpretation betrays the subtle meaning of this passage. It does not take its context into account, and anyway, it leaves the church with the difficulty of dealing with the “embarrassment” of “tyrants.”⁶ Just like with many other Bible passages, therefore, Christian anarchists are suspicious of traditional exegeses, and instead, they articulate an alternative interpretation of their own.

Paul’s Weaknesses

Before this alternative interpretation can be outlined, it is important to note that Paul himself is also viewed with suspicion by some Christian anarchists.

For a start, several Christian anarchists note that Paul himself did not always submit to Roman authorities, and they demonstrate this by listing his many recorded acts of disobedience.⁷ Redford even remarks that Paul

⁵ Jacques Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” in *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 166-167. See also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. George W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 79; Enrico C. S. Molnár, *A Study of Peter Chelčický’s Life and a Translation from Czech of Part One of His Net of Faith*, ed. Tom Lock (Oberlin: www.nonresistance.org, 2006), <http://www.nonresistance.org/literature.html> (accessed 28 March 2007), 108; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 193.

⁶ Many theologians have sought to argue that somehow Romans 13 does not really apply to tyrants and dictators, but only to peaceful and just forms of government—especially democratic ones—but Ellul has little respect for such “strange casuistry” which anyway does not appear founded on the passage. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 79.

⁷ Dave Andrews, *Subversive Spirituality, Ecclesial and Civil Disobedience: A Survey of Biblical Politics as Incarnated in Jesus and Interpreted by Paul*, <http://anz.jesusradicals.com/subspirit.pdf> (accessed 17 July 2006), 18-22; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 90; Roy Halliday, *Christian Libertarians* (Libertarian Nation Foundation), <http://www.libertariannation.org/af42h2.html> (accessed 8 November 2007), para. 23-24; Penner, 98-100; James Redford, *Jesus Is an Anarchist: A Free-Market, Libertarian Anarchist, That Is—Otherwise What Is*

proudly cites his punishments for such disobedience as proof of his commitment to Jesus.⁸ Was Paul guilty of “evil works”? Was he not doing “that which is good” by spreading the good news? Why then did he incur the “wrath” of rulers? It would seem that either Paul did not abide by his own pronouncement, or that what he meant in Romans 13 must be slightly different to what he is traditionally interpreted to have meant.⁹

Either way, some Christian anarchists also make the point that Christians ought in the first instance to follow Jesus, not Paul, since unlike Jesus, “The apostles can err in their acts.”¹⁰ Indeed, for Tolstoy, the church’s “deviation” from Jesus’ teaching begins precisely with Paul.¹¹ Hence both Tolstoy and Hennacy (who was strongly influenced by Tolstoy) frankly dislike Paul and see him as at best confusing Jesus’ message, at worst betraying it.¹² As to Elliott, he contends that Paul’s advice to submit to authorities was informed by his “expectation of Christ’s imminent return.”¹³ For him, Paul advised submission because he mistakenly expected “the present order” to be soon “swept away.”¹⁴ The “tragedy,” he argues, is that for the church, Paul’s instruction “takes precedence over the witness of Jesus.”¹⁵ Hence for Christian anarchists like Tolstoy, Hennacy and Elliott, *Jesus* is the important teacher, and Paul is just an erring follower who has been given too big a role by the tradition. Beyond this, these particular Christian anarchists have little else to say on Romans 13.

Called an Anarcho-Capitalist, <http://praxeology.net/anarchist-jesus.pdf> (accessed 14 August 2006), 13-14.

⁸ (He also remembers that Joseph and Mary disobeyed Herod to protect baby Jesus.) Redford, 13-14.

⁹ Eller, 198-199.

¹⁰ Penner, 98. See also Halliday, para. 23.

¹¹ Leo Tolstoy, “Church and State,” in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 336.

¹² Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: By Little and by Little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 142; Ammon Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, ed. Jim Missey and Joan Thomas, Second ed. (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1994), 301-302, 475; Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 39-40; Leo Tolstoy, “Introduction to an Examination of the Gospels,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 107-108.

¹³ Michael C. Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture* (London: SCM, 1990), 52.

¹⁴ Elliott, 77-78.

¹⁵ (He uses the word “tragedy” in the plural.) Elliott, 78 (see also 89).

Not all Christian anarchists, however, dislike Paul or view him with similar suspicion. Some point out that he seems to be edging towards anarchism when he says that for Christians, “there is no law.”¹⁶ Others remember his advice to contend against the principalities and powers.¹⁷ Others still try to defend him against allegations that he sought protection from the state—obviously anathema to any genuine anarchist.¹⁸ Either way, not all Christian anarchists see Paul as a traitor. Several try to make sense of Romans 13 rather than reject it outright as dishonest and inauthentic.¹⁹ Their resulting exegesis, they argue, actually ends up paradoxically confirming rather than contradicting the Christian anarchist position.

The Christian Anarchist Exegesis: Subversive Subject

One Christian anarchist interpretation of Romans 13, posited by Redford, is to argue that this is an “ingenious case of rhetorical misdirection.”²⁰ For him, Romans 13 must not be interpreted literally because Paul is not speaking his true mind (partly for reasons mentioned in

¹⁶ Unfortunately, the anarchist interpretation of this passage is nowhere elaborated in great detail—it is usually just cited as evidence of Paul’s anarchist credentials. Day, 343; Simon Watson, “The Catholic Worker and Anarchism,” *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 15, Lent 2006, 8. (Galatians 5.)

¹⁷ For instance, Eller, 198; Penner, 77. A discussion of this theme is available in Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010).

¹⁸ Ballou looks in detail at each episode in which Paul appears to seek help from, or be helped by, the state, and concludes that in no instance does Paul not behave as a Christian non-resistant should have—which is not the same thing as saying that Paul was a consistent anarchist, of course, but at least, according to Ballou, he always abided by the doctrine of non-resistance to evil which is also at the root of Christian anarchism. Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, Second ed. (Oberlin: www.nonresistance.org, 2006), <http://www.nonresistance.org/literature.html> (accessed 28 March 2007), 38-40. See also Penner, 99-100.

¹⁹ According to Goddard, in struggling with this passage, Ellul “probably changed” his interpretation over time. Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul*, ed. David F. Wright, et al. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002), 287-288 (in the footnote). As to Chelčický, Wagner asserts that he “never doubted” the “authenticity” of Romans 13. Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelčický: A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1983), 50.

²⁰ Redford, 14.

the next paragraph).²¹ Similar arguments have been made by others: Carter, for instance, suggests that Paul is using the “classic ironic technique of blaming by apparent praise.”²² He sees Paul’s apparent reverence for authorities as “deeply subversive” because of this “ironic edge.”²³ Both Carter and Redford point to examples of Paul disobeying authorities as proof of him not really meaning that Christians should obey. Such interpretations of Romans 13, however, can—rightly or wrongly—sound more like justifications to brush the text aside than patient attempts to grapple with it and give it a fair hearing.

Yet both Redford and Carter also note something that several other Christian anarchists take note of as well: Paul’s letter is addressed to the Christian community in Rome—the very heart of the Roman empire. It is written at a time when Christians are already being persecuted across that empire. For several Christian anarchists, therefore, Paul is deliberately very cautious in his wording, as his letter could easily be used by Roman authorities as a pretext to step up this persecution.²⁴ Hence for some Christian anarchists, Paul’s advice is largely “pragmatic rather than philosophical:” by submitting to the authorities’ wishes, Roman Christians might be able to develop good relations with their persecutors and thereby avoid further conflict.²⁵ The historical context of Romans 13 is thus an important aspect to pay attention to. It helps explain why Paul would have deliberately addressed the question of Christians’ relations to the authorities in the first place, and indeed even perhaps why he may have opted for that “rhetorical misdirection” or “irony” alleged by Redford and Carter.

²¹ Redford, 13-20.

²² Timothy Carter, “Commentary: The Irony of Romans 13:1-8,” *Third Way*, issue 28, May 2005, 21. (I am grateful to Keith Hebden for sending me this interpretation.)

²³ Carter, 21. See also Jason Barr, *Radical Hope: Anarchy, Christianity, and the Prophetic Imagination*, <http://propheticheretic.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/radical-hope-anarchy-christianity-and-the-prophetic-imagination.pdf> (accessed 11 March 2008), 10.

