

CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIANISM: AN INTRODUCTION AND SIGNPOSTS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Jamin Hübner¹

Abstract: Explicit discourse about “Christian libertarianism” is a relatively recent phenomenon. While relevant concepts have been elucidated throughout scattered publications and private initiatives in the past century, there remains little by way of coherent summary. There are also a number of related subject areas needing clarification and development. This article seeks to ameliorate the situation by attempting to define “Christian libertarianism” and then exploring a number of relevant topics that might need fresh attention.

Keywords: libertarianism, freedom, Christian theology, liberty, theology, nonviolence, Christian libertarianism, Christian politics, classic liberalism

I. INTRODUCTION

The connection between Christian and libertarian thought has never been more explicit than in the past quarter-century. The reasons for this are numerous and cannot all be explored here. But an important concern emerging from this situation is (a) the lack of a sophisticated summary of “Christian libertarianism” (especially in an academic context), and (b) related areas that remain unexplored or undeveloped. Should Christian

¹ Jamin Hübner (Th.D., Systematic Theology, University of South Africa) is Director of Institutional Effectiveness, founding Chair of Christian Studies, and part-time professor of economics at John Witherspoon College in Rapid City, SD.

libertarianism continue to grow and remain a viable option for those seeking a coherent interpretive framework for faith, life, and civic (un)involvement, both of these areas should be fully addressed. Until then, the following preliminary considerations will have to suffice.

II. CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIANISM

In brief, Christian libertarianism exhibits an intersection of key concepts and practices in both Christian and libertarian thought, namely, (a) peace and nonviolence, (b) freedom and voluntary order, (c) decentralization and the diffusion of power, and (d) concern for economic flourishing. Not all Christian libertarians would summarize this way, nor include these four specific items even if they did.² Furthermore, there is not always a one-for-one correspondence of these characteristics within both the framework of Christianity and libertarianism (for the obvious reason that each framework is different). Such dissonance is partly the focus of the latter half of this article.

Nevertheless, when properly understood, Christianity and libertarianism can be said to be *complementary*. It may even be argued that one (libertarianism) is simply an extension of the other (Christianity) in the realm of political and economic affairs. As such, the key concerns summarized above, along with their embodiments (e.g., in church, society, family, etc.), can easily be found in both early Christian contexts and throughout the “literature of liberty.”³

To flesh all of this out more explicitly, a brief summary of the four subject areas (above) is in order.

² In fact, some are content to say that Christianity and libertarianism are simply “compatible,” and not necessarily complementary at all. Cf. Elise Daniel, ed., *Called to Freedom: Why You Can Be Christian and Libertarian* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 12.

³ This quote is the title of an appendix in David Boaz, ed. *The Libertarian Reader* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015). Framing the discussion this way does not suggest that libertarianism is merely a literary phenomenon or “pure theory”—especially given strong evidence to the contrary (see the “Editor’s Preface” of this volume).

(a) *Peace and Nonviolence*

Regarding (a), Jesus and the early church advocated a noticeably peaceful movement. This is demonstrated in Jesus’ life and teachings (e.g., Sermon on the Mount, his refusal to use political/authoritarian power to rule during his temptations, his non-resistant and yet innocent death, teachings on what it is to be “great,” a gentle disposition—especially with the vulnerable, public rebuke of the use of physical violence, etc.). It is also demonstrated in early church literature (e.g., New Testament, early church fathers and mothers, *Didache*, etc.) and practice (e.g., refusal to participate in the military, refusal to use any direct or indirect means of coercion/force, refusal to use state apparatus to spread Christian ideals/message, the promotion of reconciliation and forgiveness instead of revenge, the promotion of patience instead of forcing things to pass).⁴

Peace/nonviolence is also essential in libertarian thought. It is frequently summarized in the “non-aggression principle” (NAP) or “principle of non-aggression.” The basic idea is that *violence is wrong*. More specifically, “It is wrong/illegitimate to initiate force or fraud against a person and/or their legitimately-owned property.”⁵ Notice, it is not that *all* coercion is immoral, for libertarians firmly believe in governance, common/customary law, and the capturing of aggressors in pursuit of

⁴ See Jean-Michel Hornus, *It is Not Lawful For Me To Fight: Early Christian Attitudes Toward War, Violence, and the State*, trans. Alan Kreider and Oliver Coburn (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980); Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), reviewed by Jamin Hübner in *The Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 13 (2017), as well as Ronald Sider, *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) and George Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

⁵ There are a number of hair-splitting variants (and criticisms) of the NAP, but this need not concern us here and now. It should be noted, however, that some in the classical-liberal tradition have been turned off by both these qualifications and this particular focus, partly because of its seemingly reductionist approach (something I deal with elsewhere) and because of its startling implications (see next page).

justice—which involves the use of force. But this is obviously *responsive* force, not *initiations* of force. It is the instigating of violence that is “wrong” or “illegitimate.”⁶

This basic proposal would not be controversial except that libertarians do not (like other political perspectives) exempt the state.⁷ Non-aggression is expected of groups of individuals (e.g., governments, organizations, businesses, etc.) as much as individuals themselves.⁸ Contrary to the social tradition of millennia, there are not two standards of morality—one for the political apparatus, and another for everything and everyone else. If, for instance, a man walked up to a woman on a sidewalk and started forcefully (non-consensually) touching her, this is sexual assault *regardless if the perpetrator is looking for an illegal plant or employed by the state*. The same principle goes for “war” (mass murder), “eminent domain” (land theft), “enhanced interrogation” (torture), and otherwise.⁹ Libertarian perspectives on peace and nonviolence do not search for potential exceptions to nonviolence, much less build an entire theory upon them—

⁶ Cf. “the good neighbor principle” in Mary Ruwart, *Healing Our World: The Compassion of Libertarianism* (San Francisco: Sunstar, 2015), 21: “As children, we learned that if no one hits first, no fight is possible. Therefore, refraining from ‘first-strike’ force, theft, or fraud, is the first step in creating peace.”

⁷ In contrast to some sociologists and political theorists (see discussions in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, eds., *Nationalism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995]), libertarians tend to use the term “state” liberally, as well as synonymously with “government” and “nation-state” in most contexts. Following Oppenheimer, Giddens, Weber, and Rothbard (see more on this below), the “state” is generally any group that wields power/force over a certain domain (esp. over a certain geographical region, indicated by “state” or “national borders”). The state is (to plunder Marx) the “overt oppressing class.”

⁸ This is because groups of individuals are made up of individuals, and the regularities/laws of the lower level are not neutralized when adding additional layers to the higher levels. (Rocket science is complicated, but in the complex layers of equations there is not all of a sudden a point reached where $3 + 3$ no longer equals 6.)

