

‘Him Only Shalt Thou Serve’

A Christian Anarchist Critique of the Westphalian International Order

Christian anarchists interpret Jesus’ teaching and example to imply a total rejection of violence and coercion. They also understand Jesus to have made it clear that one cannot have two masters, that true commitment to God can only be absolute. By contrast, the Westphalian state – the very basis of international relations – rests on the presumed allegiance conferred to it by its citizens, and upon this allegiance legitimises both domestic and international violence and coercion. From a Christian anarchist perspective, therefore, the Westphalian state is strictly incompatible with the God of Christianity, and would-be Christians must necessarily choose either one or the other. If Christianity is chosen, then the state must not only be demoted from the standing and authority it enjoys today, but its violence and coercion must also be unmasked and denounced as unjustifiable from a Christian perspective. This article outlines this political theological critique of the current international order by discussing the key biblical passages upon which this critique rests, by contrasting this to the theory and practice of the Westphalian state, and by illustrating it with the examples of dissent provided by Christian anarchist activists.

Keywords: Christian anarchism; Westphalian state; idolatry; violence.

The current international order is traditionally traced back to the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia, where major European powers agreed to respect one another's autonomy and territorial sovereignty. From the perspective of Christian anarchist thinkers, this order is based on the very inversion of Jesus' teaching: not only does it legitimise violence and thereby contradict Jesus' clear instructions on the topic, but its consecration of the sovereign state is a clear case of idolatry. This article articulates these accusations, first by describing the Christian anarchist exegesis of a number of key Bible passages, then by critiquing the Westphalian international order from the by then clarified Christian anarchist perspective. The article concludes by pointing to a number of exemplars of Christian anarchism.¹

In this article, Christian anarchist thought is defined rather broadly to include any 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

¹ For more see Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: a political commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 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, 2010), 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, no. 1 (2008). These sections are here re-arranged to apply a Christian anarchist perspective to the Westphalian order. I am grateful to the various commentators who provided helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this article, XXX.

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 strict 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, William T. Cavanaugh and Jonathan Bartley among others.² Finally, Christian anarchism also has its anarcho-capitalists, like James Redford and James Kevin Craig. This article does not draw on every one of these thinkers and writers, but extracts from them the main arguments they put forward which are of most direct relevance to the Westphalian order.

1. Jesus on the Political Order

The passages in the gospels (not to speak of those in the rest of the Bible) which have important political implications are too numerous for every one of them to be analysed or even mentioned in this article. What follows is an interpretation of selected passages, but one that hopes to nevertheless convey the main elements of the implications of Jesus' teaching for today's international order. More in depth and systematic examinations of these and other gospel passages from a Christian anarchist

² John H. Yoder is also cited in this article 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.

perspective, along with a thorough discussion of Christian anarchism and its relation to similar traditions and movements, are available elsewhere.³

Refusing to be violent

Most Christian anarchists see Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as perhaps the most important and eloquent summary of his teaching. In that Sermon, the passage that tends to draw much of their attention is the one where Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.⁴

The Christian anarchist for whom this passage most clearly encapsulates Jesus' whole teaching is Tolstoy. For him, Jesus is clearly spelling out a completely new and wiser method for human beings to deal with evil, with fear, violence or insecurity. That is, when treated unjustly, Jesus asks us not to use force or retaliate, but to respond with love, forgiveness and generosity.

³ Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, Christoyannopoulos, 'Christian Anarchism', Michael C. Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture* (London: SCM, 1990), Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. George W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, trans. Fyvie Mayo? (London: C. W. Daniel, 1902).

⁴ Matthew 5:38-42. All the Bible passages quoted in this article are from the New International Version.

Tolstoy goes on to argue that truly, the history of humankind displays repeated and yet ultimately disastrous endeavours to resist evil with evil, to respond with violence to threats of violence, to go to war to prevent another war.⁵ But violent resistance only aggravates any given problem: for Tolstoy, it aggrieves the relatives of those who have been wronged, and worse, it can then be used to legitimise the other side's use of violence in reply; the parties are then caught in a brutal game of tit-for-tat that spreads into 'a universal reign of violence.'⁶ Thus, when the oppressed grow stronger and eventually take control, they resentfully avenge themselves and in turn become the new oppressors.⁷ In the end, an eye for eye can only make the whole world go blind.⁸

Another famous episode where Jesus challenges us to reconsider our typical response to fear and insecurity is when Jesus has just been betrayed by Judas, and is about to be taken away. One of his disciples then draws out his sword and strikes one of the guards. Jesus then famously tells him to put away his sword, because 'all who

⁵ George Kennan, 'A Visit to Count Tolstoi', *The Century Magazine* 34, no. 2 (1887).

⁶ *Ibid.*: p. 259.

⁷ Leo Tolstoy, 'The Law of Love and the Law of Violence', in *A Confession and Other Religious Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 161-64.

⁸ These words are usually ascribed to Mohandas K. Gandhi, but their precise reference is actually never given – and anyway, Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was actually heavily influenced by his reading of Tolstoy Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914, A History of Pacifism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 468-69, Peter Brock, *The Roots of War Resistance: pacifism from the early church to Tolstoy* (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1981), pp. 75-76, Rene Fuelleop-Miller, 'Tolstoy the Apostolic Crusader', *Russian Review* 19, no. 2 (1960): pp. 120-21, Janko Lavrin, 'Tolstoy and Gandhi', *Russian Review* 19, no. 2 (1960): p. 134, Geoffrey Ostergaard, *Resisting the Nation State: the pacifist and anarchist tradition* (Peace Pledge Union, 2007 [cited 8 August 2007]); available from http://www.ppu.org.uk/e_publications/dd-trad1.html.

draw the sword will die by the sword.’⁹ Here again, even in the face of perceived injustice or insecurity, we are asked not to resort to any violence in reply, because as Christian anarchists interpret Jesus to mean, ‘it can only give rise to further violence.’¹⁰ Incidentally, Ellul notes that the warning applies just as much to the state as to violent revolutionaries: violence should never be used, neither to hold political authority nor to overthrow it.¹¹ And if violence *is* used, then no validation for it can be claimed from Christianity, because Jesus explicitly denounces it.

According to Tolstoy, then, any violent response to evil is both irrational and unchristian. It is irrational because in the long run, it does not guarantee that the end for which violent means are used will be satisfactorily secured. And it is unchristian because Jesus blatantly condemned it – both verbally and in the way he exemplified it in response to his arrest, trial and crucifixion. In Tolstoy’s words, this was Jesus’ message to mankind, in both his teaching and example: ‘You think that your laws correct evil; they only increase it. There is only one way of extirpating evil – to return good to all men without distinction. You have tried your principle for thousands of years; try now mine, which is the reverse.’¹²

It might be worth clarifying that in their understanding of Jesus’ teaching and example as rejecting violence, Christian anarchists make arguments similar to those put forward by Christian pacifists such as John H. Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas and many others. What makes them *anarchists* is that they develop their arguments further: noting that the state is and in its current form cannot but be violent, they

⁹ Matthew 26:52.