²⁴ Nekeisha Alexis-Manners, *Deconstructing Romans 13: Verse 1-2*, <http://www.jesusradicals.com/essays/theology/Romans13.htm> (accessed 28 October 2005), 1; Andrews, 10; Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1957), 47-48; Carter, 21; Molnár, 109, 137; Redford, 14-15; Yoder, 200.

²⁵ [Justin Meggitt], “Anarchism and the New Testament: Some Reflections,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 10, Summer 1988, 11.

The *textual* context of Romans 13:1-7 is even more important, as it throws light on what Paul has in mind when writing these particular verses. Along with Yoder, several Christian anarchists insist that “chapters 12 and 13 in their entirety form a single literary unit.”²⁶ In both chapters, Paul is writing about love and sacrifice, about overcoming evil with good, about willingly offering oneself up for persecution. Interpreting Romans 12 and 13 as a coherent whole, Ellul notes that

there is a progression of love from friends to strangers and then to enemies, and this is where the passage then comes. In other words, we must love enemies and therefore we must even respect the authorities.²⁷

Eller agrees: these authorities “are brought in as Paul’s example of those to whom it will be the most difficult to make the obligation apply.”²⁸ They are “a test case of our loving the enemy.”²⁹ In any case, for Yoder, “any interpretation of 13:1-7 which is not also an expression of suffering and serving love must be a misunderstanding of the text in its context.”³⁰ Hence Paul’s message in Romans 13 is to call for Christians to subject themselves to political powers *out of love*, forgiveness and sacrifice.

Seen in that light, Romans 13 is not a betrayal of Jesus’ revolutionary Sermon on the Mount (as Tolstoy would have it), but actually an exegesis of it: Romans 12-13 is an “eloquent and passionate statement” of the Sermon applied to the case of the state.³¹ In the Sermon, Jesus calls for his

²⁶ Yoder, 196. For others making that same point, see Alexis-Manners, 1; Barr, 12; Eller, 197; Penner, 80. Ellul, for his part, calls upon an even broader context from Romans 9-11, in which Paul makes “a detailed study of the relations between the Jewish people and Christians,” to Romans 14, in which “some details are offered as to the practice of love (hospitality, not judging others, supporting the weak),” and concludes that “It seems so odd, so out of joint, in this larger context that some exegetes have thought that it must be an interpolation and that Paul himself did not write it.” Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 80-81.

²⁷ He adds that Paul “is reminding Christians that the authorities are also people (there was no abstract concept of the state), people such as themselves, and that they must accept and respect them, too.” Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81. See also Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170.

²⁸ Eller, 197. Note that Redford disagrees with the “fallacy” that “higher powers” necessarily implies “mortal governments that exist on earth.” Redford, 16.

²⁹ Eller, 197.

³⁰ Yoder, 198.

³¹ *Why I Worship a Violent, Vengeful God Who Orders Me to Be Loving and Non-Violent* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://members.aol.com/Patriarchy/predestination/Jesus.htm> (accessed 4 November 2005), para. 5 (for the quoted words); Alexis-Manners, 2; Yoder, 210. See also Penner, who argues that the opposite of the

followers to love their enemies, to give not only the requested coat but the cloak also, and to bless their persecutors. In Romans 12-13, Paul is doing the same, and applying Jesus' commandments to the authorities.

At the same time, Eller emphasises that to "be subject to" does not mean to worship, to "recognise the legitimacy of" or to "own allegiance to."³² For him,

It is a sheerly neutral and anarchical counsel of "not-doing"—not doing resistance, anger, assault, power play, or anything contrary to the "loving the enemy" which is, of course, Paul's main theme.³³

Hence Paul is not counselling "blind obedience."³⁴ As explained below, if what the authorities demand conflicts with God's demands, then Christians ought to disobey the former—but also then submit to any punishment.³⁵ Ultimately, a Christian's allegiance is only to God, not to the state.

Yet Paul goes on to write that "the powers that be are ordained of God."³⁶ Does this not suggest divine sanctification of state authorities? Does it not imply that political powers are always endorsed by God? For Christian anarchist writers, it only means that God "allows" it, not that "he agrees with it" or that these authorities are "good, just, or lovable."³⁷ Here,

Greek for "be subject to" is the Greek used in the Bible for "resist," so that Paul is indeed repeating the commandment not to resist which Jesus uttered in the Sermon on the Mount. Penner, 90-94.

³² Eller, 199. See also *God Sends Evil: Why Calvinists Are Anarchists* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://members.aol.com/Patriarchy/predestination/sendevil.htm> (accessed 9 November 2005); *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40.

³³ Eller, 199.

³⁴ Walter Wink, *Jesus' Third Way* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1987), 59. See also Alexis-Manners, 1; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 89; J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, Revised and expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 68-69.

³⁵ Andrews, 10.

³⁶ Romans 13:1. Redford reads this to mean that "the only *true* and *real* authorities are *only* those that God appoints, i.e., one cannot become a *real* authority or ruler in the eyes of God simply because through force of arms one has managed to subjugate a population and then proclaim oneself the potentate. Thus, by saying this Paul was actually rebuking the supposed authority of the mortal governments as they exist on Earth and are operated by men!" Redford, 15 (Redford's emphasis). Tennant proposes a very similar reading in Michael Tennant, *Christianarchy?* (Strike the Root), <http://www.strike-the-root.com/51/tennant/tennant5.html> (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 15-17.

³⁷ For the first two quotes, see Alexis-Manners, 3. For the last one, see Ellul, who writes that "We have to remember that the authorities have attained to power

they recall 1 Samuel 8, where despite his disappointment with the Israelites' request for a king, God grants them their wish.³⁸ Chelčický furthermore argues that "The earthly rulers and the state authorities are the punishment of God for disobeying His laws."³⁹ Thus God does indeed "appoint" state authorities, but reluctantly, only because his commandments are being ignored. It does not imply that anything the authorities do is willed by God, or that, as Penner puts it, "God's moral character is in any way imprinted on the state."⁴⁰ Again, "appointing" or "ordaining" is not the same thing as "approving" or "agreeing with."⁴¹

Nonetheless, since people have lost faith in him and instead place their faith in political authorities, since people will not listen to him anymore, God does use the state as one of his "servants" in his mysterious ordering of the cosmos.⁴² Several Old Testament passages describe God using state authorities to punish sins and injustices.⁴³ The state, it seems, is one of

through God. Yes, we recall than Saul, a mad and bad king, attained to power through God. This certainly does not mean that he was good, just, or lovable." Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81.

³⁸ Alexis-Manners, 2; Eller, 199-200; Molnár, 139-140. A summary of Christian anarchist interpretations of this passage can be found in Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, "Christian Anarchism: A Revolutionary Reading of the Bible," in *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, ed. Nathan Jun and Shane Wahl (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 135-152; Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

³⁹ Molnár, 95 (paraphrasing Chelčický).

⁴⁰ This touches on an important debate regarding God's ultimate responsibility for the actions conducted by political authorities, a debate which Christian anarchists do not venture into in any detail and which is therefore left out of the main body of this chapter (although a few reflections related to this are offered further below in this section). Suffice it to say here that this debate concerns not just Christian anarchists, but all Christian theologians, and that most would agree that God cannot be fully responsible for every act ever conducted by political authorities, as this would imply the unacceptable conclusion that God killed Jesus. For more on this, see for instance Penner, 65-66, 89-90, 119 (for the quote).

⁴¹ Alexis-Manners, 3.

⁴² *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40; *Praying through Romans 13* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://members.aol.com/TestOath/Romans13.htm> (accessed 9 November 2005); Ballou, 32-38; Eller, 200-203; Molnár, 110-111, 119-123, 145; Penner, 65-66, 83-90; Wagner, 98, 135.

⁴³ Ballou, 34-37; Eller, 200-203; Molnár, 121; Penner, 88-89. (They cite the following Bible passages in their argument: Isaiah 10:5-15; 13:3-5; 41:2-4; 44: 28; 45:1-13; Jeremiah 25:8-12; 27:6-13; 43:10.)