⁹ In this sense, libertarians perform an incisive rhetorical “deconstruction”; the dominant discourse of state-legitimized violence is pulled out of its “it’s OK because it’s for a good cause” narrative and recast it into a “...but it’s violence” framework. See below for more on libertarianism and postmodernism.

as is so evident in the popular ends-justifies-means Rawlsian¹⁰ tradition.¹¹ Instead, it fully recognizes—much in line with the disturbing findings of Harvard psychologist Stanley Milgram¹²—that the mere possession of authority does not suspend morality, nullify personal responsibility, or change the basic nature of aggression.¹³ Or, put differently, libertarianism is the only political theory that genuinely deals with what philosopher Michael Huemer calls “the problem of political authority”:

Acts that would be considered unjust or morally unacceptable when performed by nongovernmental agents will often be considered perfectly all right, even praiseworthy, when performed by government agents....Why do we accord this special moral status to government and are we justified in so doing? This is the problem of political authority.¹⁴

A kingly decree or majority vote also does not alter “the general moral law.”¹⁵ Neither monarchy nor democracy legitimize violence. In fact, given that the state itself is a monopoly on force, it should be the *last* party

¹⁰ See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

¹¹ Strands of the classical liberal tradition (and otherwise) argue that these activities aren’t aggression since the governed have given consent to the government to do these things via a vote or “social contract” (cf. Declaration of Independence). But this argument has immediate problems, as not everyone votes, not every election is unanimous, not every winning candidate makes laws, and no one today has voluntarily signed any “social contract” with their government, real or imaginary.

¹² Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974; repr. by Harper Perennial, 2009).

¹³ In fact, in Wilder’s estimation, “So long as any large group of persons, anywhere on this earth, believe the ancient superstition that some Authority is responsible for their welfare, they will set up some image of that Authority and try to obey it. And the result will be poverty and war.” Wilder, *The Discovery of Freedom*, 70.

¹⁴ Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 332-33.

¹⁵ Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 2006), 28.

that is exempt from non-aggression.¹⁶ Those with all the guns should be held to a higher (not *lower*) ethical standard.

The connection to Christianity is obvious at this point. In fact, one popular introduction to libertarianism is aptly entitled *Don't Hurt People and Don't Take Their Stuff: A Libertarian Manifesto*.¹⁷ This thesis is little more than a restatement of two of the Ten Commandments (both of which Jesus

¹⁶ David Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*, 3rd ed. (David Friedman via Createspace, 2014), 108: "Government is an agency of legitimized coercion. The special characteristic that distinguishes governments from other agencies of coercion (such as ordinary criminal gangs) is that most people accept government coercion as normal and proper. The same act that is regarded as coercive when done by a private individual seems legitimate if done by an agent of the government"; Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 56-58: "[The state is] that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion"; Franz Oppenheimer, *The State*, trans. John Gitterman (Black Rose Books, 2007, originally published New York: B and W Huebsch, 1908), 15: "The State, completely in its genesis, essentially and almost completely during the first stages of its existence, is a social institution, forced by a victorious group of men on a defeated group, with the sole purpose of regulating the dominion of the victorious group over the vanquished, and securing itself against revolt from within and attacks from abroad. Ideologically, this dominion had no other purpose than the economic exploitation of the vanquished by the victors"; Anthony Giddens, *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 2:121: "The nation-state...is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence"; William Arnal, "Banditry," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1:388: "Very much like terrorists...bandits challenge the state's monopoly on certain types of violence. A state is a robber-band that has been recognized as legitimate by other states; a robber-band is an unrecognized state or one that operates within territory claimed by another state."; Max Weber, "Politik als Beruf," in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Muenchen, 1921), 396-450: "...we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory....at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence."

¹⁷ Matt Kibbe, *Don't Hurt People and Don't Take Their Stuff* (New York: William Marrow, 2014).

reiterates in Lk 18:20). The Judeo-Christian tradition and libertarian intellectual tradition share a rich history of advocating property rights—which largely constitutes the ground rules for “initiating violence.”¹⁸ In contrast to Christian liberals/leftists, Christian libertarians do not read the “radical egalitarianism”¹⁹ of Jesus through the Marxist lens of private-property abolishment.

(b) Freedom and Voluntary Order

Regarding (b), the themes and advocacy of freedom and voluntary order permeate the New Covenant story and message. The immediate freedom that concerned Jesus’ audience was freedom from Roman rule and oppression. Like any Jew in first-century Palestine, Jesus was obviously concerned about this situation. But he ultimately offered a much deeper and lasting freedom (Jn 8:33-34; Lk 4:18) that transcended local politics and even Israel’s tumultuous history—socially, spiritually, existentially. This came into fruition in the “Body of Christ” (Paul’s metaphor), which is a community characterized by voluntary (not compulsory) giving (2 Cor 9:7), by organic organization based on individuals’ gifts (Acts 11:29; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:7-31; Eph 4:1-14; cf. Hb 2:2-4), and by example, incarnated stories, and persuasion instead of coercion (see, for example, the kind of evangelism exhibited in Acts).²⁰

¹⁸ E.g., to use the previous example, “don’t steal” (and the goodness of generosity) presupposes private ownership of property.

¹⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 1995), 79. Cf. N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 70-71. But note the balancing correctives in N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969), 389-399, since it is too simplistic to reduce much of what Jesus was doing into ethics.

²⁰ Hence, Locke: “A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society...I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands, than which nothing can be imagined more absurd. Thus, therefore, that matter stands. No man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in

Authority in the church rests with the congregation as the whole, not with “leaders” within it...The fact that Jesus is “Lord” also needs to be allowed to subvert rather than reinforce the idea that there is a hierarchy within the congregation.²¹

This changed with the legalization (and state embodiment) of Christianity in the early 300s CE.²² But as far as the first, second, and third centuries are concerned, the church was remarkably uninvolved in civic affairs, in the operations of governments, and in the military precisely because of the church’s free and voluntary character.²³ This included the success of

which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God.” John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” cited in Boaz, *The Libertarian Reader*, 66-67. Cf. Tertullian, *Apologeticus Pro Christianis*, xviii: “Christians are made, not born.” This aspect has been missed in Presbyterianism, Reformed Theology, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, which re-establishes a household/physical element from the Old Covenant in who makes up the church (and thus *who* should be baptized; baptized infants obviously do not exercise choice). See Jamin Hübner, “Acts 2:39 in its Context,” in Richard Barcellos, ed., *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage* (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014) and Alan Conner, *Covenant Children Today: Physical or Spiritual?* (Owensboro: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2007).

²¹ John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016), 370.

²² On this shift, see Part IV of Kreider, *Patient Ferment*, chapter 6 of Hornus, *It is Not Lawful*, and Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). Some church history surveys also include helpful summaries, such as Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperOne, 2010). Contrast with Peter Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010) and, somewhat related, Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

²³ See Sider, *The Early Church on Killing* and Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the early Church*. Cf. Keith Giles, *Jesus Untangled: Crucifying Our Politics to Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb* (Orange: Quoir, 2017); Brian Zhand, *A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor’s Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); and fierce arguments of Desiderius Erasmus against war. Note also the phenomenon of “soldier saints,” where Christian martyrs were killed for refusing conscription, or Christian soldiers who were killed for refusing to offer pagan sacrifices. There were, of course, exceptions to this general trend. Nevertheless,

spreading Christianity itself. As Lactantius pointed out to Emperor Constantine, “forced conversions” are an oxymoron.²⁴

From here—from the new community that absorbs the world²⁵ and renders the state obsolete—creatures on earth can enjoy the basic kind of freedom originally sought under Roman (or any other) rule.²⁶ “Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33, NIV, emphasis mine). In the words of New Testament scholar Scot McKnight, “Our responsibility is not to chaplain the state but to call the state to repentance and to surrender to the King who is Lord. Our responsibility is to be an alternative to the state.”²⁷

This freedom from violence and freedom in Christ therefore means freedom from the heavy binds of nationalism, empire, and other vexing idolatries. In contrast to both socialist-liberal and neo-conservative Christian politics, Christian libertarianism has no inherent national loyalties. There is no “the collective” first or its equivalent, and there is no “America first” or its equivalent. There is only “God’s Kingdom first” — precisely as Jesus iterated. Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536), the great

Christian soldiers in the first and second century were “an anomaly” (see Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [New York: HarperOne, 1996], 326-43).