¹⁰ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 65.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, p. 41.

deduce that Jesus' message cannot but imply a rejection of it.¹³ For them, anarchism is the logical extension of pacifism and the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁴ These arguments cannot be rehearsed here, but the similarities between Christian anarchists and pacifists on violence, along with their differences on the state, are worth acknowledging in passing.¹⁵

For all Christian anarchists, the radical political innovation of Jesus' message was therefore to put forward a completely different way of responding to whatever may be seen as evil. That is, even in the face of unjust demands, he asks us to behave like a generous and loving servant, not to rebel, not to get aggressive, and certainly not to even contemplate using power to enforce our view of justice. In the eyes of Christian anarchists, the political implications are self-evident: the only response to disorder and insecurity in human relations is not to delegate power to a state, but to act as Jesus taught and acted – however difficult, painful or costly the sacrifice. 'Christ,' Andrews concludes, 'is the archetype of compassion – the original model of radical, non-violent, sacrificial love – which humanity desperately needs,

¹³ Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*. (add ebook)

¹⁴ Ammon Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, ed. Jim Missey and Joan Thomas, Second ed. (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1994), p. 99.

¹⁵ For more on this, see for instance Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, Phillip W. Gray, 'Peace, Peace, but There is No Peace: a critique of Christian pacifist communitarianism', *Politics and Religion* 1, no. 3 (2008), Ostergaard, *Resisting the Nation State* ([cited], J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, Revised and expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), chap. 4.

now more than ever, if it is to find a way to save itself from the cycles of violence that will otherwise destroy it.’¹⁶

Hence to borrow Eller’s words, Jesus invites us on a path of ‘voluntary self-subordination,’ even – indeed precisely – in response to violence and injustice.¹⁷

Andrews therefore speaks of treating Christ as a *model* rather than an *idol*:

The example of Christ [...] is so powerful that many of us find it overpowering and, therefore, unfortunately, disempowering, rather than empowering as it ought to be.

So we tend to treat Christ as our *idol*, someone we’d like to be like, but know we never will be like; rather than our *model*, someone we’d like to be like, and do our best to be sure we are like. But Christ never wanted to be an *idol*. He never asked anyone to worship him. Christ only wanted to *model* how to live life to the full. And all he asked of people who wanted to live this way was to follow him.¹⁸

Christian anarchists thus bemoan the fact that Christianity has evolved into the worship of an idol rather than the personal and collective effort to imitate Jesus and thereby represent him (make him present) in the world.

Denouncing idolatry

Just as relevant to this article as Jesus’ repeated denunciations of violence and coercion, however, are his pronouncements on idolatry and on choosing God as sole ‘master.’ One such passage can be found in the narrative of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness, and reads as follows:

¹⁶ Dave Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy: discovering a radical spirituality of compassion* (Oxford: Lion, 1999), p. 100.

¹⁷ Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy: Jesus’ primacy over the powers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1987), chap. 10 for an elaboration of this argument, and pp. 239-40 for the quoted words.

¹⁸ Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy*, p. 114 (Andrews’ emphasis).

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’¹⁹

Ellul interprets the text to imply that ‘all powers, all the power and glory of the kingdoms, all that has to do with politics and political authority, belongs to the devil.’²⁰ Indeed, Jesus does not deny that political power does belong to the devil. Rather, ‘he refuses the offer of power because the devil demands that he should fall down before him and worship him.’²¹ That is, as Ellul deduces, ‘a person can exercise political power only if he worships the power of evil.’²² Ultimately, Alexis-Baker explains, the temptation is ‘a question of allegiance.’²³ One can follow either Christianity and its implied anarchism, or political power and its implied betrayal of God. ‘If one chooses the path of God,’ she continues, ‘then the choice must be a complete one. There is no room for allegiance to the state and its claim to legitimacy, demand for obedience, rights to violence and desire for loyalty from its citizens.’²⁴ Jesus refuses political power because it would entail worship of the devil, and he

¹⁹ Matthew 4:8-10. It is the King James Version of this last sentence which forms the title of this article: ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.’

²⁰ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 58. This view is shared by James Redford, *Jesus Is an Anarchist: a free-market, libertarian anarchist, that is – otherwise what is called an anarcho-capitalist* (1 June 2006 2006 [cited 14 August 2006]); available from <http://praxeology.net/anarchist-jesus.pdf>.

²¹ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 58.

²² Jacques Ellul, ‘Anarchism and Christianity’, in *Jesus and Marx: from gospel to ideology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 168.

²³ Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, ‘Embracing God, Rejecting Masters’, *Christianarchy* 1, no. 1 (2005): p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

thereby also declines the possibility of changing the world through political channels.²⁵ He rejects political authority because he can only serve one Lord, and it is not possible to serve both God and worldly kingdoms.

Furthermore, there are several instances in the gospels where Jesus insists that we cannot serve two masters, and that therefore if we choose to serve God, the choice cannot but be absolute.²⁶ Tolstoy interprets Jesus' instruction on not swearing oaths of allegiance (which immediately precedes that not to resist evil) in light of precisely this impossibility of serving two masters: it is impossible, he says, to swear allegiance to a state and at the same time commit oneself to follow Jesus.²⁷ We must therefore all decide who of the two masters we will serve and who we will not.²⁸

What is Caesar's and what is God's

Many in the Christian tradition have nevertheless argued that such passages must be weighed against Jesus' famous instruction to 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's'.²⁹ Jesus, it is said, recognises the need for Christians to show their allegiance to the state

²⁵ Linda H. Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 78-79, 89-90, Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 10, Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture*, pp. 157-58.

²⁶ For instance: Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13.

²⁷ Leo Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is within You', in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), pp. 232-33.

²⁸ Leo Tolstoy, 'On Socialism, State and Christian', in *Government Is Violence: essays on anarchism and pacifism*, ed. David Stephens (London: Phoenix, 1990), p. 158.

²⁹ One concise example of such argument is provided by C. E. B. Cranfield, 'The Christian's Political Responsibility According to the New Testament', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (1962): pp. 177-78, 81, 83-84.

by paying respect for Caesar. For Christian anarchists, however, such apologies of state power are guilty of extending the implications of this passage far beyond its intended meaning, and a more truthful interpretation of it must begin by paying attention to the detailed evolution of the narrative.³⁰ The story, they remind us, reads as follows:

Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

They came to him and said, ‘Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

Should we pay or shouldn’t we?’ But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. ‘Why are you trying to trap me?’ he asked. ‘Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’

They brought the coin, and he asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.

Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’

And they were amazed at him.³¹

Ellul notes that in the first place, if they put this question to Jesus, it must have been because it was already debated, and Jesus must have had ‘the reputation of being

³⁰ The exposition of the Christian anarchist argument here follows Ellul, but one can also find interesting and similar remarks elsewhere in Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, chap. 4 and 8, Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture*, pp. 51-53, Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), pp. 310-14, Archie Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State, Mennonite Reprint Series* (Hagerstown: James Lowry/Deutsche Buchhandlung, 2000), pp. 49-52, Redford, *Jesus Is an Anarchist* ([cited), John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: vicit agnus noster*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), chap. 2.