God's tools to maintain some order where his commandments are not being heard.⁴⁴

It is probably in that sense that “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.”⁴⁵ The authorities should be feared by those who do evil, but not by those who do good works. Perhaps there is a suggestion that *despite* doing good works and nevertheless being persecuted by the state—which they were—Christians should *not fear* the state.⁴⁶ This particular phrase, however, is often steered clear from in the Christian anarchist literature: Christian anarchists never really seem to fully make sense of it. What they do point out, however, is that it cannot mean that these authorities do not persecute good people: they crucified Jesus, Paul himself was beaten by them, and Christians were being persecuted just as Paul was writing these lines.⁴⁷ Besides, elsewhere, Paul criticises these authorities, and warns Christians of further persecution.⁴⁸ Therefore, this verse cannot mean that the state always praises good works and only ever punishes evil ones. What it perhaps does imply is that persecuted Christians should not fear these authorities because in the eyes of God, the works that they do are good, and even if they die, at least their “martyrdom” will “magnify their glory”—much like Jesus’ death did.⁴⁹

In any case, even state leaders are subject to God’s judgement, and are warned of this (for instance) in Acts 28:20.⁵⁰ These leaders do not know

⁴⁴ Sometimes, therefore, these authorities are indirectly and unconsciously doing God’s work, and according to Eller, if, as a Christian, you were to resist them, “You could find yourself resisting the particular use God has in mind for that empire; at the very least, you definitely are trying to take over and do God’s work for him.” Eller, 203. See also Molnár, 137.

⁴⁵ Romans 13:4.

⁴⁶ *Praying through Romans 13*.

⁴⁷ Carter, 21; Molnár, 118.

⁴⁸ Redford, 16-17. (1 Corinthians 2:6-8; 2 Timothy 2:8-9, 3:12.)

⁴⁹ Chelčický (whose words are borrowed here) actually goes even further, saying that “if they were killed, it was in accordance with His will; He wanted to test His servants and to magnify their glory through their martyrdom” (which again touches on the debate over God’s ultimate responsibility for actions perpetrated by political powers). Molnár, 119 (quoting Chelčický).

⁵⁰ Molnár, 120. Tennant also draws a parallel with the Book of Samuel. He writes: “Samuel made it plain that ‘If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers’ (1 Sam. 12:14, 15). Similarly, Paul in Romans 13:4 asserts that the human

the precise purpose God has in mind for their actions: “like a plough in the hands of the ploughman,” Chelčický writes, the ruler “does not know what the ploughman intends.”⁵¹ God uses state authorities as “instruments in the grand economy of his providence,” but at the same time, state leaders “[act] entirely out of [their] own perverse and wicked inclinations” and are “punished” by God accordingly, writes Ballou.⁵² It is therefore *unknowingly* that state authorities are acting as God’s servants. In turn, their actions and intentions are examined by God, and, where their work is evil, they will themselves eventually incur God’s providential wrath.⁵³

Yoder moreover recalls that according to Paul, the principalities and powers, “which were supposed to be our servants, have become our masters and our guardians.”⁵⁴ They “were created by God,” but they “have rebelled and are fallen” because “they claimed for themselves an absolute value.”⁵⁵ Yoder then argues that instead of God “ordaining” these powers, a better interpretation of the text would see him as “ordering” them.⁵⁶ That is, “God is not said to *create* or *institute* or *ordain* the powers that be, but only to *order* them, to put them in order.”⁵⁷ Yet while God “orders” them and uses them for good, they remain rebellious and fallen nonetheless.⁵⁸ That God puts them in order does not mean that they “do no wrong, commit no sin, and deserve no punishment.”⁵⁹ They remain living evidence of humanity’s rebellion against God.

It is crucial to bear in mind, then, that if God ordains state authorities, it is only to maintain order *among those who have refused to follow his commandments*. In other words, the state may be valid for non-Christians, but if “all truly followed in Christ’s footsteps it would wither away.”⁶⁰ God uses the state in his ordering of the cosmos only because his commandments for a peaceful and just society are not being followed. In a community of Christians, however, these authorities and powers would be

ruler ‘is God’s servant to do you good,’ which therefore implies that the ruler is to abide by God’s law and to enforce it upon the ruled.” Tennant, para. 9.

⁵¹ Molnár, 120 (quoting Chelčický).

⁵² Ballou, 35.

⁵³ *God Sends Evil*; Molnár, 119-123.

⁵⁴ Yoder, 141.

⁵⁵ Yoder, 142.

⁵⁶ Yoder, 201. On page 172 onwards, he also agrees with the view that to “be subject to” would be better translated as to “subordinate oneself to.”

⁵⁷ Yoder, 201 (Yoder’s emphasis). Note that Alexis-Manners also quotes this passage in her exegesis. Alexis-Manners, 3.

⁵⁸ Yoder, 141-144.

⁵⁹ Ballou, 34.

⁶⁰ Brock, 48.

redundant. Thus for several Christian anarchists, the state remains a regrettable necessity among non-Christians, but only because they refuse to follow Jesus' commandments. The state is violent and unchristian, and God wants *all* humans to overcome it; but as long as Jesus' alternative is not embraced, the state remains God's only way to somehow redress sins and injustices. The state is a symptom of human imperfection, tolerated by God only because he accepts that we have rejected him.

Of course—and disappointingly for non-Christian anarchists—this does imply that Christian anarchism is only prescribing anarchism for Christians.⁶¹ Among non-Christians, the state is an acceptable, though regrettable and imperfect, servant of God's justice. This does not diminish in any way the many criticisms Christian anarchists mount against the state.⁶² After all, Christian anarchists want to see Jesus' teaching taken up by all—they want the whole society to convert to true Christianity. But at the same time, according to Paul, they are to tolerate the presence of the state as an unfortunate symptom of society's rejection of God.⁶³ Christianity overcomes the state, but it tolerates it among heathens. That, for several Christian anarchists, is what Paul is implying in Romans 13. He is reminding Christians of the reasons for the state's existence, but he is also calling them to patiently endure and forgive this pagan rejection of God.

The message behind this, therefore, is to make it plain “that Christians were not a sect out to overthrow Caesar and force their religion on everyone else.”⁶⁴ Paul's concern is for Christians not to engage in any violent insurrection—despite their persecution.⁶⁵ He is telling the Christians in Rome to “stay away from any notion of . . . insubordination,”

⁶¹ See, for instance, Eller, 12.

⁶² Again, for details of these, see Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

⁶³ It should be noted that while this view summarises the conclusion reached by those Christian anarchists who give Paul a chance and see his Epistles as genuinely compatible with Jesus' teaching, it is not one that those who reject him outright—Tolstoy in particular—would subscribe to. For someone like Tolstoy, who universalises Jesus' commandments by grounding them in universal reason, the state is evil and should not be tolerated but overcome—period. Then again, in a sense, for all Christian anarchists, non-Christians are arguably those who have not fully understood or seen the truth. Moreover, all Christian anarchists prescribe tolerance, love and forgiveness of those who err on the side of evil. In the end, therefore, the difficulties which those who reject Paul would feel with the conclusions derived by those who do not are probably less serious than might first appear.

⁶⁴ Tennant, para. 19.

⁶⁵ Molnár, 110.

and instead to adopt a loving, “nonresistant attitude towards a tyrannical government,”⁶⁶ an attitude which would therefore “set an example of humility and peaceful living for others.”⁶⁷ In other words, Romans 13 “seeks to apply love in a context where Christians detested the authorities.”⁶⁸ It does not legitimise the state, but it also makes a point of not legitimising any insurrection against it.⁶⁹ It is reminding Christians that Jesus refused to engage in that type of revolutionary politics, that the Christian revolution is to happen by setting an example of love, forgiveness and sacrifice instead.

Thus the Christian is to remain indifferent, so to speak, to particular forms of political authority.⁷⁰ However evil or tyrannical any one of them may be—and there is no denying that they can be very brutal—a follower of Jesus should overcome evil by good: by loving enemies, by turning the other cheek, and by submitting to persecution and possible crucifixion. It is not for the Christian to avenge human injustices, however horrible any one of them may be. In Romans 12:19, Paul recalls that God said: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” That is, vengeance is denied to the Christian because it belongs to God.⁷¹ Eller also interprets Paul as telling Christians not to “set their minds on high things”—that is, for Eller, not to get concerned and distracted by specific political ideologies or utopias.⁷² Instead, the only priority is to abide by Jesus’ commandments.