²⁴ *Divine Institutes*, Book V.

²⁵ I am playing off the phrase “the Bible absorbs the world” from the post-liberal tradition of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei.

²⁶ Nietzsche was not all that off-base when he remarked, “Primitive Christianity is abolition of the state: forbids oaths, war service, courts of justice, self-defense and the defense of any kind of community, the distinction between fellow countrymen and foreigners, and also the differentiation of classes...Whoever says today: ‘I will not be a soldier,’ ‘I care nothing for the courts,’ ‘I shall not claim the services of the police,’ ‘I will do nothing that may disturb the peace within me’...he would be a Christian.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage books, 1968), 123-125. Nietzsche elsewhere referred to Jesus as “that holy anarchist who roused up the people at the bottom, the outcasts and ‘sinners,’ the *Chandalas* within Judaism, to opposition against the dominant order,” (*Antichrist*, § 27).

²⁷ Scot McKnight in Zhand, *Farewell to Mars*, 20. Cf. Gandhi’s concept of *ramaraj*, the kingdom of God that makes stateless societies possible. See Mahatma Gandhi, ed. Judith Brown, *The Essential Writings* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 104-5.

proto-Christian-libertarian of the Renaissance, captured the spirit of the matter: “My own wish is to be a citizen of the world, to be a fellow-citizen to all enrolled in the city of heaven.”²⁸ “For this apostle of peace,” wrote one of his biographers, “nationalism was incompatible with Christianity and humanism.”²⁹ The same attitude could be attributed to Jesus, whose followers risked death just by regularly entitling him with politically and theologically-charged terms. “The triple-description of him as savior, lord, and anointed (Phil 3:20) is ‘counter-imperial’.”³⁰ Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the significance that the earliest and most popular Christian creed (“Jesus is Lord”) was as political as theological.³¹ Consequently, Christian libertarianism consciously avoids the modern ditch of compartmentalizing Christian faith away from politics, and appropriates the burgeoning field of “empire criticism” into a more cohesive whole.³² Furthermore, given how radically Jesus transformed the concept of authority and kingship—releasing not just the oppressed but the *oppressors* from their chains—Jesus’ Kingdom was *liberally* liberating.³³

“Libertarianism” derives its very name from “liberty” precisely because that is its chief focus. The underlying premise is that freedom (not subjugation) is the good, natural, and desirable posture of human interaction. Individuals are generally³⁴ autonomous creatures that have

²⁸ And to prove his point (and baffle the nationalists), Erasmus sometimes dedicated the same volume to competing political leaders.

²⁹ Leon E. Halkin, trans. John Tonkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 281.

³⁰ Goldingay, *Biblical Theology*, 355. “Third-quest” Jesus scholars frequently point out the association of each of these titles with Caesar Augustus (who ruled 27BCE–14CE).

³¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), ch 5; Larry Hurtado, *The Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 108-117.

³² See Scot McKnight and Joseph Modica, eds., *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

³³ See Wright, *Simply Jesus*.

³⁴ “Generally” is used here to avoid the suggestion that human freedom is absolute (as affirmed in many variants of secular libertarianism). In a Christian libertarian framework,

the “liberty” or “right” to act in any way that does not compromise or violate the freedoms of others.³⁵ As David Boaz puts it in *The Libertarian Mind*:

Libertarians believe in the presumption of liberty. That is, libertarians believe people ought to be free to live as they choose unless advocates of coercion can make a compelling case. It’s the exercise of power, not the exercise of freedom, that requires justification.³⁶

Freedom in this sense is focused on human-to-human relationships as willful, conscious agents. As such, liberty is (again, relating to the principle of non-aggression) defined in primarily strict, negative, and often physical terms (i.e., absence of compulsion/coercion) without immediate reference to larger social structures, spiritual or intellectual states of affairs.³⁷

only God has “absolute freedom”; the freedom of God’s images is inherently derivative (“ectypal” instead of “archetypal”). See more on this delineation below.

³⁵ Cf. Andrew Napolitano, *It’s Dangerous to be Right When the Government is Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), xxiv: “...we are free to do as we choose, but only to the extent that our actions do not infringe upon the freedoms of others. Thus, my freedom to swing my arms ends a few inches from your nose. In addition to individuals, governments must also obey the nonaggression principle, as governments are merely the constructs of individuals...”; Ron Paul, *Liberty Defined* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2011), xi: “Liberty means to exercise human rights in any manner a person chooses so long as it does not interfere with the exercise of the rights of others.” On the meaning of “rights,” see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³⁶ Boaz, *The Libertarian Mind*, 1.

³⁷ Libertarians debate the extent of “force” and “coercion” (e.g., blackmail, psychological and social pressures, etc.). Given the injustice of (for example) stealing digital currency from someone else’s wallet, hacking, and the like, it seems simplistic and over-limited to restrict aggression to “physical force.” However, there are complications with this view as well. This tension is acute in the debate over “intellectual property.” For thoughtful reflections (and arguments) on this subject, see Stephen Kinsella, *Against Intellectual Property* (Auburn: Von Mises Institute, 2015).

Because of this, libertarianism is regularly stereotyped as promoting “selfishness” and “isolationism.” On the contrary, “individual rights” presupposes personal relationships and social bonds precisely because the boundaries of freedom are contingent on the presence of others.³⁸ Furthermore, personal liberty is a precondition to all authentic human relationships for any layer of society. *Forced marriage, forced sex, forced education, forced worship, forced play, forced sharing,* and otherwise exhibit superficiality as much as immorality.³⁹ As these perverted dynamics extend into larger social structures, the level of superficiality and immorality is only amplified. Conversely, just as the most authentic friendships, learning, worship, etc., are *freely* chosen, so it is with institutions, organizations, and society at large.

In a word, then, society-wide states of affairs do not trivialize states of affairs on the lower level of the individual. (In this way, the libertarian is “pro-society” but anti-collectivist.) Just as a healthy body requires healthy organs, blood and bones, so does a free society require free individuals.

(c) Decentralization and the Diffusion of Power

Regarding (c), Jesus and the early church promoted and incarnated decentralized power dynamics. Naturally (cf. remarks above), this large-scale reorientation of the world began with changing individuals at the bottom, not politics from the top-down. On one occasion, after eating a meal with his friends, Jesus addresses the topic (or something approximating it) in plain terms:

³⁸ See in particular, Wolterstorff, *Justice*.

³⁹ Notice how each of these cases are oxymoronic, having their own terms because of their coercive nature (e.g., “forced sex” = “rape,” “forced giving” = “theft,” etc.). Government officials and leaders tend to obfuscate these distinctions—undoubtedly to legitimize its own coercive actions. In terms of Foucauldian discourse analysis, one would say the state manufactures its own “truth” and subjugates the competing, local knowledges of dissenters.

