

**CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS  
PUBLIC AUTHORITY ACCORDING TO THE  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**BY**

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**SCRIPT**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

**OF  
JOHANNESBURG**

**MASTERS OF ARTS**

**IN**

**BIBLICAL STUDIES**

**IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS**

**AT RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY**

**SUPERVISOR: PROF JA DU RAND**

**MAY 1998**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my deep and sincere appreciation to the following:

To the Lord my God who enabled me to accomplish this task by giving me the strength and the courage which I needed. Without Him I just would not have managed.

To Lebowakgomo Nazarene Church congregation and the Church board for their support and understanding during the time when I was busy with the script. I could feel that they were earnestly praying for me.

To my Professor Dr Jan A. du Rand who encouraged me by showing that he had much faith that I can do it.

To Ms Smith for the valuable assistance she rendered to me when I was trying to search for the sources. She willingly spared her precious time to help me.

To Ms Lucy Molomo who helped me with the typing of the script, She has been of great help to me.

To Rev. and Mrs Mahlaba for their support and encouragement. They were willing to help me with proof reading

To Dr Perre who spared his valuable time to help me with the proof reading of the script.

Last but not least to the members of my family who have been of great encouragement to me. They believed I can make it.

All quotations from the Bible come from R.S.V.

## **SUMMARY**

The issue being addressed in this script is that of the Christian Attitude Towards Public Authority According to the New Testament. The term "Public authority" has been used with the understanding that it refers to either the State or the government. This term has been used interchangeably with the term "civil authority".

The writer is aware of the fact that the State and the government are not the same. However, the difference between the two is insignificant in as far as this script is concerned. Hence the writer has, in some places, chosen to ignore the distinction between the two.

The problem which the writer endeavours to address is that of the attitude which a Christian should have towards the State. Observations have disclosed that there has always been a problem of conflict between the Church and the public authority. This problem is not only a thing of the past but of the present as well. As Cullmann puts it correctly: "The problem of Church and State..... arises because of the very essence and presuppositions of the Christian faith. It is a problem which exists also in countries and times in which there appears to be no conflict at all" (Cullmann 1963:7).

This then means that the problem of conflict between the Church and the State will only come to an end with the consummation of the Kingdom of God in the age to come. This being the case the question that confronts every Christian is what kind of attitude should the Christian have towards the public authority?

The juxtaposition of the State in the Scripture is another aspect of the problem being addressed in this script.

The purpose for this script is to make the Christian aware that it is important that he or she maintains the right attitude towards the State. In his attempt to achieve this purpose the writer has examined the attitude of Jesus and the Early Church in the New Testament with the intention of discovering the basic underlying principle that can be applicable to the Christian of the twentieth century today.

In addressing this problem, the writer has taken into consideration the social and the political problems that prevailed in the New Testament and the conflict between the Church and the State, and how Jesus and the Early Church responded to such problems.

The problem in this script has been addressed in the light of the New Testament. The scope has been limited to certain selected texts which have a bearing on the problem.

The writer has learned that the Jewish attitude towards the civil authorities of their day was very much influenced by their religious beliefs in Judaism. This is true more especially with theocracy which was the main idea in Judaism. As a result they rejected the Roman State in anticipation for Utopia.

Christianity denied the concept of theocracy instead it advocated for the respect and submission to the State. It pointed out that believers are obliged to perform their duties to the State i.e. payment of poll tax. It also disclosed the fact that both the Church and the State are ordained by God to perform specific functions in this world. The Church, for instance, is entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel while the State is entrusted with the task of administering justice thereby curbing human violence. This then means that the authority of the State is derived from God. Therefore, the State is the servant of God. The believer therefore, is obliged to submit to it. However, the believer should always bear in mind that the State is not the final authority. Hence it has no right to make absolute claim on its subjects. Only God has such authority. This then means that man's duty to God takes precedence over his duty to the State. God should always come first. For God is above the State.

Observations on the attitude of Jesus and the Early Church towards the State have disclosed that they had a dual attitude towards the State. They did not submit to its authority without reservations. They always maintained a critical eye towards the State.

The study of the scriptures in the New Testament has revealed the juxtaposition of the State in the Scriptures. For instance, in Romans 13 the State is presented as the servant of God. The believer is obliged to submit to it. In Revelations 13, the State is presented as the instrument of Satan to which a believer must not submit. In this context submission to the State is tantamount to the rejection of God. This means that the believer should be critical in his submission to the authority of the State.

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## INTRODUCTION

### a. The Definition

The writer finds it necessary to define some of the terms used in this script to safeguard against any implications of misunderstanding that may arise as a result of lack of definition for the key terms. To begin with, the term "attitude" has been used according to the meaning given in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English. "Attitude" is defined as follows:

"Way of feeling, thinking or behaving".

The other important term used in this script is public authority. This term has been used with the understanding that it refers to either the state or the government. The other term which has been used interchangeably with the term "Public authority" is the term "civil authority". The context in which both of these terms have been used is the same.

The writer acknowledges, as Fowler rightly puts it, that the State and the government are not the same in the sense that the government is not the State and vice versa. Fowler says: "We normally talk of the government in the state and besides, "government does not only exists in the state but in the church and family as well" (Fowler 1988:9). Fowler explains clearly the distinction between the two when he says:

"To make the government synonymous with the state is like saying that the elders are the church, or the parents are the family. Elders and parents are the ruling authorities and each child is also equally a member

with a distinct command function. In the same way, every citizen is as much a member of the state as the government, though with different function"

(Fowler 1988:9)

While the writer acknowledges the difference between the two, on one hand, he also, on the other hand, acknowledges the fact that the two are intimately, related to the extent that many times it becomes a problem to the common man to notice a fine line of demarcation between them. Besides it is difficult to keep the two separate from each other more especially when one is dealing with a topic like the one being addressed here: The Christian Attitude Towards Public Authority. This being the case, the writer has decided to ignore the fine line that separates the two and has, instead treat them as being the same. In addition to this, the separation of the State from the government is not important, in as far as this script is concerned. Moreover, ignoring the distinction between the two will not, in any way, have any effect on the major purpose of this script. This being the case, the writer has used both terms interchangeably.

## **b. The Problem**

The problem which the writer endeavours to address in this script is that of the Christian and the public authority or, to put it in another way, the Church and the State both of which have distinctive roles to play in the society. The role each plays are indispensable to the welfare of the people in the society. Both have their own God given sphere of sovereignty and each must exercise her function within that sphere. As correctly stated by E.C Henrlen Taylor:



Jesus Christ, in the administration of His Father's will, employs all the heavenly and earthly powers He may Choose to serve Him. He employs the church and the civil state, entrusting to each its own distinctive function. He has ordained the church to serve Him in the proclamation of His word, in the administration of His sacraments and in the life of faith which works by love. He has also in His grace ordained the state to serve him in the administration of his justice and benevolence, by discerning, formulating and enforcing such laws and policies as will promote the well being of all its citizens and curb licence, discord and destitution.....

(Taylor 1969:451)

From what Taylor has said here there is one important fact which the writer would like to highlight and this is that, both the Church and the State are ordained by God and have a specific function to perform independently from each other in accordance with God's will. This means that the Church owes her existence to God as does the State. Both are equally important in as far as their right to exist, and their function is concerned. This being the case neither of the two is permitted to cross the line of demarcation and interfere with the sphere of sovereignty that belongs to the other and neither of them should undermine the other. Instead both should mutually acknowledge and respect each other's sphere of sovereignty. It is essential to emphasize the fact that the Church and the State, though intimately related, are distinct from each other and exist for different purposes. The Church for instance, is entrusted with the task of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and pointing people to Christ the saviour of the world. The State, on the other hand, has been entrusted with the task of administering justice and curbing violence. This then means that the two need each other.

It is unfortunate that the two have had an unpleasant and strained relationship and this problem has been a burning issue down through the corridors of time and many generations have witnessed open conflict between the two. For instance, on a number of occasions in history the Church has suffered severe persecution at the hands of the State and at times the Church was deprived of her right to worship God. The writer would like to state that the problem of conflict between the Church and the State exists even today. In connection with this Cullmann correctly says:

The problem of church and state .....is by no means a problem connected only with particular historical crises, but one which arises because of the very essence and presuppositions of the Christian faith. It is a problem which exists also in countries and times in which there appears to be no conflict at all.

(Cullmann 1963:7)

This then means that even Christians of today who live in different countries experience this conflict at different degrees. In the light of this, one may want to know the cause of conflict. If it is true, as pointed out above, that both the Church and the State are ordained by God, then why is there conflict between them? Cullmann, in the paragraph quoted above gives one of the main causes of the conflict. He says that "the very essence and presupposition of the Christian faith" is the cause for this conflict. In other words when one examines the doctrine of Christianity it appears to be in conflict with the State. The truth of the matter is that Christian faith does not oppose the State. No where in the New Testament does one find a teaching that advocates for the renunciation of the State. This shall be seen in the development of this script. However, it is also true that the Church will always oppose the State

whenever, the State degenerates into a totalitarian rule. Sad to say that down through the corridors of time civil authorities have fallen into the temptation of elevating themselves to a position that belongs to God and as a result they began to demand prerogatives that belong to God. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Church came under fire from the State because she refused to recognize the false claims of the State claiming that God is above the State and the Church would worship God only.

The other cause of conflict between the Church and the State is that even though the State is divinely ordained, "it belongs to the fallen order of society, unjust laws and corruption in government, participate in the reality of social evil. The government, like other spheres of social life, is the scene of the struggle between the fallen world powers and the authority of God for the control of the human community" (Charles 1982:194).

This means that the church as the institution ordained by God to proclaim the Gospel of love and holiness automatically finds herself to be a thorn in the flesh in as far as the State is concerned. The Church cannot help speaking against the evil and the corruption prevailing in the State or government.

This discloses the reason why there has been a perpetual problem of conflict between the two and this problem will only come to an end with the consummation of the kingdom of God in the age to come. This being the case the question that confronts every Christian in the light of this problem is: What kind of attitude should the Christian have towards the public authority? What makes this question difficult to answer is that, the civil authority is ordained by God. Besides there are some scriptures in the Bible which present the State as the servant of God and goes on to say that whoever

resists public authority resists God (Rom 13: 1-2 & 1 Peter 2: 13-17). On the other hand, there are scriptures that present the State as being the instrument of the devil (Rev 13) which should be resisted. This is the juxtaposition that one finds in the New Testament. As a result the Christian finds himself or herself confused. Should the Christian resist the civil authority if so, under what conditions? If not why not? What about the case where one finds ungodly civil State persecuting the Church left, right and centre what attitude should the Christian have towards such a State?

In an attempt to find solution to this problem Cranfield, in his essay, titled **The Christian Political Responsibility According to the New Testament**,

argues:

It is necessary for the Christian not only, to submit to the government of the day, but in certain circumstances and within certain limits to join military action at the command of the government. On the other hand, in certain extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to engage in armed rebellion in order to overthrow a government that is intolerably unjust and to replace it ..... While there is no unambiguous New Testament teaching that prescribes the Christian response in either of the circumstances. The Christian would be failing to take his government absolutely seriously and so failing to render it the subjection which the New Testament enjoins if in the last resort, he was not ready even to use force against it should it ever degenerate into mere tyranny.

(Charles 1982: xviii)

The writer finds it difficult to accept what Cranfield says, hook line and sink.