⁶⁶ Yoder, 202. See also *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40; Penner, 90-94; Wink, 60; Yoder, 185-187.

⁶⁷ Tennant, para. 19.

⁶⁸ Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170.

⁶⁹ Eller argues that Paul here focuses particularly on delegitimising a violent revolution precisely because of the similarity of Jesus’ subversive message with the message of violent revolutionaries. Eller, 11, 41, 115, 121-125. Ellul makes a similar point in Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 86-90.

⁷⁰ Eller, 43, 46-47, 155, 159-161; Molnár, 109. See also Yoder, 198-199.

⁷¹ *God Sends Evil; Why I Worship a Violent, Vengeful God*; Adin Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments* (www.nonresistance.org), <http://www.nonresistance.org/literature.html> (accessed 28 March 2007), 10-11; Eller, 124-126; Yoder, 198; John Howard Yoder, “The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State,” (Elkhart: Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 1955), 14.

⁷² The passage thus paraphrased by Eller is from Romans 12:16, and, in the KJV, reads as “Mind not high things.” Eller, 118-121.

Hence, according to Christian anarchists, Romans 13 cannot be interpreted as divine sanctification for the state.⁷³ It accepts the state as ordained by God, but only for those who have rejected God. Thus “It carefully declines to legitimize either Rome or resistance against Rome.”⁷⁴ For Ellul, “we have no right to claim God in validation of this order,” and therefore “This takes away all the pathos, justification, illusion, enthusiasm, etc” that can be associated with specific political authorities.⁷⁵ Moreover, to quote Tennant, “an exhortation to obey authorities does not imply that those authorities are required to exist in the first place. . . . If there is no state, there is no need to obey it.”⁷⁶ Besides, as Chelčický remarks, while the passage does counsel submission to the state, it does not provide a justification for Christians to become rulers themselves.⁷⁷ Indeed, when Paul was writing this, all authorities were pagan—Romans 13 never considers “Christian” authorities.⁷⁸ What Paul is saying in Romans 13 is that Christians should love and forgive state authorities—not that they should participate in their sins.⁷⁹

This does not imply uncritical passivity. Where the state infringes upon God’s commandments, the Christian should—as always—side with God, not with the state. Indeed, submission to the state is only a consequence, a derivative of submission to God and God alone.⁸⁰ When Christians submit to the state, it is because they are submitting to God. If the state demands something that conflicts with God’s commandments, then the state should be disobeyed.

Thus, in apparent reference to Mark 12, Paul concludes Romans 13:1-7 by calling for Christians to “Render therefore to all their dues.”⁸¹ This is examined in more detail in the next section, but the gist of it for Christian anarchists is that Christians ought to give to the state what it asks, *unless*

⁷³ See, for instance, Eller, 196; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 86-88; Molnár, 108; Wagner, 97-98; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 198-203.

⁷⁴ Eller, 204.

⁷⁵ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 88. See also Eller, 124-125.

⁷⁶ Tennant, para. 18.

⁷⁷ Brock, 47; Molnár, 108; Wagner, 51. See also Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 34.

⁷⁸ Molnár, 117.

⁷⁹ The last section of this sentence is paraphrased from Molnár, 116 (paraphrasing Chelčický).

⁸⁰ The ideas summarised in the paragraph can be found in Alexis-Manners, 3; Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4-6; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 88.

⁸¹ Romans 13:7. For the case arguing for the parallel between these two texts, see Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 207-208.

doing so conflicts with what God demands.⁸² What is required, then, is “passive subordination” but not “pious obedience to the state.”⁸³ The state should be treated with love and due respect, but “Obedience to secular power has definite limits. In matters contrary to the law of God, the Christian is obliged to refuse obedience” and “must willingly suffer whatever penalties the state imposes.”⁸⁴ As explained elsewhere, this means that Christians must disobey “Directives such as those to wield the sword, to swear an oath, or to enter a public court to settle a dispute.”⁸⁵ What is less straightforward is the question concerning the payment of taxes—which is addressed in detail below.⁸⁶

The important point is that, as Ballou writes, “The Christian has nothing to care for but be a Christian indeed.”⁸⁷ The state is a pagan distraction, to be treated with love and respect, but only because doing so is in line with Jesus’ teaching of love and forgiveness—and it is *that* teaching only which the Christian is really abiding by even when submitting to the state. It certainly has nothing to do with any duty to protect certain freedoms or maintain some order in a chaotic war of all against all.

Similar Passages in the New Testament

Christian anarchists interpret shorter passages elsewhere in the New Testament along the same lines.⁸⁸ The most important of these minor

⁸² Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 37; Eller, 11-12; William Lloyd Garrison, “Declaration of Sentiments Adopted by the Peace Convention,” in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), 8; Molnár, 114-117; Wagner, 50-51, 136; Wink, 60; John Howard Yoder, “The Limits of Obedience to Caesar: The Shape of the Problem,” unpublished Study Conference Paper (Elkhart: Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary, June 1978); Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 203-209.

⁸³ Wagner, 51.

⁸⁴ Wagner, 136.

⁸⁵ Wagner, 136. This is explained in the longer version of the present chapter, in Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

⁸⁶ For Christian anarchists commenting on taxes in the context of Romans 13:6-7, see for instance Eller, 127; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81-83. Note that Redford considers any insinuation by Paul that Roman Christian should pay taxes to be yet again a case of “rhetorical misdirection.” Redford, 17-18.

⁸⁷ Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 37.

⁸⁸ To cite just one of the minor examples, Titus 3:1-2 is taken by both Redford and Penner to be repeating Romans 13 (even though the two of them do not actually come to the same conclusion on that meaning). Penner, 97; Redford, 19-20.

passages is probably 1 Peter 2:13-25, since as Alexis-Manners claims, it is “usually used by supporters of obedience to the government as a trump card” if defeated on Romans 13.⁸⁹ For Christian anarchists, however, it is actually just repeating the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 13. Peter’s plea for Christians to show respect for the king, for instance, is in line with Romans 13.⁹⁰ Even Peter’s call for slaves to submit to their masters—which Paul also makes elsewhere—mirrors Romans 13: it is not a defence of slavery, but a call to subvert it by accepting one’s subjection to it out of love and forgiveness.⁹¹ Moreover, just as for Paul, Christian anarchists point out that Peter seems not to have always fully abided by his pronouncements—at least not if they are taken to imply total and unquestioning obedience to authorities.⁹² Like Paul, Peter’s allegiance is first and foremost—indeed *only*—to God, and the respect he shows to the state is never absolute.

The other New Testament passage cited by a Christian anarchist in parallel to Romans 13 is Revelation 13—despite these two being often cited as an example of contradicting passages.⁹³ For Eller, the Beast does not represent just the Roman empire but the spiritual essence of what he calls “arkydom”—in other words, the state.⁹⁴ Revelation, he says, “does not go on to suggest that Christians should therefore resist, withhold their taxes, or do anything else in opposition to this monster;” but instead, “they

⁸⁹ Alexis-Manners, 3.

⁹⁰ Alexis-Manners, 3-4; Penner, 79, 105-111; Redford, 21-23. Note that Ellul claims that the common exposition of 1 Peter 2:13 as preaching “obedience and submission of Christians to political authorities” in fact “displays great ignorance regarding the political institutions of the period,” because the Greek word Peter uses for “king” was not the word then used for the head of the Roman state. Instead he surmises (and admits it is just a “hazardous hypothesis”) that Peter could have been referring to the Parthian king—in which case Peter’s pronouncement could imply “scorn,” “total repudiation” or “condemnation” of political power or of Roman power. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 75-77.