³¹ Mark 12:13-17

hostile to Caesar.’³² But aside from this, it must be borne in mind that ‘in the Roman world an individual mark on an object denoted ownership.’³³ Hence the coin did actually belong to Caesar.³⁴ No surprise, then, that Jesus says: ‘Give it back to him when he demands it.’³⁵ Nevertheless, as Ellul notices, ‘Jesus does not say that taxes are lawful.’³⁶

The important question, then, is ‘what really belongs to Caesar?’ For Ellul, a reply based on this passage can only be: ‘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 belongs to God.’³⁷ For instance, Caesar has no right over life and death. That belongs to God. Hence while the state can expect Christians to abide by its wishes regarding its belongings, it has no right to kill dissidents or plunge a country into war.³⁸ Therefore what the ‘Give to Caesar’ episode clarifies is that some things do belong to Caesar, but many other things belong to God, and the state is overstepping its mark when it encroaches upon God’s domain.

Christian anarchists maintain that what belongs to God is much broader than what belongs to Caesar: to Jesus’ Jewish audience, the debt owed to God is

³² Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 59.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The same logic still applies today, as a cursory look at the small print of most bank notes confirms.

³⁵ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 60.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

incomparably greater.³⁹ Besides, money is ‘the domain of Mammon.’⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

In other words, Jesus uses the 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.’⁴² His detractors had not been giving to God what belongs to God: they had betrayed God by their *de facto* allegiance to Caesar.

Consequently, for Eller, 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.’⁴³ By uttering those words, Jesus ‘makes the distinction between the one, ultimate, absolute choice and all lesser, relative choices.’⁴⁴ Questions concerning the payment of taxes ‘are “adiaphora” [Greek for “indifference”] in comparison to the one

³⁹ It is Myers who explains that the word ‘render’ evokes this reference to ‘debt’ in Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p. 312. Similar thinking can also be found in Philip Berrigan, *Jesus the Anarchist* (Jonah House, 2007 [cited 10 April 2007]); available from http://www.jonahhouse.org/Anita_Roddick.htm, Ellul, ‘Anarchism and Christianity’, p. 168, Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, p. 432.

⁴⁰ Ellul, cited in Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p. 312 (Myers’ emphasis).

⁴² Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State*, p. 51.

⁴³ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ One example which Eller lists of such a ‘relative choice’ is whether to collaborate with or resist the Romans. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

choice that really counts’ – the choice of God above Caesar.⁴⁵ 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 [a transliteration of the original Greek for government or principalities] be the human relativities they are.’⁴⁶

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.’⁴⁷ In other words, ‘let Caesar take his cut,’ says Eller, ‘so that you can continue to *ignore* him.’⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, what must be denounced is

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 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 Davis Richard A. Davis, ‘Love, Hate, and Kierkegaard’s Christian Politics of Indifference’, in *Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives*, ed. Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos (Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

⁴⁶ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 83. On this, see also Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology*, pp. 90-91. Eller adopts ‘arky’ as an English transliteration for the Greek ἀρχή throughout his book.

⁴⁷ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 196.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 196 (Eller’s emphasis).

⁴⁹ It should be noted 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 Redford, *Jesus Is an Anarchist* ([cited), *The Rigorous Intuition Board* (4 November 2006 2006 [cited 20 April 2007]); available from <http://p216.ezboard.com/Regarding-praxeologynetanarchistjesuspdf/frigorousintuitionfrm10.ShowMessage?topicID=6754.topic>, Michael Tennant, *Christianarchy?* (Strike the Root, 4 May 2005 2007 [cited 21 November 2007]); available from <http://www.strike-the-root.com/51/tennant/tennant5.html>.

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.⁵⁰

Submitting oneself to the governing authorities

It is perhaps worth examining, in the context of this discussion, the Bible passage which has been most widely used to justify Christians' allegiance to the state, even though this passage comes after the gospels, in Romans, an epistle written by Paul to Christians in Rome. There, Paul does clearly assert that 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.'⁵¹ This passage, it is said, most clearly defeats the Christian anarchist fallacy, and confirms once and for all that it is a Christian's duty is to owe allegiance to the Westphalian state.⁵²

⁵⁰ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), pp. 78-79, *The Christmas Conspiracy* (Vine and Fig Tree, 2007 [cited 10 April 2007]); available from <http://thechristmasconspiracy.com>, Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 84, 165, Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture*, p. 52, Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 61, Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p. 427, *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy* (Vine and Fig Tree, 2007 [cited 20 April 2007]); available from <http://members.aol.com/VF95Theses/thesis.htm>.

⁵¹ Romans 13:1.

⁵² See, for instance: Cranfield, 'The Christian's Political Responsibility According to the New Testament': pp. 177-84, Jim Davies, *Christian Anarchist: an oxymoron?* (Strike the Root, 9 August 2005 [cited 21 November 2007]); available from <http://www.strike-the-root.com/52/davies/davies1.html>.

Here again, however, Christian anarchists offer a coherent and compelling response.⁵³ For a start, they point out that Romans 12 and 13 ‘in their entirety form a literary unit.’⁵⁴ In both chapters, Paul is writing about love and sacrifice, about overcoming evil with good, about willingly offering oneself up for persecution. In doing so, he is mainly repeating the message that Jesus articulated not only in the Sermon on the Mount and other parables, but also in the very way he lived and died – indeed, as discussed further below, Jesus’ ultimate act of love and sacrifice was to subject himself to Roman crucifixion.⁵⁵ But the point is that as John Yoder asserts, ‘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.’⁵⁶ And in Ellul’s words, once one interprets Romans 12 and 13 as a coherent whole, one 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.’⁵⁷ Hence Paul’s message in Romans 13 is to call for

⁵³ The argument summarised here combines the thought of Nekeisha Alexis-Manners, *Deconstructing Romans 13: verse 1-2* (2005 [cited 28 October 2005]); available from <http://www.jesusradicals.com/essays/theology/Romans13.htm>, Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, chap. 8, Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, chap. 2 and appendix, 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), sect. 8 and 9, Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State*, chap. 4, Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, chap. 9 and 10.

⁵⁴ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Alexis-Manners, *Deconstructing Romans 13* ([cited], Dave Andrews, *The Crux of the Struggle* (2001 [cited 3 December 2006])); available from <http://www.daveandrews.com.au/publications.html>.

⁵⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 196.

⁵⁷ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 81.

Christians to subject themselves to political powers *out of love, forgiveness and sacrifice*.