In the first place he does not give good grounds why a Christian should engage in military action. He neither explains the circumstance nor the limits of a Christian's involvement in a military action. Secondly he makes a statement that the New Testament teaching is ambiguous in as far as

Christian involvement in military service and arm rebellion against a tyrannical State is concerned. He then goes ahead and makes a strong recommendation that a Christian should be involved in arm rebellion should the State ever degenerate into a mere tyranny. One wonders where does he base his recommendation. The mere fact that he regard the New Testament as being ambiguous in this issue, calls for him to produce very good reasons to justify his strong recommendation. Much to the surprise of any reader such reasons are missing. In any case, the good thing about the Cranfield's argument is that it presents what Charels Villa-Vincenzo calls "the dual attitude to government". This dual attitude to government, Charles says "has remained the theological basis of church - state relations throughout the history of the church" (Charles 1982:xviii). While the writer, on the one hand, concedes that there is hardly no way a Christian can avert the "dual attitude to government " he is however, on the other hand, seriously questioning Cranfield's strong recommendation that a Christian should go to the extent of using force to overthrow the government which has degenerated into mere tyranny. In the light of this, the writer would like to ask a basic question: Is it ever right for a Christian to revolt against an unjust civil or to assassinate a tyrant? Is it biblical? What attitude should a Christian have toward the State? Does the New Testament have anything to say about it or are there any incidents or evidence in the New Testament from which one can draw valuable insights that can provide adequate answers to these questions? Finding answers to these questions asked here and at the same time examining the juxtaposition of the State in the New Testament is exactly the problem which the writer endeavours to address in this script.

It is essential to point out here that the problem of Christian attitude towards the State has two sides like a coin. The first side is that of the spiritual dimension. The State is viewed as being under the control of the powers of darkness. The Bible in the book of Ephesians mentions that the world is under the influence of principalities, the powers ..... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12). Christians are called upon not to engage themselves in a war of flesh and blood but rather to engage themselves in the spiritual warfare against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. It seems to the writer that as far as Jesus is concerned, it is this spiritual dimension of the problem that was of paramount importance and it occupied the first place on his agenda of his mission to emancipate man from the bondage of sin. The other side of the problem has to do with physical dimension. This deals with the physical world where the Christian lives and this is where the Christian experiences social evil, injustice and corruption. These two dimensions have a tremendous influence on the Christian attitude toward the state.

### **c. The Purpose**

The major purpose of this script is to communicate to the Christian the significant importance of developing and maintaining the right attitude towards the public authority. There is a danger if a Christian develops a wrong attitude towards a civil authority. for instance, among the Early Christians there arose a tendency to withdraw from temporal affairs and

concentrate on the Kingdom of Heaven (Tellenbach 1959:25). As a result the Christians were not productive in terms of day to day living. They were not even missionary minded. They were awaiting the imminent return of Christ. Hence, they did not want to be defiled by the affairs of the State and as a result they did not contribute anything to their society. This is the one extreme end which some Early Christians reached. The other extreme end which some Early Christians reached which was equally undesirable was that they became actively involved in making this world be like heaven just like the Jews who believed in theocracy to the extent that they used force in their attempt to establish God's kingdom on earth. Christians who held this second extreme view did not bear in mind that the Christian's war is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, the powers of darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Besides, God's Kingdom cannot be established by human efforts.

The writer however, endeavours to show the Christian that while, on the one hand, it is true that the attempt to eradicate evil in all its forms in this world is out of harmony with the scriptures, the Christian, on the other hand, is not called to stand idle and watch the world plunging itself into anarchy of some sort, rather he or she is called to play a vital role of being the salt and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-16). He or she should take upon himself or herself the responsibility of influencing the civil authority for God. Stephen Charles correctly says: "The command to establish justice places in the hand of God's servants the responsibility for recovering God's purpose for human

society" (Charles 1982:160). This discloses the enormous responsibility that God has entrusted to the Christian for the welfare of his or her State.

In his attempt to accomplish this purpose the writer seeks to learn from the New Testament the attitude which Jesus and the Early Church developed and maintained towards the government authorities of their day, thereby discovering the basic underlying principle that can be applicable to the Christian of the twentieth century today. The writer believes that this discovery will be a challenge as well as an inspiration to the Christian of today in developing and maintaining the right attitude toward the public authority.



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#### **d. The Methodology**

As he addresses the problem in this script, the writer will attempt to examine the social and the political problems that prevailed in the New Testament and the conflict between the church and the governing authorities of the day, and how Jesus and the Early Church responded to such problems.

Since Christianity came from Judaism, the writer deems it necessary to examine first the Jewish attitude toward the civil authorities of their day which was very much influenced by their religious beliefs in Judaism. He will then compare and contrast the Jewish attitude with that of Christianity and will seek to find the point of their departure. In this regard, special attention will be given to the teachings of Jesus and the conflicts which arose between



Jesus and the defendants of Judaism in matters that pertain to attitude towards the State.

Finally the behaviour of the Early Church towards the civil authorities will also be examined with the intention to find out whether their attitude was unitary or not.

### **e. The Limitation**

As already indicated in the preceding passages, the problem being addressed in this script will be treated in the light of the New Testament. The scope will be limited to certain selected texts which have a bearing on the problem. In addition to this, special attention will be given to the following texts: Rom 13: 1-17, I Pet 2:13-17, and Rev 13. The writer will also consider the texts in the book of Acts which have something to say concerning the problem.


## CHAPTER 1

# JESUS AND THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY ACCORDING TO THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

### 1.1 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TIMES OF JESUS

It is important to examine the historical background of Jesus' times so that a clear understanding of the utterances of Jesus, that have to do with the ruling authorities of his day can be obtained. However, this background will not be comprehensive or detailed.

#### 1.1.1 Political Background

The logo of the University of Johannesburg, featuring two stylized birds facing each other with a sunburst above them, and the text 'UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG' to the right.

During his time Jesus lived under three governments, namely: "that of Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, that of the Romans, and that of the Jewish" (Stalker 1909: 359). Politically, the Jews as a nation lost their independence to the Romans who not only conquered Palestine but also many other nations of the world. In addition to this, all the nations under the Roman rule were forced to pay tax to the Roman State. The Jewish nation, which was strongly inclined to the idea of theocracy never found it easy to accept Roman rule.

Jewish reactions towards the foreign powers that ruled them was of mixed feelings. This was true even in the Old Testament. For instance some Old Testament prophets saw the foreign rulers that oppressed them as instruments being used by "Yahweh" to make his will known to Israel (Jer


25:9, 27:5-6, 12-13, Isa 45:1 ff.). There were some prophets like Micah, Haggai and Zachariah who did not share this view. However, on the contrary, they viewed the foreign powers as being hostile to Yahweh (Gundry 1970:49).

The behaviour of the Jews in the New Testament was not very different from that of the Old Testament. In the New Testament they also had mixed reactions in their attitude towards the State. At this point it is important to bring Judaism into the picture. Judaism "originated in the first century towards the close of the Old Testament period during the Assyro-Babylonian exile" (Gundry 1970:48). Judaism is a Jewish religion and the Chief exponent of theocracy. It strongly believed and supported theocratic rule to the extent that it provided no room for the foreign powers to rule over the Jewish nation. As a result it utterly rejected all foreign powers. It had a genuinely political theocratic programme. It urged Jews to fight against the Roman rule. It is important, however, to mention that even though Judaism strongly advocated theocracy and the renunciation of the Roman State not all sects and groups within Judaism shared this extreme view of anti-Roman rule. It is good at this juncture, to focus attention on the sects and groups within Judaism.

The first sect to be examined is that of the Pharisees who were also known as the "separated ones" probably in a ritualistic sense (Gundry 1970:48). These formed the largest Jewish religious sect and were in-charge of the mosaic law which they strictly observed. This was also the sect that advocated theocracy and as a result it renounced the State and hated the Romans. However, they were not radical political fighters who advocated the use of force. Rather they

opted for silent resistance. Generally they attempted to remain loyal to the State even though they were not happy with it. Pharisees would resort to the use of force only if it would come to a push. They also did not like the idea of paying tax to Caesar.

The Sadducees are another interesting sect within Judaism. This sect was small in number as compared to the Pharisees. They were in-charge of the priesthood and by virtue of this responsibility had great influence in the political realm of the Jewish nation. This sect differed from the Pharisees in their attitude towards the State. They utterly submitted themselves to the State and had given up all the hope of God's kingdom. This kind of behaviour brought them into disrepute as they were regarded as collaborationists.



The Essenes, another interesting sect, was stricter than the Pharisees. In fact it superseded Pharisaism in as far as legalism was concerned. Their attitude towards the State was different from that of the Pharisees and the Sadducees on the grounds that the Essenes opted for withdrawal from society live into monastic type of life. They did this under the conviction that the State was evil and corrupt, and that living in isolation would help them keep pure. This type of behaviour was tantamount to utter renunciation of the State.

The Herodians were not a religious sect as such; but were a small minority group of influential Jews who whole heartedly supported the Herodians' dynasty, by virtue of this act they automatically supported the Roman rule. One may not be very wrong to regard them as collaborationist. Their

behaviour was not very different from that of the Sadducees. In fact, the Herodians come from the sect of the Sadducees.

The Zealots were a religio-political movement and was founded by Judas the Galilean in A. D 6" (Schnackenburg 1965:114). The Zealots were political revolutionaries who were determined to overthrow Roman rule through the use of force. They not only renounce the Roman State but also refused to pay tax. They, like the Pharisees, were strong advocates of theocracy. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the Zealots, unlike the Pharisees, were radical political fighters and they proclaimed the gospel of a holy war. This was the group within Judaism which was responsible for causing bloody political uprisings against the State which later resulted in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D 70 (Gundry1970:51).

Jesus had some Zealots among his disciples some of whom formed part of the members of his disciples. For instance, the gospel according to Luke (Lk 6:15) and the book of Acts (Acts 1:13), put it in black and white that Simon was a Zealot for they both call him Simon the Zealot. This means that Simon must have belonged to the Zealots before he became a disciple of Jesus. From the look of things it seems more likely that Simon was not the only Zealot in the company of the disciples of Jesus. There is a very high probability that Judas Iscariot, Peter and the "sons of thunder" namely, James and John were also Zealots before their conversion. There is enough evidence from their behaviour that supports this assumption.

The presence of the Zealots in the company of the disciples has led some people to the assumption that Jesus had a special interest in the Zealots. Some even went further to say that Jesus was a Zealot. A closer examination of the life and the teachings of Jesus would clearly reveal the fact that Jesus distanced himself from the religious-political movements of the Zealots (Schnackenburg 1965:114). It would be very wrong to conclude that Jesus was a Zealot on the basis that he had Zealots around him and that he made some utterances that sounded like anti-Roman rule. This issue will be addressed in the chapter where the attitude of Jesus towards the State in the synoptic gospels will be examined.

What is deductible from the study of these Jewish religious-political movements is that although the dominating attitude towards the State was a negative one, not all sects shared this extreme view of anti-Roman rule. The negative attitude developed because of a strong belief in theocracy which was the major idea in Judaism.

### **1.1.2 Religious Background**

From the observation made in the preceding section it is apparent that the attitude of the Jews towards the public authority was very much influenced by their religious convictions and beliefs. The religious beliefs of the Jews developed from the works of God in history which are found in the Old Testament. From the prophetic messages of the Old Testament the Jews

were expecting a Messiah to come and deliver them from the Roman oppression. They believed that the Messiah to come would either be a prophetic, priestly, or royal figure and would bring political-military deliverance from Roman rule. Hence, they looked at their age as being evil and that it was on the verge of being destroyed by God. They further believed that Utopia (days of the Messiah) would then come and that would be followed by eternity in which the Jews would enjoy the blessings of God. This was the hope that was cherished by the Jews and was taken very seriously.