⁹¹ *The Predestined Pencil* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://members.aol.com/Patriarchy/predestination/pencil.htm> (accessed 9 November 2005); Penner, 106; Redford, 27-32; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 179-187. (1 Peter 2:18-25.) For Christian anarchists, the same applies to other New Testament passages on slavery and on accepting one’s unfortunate position in life (such as Paul’s epistle to Philemon, or 1 Corinthians 7:20-24). See Stephen W. Carson, *Biblical Anarchism*, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig/carson2.html> (accessed 8 November 2007), para. 17-20; Eller, 159; Redford, 27-32; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 179-187.

⁹² Halliday, para. 25-28; Penner, 111-112; Redford, 21-23.

⁹³ Eller, 42-43.

⁹⁴ Eller, 43-44.

are asked to bear patiently whatever injustice and suffering comes upon them *by keeping faithful to Jesus,*” and at the same time to “come out of the arkys,” to “separate [themselves] (spiritually and psychologically) lest [they] get [themselves] entangled and go down with them.”⁹⁵ For Eller, therefore, there is no opposition between Romans 13 and Revelation 13: neither differentiates between “good” or “bad” states (they refer to “arkydom” in general) and both advise patience and submission rather than violent revolution.⁹⁶

Thus, however surprising or outrageous it might at first seem, several Christian anarchists argue that Romans 13 calls for Christians to accept and forgive the state, but without granting it any absolute authority.⁹⁷ For them, this does not in any way compromise Jesus’ implicit criticism of the state or his call for humanity to overcome it, but it simply confirms that Jesus calls for Christians to subvert it through love, service and sacrifice.

Jesus’ Advice on Taxes

The other New Testament passage often quoted by supporters of the state as proof of the error of Christian anarchism is the following:

13. And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

14. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

15. Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

16. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar’s.

⁹⁵ Eller, 44-45 (Eller’s emphasis).

⁹⁶ Eller, 43-47.

⁹⁷ Such an interpretation is indeed one that is bound to result in “angry objection” from both liberal and conservative quarters, as Yoder reports to have faced in response to the first edition of his book. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 188 (for the quoted expression)-192.

17. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.⁹⁸

This passage has often been cited by church theologians to suggest that when pushed on the question, Jesus defended the state's tax system. It has also been used to develop the notion of a division of realms between state and church, whereby the state would be concerned with the material and temporal realm (politics), and the church, with the spiritual and eternal one (religion).⁹⁹ For Christian anarchists, both interpretations are illegitimate: Jesus is neither "siding with the establishment,"¹⁰⁰ nor dividing realms between politics and religion.¹⁰¹ Again, therefore, Christian anarchists put forward their own, different interpretation.

Caesar's Things and God's Things

To begin with, Ellul argues that Jesus must have had "a reputation of being hostile to Caesar" for this question to be asked in the first place.¹⁰² He was already seen as a political threat, and the authorities were trying to entrap him: if he had answered "yes, give tribute to Caesar," then this would have dealt a blow to his following; but answering a clear "no"

⁹⁸ Mark 12:13-17 KJV. Tolstoy's rendering of this episode can be found in Leo Tolstoy, "The Gospel in Brief," in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 227-228.

⁹⁹ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), 69; William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 190-191; Elliott, 51; David McLellan, *Unto Caesar: The Political Relevance of Christianity* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 4; David McLellan, "Unto Caesar: The Political Relevance of Christianity," in *Religion in Public Life*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok and David McLellan (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 112; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 312-313; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁰ Eller, 76 (for the quoted expression); Penner, 49; Ronald Sampson, "Christian Soldiers?," *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 14, March 1990, 10.

¹⁰¹ Berdyaev, 69; Cavanaugh, 190-191; Eller, 11; Elliott, 51; Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," 167; Myers, 312-313; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44-45.

¹⁰² Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59. A similar point is implied in Cavanaugh, 190-191; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44-45.

would have made him liable for immediate arrest.¹⁰³ For some Christian anarchists, therefore, Jesus' response is a "politically astute" response to a contentious question, an ingenious reply to avoid the trap set by his detractors.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, some Christian anarchists claim that the image and superscription on the coin were a clear infringement of the first and second commandment—in other words, a case of idolatry.¹⁰⁵ Hence Jews caught with the coin were arguably violating the Decalogue.¹⁰⁶

Ellul moreover explains that "in the Roman world an individual mark on an object denoted ownership."¹⁰⁷ Therefore the coin did indeed belong to Caesar—money does belong to the state.¹⁰⁸ If Caesar wanted his coin back, then this coin should be given back to him.¹⁰⁹ The important question, then, is to define what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God—because Jesus does also emphasise that what belongs to God should be given to God.¹¹⁰ For Ellul, what belongs to Caesar is simply

¹⁰³ Some commentators note that the issue of payment of taxes was a sensitive political issue both when Jesus said this and at the time during which Mark is estimated to have written his Gospel (during the Jewish-Roman war of A. D. 66-70). In both contexts, Jesus' answer would clearly and pointedly distance him and his followers from the Zealots who favoured armed rebellion against Rome. Eller, 78-80; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 61; Myers, 312-314; Penner, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Elliott, 52 (where the expression "political astuteness" appears), 72; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59; Halliday, para. 12; [Meggitt], 11; Myers, 352; Tennant, para. 11-13. Similarly, Redford sees it as another case of "rhetorical misdirection." Redford, 10-11. As to Hennacy, he rather audaciously writes that "Whether [Jesus] winked as much as to say that any good Jew knew that Caesar did not deserve a thing . . . , no-one knows." Hennacy, 432.

¹⁰⁵ *The Rigorous Intuition Board*, <http://p216.ezboard.com/Regarding-praxeologynetanarchistjesuspdf/frigorosintuitionfrm10.ShowMessage?topicID=6754.topic> (accessed 20 April 2007), post by Lysander Spooner on 11 April 2006; Myers, 311. These first two commandments are: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:3-4; KJV's italics removed).

¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, the episode does indeed suggest that Jesus himself did not possess a coin. Eller, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ (A close look at the small print of most bank notes reveals that the same logic still applies today.) Note that Christian anarcho-capitalists like Redford disagree on this: for him, Caesar's face on the coin does not make the coin his. Redford, 10-11.

¹⁰⁹ Barr, 10; Eller, 11, 77; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60; Penner, 51-52.

¹¹⁰ Eller reports Hengel's thesis that this crucial second part of the sentence is what "left them 'amazed,'" and that "the Greek of the connective should be translated

Whatever bears his mark! Here is the basis and limit of his power. But where is his mark? On coins, on public monuments, and on certain altars. That is all. . . . On the other hand, whatever does not bear Caesar's mark does not belong to him. It all belongs to God.¹¹¹

Thus, for instance, Caesar has no right over life and death. That belongs to God. While the state can therefore expect us to return its coins and monuments when requested, it has no right to kill dissidents or plunge a country into war.¹¹²

Christian anarchists indeed maintain that what belongs to God is much broader than what belongs to Caesar: to Jesus' Jewish audience, the debt owed to God is incomparably greater.¹¹³ Besides, money is "the domain of Mammon."¹¹⁴ For a faithful Jew, the higher obligation is always to God, and, against this, Caesar's claim is almost irrelevant. Myers therefore contends that by his careful answer, Jesus

is inviting them to act according to their allegiances, stated clearly as *opposites*. Again Jesus has turned the challenge back upon his antagonists: What position do *they* take on the issue? *This* is what provokes the strong reaction of incredulity . . . from his opponents—something no neat doctrine of "obedient citizenship" could possibly have done.¹¹⁵

'but' in place of the usual 'and': 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's—*but* to God the things that are God's.'" Eller, 77.

¹¹¹ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60. See also Brock, 49.

¹¹² Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60-61. To cite a few more examples of separate "belongings," Ellul writes that the only things which belong to Caesar are those things which he himself "creates;" Myers notes that the land of Israel belongs to God; Penner argues that the verse only admits taxes among things to be rendered to Caesar, and that one could perhaps infer that being made in the image of God, the Jews "owed themselves to God;" and Tolstoy suggests that money and property belong to Caesar, but one's soul, to God. On a different note, Hennacy quotes Day, who said (quoting St. Hilary): "The less of Caesar's you have, the less you have to render." Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," 167-168; Hennacy, 298 (see also 317, 431); Myers, 312; Penner, 52; Tolstoy, "The Gospel in Brief," 228; Leo Tolstoy, "The Teaching of Jesus," in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 371-372.