An argument broke out among the disciples over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest. But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called ‘friends of the people.’ But that’s not the way it will be with you. Instead, the greatest among you must become like a person of lower status and the leader like a servant.” (Lk 22:25-26, CEB)

Additionally, the marginalized and minority voices in society (women, Samaritans, eunuchs, slaves, etc.) were honored with dignity in counter-cultural episodes that shocked the crowds and altered their communal memories (e.g., Jn 4:1-26; Lk 8:1-3; 10:5-37; 17:11-19; Acts 8:34-39; 1 Cor 7; Gal 3:28). Human beings are human beings; all of the faithful pray to the same Father (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4); everyone must repent of their own sins (Mk 1:14-15; Lk 13:1-4; 15:7-10; 17:3-4; Mt 11:20; 12:41; Acts 3:19; 8:20-22; 20:18-20; 17:22, 30; Rom 2:2-4; 3:23; 2 Tim 2:23-25); all must be baptized according to their individual faith (Lk 3; Mt 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-41; 8; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12; Rom 6:4; Gal 3:27)—not on the faith of their parents, “the community,” or anyone else.⁴⁰ Besides this shift towards the individual,⁴¹ this meant that the elite were not favored. This dangerous disposition was clear enough in the prophets (note Lk 13:34//Mt 23:37), but now it was supremely clear in the Torah-incarnate, the prophet of prophets, Jesus of Nazareth. The violent, hierarchical power structures that characterized the Roman government, earlier Jewish kings and nations, and pagan chieftains dissolved from a temporary (and primarily symbolic) apostolate of twelve disciples into a loosely structured organism of mutual accountability and shared responsibility (1 Cor 3:9;

⁴⁰ See Conner, *Children of the Covenant*; Barcellos, *Recovering*; Shawn Wright and Thomas Schreiner, eds., *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. 4.4, Section 75: Fragment The Foundation of the Christian Life Baptism* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁴¹ This “shift” is in contrast to the Old Covenant. In comparison to contemporary individualism, primitive Christianity obviously looks far more communal than individualist.

12; 16:16; Phil 1:1; 2:25; 4:1-4; Rom 16:3-21), with only the Messiah himself as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19-20).⁴²

Indeed, the Messiah consolidated power (Mt 28:18-20) not to selfishly wield it but to voluntarily share through his “Body.” This further fulfilled the creation motif (Gen 1) of God bestowing God’s images with power to exercise dominion with one another (Gen 1:27-29)—not *over* one another (which is a result of rejecting God’s created order for human life; Gen 3:16; cf. Gen 4:7). For it is only God who can say “all authority has been given to me,” and only God who can wisely use it for good.

The new world we see being brought into being in the Gospels is one in which the whole grand cosmic architecture of prerogative, power, and eminence has been shaken and even superseded by a new, positively ‘anarchic’ order: an order, that is, in which we see the glory of God revealed in a crucified slave, and in which (consequently) we are enjoined to see the forsaken of the earth as the very children of heaven. In this shockingly, ludicrously disordered order (so to speak), even the mockery visited on Christ—the burlesque crown and robe—acquires a kind of ironic opulence: in the light cast backward upon the scene by the empty tomb, it becomes all at once clear that it is not Christ’s ‘ambitions’ that are laughable, but those emblems of earthly authority whose travesties have been draped over his shoulders and pressed into his scalp. We can now see with perfect poignancy the vanity of empires and kingdoms, and the absurdity of men who wrap themselves in rags and adorn themselves with glittering gauds and promote themselves with preposterous titles and thereby claim license to rule over others.⁴³

⁴² To reiterate, Christianity’s marriage with the state in the 300s and its subsequent mirror-structuring according to Roman organization (e.g., Pope = Emperor at the top and subordinate groups below) was disastrous to this balanced distribution of power. In addition to Zhand, *A Farewell to Mars*, Giles, *Jesus Untangled*, Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful* (ch 6), and Kreider, *Ferment*, see Scot McKnight, *The Kingdom Conspiracy* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), “Appendix A: The Constantinian Temptation.”

⁴³ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 174. Cf. the Christian anarchist tradition (e.g., the works of Leo Tolstoy, Jacques Ellul, Vernard Eller, Dave Andrews, Mark Van Steenwyk, and

Libertarianism, likewise, promotes the diffusion of power by “returning” (restoring) it from groups to the mass of individuals. The “power of choice” becomes important here,⁴⁴ as well as innovative thinking that takes shape in a world after modernity.

In stark contrast to the crucial features of the so-called “enlightenment,” some of the most fruitful and productive creations in human history are the result of *emergent, organic, self-organized, decentralized* efforts. The internet, Wikipedia, and cloud-computing are just three small—but revolutionary—examples [cf. block-chain technology]. Orchestras without directors, cars without drivers, globalized market systems without “anyone in control”—all of this has challenged the traditional way of thinking.⁴⁵

Similar to Gandhi’s *ramaraj*, libertarians thereby facilitate the onset of stateless societies.⁴⁶

Individual freedom and property rights expressed in the realm of economics is simply “free-market economics,” which is another

others associated with the Catholic Worker movement.). See Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospels* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010).

⁴⁴ Not least because human choice determines our identities and our ability for virtue: “The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. [The one who] does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice...gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best.” John Stuart Mill in *The Libertarian Reader*, 121-122. A lesser capacity to choose actually means lesser humanity: “Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the world prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develops itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing” (ibid.).

⁴⁵ Jamin Hübner, “Obstacles to Change: Overcoming the Hurdles of the State Apparatus in Higher Education,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 16:1 (Spring 2017): 34.

⁴⁶ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings*, 104-105. Cf. Chase Rachels, *A Spontaneous Order* (Createspace, 2015); Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*; Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*; Gerard Casey, *Libertarian Anarchy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

manifestation of decentralization in libertarian thought.⁴⁷ This stands in direct contrast to centralized control, collectivism, and top-down organization—especially as recently embodied in twentieth century experiments in socialism (e.g., in central banking, energy, food production, agriculture, public education, etc.). “The more the state ‘plans’,” wrote Nobel-Prize laureate F.A. Hayek in *The Road to Serfdom*, “the more difficult planning becomes for the individual.”⁴⁸ As in Christianity, no creature can successfully maintain a true monopoly on power and knowledge,⁴⁹ nor would it be desirable anyway. The ring of power “cannot be wielded,” remarked Strider in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Bad things happen when people try.

(d) *Concern for Economic Flourishing*

This leads to the fourth and final subject area, which is economics and business. The Christian world-and-life view has always had a general interest (and historic influence) surrounding the relationship between humanity and creation—not least because of the well-known command in the primeval creation account.⁵⁰ Varying interpretations notwithstanding, this “creation mandate” of God’s images, paired with God’s own artistic

⁴⁷ Oddly, then, in an otherwise stimulating volume, Steenwyk sees “anarcho-capitalism” as at odds with the Christian faith as an economic arrangement. See Mark Steenwyk, *That Holy Anarchist* (Minneapolis: Missio Dei, 2012). Too often in ethical discussions about capitalism, “capitalism” mistakenly refers to crony-capitalism (cf. “capture theory”) or to American consumerism. In my perspective, the former (capitalism) is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition for the latter (consumerism). See more on this below.

⁴⁸ F.A. Hayek, ed. Bruce Caldwell, *The Road to Serfdom*, The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek, vol 2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 114.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the chapter entitled “Knowledge” in Thomas DiLorenzo, *The Problem With Socialism* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2016).

⁵⁰ “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen 1:28, NIV). In doing biblical and systematic theology about creation, other similar accounts must be integrated (e.g., Ps 104, Job 38-42, Is 45).

activity, indicates the *creative* nature of all human beings. Adam and Eve’s creation earlier in the narrative highlights the *communal* nature of people, and their basic, biological interdependence (cf. 1 Cor 11:11). All of this means that human beings are *procreative, pro-creative, productive*, as well as *social* creatures in need of one another and capable of *culturing*.