Moreover, Eller makes the important point that to ‘submit oneself to’ does not mean to worship, to ‘recognise the legitimacy of’ or to ‘own allegiance to.’⁵⁸ Ellul thus comments that ‘we have no right to claim God in validation of this order as if he were at our service. [...] This takes away all the pathos, justification, illusion, enthusiasm, etc’ that can be associated with any specific political authority.⁵⁹ No specific government has any particularly special relationship with God, even though God will use it in his mysterious ordering of the cosmos.⁶⁰ Therefore, according to Ellul, ‘the only one whom we must fear is God,’ and ‘the only one to whom honour is due is God’ – not political authorities.⁶¹ Any obedience to political authorities, then, is merely an accidental epiphenomenon to the Christian’s full allegiance and obedience to God.⁶² Indeed, for Christian anarchists, *whether obeying or disobeying*, a Christian response to the state is always incidental to one’s obedience to God.⁶³

But anyhow, ‘the immediate concrete meaning of this text for the Christian Jews in Rome,’ Yoder indicates, ‘is to call them away from any notion of revolution

⁵⁸ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 199.

⁵⁹ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 88.

⁶⁰ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 202.

⁶¹ Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, p. 81.

⁶² Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, pp. 218-19.

⁶³ Adin Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments* (www.nonresistance.org, 1839 [cited 28 March 2007]); available from <http://www.nonresistance.org/literature.html>, 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), pp. 141-48.

or insubordination. The call is to a non-resistant attitude towards a tyrannical government.’⁶⁴ Paul is calling for Roman Christians to act as Jesus did. Just as Jesus did before him, he is advising against a violent political uprising and instead encouraging Christians to cultivate love, sacrifice and forgiveness. Paul is endorsing neither the Roman establishment nor any uprising to overthrow it, but reminding followers of Jesus that what matters is to focus on God and Jesus’ radical and no less revolutionary commandments.⁶⁵ Thus Romans 13, when understood in its context, ends up clarifying rather than discrediting the anarchist reading of Jesus’ teaching.

This also touches on the core of the apparently paradoxical or contradictory understanding of Jesus’ teaching as put forward by Christian anarchists. That is, Jesus’ political subversion is carried out through submission rather than revolt. Jesus’ crucifixion is the Biblical episode which best illustrates this.⁶⁶ For Christian anarchists, the cross is the symbol both of state violence and persecution, *and* of Jesus’ alternative to overcome it. To paraphrase from Paul, by submitting to his crucifixion – even uttering as his last words a call for God to ‘forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ – Jesus ‘makes a public example’ of the state, ‘unmasks’ it as violent and demonic and ‘dethrones’ it from its power and perceived

⁶⁴ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, p. 203, Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 202.

⁶⁶ The argument summarised in this paragraph is based on Andrews, *The Crux of the Struggle* ([cited]), Jonathan Bartley, *Faith and Politics after Christendom: the church as a movement for anarchy, After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), chap. 11, Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald, 1977), Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, pp. 83-85, Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: discernment and resistance in a world of domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, chap. 2 and 8.

legitimacy.⁶⁷ By submitting to his crucifixion, Jesus demonstrates that love and forgiveness, even – indeed, *especially* – in the face of violence and vindictiveness, must go to the very end. Hence Jesus’ submission is subversive because it unmasks the true nature of the state and at the same time embodies his alternative to overcome it. At the cross, Jesus and his teaching, although seemingly crushed, are paradoxically exalted. However surprising this may at first seem, the cross thus symbolises Christianity’s anarchist subversion. Hence when Jesus repeatedly demands of his followers that they take up their cross and follow him, he is demanding that they reject violence, accept persecution and nonetheless keep on striving to love and forgive both their neighbours and their enemies, just as he did.⁶⁸

Of course, this Christian ideal does appear distant, impossible or utopian, and it is easy to denounce the Christian anarchists’ insistence on it as evidence of a naïve lack of realism. Love, forgiveness and non-resistance to evil are difficult enough to enact on a personal level, let alone as a whole community. But in reply to this accusation, Tolstoy writes:

It may be affirmed that the constant fulfilment of this rule [of love and non-resistance] is difficult, and that not every man will find his happiness in obeying it. It may be said that it is foolish; that, as unbelievers pretend, Jesus was a visionary, an idealist, whose impracticable rules were only followed because of the stupidity of his disciples. But it is impossible not to admit that Jesus did say very clearly and definitely that which he intended to say: namely, that men should not resist evil; and that therefore he who accepts his teaching cannot resist.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Luke 23:34. See Colossians 2:15 and its interpretation by the authors cited above.

⁶⁸ For instance: Matthew 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34, 10:21; Luke 9:23, 14:27.

⁶⁹ Tolstoy, *What I Believe*.

In other words, although the practicality of the Christian anarchist understanding of Jesus' teaching and example can be debated, the grounding of it in scripture is harder to contest. Christian anarchists therefore call for self-proclaimed Christians to honestly declare their true allegiance. Any interpretation that compromises with political authorities, for them, exposes both hypocrisy and a lack of faith in the very essence of Jesus' teaching and example. According to Christian anarchists, the political implications of Christianity might be utopian, but they are made clear throughout the Bible: Jesus articulated and exemplified the foundations of a community based on love, a community in which love and forgiveness can be the only response to injustice and insecurity, a community therefore that cannot but reject an international order based on the hypothetical or manufactured allegiance of each and every citizen to a violent and idolatrous post-Westphalian state.

II. Implications for the contemporary international order

The contrast between Jesus' teaching so understood and the post-Westphalian nation-state should already be quite clear by now. To tease it out further, it is helpful to draw from Cavanaugh's work on the parallels and contrasts between political theory (more specifically, social contract theory) and Christianity.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ William T. Cavanaugh, 'The City: beyond secular parodies', in *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999).

The deification of the Westphalian state

Cavanaugh argues that both Christianity and political theory are based on a founding myth on the origins of social division, and that based on this myth, both advocate the ‘enactment of a social body’ to overcome social strife and bring about peace.⁷¹ These two myths and consequent social bodies for salvation, however, are so different that they are actually incompatible.

Cavanaugh contends that the Christian myth begins with ‘the natural unity of the human race,’ a unity which finds itself disrupted ‘by Adam and Eve’s attempted usurpation of God’s position.’⁷² The restoration of this unity, according to Christian soteriology, must take place ‘through participation in Christ’s Body,’ the heart of which, for Cavanaugh, is the Eucharist.⁷³ By contrast, what Cavanaugh calls the ‘state story’ (following especially Hobbesian social contract theory) begins from a ‘state of nature’ which assumes ‘the essential individuality of the human race’ and a natural starting point of war of all against all.⁷⁴ Based on this different ontological myth, ‘salvation from the violence of conflicting individuals’ again ‘comes through the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 182.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 183-84.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 184.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 186. Cavanaugh’s description of political theory (pp. 186-190) is based on a very succinct synopsis of the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and (perhaps to a lesser extent) Rousseau. One of his main points, however, is to stress that while in the Christian story human beings were *separated*, in the state story, they have always been *separate*. This, he sees as a fundamental ontological difference between the two stories, in that one speaks of a disrupted unity, but the other of a primordial disunity. For a discussion of this argument in light of an ontological perspective on love and justice, see Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos and Joseph Milne, ‘Love, Justice, and Social Eschatology’, *The Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 6 (2007): pp. 986-89.

enactment of a social body,' but in this case this happens by coming together to form a social contract 'to protect person and property.'⁷⁵ Hence both the Christian story and social contract theory begin with an ontological myth to explain social disunity and propose a road to salvation that depends on the enactment of a social body.