¹¹³ It is Myers who explains that the word "render" evokes this reference to "debt." Myers, 312. See also Philip Berrigan, *Jesus the Anarchist* (Jonah House), http://www.jonahhouse.org/Anita_Roddick.htm (accessed 10 April 2007), para. 2; Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," 168; Hennacy, 432.

¹¹⁴ Ellul, cited in Eller, 11 (see also 195).

¹¹⁵ Myers, 312 (Myers' emphasis).

In other words, as Ellul insists, “Jesus does not say that taxes are lawful.”¹¹⁶ Instead, according to Penner, he uses to occasion “to point the Jews to the fact that they had, in effect, accepted the supremacy of Rome, when He made them acknowledge whose coinage they were using.”¹¹⁷ His detractors had not been giving to God what belongs to God: they had betrayed God by their de facto allegiance to Caesar.

For Eller, therefore, the apparent choice between Caesar’s things and God’s things is “fake,” because “Whether a person chooses God or not is the only real issue.”¹¹⁸ By uttering those words, Jesus “makes the distinction between the one, ultimate, absolute choice and all lesser, relative choices.”¹¹⁹ Questions like the payment of taxes “are ‘adiaphora’ [Greek for ‘indifference’] in comparison to the one choice that really counts”—the choice of God above Caesar.¹²⁰ We are told several times in the New Testament that we “cannot serve two masters,” and the message of this passage is “to absolutize God alone and let the state and all other arkys be the human relativities they are.”¹²¹ Seen in this light, Jesus’ answer is not so much a defence of the tax system or of the division of realms, but a counsel of subversion by indifference (as discussed in Richard Davis’ contribution to this volume).

Thus, for Christian anarchists like Eller, “civic responsibility is a proper obligation only insofar as it does not threaten our prime responsibility of giving God what belongs to God.”¹²² In other words, “let Caesar take his cut,” says Eller, “so that you can continue to *ignore* him.”¹²³ Hence if Jesus seems to recognise as appropriate the payment of taxes, it is because that concern is insignificant compared to the one concern that really matters.¹²⁴ At the same time, however, what must be

¹¹⁶ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60.

¹¹⁷ Penner, 51.

¹¹⁸ Eller, 11 (also: 77).

¹¹⁹ One example which Eller lists of such a “relative choice” is whether to collaborate with or resist the Romans. Eller, 82.

¹²⁰ Eller, 83. On this notion of indifference to the state, Eller was strongly influenced by Kierkegaard. He acknowledges this throughout his book, and this is also explained in Richard Davis’ contribution to the present volume.

¹²¹ Eller, 83. See also Linda H. Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 90-91.

¹²² Eller, 196.

¹²³ Eller, 196 (Eller’s emphasis).

¹²⁴ Note that Christian anarcho-capitalists refuse to recognise any validation by Jesus of any form of taxation since, as far as they are concerned, taxes are pure theft. See for instance *The Rigorous Intuition Board*, post by Lysander Spooner on 11 April 2006; Redford, 10-11, 18-19, 48-49; Tennant, para. 11-13.

denounced is Caesar's attempt to compete with God: the state's tendency to seek to dethrone God and be worshipped and served in his place—precisely because that touches on the much more important issue of rendering to God what belongs to God.¹²⁵

The Temple Tax and Fish Episode

Christian anarchists read the other main passage in which Jesus refers to paying taxes in much the same way. The progression of the dialogue in Matthew 17:24-27 is even more interesting in this case:¹²⁶

24. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

25. He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.¹²⁷

Ellul thinks that too much attention has focused on the curious and miraculous side of this prescription.¹²⁸ For Christian anarchists, it is clear from the dialogue that the state has “no legitimate jurisdiction over” Christians, yet that Christians should nonetheless pay taxes “to avoid

¹²⁵ *The Christmas Conspiracy* (Vine and Fig Tree), <http://thechristmasconspiracy.com> (accessed 10 April 2007); *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 18 (for instance); Berdyaev, 78-79; Eller, 84, 165; Elliott, 52; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 61; Myers, 427.

¹²⁶ Eller shows the importance of the progression of the dialogue by paraphrasing it in Eller, 205-208.

¹²⁷ Matthew 17:24-27 KJV. Tolstoy's rendering of this episode can be found in Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” 227-228.

¹²⁸ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 63-64. Ellul's interpretation of that fantastic story of fishing out a coin is that, in making that prescription, “Jesus held power to ridicule,” that “an absurd miracle” is performed “to show how unimportant the power is.” Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 167; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 64.

offense”¹²⁹—that is, “so as not to stir up trouble.”¹³⁰ If Jesus ends up asking for Peter to pay the tax, Eller therefore writes, it is “for reasons entirely extraneous to the recognition of any arky.”¹³¹

Eller then compares the justifications given in Romans 13, Mark 12 and this passage as follows:

In Mark 12, the stated reason was “Let Caesar have his coin so he will get off your back and leave you alone to be giving to God what belongs to him.” In Romans 13, it was “Let Caesar have his coin so that you won’t be drawn into the disobedience of failing to love him.” Now, in Matthew 17, it is “Let Caesar have his coin so as not to be guilty of causing ‘offence.’”¹³²

The priority is always to follow God and his commandments, and any submission to the state is peripheral to that.

Yet Eller also points out that in some other instances, Jesus does not seem to mind causing offence.¹³³ The difference, he argues, is between causing offence “deliberately” and “accidentally.”¹³⁴ The difference is in what constitutes the main motive. To repeat, what matters is always giving priority to God, and abiding by his commandments. In doing so, one should indeed avoid causing offence to others. Sometimes, however, people might be offended at one’s actions when giving priority to God—but if so, “that’s their business,” says Eller, because offence was never

¹²⁹ *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, theses 77-78. Craig here applies the verses to the state even though they describe the paying of tax to the *temple*. Other Christian anarchists follow that trend—partly perhaps, as Eller remarks, the author of these verses “gives no attention at all to the tax’s ‘temple’ aspect.” In any case, the distinction between the authorities’ religious and political functions was less clear during Jesus’ time than it is today, therefore extending the meaning of these verses to the state does not seem too inappropriate. Eller, 204.

¹³⁰ Redford, 11, 49. See also Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 64. Tolstoy, for his part, argues in one place that Jesus asks for the tax to be paid in order not to resist evil, and in another, “in order not to tempt men.” Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” 227; Tolstoy, “The Teaching of Jesus,” 371.

¹³¹ Eller, 206.

¹³² Eller, 208.

¹³³ He writes: “Who is this Jesus who can tell *us* not to cause offense (thirteen times in seven different books of the New Testament such wording is found) when much more frequently the scriptural word “offense” is used to report the offense he himself causes—to the point that both Romans and 1 Peter name him as ‘the Rock of Offense’?” Eller, 208.

¹³⁴ Eller, 208-210.

intended and because the only purpose was “to obey God.”¹³⁵ What should be avoided is the causing of intentional offence. For Eller, therefore, the proper Christian attitude with respect to taxes is to pay them, because withholding them would turn the causing of offence into a political instrument and thus lose sight of what is much more important: obedience to God.¹³⁶

Pondering the Role of Civil Disobedience

The above exegeses open up the question of the limits of acceptability of any civil disobedience. On this issue, however, Christian anarchists are somewhat divided.

Against Civil Disobedience

The main Christian anarchist who argues against any form of civil disobedience is Eller.¹³⁷ For him, one should not engage in “deliberately illegal action” in attempting to counter any particular evil in society.¹³⁸ Too often, he says, Christians who try and fail to persuade others react by “turning up the volume,” at the “high end” of which is civil disobedience.¹³⁹ Such disobedience, according to Eller, presumes that effectiveness is enhanced by “offense-causing.”¹⁴⁰ Yet for him, civil disobedience helps neither the “content” nor the “persuasiveness” of the “witness and protest” because it “does not call attention to the truth content of the witness and protest but to the offensive behavior of the

¹³⁵ Eller, 209.