Such needs and creativity find basic expression in *business*—which constitutes the necessary elements of societal service, growth and material prosperity. The individual voluntary transactions of creatures—creatures who always exhibit needs *and* productive abilities—build a flourishing economy through which the creation mandate to “subdue” and “rule” (or “master” and “take charge,” CEB)⁵¹ can actualize.⁵² From boats to eating utensils to couches to smart phones, the “entrepreneurial spirit” images God’s own creative work in the cosmos.⁵³

The dynamics of this economic environment are therefore praised throughout the Christian scriptures (e.g., a strong work ethic and honesty in Torah and Proverbs; the entrepreneurial spirit of the “Wife of Proverbs 31”; cf. 2 Thess 3:10; 1 Thess 4:11), for they are part and parcel of the human flourishing that pleases God (Gen 1:31). And precisely because of creatureliness and interdependence, people are called to give and be generous with our possessions to others (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 4:7; 2 Cor 9:6-7; 1 Tim 6:18; Lk 11:41; Acts 10:2; Prov 11:25; 22:9). Thus, *serving others and enjoying each other’s creativity* are perhaps the primary purposes of “business.” Profit, on the other hand, is a necessary but *secondary* outcome

⁵¹ *Not* to be confused with “destroy.”

⁵² For a helpful introduction to the intersection between Christianity and economics, see Victor Claar and Robin Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012).

⁵³ “...in Christian thought [humanity’s] moral activity is thought of as being receptively reconstructive.” Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*. 4th Ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2008), 76. Cf. J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heavens and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014) and *idem*, *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

of this pursuit.⁵⁴ The strict pursuit of profit—especially for the sake of profit, power, or status—is fervently criticized from one corner of the Christian story to the next (e.g., 2 Sam 12:1-5; Job 36:18; Ps 49:16-17; 62:10; Prov 11:28; 22:2, 16; 23:4-5; 27:24; 28:20, 22; 30:8; Eccl 5:12; Jer 5:26-29; 9:23-24; 17:10-11; 48:7; 49:4; Hos 12:7-8; Mt 19:23-24; Lk 6:2; 12:15, 20-21; 18:24; 2 Cor 2:17; 8:2-9; Eph 4:17-19; 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 6:9-10, 17-18; Js 1:9-11; 5:1; Rev 2:8-11; 3:17; 18:1-19).⁵⁵

Libertarianism also has a noticeable preoccupation with economics and business. It is no irony that the popularity of libertarianism has increased with the demise of socialism in the twentieth century. It is precisely in trying to control a society via its economy (which ultimately requires controlling *individuals*) that the evils and catastrophes of anti-liberty are exposed.⁵⁶ Conversely, it is also in freedom of markets that the “spontaneous” and “self-organizing” economy boasts its most illustrious riches.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, leading figures of libertarianism—such as Ludwig Von Mises, Murray Rothbard, F.A. Hayek, Frederick Bastiat, Henry Hazlitt, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, David Friedman, and Robert Murphy—are accomplished economists. Other leading libertarians tend to be entrepreneurs in the business world. Still others, like the journalists

⁵⁴ It is also an indicator of successfully aligning creative products with actual human needs and desires. See Shawn Ritenour, *Foundations of Economics: A Christian Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 211-221. Profit does not indicate, however, that *ethical* desires have been fulfilled.

⁵⁵ Cf. Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999).

⁵⁶ E.g., mass starvation and forced famines, gulags and concentration camps, economy-wide boom-bust cycles, hyperinflation and the destruction of currencies, wars, etc.

⁵⁷ E.g., eradicating poverty for nearly a third of the human population by producing unprecedented amounts of food, clean water, housing, and wealth; countless innovations taken for granted such as the wash machine, internet, phone, drone, computer, etc. See the section “Spontaneous Order” in *The Libertarian Reader* for short essays on this concept of unplanned organization, as well as Jamin Hübner, “A Concise Theory of Emergence,” *Faith and Thought*, 57 (October, 2015): 2-17.

and literary critics Rose Wilder and Isabel Paterson, had keen eyes toward economic inequalities around the globe and the reasons behind them.

In addition to being uncompromisingly anti-fraud, anti-theft, and pro-private-property, libertarianism recognizes that evil virtues (e.g., greed, selfishness, dishonesty, envy, etc.) are best mitigated through the same mechanisms that produce wealth: *diffused power*. In the realm of economics and law, that means markets based on voluntary (not coercive) exchange, property rights, and contract law.⁵⁸ There is only so much harm than can come from diffused power; but great harm can come from centralized power. A *competitive* economy, as ugly and annoying as it may get, remains far more effective at discouraging greed, envy, reducing waste, eliminating fraud, preventing theft, and improving the standards of living for everyone (*especially* the poor) than the alternative of mandated monopolies, price controls, government-facilitated cartels, and crony-capitalism. (“If you think CEOs are greedy,” the saying goes, “just wait until you meet a politician.”)⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Classic works on this subject include Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2012); Robert Sirico, *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2012) and Jay Richards, *Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism Is the Solution and Not the Problem* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

⁵⁹ As noted in Doug Bandow, *The Politics of Envy: Statism as Theology* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994), xvii, capitalism may sometimes be charged with catalyzing greed, but one must remember that statism and socialism catalyzes envy, which is far worse: “...politics, in the United States, at least, has increasingly been based on envy, the desire not to produce more for oneself, but to take as much as possible from others. Of course, all of the proponents of the politics of envy proclaim themselves animated by public-spiritedness: who in Washington would admit that the higher taxes he advocates will be used to pay off the interest group of the day, whether farmer, corporation, or union? Who would suggest that he has anything but good will toward those who he is intent on mulcting? Indeed, the problem of envy has always been much more serious than that of greed. Those who are greedy may ruin their own lives, but those who are envious contaminate the larger community by letting their covetousness interfere with their relations with others. Moreover, one can satisfy greed in innocuous, even positive ways — by being brighter, working harder,

Indeed, CEOs must satisfy *many common* people to stay employed. The politician and government administrator, however, only has to satisfy a *few wealthy* people to stay employed. In free markets “the consumer is king” instead of an *actual king* (or bureaucratic committee), so the reward for better goods and services is high, and the punishment for *poorer* goods and services is also high.⁶⁰ This contrasts with goods and services produced by the state, which must be accepted no matter how unsatisfying or dehumanizing they are. Consumers cannot avoid or correct the grotesqueries of such things as the welfare system, the VA system, Native-American Reservations, public schools, or otherwise (e.g., prison systems) simply by withholding payment.⁶¹ Consequently, improvement in the affairs of the state is notoriously sluggish.

[Regarding] the market, in society in general, we expect and accommodate rapidly to change, to the unending marvels and improvements of our civilization. New products, new life styles, new ideas are often embraced eagerly. But in the area of government we follow blindly the path of centuries, content to believe that whatever has been must be right.⁶²

A society with free enterprise, however, can flourish (and has flourished) more than any other arrangement. It remains a fact that free trade and free enterprise is the leading cause for eradicating poverty for

seeing new opportunities, and meeting the demands of others, for instance. In contrast, envy today is rarely satisfied without use of the state.”

⁶⁰ For example, in 2016 a doctor was forcibly removed from an overbooked United Airlines flight, making headlines across the world. The punishment for this poor service was immediate: United Airlines lost over \$250,000,000 in crashed stock within 48 hours of the incident. (Something like this is obviously not possible with the state, which can—and does—forcibly remove peaceful persons from public streets, and even from their own homes, without any penalty whatsoever.)