What Cavanaugh then explains, however, is that 'the Church is perhaps the primary thing from which the modern state is meant to save us. The modern secular state, the story goes, is after all founded precisely on the need to keep peace between contentious religious factions.'⁷⁶ Indeed, the 'Wars of Religion' of the sixteenth and seventeenth century are often cited as prime examples of the sort of religious conflict and violence which the secular state is here to save us from.⁷⁷ Cavanaugh therefore argues that the process of 'secularization' must be seen as 'the substitution of one *mythos* of salvation for another.'⁷⁸ The two contrasting stories of salvation are not just incompatible, but they are also competing with one another.

It is in this context that Cavanaugh goes on to argue that to call the wars out of which the Westphalian state emerged 'Wars of Religion' is 'an anachronism, for what was at issue in these wars was the very creation of religion as a set of privately held beliefs without direct political relevance.'⁷⁹ For him, these wars were actually 'the *birthpangs* of the State, in which the overlapping jurisdictions, allegiances, and

⁷⁵ Cavanaugh, 'The City', pp. 187-88. Cavanaugh emphasises (on p. 186) the theological shift which this represents from 'a theology of participation' to 'a theology of will,' something which, again, is commented on in Christoyannopoulos and Milne, 'Love, Justice, and Social Eschatology': pp. 986-89.

⁷⁶ Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 188.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

⁷⁹ William T. Cavanaugh, 'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House: the wars of religion and the rise of the state', *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (1995): p. 398.

customs of the medieval order were flattened and circumscribed into the new creation of the sovereign state [...], a centralizing power with a monopoly on violence within a defined territory.’⁸⁰ Those wars ‘were fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging State over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order.’⁸¹ The state relied on a myth to legitimise its increasing omnipotence through this monopoly, a myth that also deliberately confined religion to the private and subjective sphere, away from modern politics.

Students of International Relations are always reminded that the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia, credited with bringing an end to these religious wars, mark the beginning of an international order based on territorially sovereign and autonomous states, and on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. This Westphalian system was necessary, they are told, as a solution to the Wars of Religion that had ravaged Europe over a century. By establishing the principle of complete (religious and political) sovereignty of a state over a given territory, the Treaties of Westphalia laid the foundations for the modern nation-state and the concomitant international order. It is, therefore, the founding myth of modern politics and international relations. But of course this myth rests on the assumed or expected allegiance of every citizen to the state that asserts its sovereignty over any given territory. If these citizens are not obliged to swear such allegiance in some ceremony or other, they are at least assumed to consent to it. That is what the legitimacy of the whole edifice rests on.

Realist schools of International Relations certainly all take this Westphalian state to be central to relations between people located in different states, assuming as they often do the very Hobbesian mythology mentioned above. But even Liberal

⁸⁰ Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 191 (Cavanaugh's emphasis).

⁸¹ Cavanaugh, 'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': p. 398.

scholars of International Relations rely on the state to regulate and arbitrate international interactions. Almost anywhere one looks in International Relations scholarship, the relations between the different people of the world are framed in a Westphalian casing (and this, due to far from innocent reasons, as exposed by Alex Prichard).⁸² Yet to rephrase Alexander Wendt's famous 'anarchy is what states make of it,' from a Christian anarchist viewpoint, 'the Westphalian order is what human beings make of it' – and Jesus is calling human beings to make very little of it, to constitute and be constituted by a radically different political structure.⁸³

As explained above, Jesus asked his followers *not* to grant the sort of allegiance, power and legitimacy given to the Westphalian state to any master other than God. To do otherwise is to dethrone God and to crown another god in his place. It is idolatry, and that is precisely what the Westphalian order is based on. Moreover, the post-Westphalian sovereign 'is a jealous god,' for whom 'any association which interferes with the direct relationship between sovereign and individual becomes suspect.'⁸⁴ Caesar has a tendency to seek to completely supplant God, to sit in his throne, and to use violence and deception to protect this status. The post-Westphalian system of international relations has institutionalised idolatry. No true follower of Jesus, Christian anarchists argue, can consent to it.

⁸² Alex Prichard, 'What can the Absence of Anarchism tell us About the History and Purpose of International Relations?' *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming).

⁸³ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The social construction of power politics', *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992).

⁸⁴ Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 191.

A violent god

What makes this situation even more unchristian is that the institution which finds itself empowered by the Westphalian order is openly violent. In order for it to enforce law and order, the Westphalian state demands from its citizens a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Hence coercion is essential to government. For Hennacy, this means that ‘all governments – even the best – were founded upon the policemen’s club: upon a return of evil for evil, the very opposite of the teachings of Christ.’⁸⁵ The state is founded on the very thing which Jesus prohibits. The resulting tragedy is that although the state promises to protect from evil, it itself ‘produces evil and extends it.’⁸⁶ Civil law, according to Chelčický, ‘encourages a continuing fall of man,’ because it ‘perpetuates lawsuits, punishments, and revenge: it returns evil for evil.’⁸⁷ For Christian anarchists, law is thus an inadequate and unchristian response to violence since it is itself another form of violence.

The state is also more visibly violent and therefore unchristian in that it wages war.⁸⁸ In doing so, it breaks not only Jesus’ instruction not to resist evil, but also one of the much older Ten Commandments, namely: ‘You shall not murder.’⁸⁹ Yet as Berdyaev remarks, ‘murder is committed in an organized way and upon a

⁸⁵ Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, p. 62.

⁸⁶ Berdyaev, *The Realm of the Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, p. 83.

⁸⁷ Molnár, *A Study of Peter Chelčický’s Life*, p. 99, quoting Chelčický.

⁸⁸ For a short discussion of Tolstoy’s views on war, see Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, ‘Leo Tolstoy on the State: a detailed picture of Tolstoy’s denunciation of state violence and deception’, *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): pp. 24-25.

⁸⁹ Exodus 20:13. This passage is also quoted to make this point in William Van Wagenen, ‘War and the State’, *The Mormon Worker*, September 2007, p. 9.

colossal scale by the state.’⁹⁰ A letter to a Christian anarchist publication notes that ‘states institutionalise killing by maintaining armed forces.’⁹¹ The army is the state’s killing machine, its ultimate tool with which to murder and resist evil.