¹³⁶ He sees “tax payment” (or “an allowing of Caesar to take his taxes”) as “the model of all the offense-causing actions of Jesus,” which only aims to obey God and has “total disregard of the arkys;” and “tax withholding” as an “arky-faith action” which “[uses] offense as a tactic for influencing events.” Eller, 208-209 (emphasis removed).

¹³⁷ Eller, especially chap. 4, 8, 10.

¹³⁸ Eller, 210. Here, Eller is not alone: some Christian anarchists seem to agree that however evil the laws of the state might be, Christians should avoid taking part in illegal activity. See for instance Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 8; Hugh O. Pentecost, *Anarchism*, <http://www.deadanarchists.org/Pentecost/anarchism.html> (accessed 22 November 2007), para. 12; Wagner, 51.

¹³⁹ Eller compares this “turning up with volume” to what Ellul calls “dramatization.” Eller, 210-214.

¹⁴⁰ For Eller, offence is caused partly because “in almost every case, the law that is actually broken is an innocent one which all parties would agree is perfectly just and which no one could claim reasons of conscience for violating.” Eller, 214.

witness-protester.”¹⁴¹ For him, “failure of others to accept” the “truth” does not justify “recourse to questionable methods.”¹⁴²

One of Eller’s problems with such tactics is that typically, they result in “two worldly arkys condemning each other”—that is, a political climate of mutual, zealous and self-righteous condemnation that polarises society into rival political views.¹⁴³ What is lost in the process is the higher aim of obedience to God. For him, any civil disobedience should be accidental to that primary goal. Obedience to God, rather than effectiveness in persuasion, should always remain the guiding principle.¹⁴⁴ Hence one should avoid compromising with power politics. According to Eller, direct action is not the only way to bring about change.¹⁴⁵ Another way, and for Eller the only Christian way, is “voluntary self-subordination.”¹⁴⁶ Eller admits that the outcome of this method is uncertain, but that is nonetheless precisely the alternative which Jesus and his early followers taught and lived.

¹⁴¹ Eller, 213. The same point is made in Dick, “Pure Quakerism and Ploughshares,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 8, October 1987, 11.

¹⁴² Moreover, according to Eller, however evil the state is (and he repeat that he continues to believe it is), at least democratic laws do make it possible to use more honourable ways of being heard. Eller, 216.

¹⁴³ Eller, 217. On pages 87-101, Eller illustrates this point by analysing what he calls the “zealotism” of the peace movement (and he explains that he chose the peace movement precisely because its concerns are likely to be close to those reading his book).

¹⁴⁴ Eller, 218-219.

¹⁴⁵ He claims to “understand why so many Christians find some sort of arky faith to be absolutely essential to their creed,” because it “assumes there is only one possible way social good can happen,” but he maintains that “The direct-action method of messianic arkys is hardly recommended by its track record,” and that “although the results are neither quick nor spectacular, it may be that social service has a better record in effecting even structural change than has revolutionism.” Eller, 237-239.

¹⁴⁶ Eller, 239. In the remaining pages (239-248) of that chapter, Eller interprets as an example of a story of such “voluntary self-subordination” Paul’s epistle to Philemon about the latter’s slave, Onesimus. He understands Onesimus to have been a runaway slave who voluntarily submitted himself back to his master, and he suggests (following John Knox) that this same Onesimus could well have become the great Bishop which Ignatius so keenly praises in his later writings. If so, then this would be a story of eventual emancipation through initial voluntary self-subordination. To Eller, this illustrates perfectly the Christian alternative to class warfare through the cultivation of patient and loving one-to-one relationships with any given oppressor.

For (Non-violent) Civil Disobedience

For other Christian anarchists, Eller's position is a "total cop-out."¹⁴⁷ It is "naïve," and in effect, it "accepts" or "condones" oppression.¹⁴⁸ They say that "we *are* called to resist, . . . to actively confront evil and hatred and violence"—though loving and non-violent means should of course be adopted in that struggle.¹⁴⁹ For these Christian anarchists, the "arrogant state" simply must be confronted, unmasked and subverted.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, doing so is not unchristian: Jesus himself challenged the authorities, spoke out against them, broke a few rules (on the Sabbath) and even sometimes engaged in militant (but non-violent) direct action.¹⁵¹ He

¹⁴⁷ These words are Stephen Hancock's, the editor of the first fourteen issues of *A Pinch of Salt*, in his review of the book, in [Stephen Hancock], "Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy over the Powers (Book Review)," *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 8, October 1987, 9, 13. Eller's book is also reviewed in the following issue, where Hancock's conclusions are agreed with. Justin Meggitt, "One of Three Letters," *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 9, Spring 1988, 7.

¹⁴⁸ For the accusations of "political naivety" and "condoning" of "oppression," see [Hancock], 13. Although not referring to Eller, Elliott seems to share this view. Elliott, 176. As to Ellul, he writes that "Christian radicalism . . . cannot counsel the poor and the oppressed to be submissive and accepting . . . without at the same time constraining the rich to *serve* the poor." Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul Kings (London: SCM, 1970), 150-151 (Ellul's emphasis).

¹⁴⁹ The ending of the full sentence of the latter passage is important: "We are called not to be passive, but to actively confront evil and hatred and violence with love of enemies, forgiveness and self-sacrifice," hence also the insistence on non-violence. "The Power of Non-Violence," *London Catholic Worker*, issue 12, January 2005, 2-3 (writer's emphasis). See also Day, 304.

¹⁵⁰ Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance* (Friends of Adin Ballou), <http://www.adinballou.org/cnr.shtml> (accessed 12 February 2007), chap. 1, para. 7; Simon Barrow, *Rethinking Religion in an Open Society* (Ekklesia), <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/research/070201> (accessed 17 January 2008), para. 27; Keith Hebden, "A Subversive Gospel," *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 20, Autumn 2007, 14; Molnár, 39 (where the notion of "arrogant state" is mentioned), 57; Myers; Penner, 43; Greg Watts, "Following Jesus in Love and Anarchy," *The Times*, 29 February 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3461731.ece> (accessed 29 February 2008); Roger Young, *A Plea to Christians: Reject the State! (Strike the Root)*, <http://www.strike-the-root.com/columns/Young/young3.html> (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 3.

¹⁵¹ Retta Fontana, *Citizen Jesus* (Strike the Root), <http://www.strike-the-root.com/61/fontana/fontana3.html> (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 8-16; Halliday, para. 11; David Mumford, "The Bible and Anarchy," *A Pinch of Salt*,

also warned that Christians will be persecuted and that this will be an “opportunity to bear witness.”¹⁵² Furthermore, the cross is “a symbol of resistance to evil,” so following Jesus and taking up the cross implies at least some form of resistance as well.¹⁵³ Besides, when God and the state require contrary things, Christians are clearly called to obey God, not the state, which would then indeed imply some form of disobedience to the state—but also patient endurance of the consequences.¹⁵⁴ Hence rather than seeing it as civil disobedience, for them, one should see it as obedience to God.¹⁵⁵

Some Christian anarchists even speak of acts of disobedience or witness against the state in the language of liturgy.¹⁵⁶ Thus civil disobedience becomes “a prayer,” and the confronting of state power a sort of “casting out of demons.”¹⁵⁷

issue 14, March 1990, 8; Myers, 161-162, 436-437; Tim Nafzinger, “Marks of a Resistance Church,” *London Catholic Worker*, issue 13, April 2005, 8.

¹⁵² “The Power of Non-Violence,” 3. (Luke 22:12-13.)

¹⁵³ Berrigan, para. 3.

¹⁵⁴ This sentence is heavily paraphrased from Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4; Adin Ballou, “Non-Resistance: A Basis for Christian Anarchism,” in *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writings on the Anarchist Tradition*, ed. Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (Garden City: Anchor, 1966), 141-142. Note that even Eller admits that in his argument, he has not analysed this very possibility of the state demanding something that is contrary to the will of God—in which case he is clear that the only course of action is obedience to God and “accidental” disobedience to the state. He then even proposes a “litmus test for making the distinction: If an action of lawbreaking is done solely as obedience to God, then, plainly, whatever media exposure occurs is entirely incidental to the purpose. If, however, media exposure is *sought* and valued, the action must have a political, arky motivation that goes far beyond simple obedience to God.” Eller, 218-219 (Eller’s emphasis).