The Jews believed that the Messiah would not come until all evil and corruption were eradicated. They believed that the coming of the Messiah was delayed because of the presence of evil and corruption in the world. The Roman State was regarded as one of the evils that was contributing to the delay of the coming of the Messiah and therefore it needed to be removed. It was because of this religious conviction that some Jews resolved to use force to overthrow Roman rule so that the Messiah would come quickly. The Zealots, for instance, rebelled and fought against the Roman rule.

Another important point that need to be mentioned here is the Jewish belief in monotheism which contrasted with polytheism which prevailed in the State. The Romans believed in many gods and went to the extent of making a provision for the gods of other nations under their rule. Judaism, on the other hand, believed strongly that there is only one God, who created the heaven and the earth. This differences in religious convictions and beliefs brought about conflict between the Jews and the Roman State to the extent that

Judaism ended up being persecuted by the Romans, and as a result the Jews hated the Romans. However, the Romans later legalized Judaism and the Jews were free to practice their religion anywhere in the Roman Empire. This favour never changed the attitude of the Jews towards Roman rule simply because of their belief in theocracy. All other religions were allowed to be practiced within the boundaries of their origin and when any of those other religions was practiced outside the boundary of its origin, it was declared illegal and its practitioners would be prosecuted.

Even though the Romans were pagans who believed in many gods and oppressed Israel, one would not hesitate to say that God was the one who gave them the authority to rule over the world. As to whether one can say the same about any other State that existed and exists today is another question that needs to be handled with care. However, one would not hesitate to mention that "the State", even the Pagan State, has its importance in its own sphere and its provisions (for example, coinage) serve the common good (Schnackenburg 1965:119)

### **1.1.3 Jesus And The Jewish Convictions Towards The Roman-Rule**

During the time of Jesus Jews were under the oppression of Roman rule and were forced to pay tax to Caesar something which they hated wholeheartedly. They were not happy with what was going on in their community. Political abuses and corruption prevailed under Roman rule. As a result Jews longed for political freedom which they believed would be obtained when the



Messiah come. The Jews also believed that Roman rule was one of the evils that needed to be removed so that the Messiah would come. The question which one is compelled to ask in the light of the conviction the Jews had towards the Roman rule is whether Jesus shared the same convictions with the Jews or not. If he did not, then why? What is it that made him not share the Jewish conviction concerning the Roman rule? These are the questions that need to be examined in order to find Jesus' view point.

To begin with the answer to the first question asked above is an obvious "No". Jesus never shared such convictions with the Jews. He never formed any political movement to fight against Roman rule for the freedom of the Jews. Neither did he show, in the least, an interest to join any of the existing political movements which were anti-Roman. This was so because Jesus, as L.H Marshall puts it: "was certainly no political revolutionary" (Marshall 1960:149). Klausner, in his attempt to explain why Jesus was not a political revolutionary, "complains that Jesus did not think it worthwhile to fight against the political oppression of Rome, for the political freedom of the nation" (Israel) (Marshall 1960:149). Rudolf Schnackenburg brings more light on this matter when he points out that "Jesus refused to intervene directly and regulate the disordered affairs of the world. His often-repeated "I am come" reveals his consciousness of his vocation..... (Schnackenberg 1965:113). This is why Jesus distanced himself from the religio-political movement of the Zealots. The writer would like to mention that there is a remarkable difference between the attitude of Judaism towards the State and that of Christianity. In fact Christianity actually rejected the Jewish theocratic idea as Satanic.

Cullmann says: "we need only recall the temptation stories in the Gospel. Satan offers to Christ the Kingdoms of the world" (Cullmann 1963:14). The early Christians did not buy the Jewish idea of revolting against the Roman State with the intention of establishing the Kingdom of God. They chose instead to be submissive to the Roman State. This does not imply that the Early Christians never resisted the Roman State. However, the early Christians resistance to the Roman State proceeded from entirely different ideal as compared to that of the Jews. In connection with this Cullmann says:

The Gospel knows nothing of that confusion of the King of God with the State which is characteristics of the theocratic ideal of Judaism. On the contrary, it opposed the theocratic ideal of Judaism with the same sharpness with which it resistant the totalitarian claims of the Roman State. Judaism was persecuted by the Roman State because it had a genuine political theocratic programme. But this does not hold true for Christianity at its origin.  
(Cullmann 1963:14)

When Jesus came into this world he knew from the word go, that the battle for which he came to fight was not of flesh and blood but rather it was a spiritual warfare (Lk 4:18, 1Jh 3:8b). He was very clear concerning the mission for which he came. As far as Jesus was concerned the State is something provisional and this being the case, it is very much temporary. It was never meant to last forever. This discloses the reason why Jesus was not a political revolutionary.

Does this mean that Jesus was completely not, in the least, concerned with the social and political abuses which prevailed during his time? When he witnessed such abuses did he not feel offended by them and did he not see the need to combat such abuses and put them to an end? To answer these

questions correctly one must acquaint oneself with the way Jesus looked at the problems in society in terms of the cause. Jesus knew the real cause or source of social and political abuses in his society and was well prepared to deal with the real problem and not with the secondary matters of a problem which can be described as symptoms or signs.

It is important to remember that there are two sides of this issue as pointed out already. As far as Jesus is concerned the spiritual side of this issue carries more weight than the physical side. Jesus knew that if man can be right with God he would treat his fellow man with respect, love and justice. If one is to explain this in terms of cause and effect he or she would be right to state that Jesus interpreted the spiritual side of this issue to be the main cause of the problem and he viewed social evils as the effects or signs and symptoms which reveal that there is a problem. Whilst it is true, on one side, that symptoms and signs are important in the sense that they help one to diagnose a problem, on the other side, it is also very true that a wise man does not try to deal with or treat the signs and symptoms, instead he or she deals with or treats the real cause. It is unfortunate that sometimes it happens that as one tries to address the real problem, in the process he or she can be misunderstood and be blamed by people who have mistaken the signs and symptoms for a real problem. Jesus, as mentioned already knew the real cause of social and political abuses of his day. "Jesus recognized the interrelatedness of the social source of evil and individual responsibility" (Charles 1982:14). He knew that sin was the major problem and the cause of all social evil. His refusal to intervene directly and regulate the disordered

affairs of this world is a clear cut indication that he viewed such affairs as signs and symptoms, and not as the real problem. In connection with this Schnackenburg correctly mentions:

His often-repeated "I am come" reveals his consciousness of his vocation: he had been sent to call sinners (Mark 2:17 par), save the lost (Luke 19:10), give his life as a redemption for many (Mark 10:45 par.). His purpose is to bring the divine life back to the world (John 3:6ff, 10:10, 12:46 f.). Before Pilate he declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He fled from the desire of his Galilean supporters to make him a political messianic king and national liberator (of John 6:14f.) and rejected Simon Peter's plea to relinquish the path of suffering and death, just as energetically as he repulsed the temptations of Satan in the wilderness (Matt 16:22f.). The demonstration by the people at the time of the entry into Jerusalem was so peaceful in character that it did not even feature as an item in the indictment against him at his trial. Jesus never suggested that his precept of love is to lead to a "peaceful revolution, "to reform and renewal of this world".

(Schnackenburg 1965:113)

The mission of Jesus was not to eradicate evil in all its forms in this world but rather to get a sinner reconciled to God so that the sinner can be at peace with God.

This does not mean that Jesus was completely not concerned with the social evils prevailing in the State. On the contrary, Jesus was concerned with deplorable conditions of the disordered affairs of this world however, he dared not allow anything or anyone to divert him from his mission of dealing with the real problem in human society. He did not come for a cheap reason of fighting for political freedom for Israel but rather to fight against the forces of evil that cause man to treat his fellow man with injustice. He came for a higher purpose which would solve man's problems once and for all and

thereby securing true freedom and peace for not only Israel but the whole human race.

### **1.2 The Attitude Of Jesus Towards Public Authority According To The New Testament**

As mentioned already, Jesus was very much conscious of the mission for which he came and never allowed himself to be diverted from it. However, this does not mean that Jesus had no personal convictions regarding the public authorities of his day. There is just no way Jesus could have avoided the question of the attitude which one should have towards the governing authorities more especially when one takes into consideration the fact that he lived under three governments. In the light of this knowledge one may want to know, for curiosity sake, the attitude of Jesus towards the State.

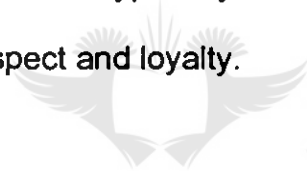
A closer examination of the life of Jesus reveals that he was a victim of political abuses and injustice during his time. Just as Stalker points out correctly: "painful it is to observe as we follow His career step by step, that He is never brought in contact with any (of the three government under which He lived) "without suffering injustice" (Stalker 1909:359). He mentions that even though Pilate made an attempt to protect Jesus and set him free he quickly gave in to the demands of the Jews when he realized that his own interests were in danger. Pilate was not prepared to stand for justice at the expense of his own interests and as a result he handed Jesus over to his enemies. "The final scenes were a travesty of justice and the gravest exhibition the world has ever seen of unrighteousness masquerading in the garb of legality" (Stalker 1909:360). Perhaps this, to some extent, helps one to understand why there

is injustice, corruption and political abuses prevailing in the State. People are selfish and as a result are willing to help others only if their own interests are not threatened. As soon as they realize that their good intention to protect and defend the innocent will, in turn, cause them to suffer in one way or another and thereby endangering their interests, they quickly withdraw. It seems that people are more concerned with their own safety than they are with the safety of others. In this regard, Jesus was different. He was so much concerned with others to the extent that he did not care suffering for those who were oppressed and innocent. He actually gave his life as a sacrifice to redeem man from the bondage of sin. It is interesting to learn that Jesus never ever got into any fights with the public authorities of his day. Probably for the simple reason mentioned above that He was certainly not a political revolutionary. It would be good at this point to examine his attitude towards the three governments under which He lived.

### **1.2.1 Jesus and the Jewish Authorities**

To begin with, the writer finds it necessary to disclose the fact that “the attitude of Jesus all along to law and governments was one of respect” (Stalker 1909:350). For instance, “Jesus was submissive to the Jewish authorities. He paid the Temple Tax (with a mild protest), as He said to Peter, “in order that we may not shock them” (Matt xvii.27). By His cleansing of the Temple, He antagonized the High priestly families who drew their wealth partly from the extortionate trading that went on there, yet He was not challenging their right to control the Temple, but simply denouncing the way they did it, for they had turned the House of Prayer into a cave that sheltered

a gang of thieves” (Marshall 1960:249). He advised the leper whom he had healed to go and show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for the poor to the people (Matt 8:4). “He took the Sanhedrin for granted and did not challenge its competence to arraign Him. Nor did He demur when Caiaphas put Him on oath” (Matt xxvi:63) (Marshall 1960:150). He urged the crowds and his disciples to recognize the authority of the Scribes and the Pharisees. He told them that “the Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do for they preach but do not practice (Matt 23:1-3). In this portion Jesus is against hypocrisy and not against their authority. Whilst, on one hand, He recognizes their authority He does not, on the other hand, condone their sinful practices of hypocrisy. Jesus gave the Jewish authorities of his day their due respect and loyalty.