Some might retort that a distinction should be made between murder and war. To those, Ballou asks rhetorically:

How many does it take to metamorphose wickedness into righteousness? One man must not kill. If he does it is murder. Two, ten, one hundred men acting on their own responsibility must not kill. If they do it is still murder. But a state or nation may kill as many as it pleases and it is no murder. It is just, necessary, commendable, and right. Only get people enough to agree to it, and the butchery of myriads of human beings is perfectly innocent. But how many men does it take?⁹²

Christian anarchists see no valid reason to distinguish between people acting on their own and people doing the same thing through the state. Christian commands apply in both cases. Hennacy even finds support on this in Pope Benedict XV, who said that ‘The Gospel command of love applies between states just as it does between individual men.’⁹³

Both at home and abroad, then, the state directly contravenes the related commandments not to murder and not to resist evil. Hennacy affirms that ‘all government denies the Sermon on the Mount by a return of evil for evil in

⁹⁰ Nicolas Berdyaev, 'Personality, Religion, and Existential Anarchism', in *Patterns of Anarchy: a collection of writings on the anarchist tradition*, ed. Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (Garden City: Anchor, 1966), p. 159.

⁹¹ Frits ter Kuile, 'Anarcho Theologie', *A Pinch of Salt*, March 1989, p. 16.

⁹² Adin Ballou, quoted in Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is within You', p. 13.

⁹³ Quoted in Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, p. 373.

legislatures, courts, prisons, and war.’⁹⁴ Of his own (American) government, he says that it ‘represents the largest single example of the organised return of evil for evil, both in foreign relations and in domestic affairs.’⁹⁵ Through war and capital punishment, the state responds to evil with murder. A Christian should neither kill nor resist evil, yet the state does both.

Moreover, as Ballou explains, ‘what [one] does through others he really does himself.’⁹⁶ Therefore human beings might find themselves resisting injury with injury ‘as constituent supporters of human government.’⁹⁷ That is,

if a political compact [...] requires, authorizes, provides for, or tolerates war, bloodshed, capital punishment, slavery, or any kind of absolute injury, offensive or defensive, the man who swears, affirms or otherwise pledges himself, to support such a compact [...] is just as responsible for every act of injury done in strict conformity thereto, as if he himself personally committed it.⁹⁸

When the state resists evil, its citizens who have consented to it holding power to resist evil are just as responsible for its behaviour as they would be if they had resisted evil themselves.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 259.

⁹⁶ Adin Ballou, 'A Catechism of Non-Resistance', in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), p. 16.

⁹⁷ Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance* (Friends of Adin Ballou, 2007 [cited 12 February 2007]); available from <http://www.adinballou.org/cnr.shtml>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.([cited]).

Choosing Jesus' alternative

Therefore, according to Tolstoy, every would-be Christian faces a choice: God or the Westphalian state, Jesus' teaching and example or the modern state and the international order that comes with it. It is 'impossible,' he says, 'at one and the same time to confess the God-Christ, the foundation of whose teaching is non-resistance to evil, and yet consciously and yet calmly labour for the establishment of property, tribunals, kingdoms, and armies.'⁹⁹ He further believes that this choice is inevitable, that every single person must decide where they stand on this issue.¹⁰⁰ He writes:

Perhaps Christianity may be obsolete, and when choosing between the two – Christianity and love or the State and murder – the people of our time will conclude that the existence of the State and murder is so much more important than Christianity, that we must forego Christianity and retain only what is more important: the State and murder.

That may be so – at least people may think and feel so. But in that case they should say so!¹⁰¹

People should openly admit to have chosen what they have chosen and not pretend they have been able to combine the two, because each one of these alternatives directly repudiates the other. It is either Christianity, or the Westphalian order.

To return to Cavanaugh, the Christian story is deeply subversive because it presents an alternative to the state's ontological mythology and soteriology. Cavanaugh speaks of 'eucharistic anarchism,' and explains that 'in the making of the Body of Christ, Christians participate in a practice which envisions a proper

⁹⁹ Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

¹⁰¹ Leo Tolstoy, 'Address to the Swedish Peace Congress in 1909', in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), p. 540.

“anarchy” [...] in that it challenges the false order of the state.’¹⁰² According to Cavanaugh, ‘The Eucharist defuses both the false theology and the false anthropology’ of the state story, and instead ‘overcomes’ our ‘separateness [...] precisely by participation in Christ’s Body.’¹⁰³ Christians must therefore stop acknowledging the state’s salvation myth and instead recover and proclaim their own.¹⁰⁴ Christianity, he says, ‘provides resources for resistance’ against the state’s deceptive ontological myth and path to salvation.¹⁰⁵ Cavanaugh’s focus on the ritual of the Eucharist is unique to him, but all Christian anarchists concur on the need to unmask and disown the state, and to fully embrace the political dimension of Jesus’ teaching instead.

At the same time, Christian anarchists are emphatically *not* calling for a return to the international order which preceded the Treaties of Westphalia. For them, the medieval order was no closer approximation to Jesus’ teaching than the one that followed it. Indeed, they are bitterly critical of the church for having colluded with political power and in so doing compromising the essence of Jesus’ teaching. For Christian anarchists, the symbolic moment which epitomised the degeneration of Christianity was Emperor Constantine’s ‘conversion,’ when ‘Christ, who had turned the Roman empire upside down, was turned into a lap-dog for the Roman emperor.’¹⁰⁶ The early church had strived to enact Jesus’ teaching, but with Constantine’s reforms, what had begun as a voluntary, nonviolent movement, a conscious choice of love, forgiveness and sacrifice eventually became a compulsory and hence meaningless tag

¹⁰² Cavanaugh, ‘The City’, p. 194.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁶ Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy*, p. 70.

synonymous with the status quo.¹⁰⁷ And predictably, scriptural exegesis was thereafter reassessed in order to justify unquestioning obedience to the state.

Tolstoy uses particularly strong language to condemn this corruption of Christianity.¹⁰⁸ Although the following are not his words but Henry George's, he quotes them at length because they eloquently echo his view:

The Christian revelation was the doctrine stating the equality of men, that God is the Father and that all men are brothers. It struck to the core of the monstrous tyranny which inspired the civilized world; it smashed the slaves' chains and annihilated the enormous injustice whereby a small group of people could live in luxury at the expense of the masses, and ill-treat the so-called working classes. This is why the first Christians were persecuted and why, once it became clear that they could not be suppressed, the privileged classes adopted it and perverted it. It ceased to be the celebration of the true Christianity of the first centuries and to a significant extent became the tool of the privileged classes.¹⁰⁹

When Constantine converted to Christianity, instead of adapting politics to Jesus' teaching, 'they arranged a Christianity for him, [...] they carefully devised a kind of

¹⁰⁷ See for instance: Bartley, *Faith and Politics After Christendom*, chap. 2 and 3, Ciaron O'Reilly, 'The Anarchist Implications of Christian Discipleship', *Social Alternatives* 2, no. 3 (1982): p. 10, Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State*, chap. 2.

¹⁰⁸ In particular, see: Leo Tolstoy, 'An Appeal to the Clergy', in *On Life and Essays on Religion, Tolstóy Centenary Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), Leo Tolstoy, 'Church and State', in *On Life and Essays on Religion, Tolstóy Centenary Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), Leo Tolstoy, 'The Restoration of Hell', in *On Life and Essays on Religion, Tolstóy Centenary Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, Leo Tolstoy, 'What Is Religion, and Wherein Lies Its Essence?' in *On Life and Essays on Religion, Tolstóy Centenary Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

¹⁰⁹ Henry George, quoted in Tolstoy, 'The Law of Love and the Law of Violence', p. 187.