¹⁵⁵ This paraphrases Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen, who said: “Some would call what I am urging ‘civil disobedience.’ I prefer to see it as obedience to God.” *Multi-Denominational Statements* (Jesus Radicals), <http://www.jesusradicals.com/library/taxes/wartaxes.html> (accessed 5 November 2006), under “Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle”.

¹⁵⁶ Cavanaugh makes the case for seeing such actions as liturgy in Cavanaugh, 12, 273-277. Bartley also mentions this in passing in Jonathan Bartley, *Faith and Politics after Christendom: The Church as a Movement for Anarchy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 68.

¹⁵⁷ “A Vote for the State Means...” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 12, March 1989, 9; Jim Douglass, “Civil Disobedience as Prayer,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 3, Pentecost 1986, 8-9. See also, for instance, Scott Albrecht, “The Politics of Liturgy,” *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 14, Advent 2005; [Stephen Hancock], “Interview with Dan

Then again, Ellul insists that civil disobedience must not become a political strategy to achieve political goals—whether or not it can indeed be effective as a political strategy.¹⁵⁸ As discussed below, Christians can sympathise with and participate in movements of civil disobedience, but their goal must always remain solely to follow God’s commandments.

Moreover, the state’s punishment for such disobedience should be fully accepted. Day says of Hennacy that

His refusal to pay federal income tax does not mean disobedience since he has always proved himself to be ready to go to jail, to accept the alternative for his convictions.¹⁵⁹

The penalty for disobedience should thus be patiently and forgivingly endured. Besides, for Christian anarchists, prison is a kind of resting place in today’s world, a “new monastery” in which Christians can “abide with honour.”¹⁶⁰

In any case, there can be no denying that there is a tension here, between Jesus’ call to turn the other cheek and his cleansing of the temple, between what Eller calls “voluntary self-subordination” and civil disobedience. Yet even so, the tension should not be over-exaggerated: for Christian anarchists, even turning the other cheek is defiantly trying to unmask an evil (the violence that has just been inflicted), and Jesus’ cleansing of the temple was an equally non-violent attempt to unmask another evil (the concentration of power in the temple).

As to Tolstoy, as discussed elsewhere, he seems to have quite genuinely read (perhaps indeed misread) Matthew 5:39’s “non-resistance to evil” as “non-resistance to evil *by evil*”—not unlike Walter Wink.¹⁶¹

Berrigan,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 11, Autumn/Winter 1988, 11; Myers, 452-453; Ciaran O’Reilly, *Remembering Forgetting: A Journey of Non-Violent Resistance to the War in East Timor* (Sydney: Otford, 2001), 21, 50, 63, 95 (for instance); Watson, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Goddard, 180-181.

¹⁵⁹ Dorothy Day, “Foreword,” in *The Book of Ammon*, by Ammon Hennacy, ed. Jim Missey and Joan Thomas (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1994), ix.

¹⁶⁰ Douglass, 8 (where the expression “new monastery” comes from); Hennacy, 132 (from where the expression “abide with honour” is borrowed); Molnár, 130.

¹⁶¹ Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, “Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism: Reflections on the Contemporary Significance of Leo Tolstoy’s Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Politics and Religion* 1/1 (2008), 39-41; E. B. Greenwood, “Tolstoy and Religion,” in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 170; Aylmer Maude, “Editor’s Note,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans.

This ambiguity was picked up by his detractors,¹⁶² and many of his admirers cling on to the non-violent resistance which Tolstoy's reading allows for.¹⁶³ As explained again below, Tolstoy himself was happy to disobey and "to fight the Government by means of thought, speech, actions" and the like, and called for Christians to desist from participating in the mechanics of the state's power.¹⁶⁴ He was keen to protest and disobey, though always in a strictly non-violent way.

Obedience to God

So who is right? Are Christians called to engage in civil disobedience? It seems that there can be no nicely detailed and predefined answer to these questions.¹⁶⁵ In the end, the highest principle and ultimate reference on which all Christian guidelines are based is love. Jesus frequently repeats that love of God and of one's neighbour are the two most fundamental commandments on which the rest of the law subsequently

Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), xv; Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, 250-251; Wink.

¹⁶² For instance: Edith Lyttelton, "Introduction to a Confession and What I Believe," in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), viii.

¹⁶³ For instance: Terry Hopton, "Tolstoy, God and Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000), 44; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1993), 378; Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom, 1996), 251; David Stephens, "The Non-Violent Anarchism of Leo Tolstoy," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, by Leo Tolstoy, ed. David Stephens (London: Phoenix, 1990), 17-19; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 217.

¹⁶⁴ George Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoy," *The Century Magazine* 34/2 (1887), 256; Leo Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 63; Leo Tolstoy, "Christianity and Patriotism," in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), 450; Leo Tolstoy, "The End of the Age: An Essay on the Approaching Revolution," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 24, 40, 41, 50; Leo Tolstoy, "On Anarchy," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 79 (where the quote comes from).

¹⁶⁵ The discussion in this section is very similar to Christoyannopoulos, "Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism," 39-42.

hangs.¹⁶⁶ It follows that if to love God and to love one's neighbour sometimes requires disobeying the state (when obedience to the state would imply a violation of any of these two fundamental commandments), then there might be a case for moderating the purest interpretation of the subsequent command not to resist.

Besides, if Wink is right in interpreting the original Greek as criticising violent resistance and rebellion only, and indeed since (according to Christian anarchism) Jesus does call us to react to state violence and injustice, it seems that some degree of civil disobedience is inevitable for his followers in certain specific situations. At the same time, what for Christian anarchists remains clearly contradictory to Jesus' commandments is *violent* resistance.¹⁶⁷ It is whether *non-violent* resistance can sometimes be tolerated that is less clear. Evil certainly calls for a response, but for Christian anarchists, this reaction can never be violent. The spectrum of possible responses to evil ranges quite narrowly from non-resistance to non-violent resistance—but also, in the latter case, submission to any consequent penalty for this resistance.¹⁶⁸ Anything outside this narrow range, however, would seem to amount to a disobedience of Jesus' law of love.

Nevertheless, Eller's warning seems important enough to heed. For example, Tolstoy's own reaction to violence was to spread his gospel in various essays, plays and novels: his protests were largely verbal; Gandhi, who was inspired by Tolstoy, applied the principle of non-violence much more confrontationally; King and later pacifists pushed it even further into tactical political activism. Similarly, the *Catholic Worker* movement only adopted more confrontational methods of civil disobedience over time, partly under the influence of Hennacy.¹⁶⁹ What these and other examples suggest is that there is perhaps a tendency for what begins as fairly strict non-resistance and obedience to *God* to move along the spectrum of possible actions ever closer to *politically*-driven civil disobedience—and beyond. Eller's fear about turning up the volume might be worth

¹⁶⁶ For example, Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35.

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of Jesus cleansing of the Temple (often said to legitimise Christian violence) from a Christian anarchist perspective, see Christoyannopoulos, "Christian Anarchism"; Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

¹⁶⁸ Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Tom Cornell, "Air Raid Drills and the New York Catholic Worker," *The Catholic Worker*, issue 73, May 2006, 1; [Hancock], "Interview with Dan Berrigan," 10-11 (where Berrigan explains that Day "had qualms" and was initially "quite shocked" at the slightly more assertive tactics adopted in the late 1960s).

remembering: doing so tends to reveal a gradual relegation into power politics and a concomitant loss of sight of God.

Thus, even if a variety of actions are in line with a Christian anarchist reading of the Bible, one must perhaps always remain on guard to avoid the sort of degeneration spotted by Eller. Every context might result in different actions being most appropriate to continue to serve God and not the state, but it is crucial to always keep service to God as not just the primary but indeed the only concern that informs such non-violent and (in that sense) accidental civil disobedience.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, for Christian anarchists, as this discussion and exegesis of Romans 13 and “Render to Caesar” has argued, *whether obeying or disobeying*, a Christian response to the state is always incidental to the Christian obedience to God.¹⁷¹

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¹⁷⁰ Eller, 218-219.

¹⁷¹ Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4-6; Ballou, “Non-Resistance,” 141-148.

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