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### **1.2.2 Jesus and Herod, The Tetrach of Galilee**

It is apparent in the scriptures that Jesus had very little contact with Herod and therefore there is very limited information which is furnished pertaining his interactions with King Herod. However, it is easy to deduce from the little information available that “Jesus thought very little of him and said so plainly, calling him a “fox” (Luke xiii:32) (Mr Marshall 1960:150). In addition to this when Jesus, during his trial was sent to Herod for trial by Pilate, he kept silent and never answered even a single question despite the many questions which Herod asked him (Luke 23:812). The authority of Herod was the only legitimate government to which Jesus showed some sort of contempt. This

was so perhaps because of the inhuman behaviour Herod showed to his forerunner, John the Baptist. However, there must have been a deeper reason. Charles correctly says: "Herod was coming between Him and His duty to God.....There is region into which human law and government dare not intrude - the domain of conscience" (Charles 1982: 361). This being the case, the incidents quoted above of Jesus' contact with Herod should not be interpreted as rebelliousness, on the part of Jesus, against the Herodian government. Moreover, it seems likely that when he called Herod a "fox" he was actually revealing the true character of Herod. For "Jesus knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man, for he himself knew what was in man (Jn 2: 25). Jesus' negative attitude towards the Herodian government comes close to what Charles Villa-Vincenzo terms "dual attitude to government". Even though it is not as strong as Cranfield would like it to be. Jesus here shows mild resentment and does not display any intentions of using force to dethrone Herod even if Herod was coming between Him and his duty to God. Jesus only disapproves what Herod is doing. It is surprising that Jesus never set himself to condemn or criticize the Herodian Government. It is true, however, that "under certain circumstances, a mature Christian may find himself in a position which requires an honest expression of criticism to his superior" (Haring 1964:78).

### **1.2.3 Jesus and the Roman Government**

It is obvious from the Scriptures that Jesus did recognize the political supremacy of the Roman State and in addition to this he seemed to have the opinion that his fellow Jews should follow his example on the ground that it



was not practical politics for them to try to break the Roman power (Marshall 1960: 150).

One of the most important incidents, in the Scripture which discloses the attitude of Jesus towards the Roman rule is that of the poll-tax (Mk 12:13-17). The problem of poll-tax was a burning issue during the time of Jesus "it had to be paid in Roman currency in the form of a silver denarius bearing the Emperor's portrait and name" (Schnackenburg 1965:117). The following definition of the Roman silver coin by Schrage helps one to have a clear understanding on the reason why some Jews were reluctant or bluntly refused to pay the poll-tax. He explains that denarius was a "Roman silver coin, a visible symbol of Roman power and sovereignty. Its obverse depicted the emperor with a laurel wreath symbolizing his divinity; the reverse depicted his mother seated on a divine throne as the earthly incarnation of heavenly peace. The reference to the emperors apotheosis in the inscription made it no less offensive than the portrait: the obverse read "Emperor Tiberius, venerated son of the venerated God" and the reverse "High Priest" (Schrage 1982: 113). By virtue of paying the tax one would automatically mean that he or she recognizes the pagan authority of the Roman rule and places oneself under it. This is what the Jews were not ready to acknowledge. This was so because of their strong convictions regarding theocracy and as a result the Jews were in conflict amongst themselves. Some complied to the demand while others adamantly refused to pay the poll tax i.e. the Zealots.

When the Pharisees and the Herodians asked Jesus the question of whether they should pay the poll tax or not they were not genuinely looking for an answer to this question simply because they had accepted this condition. Instead they “assumed that he was disposed to reject authority, because of his teaching about the reign of God..... They suspected that he lacked reverence for the ruler’s authority (Mott 1982:151). Much to their surprise Jesus in his response affirmed obligations to the civil authority. The main motive of his opponents behind this question was as the Bible say to entrap Jesus. A yes or no answer would put Jesus in a very awkward predicament. In his reply, Jesus asked for a Roman silver coin. When the coin was given to him he then asked a question “Whose likeness and inscription is this” They said to Him Caesar’s. Jesus said to them “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s (Mk 12: 13-17). This answer is very important and it needs to be examined so that one should understand the meaning behind. Schnackenburg puts it correctly when he points out:

Jesus unequivocal decision was that the tax should be paid and he countered his cunning questioner with the argument that by using coins bearing the portrait of the Emperor (and profiting by the Roman economic order) they were recognizing the Emperor’s right to strike coinage and consequently, in accordance with the view current in the ancient world, his sovereignty too. They therefore owed him the tax and, as the universal form of the reply shows obedience generally in the duties required of citizens. But of his own accord Jesus also added a second clause, which, by its position must receive all possible emphasis “and render (give) to God the things that are God’s”. Just as great, and even greater, is man’s duty to God. “The state can demand what is necessary to its existence, but God claims the whole man and has to give himself back to him.

(Schnackenburg 1965:117).

From what is said here one can deduce that Jesus put it clearly that "God and State are not identical nor are they powers standing side by side but inwardly united. He emphasized on their separateness - God and Caesar rule different territories. "As Marshall puts it, "the coin with Caesar's image is an earthly thing that belongs to Caesar. The soul of man, made in divine image, is a spiritual thing and belongs to God.....The implication is that man's supreme loyalty is to God, and so if duty to God and duty to the State are in conflict, it is the duty to God that has the paramount claim" (Marshall 1960:152). Through the answer of Jesus "render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, Jesus also emphasized the fact that whilst it is true that man should be loyal to the State he must never disregard the fact that God is above the State because he is the one who gave the State the authority to rule and by this virtue he must be given the first place in man's life. No wonder Peter stated that "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). To take it a step further one would say that it is important to know that it is God who determines what is Caesar's and not Caesar himself. This means that whatever Caesar claims from an individual it should be within the limit which God has set for him.

Caesar does not have the right to make an absolute claim on an individual for this type of claim can only be made by God and God alone. In conclusion

Schnackenburg draws four crucial points as follows:

1. Jesus did not give the Roman Emperor the halo of rule by divine right, otherwise he could not have contrasted God and the Emperor in the way he did. But he did recognize the Emperor's right and demand obedience from his subjects.
2. The state, even the pagan state, has its importance in its own sphere and its provisions (for example coinage) serve the common good.
3. By emphasizing man's duty to God as the higher, Jesus expresses reservations about the power of the state, it must not encroach on God's dignity, forbid worship of

him, or contradict his commandments. 4. Jesus neither draws attention to, nor makes mock of, the limited and ephemeral nature of the state, but he is conscious of its dependence of God's will and power

(Schnackenburg 1965:114)

In line with what Schnackenburg says here Hebden Taylor, presents two strong basic principles which he believes were laid down by the Lord Jesus and to which the whole New Testament adheres. The two basic principles are:

1. Christ does not regard the state as a final institutions to be equated somehow with the Kingdom of God. Instead, it belongs to the aged of sin which still exists but which will vanish as soon as God's kingdom is finally and completely brought in at the second coming of Christ. As long as this age continues, however, Christians must give to the state due obedience and loyalty, because under the conditions caused by sin it is willed by the Creator as the custodian of justice and for the restraint of the worst outward consequences of human sin.
2. While recognizing that the state exists as an institution of God's common grace to maintain public order and to repress crime, and while making such contributions as are necessary to enable the state to carry out its task, Christ, however, also teaches that his followers are not bound to render the state allegiance when it claims prerogatives that belong only to God, and when it demands more than is necessary to its life

(Taylor1969:431).

It is apparent here that Jesus had no problem at all with recognizing the public authorities of his day. He did not even care that the Roman State which ruled the Jews was pagan and foreign. Instead he respected it probably because he knew that it was God who gave the Roman State the authority it had. Otto A. Piper mentions that Jesus laid special stress on four points in as far as political life is concerned:

1. In this world, political government is necessary and its legitimacy is to be acknowledged by all men.
2. In a world of sin and evils, political government has been assigned the task of curbing human anarchy, and thereby it promotes the common good of the citizens. The rulers are therefore to be obeyed and served.
- 3.

Political organizations have a temporary function in the history of mankind. Eventually, their delegated power will be replaced by the direct exercise of God's rule in the "coming" of his Kingdom. All people will then be willing to act in agreement with the impulses received from the script. 4. The goal of that development will be the reign of the Son of Man, that is to say, an epoch in which Mankind has reached complete selfhood as God's servant. This means that Jesus sees political life as taking place within an eschatological process whose teleological dynamic is the result of God's redemptive purpose (Piper 1970:229)

One thing that comes so clearly in all this is that Jesus was fully aware of the fact that the State and the government have been put in place by God himself for temporary measures. They are not permanent structures and this being the case even their authority is not absolute. Therefore, while it is right and proper, on one hand, that all men should obey and serve these authorities it is wrong, on the other hand, to render to them prerogatives that belong to God alone. Under no circumstance must men render to the State or government absolute obedience because only God has the right to demand such a prerogative and no one else. This is what was implied by Jesus when he said that "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can destroy both the body and soul in hell (Mt 10:28). Hebden Taylor says: "when Christ said render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's, he gave to the state a

legitimacy it had never before enjoyed, and set bounds to it that had never yet been acknowledged" (Taylor 1969:445). This means that the State is not the ultimate source of authority instead God is and to go a step further, God is the one who grants the State the authority it has and he also sets the limit to the authority of the State. However, it is important to point out that civil authority is indispensable in this world which is full of sin hence, the Christian should accept it and submit to its authority in the manner that is right and proper.

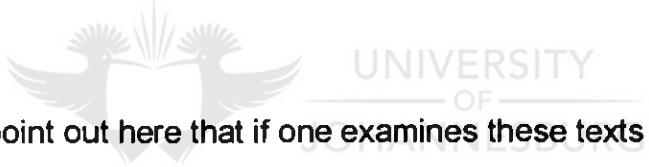
#### **1.2.4 Jesus' Observation Of Conditions Of Public Authority In This World**

As it has already been observed, the attitude of Jesus towards the governing authorities of his day was that of loyalty and respect. However, there is another aspect of the attitude of Jesus towards the public authority that need to be explored. This is the aspect which discloses the juxtaposition of the State in the New Testament. This juxtaposition in the teachings of Christ comes from his observations of the conditions of the public authority in this world.

Jesus was quite aware of the fact that even though the State is "God-given basis and structure of human life, without which the individual will have no existence at all, yet man's sin, his pride, greed, fear, loyalty has infected it. Hence any Christian who has come to know the perfect will of God in Christ and would serve that will in the midst of his fellow men finds himself in perpetual tension and conflict (Moberly 1937:70). This is why he told his disciples that they will be dragged before the courts, and they will condemn them. That will be evidence in God's court against those in authority (Mt

10:17). The persecution is something that is going to take place in the future (Mk 13:9-13). When the disputes arose among the disciples over which one of them was the greatest, Jesus disclosed a striking contrast between world rulers and those in the Kingdom of God. He said "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you, rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves (Lk 22:24-26). In this portion Jesus is making a statement which is based on his observation on what the kings of the Gentiles do. He is not, in any way, advocating the renunciation of the civil authorities. The point which Jesus is emphasizing here is that the order of ruling within the body of Christ is different from that of the world which is characterized by the quest for power. Jesus is actually warning his disciples against the danger of being power hungry. Instead the disciples must be prepared to play a role of a servant if they want to be great. Besides, they must be willing to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom of God. This meaning becomes even more clear when one reads this text from the account of Mark 10:42-44. In this account Jesus says "whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. For the son of man also came not to be served but to serve " (verse 44-45). A slave has no rights and this is the plight under which the disciples are to serve. Schnackenburg puts it correctly when he says: "emperor and God, state and divine rule are for Jesus two realities, belonging to two different order " (Schnackenburg 1965:118). The order in which the civil authority run its affairs is very different from that of the Church.

There are also times when Jesus regarded the public authority as instruments of Satan. For instance according to John 14:30 Jesus was about to be arrested by the Jewish authorities and he said to his disciples "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me". In this portion Jesus looks not only at the Jewish authorities but also at the Roman civil authorities as being instruments of Satan who was after his life. The same applies in Luke 22:53 where he is addressing the Jewish authorities. He says "when I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". This means that Satan was behind these public authorities that arrested him. However, Jesus pointed out that he yields to them simply because it is God's will.