⁶¹ “The Government monopoly, being maintained by force, does not depend upon its customers. Their desires have no direct effect on it.” Wilder, *The Discovery of Freedom*, 45.

⁶² Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 241.

nearly two billion persons in the past half-century—an unparalleled accomplishment in the history world-wide humanitarianism.⁶³ Walmart and Amazon (entrepreneurs and the market) are the true friend of the poor—not the Labor and Welfare Bureau (the state).

The Christian-libertarian connection, then, is complementary:

We build, create, and restore in a way that fulfills our purpose as human beings created in the image of God. It is here that libertarians have so much to add to the conversation. Libertarianism teaches that creating, building, and producing are all ways we participate in the broader market process, which libertarians typically believe should be left alone to the fullest extent possible. While this can't save souls or put an ultimate salve on the problem of pain, peaceful engagement in market processes and societal institutions is a fruitful way to live life on earth...Libertarianism explains and empowers some of the most beneficial ways we can practically serve our fellow men and women.⁶⁴

Were it not for its Marxist framework, liberation theology would not be so incompatible with libertarianism in this respect: “Private enterprise capitalism, is, in fact, the answer for anyone who really does have a preferential option for the poor.”⁶⁵ Or, in the words of Prime Minister and theologian Abraham Kuyper:

⁶³ In addition to Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, see Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), and the thoughtful reflections in Rose Wilder, *The Discovery of Freedom* and Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1994 [1776]).

⁶⁴ Leah Hughey, “Bards with Breadcrumbs,” in *Called to Freedom*, 108. This writeup is particularly persuasive with unusually eloquent prose (making for most pleasurable essay-reading).

⁶⁵ Edmund Opitz, “Biblical Roots of American Liberty,” *FEE* (July, 1991). Accessed at <https://fee.org/articles/biblical-roots-of-american-liberty/>

Never forget that all state relief for the poor is a blot on the honor of your savior. The fact that the government needs a safety net to catch those who would slip between the cracks of our economic system is evidence that I have failed to do God's work. The government cannot take the place of Christian charity. A loving embrace isn't given with food stamps. The care of a community isn't provided with government housing. The face of our Creator can't be seen on a welfare voucher. What the poor need is not another government program; what they need is for Christians like me to honor our savior.⁶⁶

Finally, this creative world of wealth also makes *large-scale generosity* an exciting new possibility.⁶⁷ This is particularly exciting for the Christian who is called to be (if not already habitually) generous.⁶⁸

Such material prosperity may, nevertheless, lead to increased temptations. An environment of wealth may even lead to spiritual impoverishment—as it seems to have in the “developed world.”⁶⁹ Many (but not all) libertarians recognize this and, in the spirit of the Messiah who fed the hungry and healed the blind before preaching sermons, attempt to balance their efforts for the whole spectrum of human needs.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Abraham Kuyper, trans. James Skillen, *The Problem of Poverty* (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2011), 78.

⁶⁷ This is evidenced not only in countless new charity organizations, but in microloans, crowd-sharing platforms, tuition-free advertising-based education, and a string of new financial instruments to “put wealth to work” for the church and the community.

⁶⁸ Cf. Isabel Paterson, *The God of the Machine* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993, orig. 1943), 239: “The great religions, which are also great intellectual systems, have always recognized the conditions of the natural order. They enjoy charity, benevolence, as a moral obligation, to be met out of the producer's surplus...without production there could be nothing to give.” See also, Edmund Opitz, *Religion and Capitalism, Friends Not Enemies* (FEE, 1992, previously published in 1970 by Arlington House).

⁶⁹ An internet search for “banker suicides” or “wall street suicide” will make this evident.

⁷⁰ Edmund Opitz, perhaps the greatest Christian libertarian of the twentieth century, dedicated a whole chapter towards the strengths *and* weaknesses of the marketplace. See Edmund Opitz, *Religion and Capitalism: Allies, Not Enemies* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1970), ch 4.

For the libertarian who is Christian, the haunting words of Jesus allow no confusion: “For what will it profit [κερδαίνω, primarily an economic term] them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (Mk 8:36, NRSV).⁷¹

All things considered, it is well-founded to say that “libertarianism is the most consistent expression of Christian political thought.”⁷² To conservative evangelicals committed to the Republican party and to the progressive left that reads socialism into the New Testament, this may be a baffling conclusion, indeed. But it is a valid conclusion, formidably argued, and must be dealt with on its own terms.

We are now in a position to discuss where all of these issues might go—need or *ought* to go—if Christian libertarianism is to remain a viable option. The purpose of the following sections are to expose vistas for exploration by invoking open-ended questions and points of contemporary dialogue.

III. FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...the one who sins is a slave to sin.”

—Jesus (John 8:31, 34, NIV).

In what sense is freedom (and slavery) meant here and elsewhere in Jesus’ teaching? Moral? Existential? Salvific? Socio-political? Economic? It

⁷¹ It must also be noted that libertarians carefully distinguish capitalism (a general arrangement) from *American* capitalism (a particular expression of capitalism) and from *consumerism* (another particular expression, not geographically located). These three are not all the same and must be distinguished. Free markets, because they are *free*, do not all look the same because not all peoples and societies use their freedoms in the same way. Contemporary critiques of “capitalism” very rarely take this into account and assume that the worst forms of American enterprise are simply “the result of capitalism.” This would be like saying “Thousands die each day of car wrecks. Look at the evils of cars! How can we keep saying automobiles are a good idea?”

⁷² This motto was coined by Dr. Norman Horn, founder of The Libertarian Christian Institute.

doesn't immediately seem to be freedom from violence—although perhaps this was a potentially latent or ongoing implication. Whatever the case, these words at least give reason for pause before saying without qualification, “all people are free creatures.”

Jesus and his Kingdom did not exactly materialize as anticipated. The fanfare on the way to Jerusalem involved a donkey and palm branches, not warhorses and swords. “Enemies” of every kind were made into friends. The Romans ended up killing Jesus (not the other way around). The Messiah was resurrected, which was never supposed to happen (because the Messiah was never supposed to die).⁷³ Followers of the Messiah grew in number because of their character and convictions—not because of their political authority or some federal programs. Similarly, then, the freedom Jesus offered wasn't merely freedom from civil and political oppression—if it was even that, at all.

The legal scholar and Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas observes, “Christian nonviolence does not gain its intelligibility from a high humanism presupposing that freedom is the absence of ‘coercion.’ Rather, Christian nonviolence gains its intelligibility from the cross, where we see our God suffering so that we might be freed from the violence that grips our lives.”⁷⁴ What, then, is the intersection between freedom from coercion and violence and the freedom(s) offered in the New Testament story? There is no question that Jesus embodied the principle of non-aggression,⁷⁵ but how does this inform the larger theology of Christ and

⁷³ See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁷⁴ Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000), 114. Cf. Daniel Finn, *Christian Economic Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 99: “Thus the Christian view of freedom insists that individuals make their own decision but recognize that not every decision being made is a free one. We are free when we actively choose to do what fulfills ourselves, in accord with God's plan.”

⁷⁵ Despite speculative claims to the contrary, such as in Lloyd Steffen, “Religion and Violence in Christian Traditions,” ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, *Violence in the World's Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 114-

the NT with regard to physical non-violence—and is such basic nonviolence simply an uncritical adoption of “high humanism” and Enlightenment thought?