Christianity for him that would let him continue to live his old heathen life unembarrassed.¹¹⁰

The resulting paradox, for Tolstoy, was most visible in the army. Before Constantine, Origen had justified Christians' refusal of military service by arguing 'that Christians fight more than others for the sake of the Emperor, but they do it through good deeds, prayers, and by setting a good example to others,' not through armed combat.¹¹¹ But this changed:

Under Constantine the cross had already appeared on the standard of the Roman Legions. In 416 a decree was issued forbidding pagans to join the army. All the soldiers became Christians: that is, all the Christians, with only a few exceptions, renounced Christ.¹¹²

And so for Christian anarchists, Christianity never recovered from this compromise with political power. Emperors, Crusades, the Inquisition, the Wars of Religion – according to Christian anarchists, none of these really have anything to do with the essence of Christianity. Those dark chapters of history were political power-games in which Christianity was hypocritically used as hypnotic cloak to mobilise the masses; and as a result, the real meaning of Jesus' teaching remained hidden under thick layers of lies and stupefying rituals.¹¹³

Hence the net of true faith, to use Chelčický's phrase, was torn by two great predators: the pope and the emperor.¹¹⁴ Christian anarchists are therefore very critical

¹¹⁰ Tolstoy, 'Church and State', pp. 339-40.

¹¹¹ Tolstoy, 'The Law of Love and the Law of Violence', p. 188.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 190.

¹¹³ On these dark chapters of history and the church's role in them, see most of Tolstoy's political writings already mentioned above, but also (for instance) Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy*.

¹¹⁴ Molnár, *A Study of Peter Chelčický's Life*.

of the church's alliance with the state.¹¹⁵ They accuse it of saying “‘Yes” to the very temptation that Jesus denies.”¹¹⁶ They accuse it of disingenuously reinterpreting Jesus' radical commandments to enfeeble them and curb their politically revolutionary importance. They accuse it of further distracting its flock from these commandments by the promotion of obscure dogmas and the enactment of stupefying ritual. And they accuse it of remorselessly showing allegiance to and supporting any political authority, however violent and repressive, that offers it benefits and protection. Thus for Christian anarchists, the church is really the antichrist, portraying itself as the saviour but in fact confining Jesus' emancipatory teaching to its very opposite.¹¹⁷

Leading by example

Christian anarchists are therefore not advocating a return to the days of Christendom as a response to the current international order. Instead, for Christian anarchists, ‘Real change must come from the bottom up or, better yet, from the inside out.’¹¹⁸ Chelčický argues that to make people better, the only option is to teach them by example – they might then, of their own will, choose to follow that example.¹¹⁹ ‘A

¹¹⁵ The argument summarised in this paragraph, as well as even stronger diatribes against the church, can be found in many of Tolstoy's writings, but also in Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, Molnár, *A Study of Peter Chelčický's Life*.

¹¹⁶ Alexis-Baker, 'Embracing God, Rejecting Masters': p. 2.

¹¹⁷ A vivid illustration of this view can be found, for instance, in Tolstoy, 'The Restoration of Hell'.

¹¹⁸ Carl Thomas, quoted in Stephen W. Carson, *Christians in Politics: the return of the 'religious right'* (30 October 2003 2007 [cited 21 November 2007]); available from <http://www.lewrockwell.com/carson/carson17.html>.

¹¹⁹ 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), p. 47, Molnár, *A Study of Peter*

righteous society,' another Christian anarchist writes, 'can only be realized by changing the heart and mind of each individual.'¹²⁰ Hence, to borrow a famous phrase attributed to Gandhi, 'We must be the change we want to see in the world.'¹²¹ For Christian anarchists, 'There can be no more powerful strategy than that of people who dare to be different.'¹²² This strategy of course implies foregoing the (for Christian anarchists, deluded) dream of top-down efficacy.¹²³ Success is therefore measured not by the 'immediate delivery of political outcomes' but 'in terms more of the consistent faithfulness' of the witness.¹²⁴ The focus is not on the effect of Christian discipleship, but on Christian discipleship itself. That way, as Day writes, 'The "means to the end" begins with each one of us.'¹²⁵

Of course, this relies on Christians leading the way. Hence Christian anarchists call for all Christians to fully embrace Jesus' subversive teaching. The

Chelčický's Life, pp. 102-03, Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelčický: a radical separatist in Hussite Bohemia, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1983), p. 142.

¹²⁰ Roger Young, *A Plea to Christians: reject the state!* (Strike the Root, 25 February 2002 2007 [cited 21 November 2007]); available from <http://www.strike-the-root.com/columns/Young/young3.html>. See also Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, p. 29.

¹²¹ Gandhi, quoted in Dave Andrews, *Plan Be: be the change you want to see in the world* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008), p. 69.

¹²² Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture*, p. 167.

¹²³ Bartley, *Faith and Politics After Christendom*, pp. 144-47, 82.

¹²⁴ This quote is actually partly a paraphrasing of Bartley, who writes that the church 'may come to see success and failure in terms more of the consistent faithfulness or otherwise of its witness than of whether it delivers the immediate political outcomes that the church has often sought historically.' *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹²⁵ Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: by little and by little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), p. 290.

Christian anarchist response to the state is not to resist it (at least not violently) but to unmask it, to forgivingly subject oneself to it, to render to it the few things that belong to it – but also to clearly follow God alone and ignore or disobey the state if it demands things which should be rendered to God, if obeying it would entail a disobedience of God. For Christian anarchists, the only truly revolutionary response to the state is not to overthrow it and compose a different government, but to adopt a different – Christian – way of being, to patiently forgive and thereby unmask the state, but at the same time, to live out the stateless alternative here and now.

Hence what matters for Christian anarchists even more than how Christians respond to particular demands formulated by the state is how they embody Jesus' teaching in community, because that community is what can set the example for those not convinced by Christianity yet. For Christian anarchists, therefore, this revolutionary Christian society must be built 'by *ordinary* people doing *ordinary* things for one another.'¹²⁶ Tolstoy writes that 'Great, true deeds are always simple and modest.'¹²⁷ For Andrews, 'as little people, we can only do little things,' but 'Great things can happen [...] as a result of the cumulative effect of lots of little people doing lots of the little things we can do.'¹²⁸ One Christian anarchist notes that this only requires the same 'energy, [...] organization and teamwork' which humanity today commits to war.¹²⁹ The accumulation of the individual actions of committed followers

¹²⁶ Dave Andrews, *Not Religion, but Love: practicing a radical spirituality of compassion* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), p. 61 (Andrews' emphasis).

¹²⁷ Lyof N. Tolstoï, *What to Do?* (London: Walter Scott), p. 227.