It is essential to point out here that if one examines these texts he or she will find out that Jesus in these texts is not renouncing the public authorities at all. He is simply pointing out that the public authority can be used as instruments of the prince of darkness like the incidents quoted above. The prince of darkness was actually acting behind these authorities. However, this does not mean that a Christian should renounce the State. All it means is that a Christian should not render absolute obedience to the State. He or she should have some reservations. In connection with this Schnackenburg says: "Jesus gives the circular and at that time the pagan state, its rights in its own sphere, but only to the extent that the all-embracing rights of God over man are not thereby violeted. That implies a reservation in regard to the State but there is no reservation in regard to God" (Schnackenburg 1965:118). It is



important to know that only God can demand absolute obedience. He is above the State, in fact, he is the one who gives the State the authority it has and he also has the power to depose the State. He is in control. In the light of this the Christian is called upon to maintain a critical attitude towards the State. He or she should not submit to the State blindly.

In conclusion the writer would like to point out that from the observations of the attitude of Jesus towards the State the following points can be drawn as true reflection of the observations. Firstly, His attitude towards the State comprised of loyalty, submission and respect. However, contrary to the Sadducees of his day, he was not a collaborationist. Secondly, Jesus did not submit to civil authority without reservations. In his teaching, Jesus showed that he had reservations in his submission to the State. Thirdly whilst it is true that he recognized the authority of the State and also saw the need for the State to exist, he did not regard the State as being final instead he viewed it as something temporary which is ordained by God to curb human anarchy and thereby administering justice on behalf of God. Jesus never ever recommended the renunciation of the State instead he even encouraged his fellow Jews to be submissive to the civil authority. However, it is implied in his teachings that the Christian should maintain a critical attitude towards the State. Lastly, Jesus set a limit with regard to the State but never set a limit with regard to God. In other words, obedience to the State must have reservations while as obedience to God is absolute. The juxtaposition of the State found in the teachings of Jesus should always serve as a reminder that

the State can be used as an instrument of Satan and that is why Christians are not encouraged to obey the State blindly.



## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY

#### 2.1 THE ATTITUDE OF THE EARLY CHURCH TOWARDS PUBLIC AUTHORITY

When one examines closely the Christian's attitude towards the State in the New Testament he or she will discover that their attitude was to a great extent influenced by their religious beliefs and convictions. It is interesting to observe that their behaviour towards the State varied from time to time due to various circumstances in which they found themselves. This being the case, their attitude towards the civil authority was not unitary. In fact, on the surface it appeared to be contradictory even though in reality it was not. For instance, if one brings into the picture Romans 13 and Revelation 13 both of which were written during the time when the Roman Civil Authorities were in power, he or she will find that they appear to contradict each other. Romans 13, for example, talks about submission to the State while Revelation 13 presents the State as the beast from the abyss to which any Christian should not submit. An in-depth study of these two texts would reveal that they do not contradict each other even though they differ in their attitude. These texts will be closely examined later in this script.

Since the Christians' attitude of the Early Church towards the State was very much influenced by the teachings of Jesus, it would be good at this juncture to look at some of the sayings of Jesus which influenced the attitude of the Early Church towards the State.

To begin with, Jesus taught his disciples that they do not belong to this world instead they belong to the world above. He said "If the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jh 15:18-19). This meant that the disciples were going to be ill treated by the State simply because they are not of this world but of that above. He also taught that he would come soon to judge the world therefore, the disciples should devote their lives to the Kingdom of God. He said "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and he will repay every man for what he has done. (Mt 16:26-27). The disciples were therefore, expected to dedicate themselves to the Kingdom of God hundred percent.

In his eschatological teachings, Jesus instructed the disciples to go and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God which was both present and future. At the same time he made it clear to them that his Kingdom was not of this world but a heavenly one which had divine power operating in this world (Jh 18:36). This Kingdom of God, in the understanding of the disciples, was both present through Jesus and was

also future in as far as its consummation was concerned. This eschatological dualism together with the texts quoted above had tremendous impact on their

attitude towards the State. The relationship of the Christian to the State was viewed as being temporary and as a result the State was regarded as something provisional and was on the verge of coming to an end. This being the case some Christians ended up adopting the attitude of withdrawal from the affairs of the State. It is important to mention that the emphasis on the Kingdom of God as something that stands in opposition to this world lead some Christians to think of the State as something that should be avoided simply because the State was viewed as being the instrument of the Prince of darkness.

The attitude of the Early Christians was not comprised only of negative thinking but of positive thinking as well. Even the teachings of Christ had both positive and negative attitude towards the civil authorities as pointed out in the preceding chapter. The writer would like to point out here that the juxtaposition found in Jesus teaching can also be traced in the behaviour of the Early Church towards the civil authority. This shall be seen in the development of this script.

### **2.1.1 THE GROUNDS FOR SUBMISSION TO PUBLIC AUTHORITY**

The Early Church's attitude towards the State was very much influenced by their strong belief in the imminent return of Christ and as a result their interest in the life to come was overwhelmingly greater than that in the

present world. Some Christians went to the extent of withdrawing from temporal affairs and concentrated on the Kingdom of God. They lived in daily expectation of Christ's return which they believed would happen at any time

then. This meant that getting involved in the affairs of the State was a waste of time and energy in as far as they were concerned. Tellenbach puts it correctly when he says:

The life of Christ and his disciples was raised above the world, since they prized nothing that it could give or take away. They rendered to Caesar, the ruler of this world, whatever he might claim, thinking neither of opposition to him nor of his conversion..... They awaited the appearance of the promised Kingdom of God, and the vicissitudes of this life could not touch them closely.

(Tellenbach 1959:25)

As far as these Christians were concerned they were not of this world anymore, as pointed out above, but of the world above. Hence they cared less about the affairs of this present world. After all, they believed that Christ would come very soon and life on earth would be over, so why bother about the world that is coming to an end in no time at all. This was the mentality or belief which some of the Early Christians maintained. One would not be wrong to say that even today there are Christians who have this kind of mentality. This very mentality mentioned here became one of the grounds on which the Early Church submitted to the civil authority of their day. They did not care whether the authority was tyrannical or not. After all it was on the verge of coming to an end at any moment.

In connection with this Walter James points out that in the Early Church christianity spoke "politically with two voices, the one optimistic of the world conservative. The pessimistic and the strongly conservative voice emanated from the strong belief in the imminent return of Christ". (James 1962:29). The two voices mentioned by James here are part of the juxtaposition mentioned

earlier in this script which is a characteristic of the New Testament's Christian attitude towards the State.

Contrary to the Early Christians expectation of the imminent return of Christ, they discovered that time was running out and much to their disappointment Christ still did not come. This delay in the second coming of Christ compelled the Early Church to make efforts to come to grips with the affairs of this world.

Tellenbach says:

The hope of an imminent Second coming began to disappear, charity decreased and austerity became softened. As a result it became evermore necessary, in spite of a continued concentration on the hereafter, to come to terms with the earthly life in some way, for both the generation then living and many generations to come would have to live in the world and be concerned with its affairs.

(Tellenbach 1959:26)

This means that Christians began to realize that even though they regarded themselves as strangers in this world, and citizens of the

heavenly Kingdom they were still living in this world and not in heaven and therefore the affairs of this world directly affect, not only them, but their children as well, and will continue to affect the future generation as citizens of the State. Therefore they could not claim to be above the affairs of this world neither could they afford to ignore them. They had no choice but be concerned with the affairs of the State and had to find ways to come to terms with the State. However, it is important to mention here that it took Christians

a very long time before they liberated themselves from the attitude of looking at the State as a transitory thing which they need to avoid and not get involved in its affairs. This means that Christian began to look at the State with a different eye. They began to be optimistic in their attitude towards the State.

They had a strong belief in God, the omnipotent. They believed that all authority is derived from God. This meant that even the State was under the authority of God. Hence it was viewed as being a servant of God (Rom 13:1-4). While it is correct to regard the State as a servant of the Lord on the grounds of its divine ordination there is, however, a need to safeguard against blind submission. Just because the State is the servant of the Lord it does not mean that one should submit to it without being critical. Christians, as well as , all other citizens of a particular State have a right to question the State should there be a need to do so. Sad to say that some Christians held on to the view that since the State is the servant of God then even if it becomes oppressive and tyrannical

Christians were still bound to obey it. In connection with this Norman L.

Geisler points out by saying:

When Paul exhorted the Romans to submit.....  
to the governing authorities as God's servant (Rom 13:1-4), Nero was emperor. He had killed his mother to ascend to the throne, burnt Rome, and even burnt Christians alive for street lights. He was a brutal and wicked man, yet Paul called him "God's servant" and asked Christians to obey him.

(Geisler 1989:240)

In the first place, the writer would like to point out that Geisler's historical facts presented here are highly questionable. No one can say with certainty that when Paul wrote Rom 13:1-4 he had Nero in mind. Moreover, Biblical



scholars agree that the Book of Romans was written between 54 and 57 AD. Which means that it was written during the very early stages of Nero's reign. And history has it that "the first five years of Nero's reign were marked by enlightened government which became famous in the provinces" (Bahnsen 1989:368). This means that Paul wrote this book before Nero's brutality come to the surface. This also means that if ever Paul had Nero in his mind when writing Rom 13:1-4 then he did so basing it on his knowledge of Nero's enlightened government and not on Nero's barbaric acts, as they were not yet known to Paul. In connection with this Schrage says "Some of Paul's experiences with Roman authorities were favorable..... On the other hand, he clearly had negative experiences as well. Although he may not yet have heard anything bad about Nero, who later went on to murder his mother, brother and wife....." (Schrage 1982:235). Romans 13:1-7 shall be examined later in this script.

It is important to point out here, that disobedience to the State is not tantamount to rejections of the authority of the State. The two are different in the sense that one can disobey the State whilst at the same time being submissive to its authority. There are conditions and circumstances where a Christian will have to say no to the State while at the same time submitting to its authority. This shall be discussed later in this script.

The Early Church was expected to recognize the authority of the Roman State simply because it was ordained by God. Hence their recognition of the authority of the State was rendered in obedience to God. They clearly

understood that rejecting the authority of the State was tantamount to resisting God simply because the State was acting as an instrument of God. This explains the reason why the Early Christians never revolted against the civil authorities of their day but rather left the judgment to God. Nowhere in the New Testament does one find the Early Christian revolting against the civil authorities using force. In the light of this observation the writer would like to disagree with Cranfield's strong recommendation, mentioned above that a Christian should go to the extent of using force to overthrow the government which has

degenerated into mere tyranny. This is not compatible with the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles in the Early Church. Besides, the Church is not called upon to be a political revolutionist or to get itself involved in political fight using the sword, rather it is called upon to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the world and to show God's love to the world thereby leading the lost sinners to the Lord. In connection with this Greg L. Bahnsen says:

Both Church and State have their legitimate functions and authorities, and the sword belongs to the State while being banned in the Church..... The Church and the State are separate realms with different functions, only the State has a warrant to use violence and the sword, but then it is not antonymous in so doing. All who use the sword must submit to God's direction.

(Bahnsen 1959:421)

Bahnsen mentions that the only sword which the Church is allowed to use is the Word of God which is a spiritual sword (Eph 6:17). This sword surpasses, by far, the sharpness and the ability of the State's sword which is physical. In addition to this, Jesus disapproved the use of a sword by pointing out that

those who live by sword shall die by the sword (Mt 26:52). Therefore, under no circumstance is the Church allowed to use force to overthrow a government that is oppressive and wicked or assassinate a tyrant.

Observation in this section have lead to the conclusion that the Early Church submitted to the State simply because the State was regarded as something, that was on the verge of coming to an end therefore, they submitted knowing that it will soon be over. On the other hand the Early Church viewed the State as the servant of God on the grounds that it was ordained by God. Their obedience to the State was rendered in obedience to God. Hence the Early Church never ever renounced the State. Even though there are incidents whereby the Early Church disobeyed the State they did so whilst at the same time being submissive to its authority.