David Bentley Hart picks up on these concerns in his brilliant work *Atheist Delusions*. After a blistering critique of the modernist narrative of progress, Hart presses the point about how the myth of “freedom” and “autonomy” actually motivated the most evil acts of aggression in recent times:

The ambition to refashion humanity in its very essence—social, political, economic, moral, psychological—was inconceivable when human beings were regarded as creatures of God. But with the disappearance of the transcendent, and of its lure, and of its authority, it becomes possible to will a human future conformed to whatever ideals we choose to embrace. This is why it is correct to say that the sheer ruthlessness of so much of post-Christian social idealism in some sense arises from the very same concept of freedom that lies at the heart of our most precious modern values. The savagery of triumphant Jacobinism, the clinical heartlessness of classical socialist eugenics, the Nazi movement, Stalinism—all the grand utopian projects of the modern age that have directly or indirectly spilled such oceans of human blood—are no less results of the enlightenment myth of liberation than are the liberal democratic state or the vulgarity of late capitalist consumerism or the pettiness of bourgeois individualism. The most pitilessly and self-righteously violent regimes of modern history—in the West or in those other quarters of the world contaminated by our worst ideas—have been those that have most explicitly cast off the Christian vision of reality and sought to replace it with a more ‘human’ set of values. No cause in history—no religion or imperial ambition or military adventure—has destroyed more lives with more confident enthusiasm than the case of the ‘brotherhood of man,’ the postreligious utopia, or the progress of the race.

118, also published in *idem.*, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

To fail to acknowledge this would be to mock the memory of all those millions that have perished before the advance of secular reason in its most extreme manifestations. And all the astonishing violence of the modern age—from the earliest European wars of the emergent nation-state onward—is no less proper an expression (and measure) of the modern story of human freedom than are the various political and social movements that have produced the modern west's special combination of general liberty, material abundance, cultural mediocrity, and spiritual poverty. To fail to acknowledge this would be to close our eyes to the possibilities for evil that have been opened up in our history by the values we most dearly prize and by the same 'truths' we most fervently adore.⁷⁶

Jürgen Moltmann, another leading theologian of our age, recently brought attention to the same disturbing problem by drawing the connection between atheism and anarchism:

[In Bakunin,] if we want to liberate human beings, we must negate God. Atheism is the presupposition for true human liberty. Human liberty stems from rebellion. For Bakunin as for Feuerbach, God and the human being are not one and the same. Ironically enough, Bakunin uses the biblical story of the fall as justification for his doctrine of freedom: 'But then came Satan, the eternal rebel, the first free thinker and universal liberator...He frees him [i.e., the human being] and impresses on his brow the seal of freedom and humanity by driving him to be disobedient and to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.' And 'God said that Satan was right' and found that the human being 'had become like God.' Bakunin concludes from this myth about the fall that human beings have liberated themselves—and will liberate themselves—'through rebellion and thought.'

That was undoubtedly meant politically. Bakunin was living in the holy Russia of the autocratic tsars and the Orthodox state church. 'As the slaves of God, men and women must also be slaves of the church and of

⁷⁶ Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 108.

the state, inasmuch as the state is blessed by the church.’ Consequently, his writing *God and the State* culminates in the anarchistic cry, ‘*Ni Dieu ni maitre*’—neither God nor state! He knew only the political state god and rose against it for freedom’s state—politically speaking, rightly so.⁷⁷

This leads one to ask: to what extent has contemporary libertarianism (and its emphasis on “liberty”) been shaped by the Enlightenment philosophy of autonomy, if at all? More crassly, is “Christian libertarianism” a hopeless rip-off of an atheistic philosophy, a sort of “Christianized” spin on modernist autonomy? How might answering this inform our discourse about “liberty”?

This is important to ask not merely for historical and philosophical reasons, but because “autonomy” is a particularly dirty word for theologians. Rothbard said “everyone has the *absolute right* to be ‘free’ from aggression.”⁷⁸ However, Christian theology suggests that only the Creator is “absolute” and “absolutely free.” Are we then left with a dubious “relatively absolute freedom” in describing the liberties of creatures?

“The revelation of a self-sufficient God,” wrote the Calvinist professor Cornelius Van Til, “can have no meaning for a mind that thinks of itself as ultimately autonomous.” In fact,

The entire idea of inscripturated supernatural revelation is not merely foreign to but would be destructive of the idea of autonomy on which the modern man builds his thought. If modern man is right in his own assumption with respect to his own autonomy, then he cannot even for a

⁷⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 104. Note also the title of the anarchist anthology, Daniel Guerin and Paul Sharkey, *No Gods No Masters* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 27. Emphasis mine.

moment logically consider evidence for the fact of the supernatural in any form as appearing to man.⁷⁹

In other words, the one who sins is a slave to sin—and *this appears to be everyone on earth not “reborn.”* We’re back to Jesus once again.⁸⁰

So it seems that there might be some room for clarification when it comes to the nature of human freedom and action with respect to other people—*within* the context of God’s creation. At the very least, we ought to distance ourselves from simplistic reductionisms regarding freedom. David Friedman is right, after all: “Liberty is not the only value, nor is it infinitely important compared to other values.”⁸¹

IV. DISTINCTIVES OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIANISM

“What if one of you said, “Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!”? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs?”

—James (2:16, CEB)

To put it differently, there would seem to be a *Christian version* of the Non-Aggression Principle, one that goes beyond the protection of natural negative rights and into the protection of *positive* rights (e.g., to health,

⁷⁹ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 163. Greg Bahnsen, Van Til’s successor, later clarified in terms of thought and epistemology: “The non-Christian thinks that his thinking process is normal. He thinks that his mind is the final court of appeal in all matters of knowledge. He takes himself to be the reference point for all interpretation of the facts. That is, he has epistemologically become a law unto himself: autonomous.” Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches: Covenant Media Press, 1996), 20.

⁸⁰ This isn’t even to mention the philosophical debates surrounding “libertarian free-will” (the power of contrary choice), which has long plagued the church since Augustine, to Aquinas, to Luther and Erasmus, and post-reformation scholasticism.

⁸¹ Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*, 173. Hence Daniel, *Called to Freedom*, 6: “For the libertarian Christian, liberty is an opportunity to freely choose true Christian virtue. Worshipping and knowing God is still the chief aim of life, not radical individualism.”

education, housing, water, food, etc.). This was largely Hauerwas’s point above, and it was definitely what Jesus and the early church embodied.

In other words, Christian libertarianism, as expressed in the local church and elsewhere, is non-aggression *plus*. It is absence from violence *and* the individual and communal pursuit of the good, true, and beautiful.⁸² It’s as if the (libertarian) Silver Rule of Confucius (“Don’t do to others what you’d not have them do to you”)⁸³ combines with the (Christian) Golden Rule of Jesus (“Do to others what you’d have them do to you”).⁸⁴ Reformulated into the typical NAP creed, it might look something like the following:

It is legitimate—*blessed*, in fact—to initiate goodness, grace and all the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) towards another person and/or their property.⁸⁵

⁸² “True freedom is the gift of the Spirit, the result of grace; but precisely because it is freedom *for* as well as freedom *from*, it isn’t simply a matter of being forced now to be good, against our wills and without our cooperation (what damage to genuine pastoral theology has been done by making a bogey-word out of the Pauline term *synergism*, ‘working together with God’), but a matter of being released from slavery precisely into responsibility, into being able at last to choose, to exercise moral muscle, knowing both that one is doing it oneself and that the Spirit is at work within, that God himself is doing that which I am too doing.” N. T. Wright, *Justification* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016), 189.