¹²⁸ Andrews, *Plan Be*, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Tom Fox, 'The Force of War and the Force of Peace? The same force moving in the opposite direction?' *The Mormon Worker*, September 2007, pp. 1-2.

of Jesus would subvert the Westphalian order by rendering it obsolete, and replace it by a truly Christian and loving community.

Building such a Christian community therefore consists in building ‘a new society within the shell of the old,’ as Catholic Workers are fond of repeating – thereby borrowing this expression from the Industrial Workers of the World.¹³⁰ Like many secular anarchists (anarcho-syndicalists in particular), Christian anarchists will not ‘wait for a revolutionary situation before developing alternative economic systems,’¹³¹ because it is precisely in the adoption of these new ways of life that the revolution is enacted. Hence Christian anarchists also quote Landauer’s explanation that ‘The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.’¹³² In other words, the true church ‘destroys’ the state by creating new relationships. Just by being

¹³⁰ Eileen Egan, 'Foreword', in *Easy Essays* (Washington: Rose Hill, 2003), p. xii, Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, p. 232, Peter Maurin, *Easy Essays* (Washington: Rose Hill, 2003), p. 37, Peter Maurin, 'What the Catholic Worker Believes', *The London Catholic Worker*, Lent 2006, p. 5, Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p. 288.

¹³¹ These words are Kinna’s and summarise the view of Ferdinand Pelloutier, who she names as the ‘founder’ of anarcho-syndicalism. Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: a beginner's guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), p. 109.

¹³² For instance: Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture*, p. 206, Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry, eds., *Patterns of Anarchy: a collection of writings on the anarchist tradition* (Garden City: Anchor, 1966), p. 559, David Stephens, 'The Non-Violent Anarchism of Leo Tolstoy', in *Government Is Violence: essays on anarchism and pacifism*, ed. David Stephens (London: Phoenix, 1990), p. 18, Colin Ward, 'Anarchist Entry for a Theological Dictionary', *The Raven: anarchist quarterly* 25 7, no. 1 (1994): p. 21.

what Jesus calls it to be, the community of Jesus' followers subverts the Westphalian order and presents its revolutionary alternative to it.

Jesus' followers, therefore, are not expected to concern themselves with the search for an international order built upon the Westphalian state. The system of states on which such an order would be based is directly contradictory to the mode of life advocated by Jesus. What should concern his followers instead is the striving after the kingdom of God. This, in a sense, should be their 'international' concern, in that it is directed at the whole of humanity, not limited by the artificial boundaries imposed by idolatrous and violent states. And of course it is a quintessentially Christian concern, rooted in Christian scripture (and tradition). That, for Christian anarchists, should be the Christian response to the Westphalian state and the international order constructed upon it.

III. Christian Anarchist Exemplars

In a way, Christian anarchists would argue that Christianity so understood has never really been tried yet on a politically significant enough scale. As already noted, the early churches did their best; but they were betrayed by the Roman authorities' manipulation of their cause. In the late Middle Ages, several millenarian movements and protestant sects (such as the Anabaptists, the Mennonites, the Hussites and the Quakers) endeavoured to apply some of the political aspects of Jesus' teachings; but although some of these survive today, they often compromised their goals in the face

of persecution.¹³³ There are also both ancient and more recent examples of conscientious objectors inspired by Jesus' example of love and non-resistance; but these examples of bravery remained local and individual rather than truly social and collective.¹³⁴

Today, the *Catholic Worker* movement (named after the journal it has published since 1 May 1933), founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, continues to strive to embody the Christian anarchist society that Jesus described through its network of houses of hospitality, through its regular publications and through its involvement in public demonstrations.¹³⁵ Thus Ammon Hennacy, another famous figure behind the *Catholic Worker*, picketed, protested, and worked the land in what he called his 'one-man revolution.'¹³⁶ More recently, there are groups like the 'Jesus radicals,' formed on the internet, who organise conferences and discussion groups on a Christian anarchist vision for society.¹³⁷ In Australia, Dave Andrews has for years worked on several projects that aim to strengthen a sense of Christian community in his neighbourhood, and his writings abound with moving examples of the impact that such beacons of love, care and forgiveness have had and can have in the face of

¹³³ Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy*, section 3, Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, chap. 2, Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is within You', preface and chap. 1 and 3.

¹³⁴ Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, chap. 8, Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, introduction and appendix, Tolstoy, 'The Law of Love and the Law of Violence', chap. 9 and 11.

¹³⁵ Andrews, *Christi-Anarchy*, section 4, Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: the autobiography of the legendary Catholic social activist* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1952).

¹³⁶ See his detailed autobiography: Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*.

¹³⁷ See <http://www.jesusradicals.com>.

adversity.¹³⁸ In Britain, in the late 1980s, a journal called *A Pinch of Salt* was published for several years to try to publicise the theory and practice of these Christian anarchist ideas, and it has recently been revived. Aside from these, there are plenty of examples of radical Christians who are trying their best to create communities that foster the sort of love and forgiveness preached by Jesus, and who also speak up, sometimes through non-violent demonstrations, against the violence and injustice perpetrated by the state.

But these are all small-scale examples. The political implications of Jesus' teaching have never really been tried yet at any bigger social scale – if anything, they have been forgotten, even by self-proclaimed Christians. Almost all Christians today accept the premise that the state and the international order that comes with it are necessary to preserve our freedom and security. Almost all Christians today explain away the more radical element of Jesus' message as admirable but unrealistic. And almost all Christians today accept that a good Christian ought to work within modern political institutions rather than undermine them from a religious perspective. For Christian anarchists, however, Christianity actually proposes a radical alternative to the current order, and only Christians who stubbornly enact even the most radical of Jesus' commandments are faithful to their professed religion.

It may be that Christian anarchist demands are far too ambitious for us today. It may be that they will never catch on, and that we should therefore concentrate on pragmatically working within the current international order to tackle the momentous dangers facing humankind in the twenty-first century. But from a Christian anarchist perspective, Jesus' teaching provides a radical and incompatible

¹³⁸ See his website (<http://www.daveandrews.com.au>), for instance, as well as his books, where he often reflects on personal experiences or experiences reported to him by friends and neighbours.

alternative to the violent and idolatrous Westphalian order. Beyond the insistence that this complete incompatibility be recognised by all, the Christian anarchist message is really aimed first and foremost at those who identify themselves as Christians, calling them to bear witness to the radical political element of the person they claim to follow. To non-Christians, it would seem that all Christian anarchism has to offer is an unusual understanding of the apparent political implications of one of the world's major religions. But the hope harboured by Christian anarchists is that many can be won over and converted through the courageous bearing witness of Christians to even (if not above all) the more challenging elements of Christianity. Again, though, this first relies on Christians fanatically committing themselves to Christian love. But then that is what a literal, indeed (in that sense) 'fundamentalist' exegesis of the Bible seems call to. 'What a fine place this world would be,' Maurin quipped decades ago, 'if Fundamentalist Protestants tried to exemplify the Sermon on the Mount.'¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Maurin, *Easy Essays* (2003), p. 193.

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