The most important thing here is that the State was engaged in a direct conflict with the saints. It represented satanic forces. This is the juxtaposition which can be traced throughout the entire New Testament.

### **2.1.2 THE GROUNDS FOR RESISTENCE TO PUBLIC AUTHORITY**

Having stressed the fact that the Early Church, in the Book of Acts never ever revolted against the Roman State, in spite of its wickedness and ungodliness and having also pointed out that, not only on the basis of the behaviour of the Early Church but also on the basis of the teachings of Christ, the church is not allowed to use force to overthrow a wicked and ungodly government, it is essential at this juncture to explore the possibility of disobeying the State whilst at the same time being submissive to its authority. The most important

question to ask in this regard is: Under what condition is the Christian permitted to disobey the State?

This question seeks to find the line of demarcation between the conditions under which disobedience to the State is allowed and those under which it is forbidden. The majority of Christians have no problem at all in agreeing that indeed there are times when it becomes necessary for a Christian to say no to the. In connection with this, Mott says "civil disobedience accords with the major characteristics of the biblical teaching on the relationship of the believer to society. It is non conformity with the world as in conflict with the new life under God" (Mott 1982:160). The main problem which the majority of Christians have, pertaining this issue, lies with the drawing of the line of demarcation. Norman L Geisler points out that the problem of drawing the line has two views "one view holds that government should be disobeyed only when it promulgate a law that is contrary to the word of God. The other view contends that government should be disobeyed when it commands the Christians to do evil" (Geisler 1959:241). It is interesting to note that both of these views claim to base their arguments on the Scriptures. Since this script limits itself to the New Testament, these two views shall be examined in the light of the New Testament. It is important that a clear understanding of these views should be obtained. The table below shows the differences between the two views

**..TWO VIEWS OF WHEN TO DISOBEY GOVERNMENT**

<b>ANTIPROMULGATION POSITION</b>	<b>ANTICOMPULSION POSITION</b>
When it permits evil	When it commands evil
When it promulgates evil laws	When it compels evil action
When it limits freedom	When it negates freedom
When it is politically oppressive	When it is religiously oppressive

**FIGURE I**

(Geisler: 1989:243)

A comparison of the two views reveals that the Anti-compulsion position is more inclined to the Bible than the Anti-promulgate position. This is apparent when one examines the incidents that are present in the Bible. For instance, in Revelations 13 one finds that Christians were commanded to worship the beast. The Early Church disobeyed the State because it commanded evil. Before, this incidents happened there were many evils that were permitted in the Roman State i.e. polytheism and prostitution just to mention a few. However, Christians disobeyed the Roman State only when it commanded evil. It is also important to remember that the Roman State was pagan therefore, to expect a pagan State to operate on Christian principles or to be holy in its conduct is not being realistic. In the light of this, the writer feels that the greatest weakness of the Anti-promulgates position lies in the fact that it takes for granted that all governments are Christian therefore they must abide by what is written in the Bible. It fails to take into consideration the fact that some governments are pagan and do not recognize the authority of the Bible and as a result such governments are bound to permit evil.

Just because a government has laws that permit evil it does not give the Christian the right to disobey that particular government. The Christian however, can voice out his concern against the evil law through the proper channel while at the same being loyal to the civil authorities.

Taking into consideration the times that Christians are living to day times of democracy, and religious pluralism, one would find it difficult to expect a State to be perfect. After all does not the Bible prophesy that in the last days wickedness and sin shall multiply and that people will become ungodly? It is therefore, too much to expect a government to be free from evil laws. The world is under the influence of demonic forces this is why Christians are called upon to pray for the civil authorities. The Christian should be reminded now and then that the battle which he or she is fighting is not of flesh and blood but rather a spiritual warfare. This places a tremendous responsibility on the Christians of praying for the civil authorities so that they can restrain from evil. The Christians are also entrusted with the preaching of the Good News to the lost so that human violence can be curbed by the Gospel.

The Christians, as pointed out already, can also raise their voice of disapproval and concern against the evil prevailing in the State through the proper channel. It is essential that the Church remain loyal to the State while expressing her concern to the State. For instance, the Roman State was a pagan State and that is why it permitted evil so to say that a State should be disobeyed when it permits evil is going to the extreme after all there is no State in this world which does not have laws which permit evil.

It would be good at this junction to consider the biblical incidents where Christians disobeyed the State. In connection with this Geisler says:

There are several biblical instances of divinely approved disobedience. In each case there are three essential elements. First, a command by divinely appointed authorities that is contrary to the Word of God. Second an act of disobedience to that command. And finally some kind of explicit or implicit divine approval of the refusal to obey the authorities

(Geisler 1989:244)

It is important at this junction to give attention to the biblical incidents of divinely approved civil disobedience in the New Testament. The first incident of disobedience to public authority, in the New Testament is found in the book of Acts 4:18-21. It is surprising though that the first authorities to persecute the Church were not the Roman Civil Authorities but rather the Jewish Religious Authorities. In this incident the apostles, namely Peter and John are strictly forbidden to proclaim the Gospel in the name of Jesus. Peter and John answered them that "whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). The Bible says "they went and reported what had happened to their friends. Probably, they reported it to the other apostles and the company of believers.

“When they heard what had happened they lifted their voices together to God” (verse 24). “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness” (verse 31). This shows that God approved their disobedience to the public authorities because he answered them by filling them with the Holy Spirit so that they can continue to preach the Word with boldness.

The second incident is found in Chapter 5 from verse 17 to verse 32. In this incident it is again the local Jewish authorities namely: the high priest and the party of the Sadducees who, out of Jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in prison. On the following day they were charged with disobeying their command. They said “we strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (verse 28). In reply the apostles repeated their answer “We must obey God rather than men” (verse 29). The apostles here “were resisting the authority of the Sanhedrin, which had responsibility for internal legal affairs delegated to them by the Roman officials” (Mott 1982:152). When the apostles were released after being punished the Bible says “they left the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name.”

And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (verse 41-42). Once again there is God’s approval in this incident in the sense that the joy they had came from God.



And they continued to proclaim the Gospel under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Another incident is reported by Stephen in his sermon (Acts 7:34). He quotes the story of Moses whom God sent to deliver his people who were under the bondage in Egypt. In this story Moses had to resist Pharaoh's authority under God's command. Moses ended up leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea.

Peter in Acts 12:1 was arrested and thrown into prison because of the preaching of the Gospel. This shows that he continued to disobey the command of the Jewish Sanhedrin which forbade him to proclaim the Gospel. In this Scripture God delivered him miraculously because the Church was praying for him.

Paul and Silas were also arrested by the crowd in the city of Phillip and were brought before the rulers who in turn brought them before the magistrates who ordered that they should be beaten. After which they were thrown into prison (Act 16:19-24).

Paul and Silas accepted the punishment and the Bible says in the middle of the night they began to praise the Lord. When the authorities realized that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and that they were wrongly punished they apologized to them. Paul and Silas went on their way.

All these incidents quoted here and many others that have not been quoted here constitutes divinely approved cases of civil disobedience. What is apparent in these cases is that the believers are forced to do something against their belief. For instance, they are forbidden to proclaim the Gospel which God has commanded them to preach. In all the incidents where there has been divine approval for the disobedience of civil authority one would find that believers were forced to disobey God. In some incidents Christians were forced to worship idols and emperors. These types of commands are religiously oppressive and Christians have the divine approval to disobey them. This means that the believer is allowed to disobey civil authority on the condition that he or she is forced to do something contrary to God's command. This is the position where the line is drawn. It is important that a believer should understand that disobeying civil authority under this condition is important not only to the believer as an individual but also to the civil authority itself.

#### **2.1.2.1 The New Testament Pattern Of Resisting The Public Authority**

Having drawn a line on conditions under which a believer is allowed to disobey the civil authority one may be curious to know the pattern which a believer should use in disobeying the State. In connection with this Norman L. Geisler says that the Bible does not disclose to a believer only when to

disobey civil authority but it also disclosed how a believer should disobey the civil authority. He points out that there are two views namely: Revolt and refusal. Figure 2 below shows the difference between the two.

**TABLE 13.2**  
**TWO VIEWS OF HOW TO DISOBEY GOVERNMENT**

<b>REVOLT</b>	<b>REFUSAL</b>
Revolt against it violently	Refuse to obey it non-violently
Fight it	Flee it
Reject it's punishment	Accept its punishment

**FIGURE 2**

(Geisler 1989:246)

From these two pattern of civil disobedience it is easy to deduce which one is biblical, especially when one examines all the biblical divinely approved cases of civil disobedience quoted in this script. The pattern of refusal has been used in all the cases. There is not even one single case in the Bible where revolt was used as a pattern for divinely approved civil disobedience.

The apostles, for examples, when they were commanded not to preach the Gospel in the name of Jesus, they refused to obey that command without using violence and in addition to that they accepted the punishment that was given to them by the council. The Bible says, they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:29, 40-42). This means that the non-violent resistance to civil authority is the only view that is accepted in the Bible.

Under no circumstance is a believer allowed to use violence in his or her rebellion against the State. Instead the believer should either flee if the opportunity is there to do so or be willing to accept the civil punishment with regard to his or her disobedience to the State.

The Bible gives the believer tips of how he or she ought to respond to the civil authority that is oppressive. First, the believer is urged to be submissive to the rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all men" (Tit 3:1-2). This means that a believer's obligation towards his State is that of submission and obedience regardless of whether the government is christian or pagan, just or unjust, tyrannical or not. He or she must submit and obey it. Disobedience should be exercised only when it comes to a push. This means that when everything else has failed then disobedience to civil authority can be used as a last resort. And even then it should be done with respect and should not be violent.

Secondly, the Bible instructs all believers to pray for the public authorities. It says "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanks giving be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life godly and respectful in every way (1 Tim 2:1-2). Bearing in mind that believers are engaged in a spiritual warfare, Paul urges that Christians should take the responsibility upon themselves to pray and intercede for those in the position of leadership. There is hope that life in the State can become quiet and peaceable. This is very

important responsibility and should not be looked down upon. Instead it should be taken very seriously.

Thirdly, the Bible urges believers to endure suffering patiently. It says "beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1Pt 4:12-13). This portion of scripture calls upon all Christians to be prepared to suffer for Christ. When persecutions come upon them for the sake of their faith they must take courage and persevere. The writer would like to mention that even here the suffering should be accepted as a last resort. That is to say that should there be no opportunity to flee it then the believer should accept it but should there be a chance to run away from it then one should make the full use of it.

Observations of the behaviour of the New Testament believers towards the civil authority have disclosed that their attitude towards public authority comprised respect, submission and obedience.

They never ever used force to rebel against the government authorities.

Whenever, the civil authorities used force to command them to disobey God they simply refused to obey it non-violently. They either flee the civil authorities punishment imposed upon them, whenever possible or accepted it. They never tried to organize themselves into a political movement to fight the government. They were very much aware of the fact that they were obliged to obey the people in the position of leadership in their State on the grounds that

they were put there by God regardless of whether they are pagan or Christians. Their authority is derived from God.

## 2.2 PAUL AND THE STATE

Having examined the attitude of Jesus towards the State in the synoptic Gospels and that of the Early Church in the Book of Acts, the writer finds it essential that Pauline attitude towards the State should also be examined. The question to be addressed here is that of whether Paul's attitude towards the State has any connection with that of Jesus. Oscar Cullmann, says "some men are willing to classify Paul as an almost servile, uncritical servant of any State, as if he would say Yea and Amen to every claim of the State, be it never so totalitarian" (Cullmann 1963:46). Cullmann mentions that these men base their case on the single Pauline statement in Rom13:1.

In connection with this, Greg L. Bahnsen says "Romans 13 has been one of the most misused portions of the New Testament because Christians have often mistaken it to be an endorsement of indifference to concrete political wrongs" (Bahnsen 1979:366). The writer feels that it is important at this

junction to examine this chapter in order to find out Paul's attitude towards the State.

### **2.2.1 Paul's Teaching On The Christian And The State In Romans 13:1-7**

The major tasks in this section is to examine closely Paul's teachings on the christian and the State according to Romans 13. As pointed out already, the writer will endeavour to address the question of whether there is any connection between Paul's attitude towards the State and that of Jesus. In order to achieve this one will have to ask questions like: how does Paul regard the Roman Empire? Does he regard it as divine? Does Paul leave any room for civil disobedience or does he instruct believers to submit to civil authority without any reservation like the Sadducees? These are the questions that will be examined in the light of Paul's teachings in Romans 13:1-7.

It is essential that one should acquire a better understanding of Paul's intention when he wrote this chapter if he or she is to grasp this passage correctly. To begin with, Paul's intention in this chapter was not to give a comprehensive doctrine of the State thereby provide answers to all questions

pertaining the Christians relationship to the State. His intentions rather was, as Stephen Charles Mott says, to address the question of Christian freedom.

Mott point says:

Particularly in the Pauline churches, there were Christians who overemphasized and misused their freedom in connection with their spiritual gifts, whether present possession of the powers and privileges of the age to come, or a mystical participation in the perfection of knowledge and moral purity that freed them from material reality. As a result, they sought to cast off the duties of their roles in society, in the form of moral codes, marriage, slavery, or labor

(Mott 1982:148)

Paul then wanted to tell the believers that as long as they live in this world they have an obligation from God to carry out their earthly responsibilities. Even though it is true, on one hand, that Paul emphasized that believers in Christ belong to the New Age, he does not, on the other hand, endorse their wrong behaviour which emanated from the belief that since they belong to the New Age, which is both present and future, they no longer have to bear any responsibility in as far as the present age is concerned. On the contrary, Paul tells them that "the New life in Christ places special moral requirements upon the believer" (Furnish 1983:124).

The believers are therefore urged to be good citizens by faithfully carrying out their duties to the government.



Having looked at the problem which Paul is addressing in Romans 13:1-7, the question that one may ask is: What is the right interpretation of this passage of scripture. In connection with this Greg L. Bahnsen talks of two schools of thought which evolved with regard to the interpretation of this passage. The schools "can be summarized as the normative and descriptive, the former sees Paul as prescribing what propose government is, while the latter maintains that the Apostle was simply giving an inspired description of the actual government with which he was familiar" (Bahnsen 1979:366).

According to Bahnsen of the two schools of thought the descriptive one creates more problems than answers. Its weakness lies in the fact that it makes assertions many of which it does not have enough grounds to substantiate their validity. Besides, some of its historical facts are questionable. This being the case, the writer does not intend to give a comprehensive presentation of the arguments involved in the descriptive school of thought. However, the writer will present, in part, both schools of thought and their interpretation of the passage under consideration here.

The descriptive interpretation of Romans 13:1-7, according to Bahnsen, tends to render to the state the freedom to govern its subjects the way it likes, thereby giving the impression that it is above reproach by its subjects. And for this reason:

Others have maintained that Paul is saying that all governments have divine approval of such a character that the Christian would be morally culpable for disobeying the government except where preaching the Gospel is prohibited. Beyond that no ethical criteria can be laid upon the state, and the believer has a strong obligation to have a positive and patriotic attitude toward whatever government is in power.

(Bahnsen 1979:367)

This assertion is based on the assumption that when Paul wrote this passage Nero was already emperor of Rome. It assumes that, in spite of Paul's knowledge of the wickedness of Nero, he still called him a ruler ordained by God therefore, should not be resisted. For whoever resists Nero resists God. Christians, according to this interpretation, were therefore urged to pledge their loyalty and support to this evil emperor, Nero who was regarded as a minister of God, in as far as Paul's warning in the passage are concerned.



According to Bahnsen the greatest weakness of this argument lies in the fact that it does not have the strong spiritual backing and as a result it uses extra scriptural sources to support itself.

In addition to this its historical facts are highly questionable. For instance, the assertion that Paul had Nero in mind when writing this is questionable.

Besides the issue of Paul having the knowledge of Nero's wickedness is incorrect as pointed out already in this script.[see pages 43 & 44 above]

This means that by the time Paul wrote this epistle to the Roman it was before Nero committed the atrocities which tarnished his reputation as an emperor.

This means that if Paul had Nero in mind when writing this passage then he

was not recommending the oppressive and immoral government but only the enlightened kind of government for which Nero was then famous (Bahnsen 1979:368).

The argument then falls off. Secondly, the writer would like to point out here that there's just no way Nero, on the one hand, could be described as a servant of God doing God's will while on the other hand, he was actually persecuting the children of God. The two just don't jive together well.

The second school of thought is the normative. This interpretation as mentioned already, states that Paul in Romans 13:1-7 describes the proper function of the government. It rejects the assertion that this passage is simply giving an inspired description of the actual government with which he was familiar" (Bahnsen 1979:367). As far as it is concerned, Roman 13:1-7 does not talk about the Roman government in particular but rather talks about the proper function of a government in general. This being the case, it argues that this passage does not only emphasize the need for a believer to submit to the civil authority but it also places the civil authority in a position where by it has to carry out its obligation to its subject in a proper manner. The civil authority cannot just do things the way it pleases. It must act according to the function for which it exists. The normative interpretation of this passage does not accept the concept that this passage instructs the believer to accept every human ruler without any reservations. It implies that the believer has the right to have reservations towards the State. He or she can even criticise the State should there be a need to do so. The greatest weakness of this

interpretation lies in the fact that it takes for granted that this is the whole message which Paul is communicating in this passage. This is wrong because Paul in this passage is not talking about the State. In other words, the topic of this passage is not "the State". As it has already been pointed out above that Paul, in this passage, is addressing the issue of Christian freedom which was being abused by some Christians.

It is now time to turn to the passage itself.

1. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and 2. therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment. 3. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4. He is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrong doer. 5. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom is due, honour to whom is due (Romans 13:1-7).

It is important to bear in mind that this passage should be interpreted from the context in which it was written. It is very wrong to interpret this passages out of its context. The writer feels that this is one of the big mistakes committed by the descriptive and the normative schools of thought. Both of these schools fell into the big temptation of interpreting this passage without taking into consideration its context and as a result they ended up doing injustice to

the passage in as far as its interpretation is concerned. Besides, both schools neglected the occasion of the passage which is vital if one is to come to grips with the passage.

There is just no way Paul could have written this passage out of the blue.

"There must have been some local circumstances to account for the present emphasis" (Thomas 1912:49). In connection with this Morton Scott Enslin says:

It is quite probable that the question of loyalty to Caesar and of payment of taxes, which was a sure point of many Jews, has its effect on the Christians also, particularly Jewish Christians. The Roman Jews had the name of being turbulent group, and lately had been expelled from Rome as branciers, or at least had suffered a drastic curtailment of their privileges. The grave danger of converting liberty into license and freedom from law into lawlessness was ever before Paul's mind.

(Enslin 1930:210)

Griffith Thomas presents a background for this passage which is similar to that of Enslin. He points out by saying:

The Jews at Rome notorious for their turbulence. Their ideals of their position and theocracy made submission to government by Gentiles intolerable, and they had lately rebelled and suffered expulsion (Acts xviii.2). Since Christians were regarded by many as a tendencies was easily turned against them. All this may have weighed with the Apostle in bringing danger also last the Christians should be misled by false ideals of the Kingdom of Christ and its relation to the Kingdoms of the world, and as in Rome Christianity was naturally brought face to face with the imperial power, it was essential that the true relations of Christian to the state should be clearly defined.

(Thomas 1912:49)

It seems to the writer that it is difficult to recreate the political and the social setting in which this passage was written. Both authors Thomas and Enslin do not present the historical background for this passage with certainty. They seem to speculate in as far as their presentation of the historical background for the passage is concerned. In any case, the truth of the matter is that there must have been some kind of danger which Paul foresaw hence he saw it necessary to write this passage. Besides it is the permanent principle, and not mere local need, which is mainly emphasize in the passage.

The context of this passage starts with Roman 12:1 and goes up to chapter 13:14. In chapter 12:1 Paul makes an appeal to the Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, in spiritual worship. Christians are urged not to be conformed to this world but rather to be transformed by the renewal of their mind so that they should know God's will and what is good and acceptable and perfect. In connection with this Victor Furnish says "this appeal serve as a summary of what had preceded. God's will is love, that is how all the laws commandments are fulfilled."  
(Furnish 1983:123)

When one examines this context he or she would find that it has many moral exhortations. In addition to this, it also talks about love and law. This means that Roman 13:1-7 emanates from a context of ethical instruction. For instance, he instructs the believers never to avenge themselves, but rather to leave it to the wrath of God (12:19). He also instructs them to owe no one

anything except love (13:8). And their love must be genuine (12:9). In connection with this Cullmann points out:

the context teaches us two things: First, the matter under discussion at this point is the Christian commandment of love - evil is not to be rewarded with evil, rather one is to do good to his enemy. This stands in Romans 12 immediately before the section about the State in Rom. 13:1 ff., and directly afterwards, in v.8, the same is resumed. Second, the expectation of the End is also under discussion: the night is far spent, the day draws near (Rom 13:11ff).

(Cullmann 1983:123)

The background of the context from which this passage arises is very important to the interpretation of this passage in the sense that it shows that while, on one hand, it is proper to honour the authority of the State, on the other hand, it is also proper to criticize it when it makes demands of the prerogatives that belong to God. This means that this passage does not command an unconditional and uncritical subjection to every demands of the State on the part of the believer.

From the context one would discover that while, on one hand, the Christian is forbidden to avenge oneself, the State, on the other hand, is permitted to take vengeance on behalf of God. The State is entrusted with the responsibility of administering justice. The Christian is also forbidden to renounce the State. Instead he or she should accept its authority.

One other important thing pointed out from the context is that the State is temporary and it is not final (13:11-12). However, for the mean time it exists for the will of God.

It is time now to turn to the teaching of this passage. To begin with, Paul in Romans 13:1 talks about two things: First, he talks about the Christians duty of obedience to the civil authority. He stresses that Christians have an obligation to obey the governing authorities. The second part of this verse he gives the reason why the Christian should obey the State. He says "For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God" (v.16). This means that the civil authorities are divinely ordained hence, their authority is derived from God himself. It was God's intention that man should live under authority.

The second verse talks about the resisting of civil authority. Paul condemns it stating that "he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed" (v.2). this means that resisting God ordained authority is tantamount to resisting God. This verse if it is read out of its context can be misleading. One may want to ask the question, does Paul call for the unconditional submission to the civil authorities on the part of the believer? Does he mean that the State is absolute? The answer to these questions, as pointed out above already is no. In connection with the second question here Bahnsen says:

The fact that the magistrate has been ordained by God places stress upon the supremacy of God, not that of the State. The same root for the key words Paul uses in telling believers to be in subjection and not resist the authority of the state is used by Paul to speak of the state being "ordained" by God. The subjection of the Christian unto the state's authority, then should suggest the corresponding appropriateness of the state being



subject to God's authority. And just as a person does not need to be a Christian to be under moral obligation to obey the state (note "every soul" in Rom 13:1), so also unbelief does not rid the magistrate of his obligation to God.

(Bahnsen 1979:374)

In verses 3 and 4 Paul talks about the vindication of civil obedience. Another reason why a Christian should submit to civil authorities is that they are God's servants to punish those who do crime. This is the obligation and the function for which they exist.

In verse 5 Paul gives further reasons why one should subject himself or herself to civil authority. The verse reads: "Therefore one must subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience (v.5).

This means that the Christian is called upon to be submissive to the governing authorities on the ground of one's morals. "This reference to conscience suggests both the spirit and the limit of obedience" (Thomas 1912:52). In connection with this Furnish says Paul in using the term conscience "He simply means that, if one thinks reasonably and carefully about the matter at hand, subjection to the ruling authorities will commend itself as the wise and prudent in a way" (Furnish 1983:130).

The last two verses of the passages being examined here constitute the conclusion and the real point of the passage. The last verses read "For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenues to whom revenues are due, respect to whom respect is due,

honour to whom honour is due (vs.6 and 7). Paul in these verses makes a practical appeal. He says pay all of them their dues. It is important to observe that all Paul has been saying from verse one up to verse five has actually been leading up to the issue of taxes. Paul in these verses urges the believers to faithfully fulfill their obligation to the civil authorities. He puts it very clearly that the Christians should render to the State its dues because it is the servant of God therefore Christians should support it. It has been put there to curb human anarchy.

The writer feels that the following points can be drawn as conclusion from the passage. Firstly the Christian's subjection to the State is secondary to the Christian's obedience to the will of God. Secondly, the governing authorities derive their authority from God. They are commissioned by God to administer justice. This being the case, they are not absolute. Hence they have no right to demand absolute obedience from their subject only God can do this.

Besides civil authorities are temporary and are answerable to God. Thirdly the civil authorities exist for the good of its subjects. The fourth point is that the command to be submissive to the government authorities is secondary and preliminary to the major point of the passage which is found in verse 6 and 7 which deals with the issue of paying taxes and rendering to all their dues.

This means that Christians in whatever country they are must pay tax, fulfill their duties to the State and should be submissive to the State on the other hand, it also means that the civil authorities should carry out their function with the understanding that they are answerable to God therefore they should administer justice in the right manner.

It is apparent that there is connection between Paul's attitude and that of Jesus. For instance, Jesus in Mt 22:21 mentioned that people should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that belong to God. Jesus did not forbid the paying of taxes instead he urged the people to pay it. At the same time he showed that man's first obligation is to God. God is the only one who can demand absolute obedience from people and not the State. Paul also makes appeals to the Christians which are similar to those made by Jesus. For instance the issue of taxes examined above, Paul urges the Christians to pay tax to the state, however, as pointed out already, he does not encourage Christians to render unconditional obedience to the State. He mentions that the authority of the State is derived from God thereby setting God above the State. Both of them view the State as temporary and its function is to curb human violence. Both acknowledge that the State exists by the will of God. Therefore, they would not permit Christian to renounce the State.

### **2.2.2 Comparing And Contrasting Paul's Teaching In Romans 13:1-7 And 1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

A close examination of these two texts would disclose the fact that they do not contradict each other as some may think. They, instead complement each other. They, kind of, give two sides of the same coin. Since Romans 13:1-7 has already been examined above, therefore, in this section 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 will be given much attention.

1. When one of you had a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 2. Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3. Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! 4. If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are at least esteemed by the Church? 5. I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, 6. but brother go to law against brother and that before unbelievers? 7. To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

Unlike in Romans 13:1-7, Paul in this text is not concerned mainly with the relationship of the Christian to the State but rather with the relationship amongst the believers themselves. He is addressing them on the issue of how they should treat each other whenever they have a dispute amongst themselves. Therefore, his negative comments pertaining the magistrates of the State should not be regarded as an attempt to reject or renounce the civil authorities not at all.

The believers at Corinth are to set a good example before the heathens . They are to resolve their differences in a good and loving manner. They should not be full of vengeance but rather should practice love and should have a forgiving attitude towards one another.

Their moral standard should be above that of the heathen. This being the case, Paul recommends that their differences should be peacefully resolved within the Church. The heathens are to learn from the Church how to live in harmony with each other. Therefore, it is an embarrassment that the believers should sue each other and go to court to be judged by the heathen judges.

It is important here to notice that Paul neither condemns the civil magistrate nor rejects its authority. on the contrary, like in Romans 12:1-7, he recognized the authority of the civil magistrates. Paul does not even doubt the ability of the State to judge rightly. His point of contention is that believers who are supposed to be the light of the world should not sue each other and go and sit under the heathen judges to be judged by them.

Paul in these two text is addressing different problems. For instance, in Romans 13:1-7 he is addressing the issue of the believer's civil and social duties while in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 he is dealing with the issue of moral disorders amongst the believers themselves. Therefore the difference in Paul's attitude towards the State found in these texts is by, no means, an indication of inconsistency, on the part of Paul in his teaching concerning the relation of the believer and the civil authority. The conclusion which on can

draw from this, observation is that Paul in these two texts in bringing the two sides of the same coin. Christian, on the one hand, are called upon to submit to the civil authorities but, on the other hand, they are not to submit without reservations. For the State is nothing absolute. In connection with this Cullmann states:

What is said in Roman 13:1ff may be valid here as well. It stands in the background of 1 Corinthians 6, but it is not explicit here, just as what is said in 1 Corinthians 6 stands in the background of the Romans passage, but is not explicit there..... It is false to read Roman 13:1 ff. apart from 1 Corinthians 6:1ff and it is false to read 1 Corinthians 6:1ff apart from Romans 13:1ff. The state is not simply divine, as is usually inferred from Romans 13:1ff. It is merely willed by God, ordained by God (Cullmann 1963:50).

This supports what has already been mentioned about that these texts are not contradictory but rather complementary to each other.

### **2.3 Peter's Attitude Towards Civil Authorities According To 1 Peter 2:13-17**

It is the desire of the writer that as this passage will be examined, Peter's attitude towards the State will be exposed. The questions that the writer would like to explore in the light of the text are: What is Peter's attitude towards the civil authorities? Does his attitude have any connection to that of Paul? How does Peter regard civil authorities? Finding answers to these questions is the task of this section.

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14. Or to governors as sent by him to punish those

who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil but as servants of god. Honour all men. 17. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

To begin with, this epistle was written to the Church which was scattered and was in Pontus, Galatian, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1).

Probably the relationship between the Church and the State was getting bitter and bitter. Peter wrote this epistle to encourage the Church and also give it some instructions.

It is interesting to note that there is relationship between this text and Roman 13:1-7. Schrage points out that the two texts "are based on a common tradition" (Schrage 1982:130). This means that there is a connection between the attitude of Peter and that of Paul.

Peter in this passage urges the believers to be submissive to the civil authorities. He discloses the fact that "the first and foremost responsibility a Christian has to any government, just or unjust, democracy or monarchy, is to be obey its law" (Geisler 1989:251). And he states that this should be done for the sake of the Lord. In other words, the believers aim in obeying the authorities should be to please the Lord. It is God's will that Christians should be recognize civil authorities for they exist because of his will. Peter regards the civil authorities as institutions that have been ordained and established by

God. Therefore, they do not exist out of their own will or power but rather out of the will of God. However, Peter would never advocate for absolute obedience to the civil authorities. Even though he has mentioned that believers should subject themselves to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by Him..... (v.13). It seems that Peter is quite aware of the fact that God ordained the government and this includes even the evil government. The important thing to bear in mind though is that God did not ordain its evil. Therefore, in this text the believer is not called upon to render to the civil authorities absolute obedience as this prerogative belongs only to God. This can further be supported by what Peter himself answered the authorities in Acts 4:19 when he was instructed by them never again to preach the Gospel in the name of Jesus. His answer was that "whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and hear" (Acts 4:19-20). In the light of this, one would say with certainty that Peter does not encourage the Christians to obey the evils of the governments.

He also points out in this passage that a believer is to obey the State as a free man, yet he or she should not use his or her freedom as a pretext for evil

(v.16). Schrage says:

The basis and mode of Christian obedience to civil authority, however, is freedom (1 Peter 2:16) such obedience is the obedience of those who are free: It rules out blind and docile subordination as well as Christian abuse of freedom. Christians are not slaves of the state but "slaves of God (v.16) and therefore free. Therefore they do not fear the emperor but God.

(Schrage 82:278)



From this quotation it is apparent that Peter does not regard the civil authorities as being absolute. He emphasizes the fact that believers are responsible to God.

God comes first and everything that the believer does should do it in honour of God. Schrage has said it well when he points out that believers are not slaves of the State but of God.

The writer would like to point out that Peter's main objective in this text is not to present the doctrine of the State, that is why the text is short and does not cover much ground pertaining the State as one would love. However, from this passage one can be able to draw conclusion on the attitude of Peter towards the State as has been observed above.

#### **2.4 THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY IN REVELATION 13:**

Revelation 13 is the last text to be examined in this script. The writer would like to confess that this text is one of the most difficult texts to interpret simply because it contains messages for the events which were to happen during the seer's time and for the events that will take place in the future. It is difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the two.

It is essential to acquaint oneself with the historical background of this text so that a better understanding of this text can be obtained. The writer would like to mention that he does not endeavor to give a comprehensive detailed account of this historical background for this passage because it would be too long and complicated. Besides, this is not the major concern of this script. This being the case, the writer will only touch the important issues of the historical background of this passage which he feels will help one to acquire a better understanding of it.

To begin with, Schrage points out that even though there were other Romans emperors who made a claim that they were divine beings, emperor worship never reached its peak until the reign of Domitian. He states that One thing that is clear in this text is that there was a direct conflict between the civil authorities and the believers. In this passage one is confronted with the problem of the juxtaposition of the State which can be traced throughout the entire New Testament. Contrary to Romans 13:1-7, the State here is presented as being demonic it sets itself up to stage war against the saints. The Romans State in this vision is described by John the seer, as a beast that comes out of the sea and has ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and had blasphemous name upon its heads (v.1). This beast speaks blasphemous words against God. It blasphemes God's name and his dwelling in heaven (vs 5 and 6). In addition to this it is given permission to wage war against the saints and to overcome them. It also demands worship from all nations who dwell on earth.

Some of the saints are taken into captivity and some are to be slain by the sword. The believers are called upon to endure and not to give up their faith (vs.7-10).

After the first beast, there comes a second beast from the earth. This beast has two horns like a lamb and it speaks like a dragon (v.11). This beast, according to John the seer, performs powerful signs to the extent that it makes fire to come down from heaven. Besides it commands the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast and that people should be marked with the number of the beast which is triple six (vs.13-18).

Schrage believes that the first beast symbolizes the Roman State while the second beast represent "the provincial priesthood of the emperor cult" (Schrage 1982:344 & 345). In any case, whether Schrage is precisely right or wrong in his interpretation it does not really matter. The most important thing to remember here is that the State is presented as the instrument of Satan. This means that it has ceased to be the servant of God. It has usurped the authority which does not belong to it. It has now become the enemy of God. It has rebelled against God. The Christians in this Revelation are no longer encouraged to obey it. Neither are they told to form political parties and start fighting for their rights. Instead they are encouraged to disobey the State without violence and at the same time they are encouraged to persevere and to stand firm in their faith.

## **Conclusion**

Observations in this script have shown that the attitude of Jesus was that of respect and loyalty. However, he did not submit without reservations. In his teachings he showed that he did not regard the State as something final. He made it clear that God is above the State. Man's obligation to God comes first. And only God has the right to make absolute claim in the life of a man. However, man is obliged to perform his duties to the State.

The attitude of the Early Church towards the public authority was not different from that of Jesus. They were obedient and respectful to the State. However, they did not regard the State as the final authority. They believed that only God is the absolute hence, has the right to make absolute claims on the life of an individual.