⁸³ 己所不欲，勿施於人。 *Analects* XV.24.

⁸⁴ Mt 7:12.

⁸⁵ Although different, this may alleviate Friedman’s concern in *The Machinery of Freedom*, 171, “Perhaps we should replace a statement about what one should do (‘never initiate coercion’) with a statement about what objective one should seek (‘do whatever minimizes total amount of coercion’).”

Rothbard creatively imagined what a society might look like if it adhered to the NAP and remained peaceful⁸⁶; what might a society look like if it was Christlike and adhered to *this* creed?⁸⁷

Is it then appropriate to speak of a Christian “obligation” to look after the “positive liberties” of others—and perhaps even “enforce” this within the Christian community? Internal discipline did, after all, make stark appearances in the early church of Acts, Corinth, and Galatia.⁸⁸ And Jesus did expect distinctive habits, behaviors, and attitudes that would set the new covenant community apart (e.g., Jn 21:15; Mt 28:19-20). These, too, are questions that might need attention.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that *Christian* libertarianism, based on the reign of King Jesus and gospel of peace, might lay to rest Friedman’s claim that “libertarians have not yet produced any proof that our moral position is correct.”⁸⁹ If God’s own self-revelation—coupled with two thousand years of contemplation by some of the brightest minds ever known—does not suffice, then nothing probably will. The highest form of moral “proof” is not so much a compelling syllogism, a discovery of fresh evidence, or numerical consensus as much as it is the chief Metaphor of God breaking into creation and living an entire life of moral uprightness, fulfilling a well-documented and deeply rich 2,000 year-old drama (complete with prophetic expectation), teaching ethics (among other things) in our language, performing extraordinary wonders to help

⁸⁶ See the latter half of *For a New Liberty*, and also *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

⁸⁷ One doesn’t have to wonder, of course, for this was one the reasons the Gospels were written. To look at the world inaugurated in the narratives of Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke-Acts is to witness the first-stages of the new creation. Cf. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperOne, 2010); *idem.*, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

⁸⁸ Some, like Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2003), would go as far as to say that the NT church was modeled after the Greek πόλις (city). While there may be something to this (especially as Paul also uses “citizenship” in a transformative way in Phil 3:20, etc.), it has the negative potential of importing the coercive elements of statism and nationalism into the ethos of the church.

⁸⁹ Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*, 163.

others, and having all of this written down in the most reliable documents of the ancient world *and* the most influential collection of writings in all of human history. *This should at least be an option to consider*—though this would, of course, require an openness to non-atheistic metaphysics and non-modern epistemologies.⁹⁰

This introduces us to some of the ways in which secular libertarianism may differ from *Christian* libertarianism. Some of these ways were alluded to earlier (e.g., human beings having relative, not absolute freedom, business is a means of service and not merely the pursuit of profit, etc.). At the very least, “Libertarians do not have to be libertines.”⁹¹ Popular topics from media headlines furnish other case studies. Take guns and “gun rights” for example. “Christian conservatives” have always tended to be “pro-gun,” but what follower of Jesus could possibly justify the *promotion of weapons*—especially when not under immediate threat? (The Sermon was “blessed are the peacemakers,” not “blessed are the drone-bombers.”)

On the other hand, what can justify the forceful removal of guns from an entire population—only to dangerously monopolize all this firepower into the hands of a single, authoritative group? Again, if weapons function as power, they should be disseminated through the masses and not hoarded by an elite few. Whatever the case, there are a variety of reasons for caution when either limiting or promoting weapons.

It is one thing to say that we are permitted to own and use guns. It is quite another to place one’s trust and safety solely on what’s in a holster close by. There are psychological ramifications to possessing the power to kill, and we must search our own hearts to ensure we have not misplaced our security. It is disheartening when Christians permit their gun-owning

⁹⁰ And this option (at least as I’ve stated it) is anything but turning off one’s brain and capitulating to a statist-like system of religious authority and obedience. Christians ought not adopt an uncritical, simplistic understanding of “divine revelation” (e.g., “God said it, that settles it”)—which is a legitimate concern of contemporary skeptics (e.g., Sam Harris).

⁹¹ Taylor Barkley, “Cool It: You Don’t Have to Be a Libertine,” in *Called to Freedom*, 85.

rights to become an opportunity to relish the power that comes with protection. We cannot mistake insecurity for prudence.⁹²

It seems once again that the promotion of liberty and property looks different within a Christian orientation than from outside of it.⁹³

V. SEXUAL FREEDOM AND FEMINISM

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

—Apostle Paul (*Gal 3:28, NRSV*)

“What business is it of the State?”

—C. S. Lewis (on illegalizing homosexual acts)

And then there is the hot-topic of *sexual* freedom. Libertarians (especially those who have lived through the 1960s and 70s) have addressed the subject of sexual freedom against the coercive/legislative approach of right-wing conservatives. (As the saying goes: *“Libertarianism: keeping liberals out of your fridge and conservatives out of your bedroom.”*)

This is a thorny issue for Christian libertarians on two fronts. The first concerns homosexuality and homoeroticism.⁹⁴ How should homosexuality (and those identifying with the LGBT[...] group[s]) be properly perceived within a Christian theological and ethical framework, and how does an ethic of non-violence inform the local Christian response to it? If libertarianism is all about freedom, to what extent does this apply to sexual freedom—both in and outside the “law of Christ”? Christian

⁹² Douglas Stuart, “Christians and Guns: A Libertarian Christian Perspective.” Libertarian Christian Institute (January 16, 2016).

⁹³ For preliminary investigations of this topic, see Barkley, “Cool It,” in *Called to Freedom*, 87-96.

⁹⁴ For reasons that cannot all be explained here, I think this delineation is important especially as “homosexual” and “homosexuality” are notoriously imprecise.

libertarians generally agree that the state, if it is to exist at all, should not interfere with the choices of others unless those choices are coercive in nature. There is nothing, in principle, that should deem any sexual act “illegal” except those which are coercive (e.g., rape).⁹⁵ But, because Christian ethics goes beyond non-aggression into virtue ethics, the Spirit of Christ (i.e., Golden Rule), and the moral vision of the New Testament,⁹⁶ a whole host of sexual acts (e.g., bestiality, adultery, fornication, pederasty/pedophilia, necrophilia, etc.) fall outside the boundaries for those in the community of Christ. In fact, one of the reasons for the church’s initial growth in the second and third centuries was due to its noticeably radical sexual ethic.⁹⁷ How should such boundaries be understood and enacted, and what attitudes might be adopted along the way?⁹⁸

The second thorny issue regarding sexuality and libertarianism is feminism and/or “egalitarianism.” The subject is equally as divisive as the homosexuality, gay-marriage, and LGBT debates. It seems that on any given day, one can view videos, listen to podcasts, or read essays of

⁹⁵ Furthermore, there is generally no reason to forbid the freedom to contract and freedom of association between consenting partners of a particular sex or gender orientation, whether for business, or sharing of assets, or whatever (cf. Paul, *Liberty Defined*). The same for aspects of religion, income, ethnicity, etc. Whether the state (or a contract-enforcing agency) decides to call one particular type of contract “marriage” or not is up to that agency or government, and changes little about the nature of the contract itself. All of this, unfortunately, is clouded in the contemporary debates about gay marriage because (a) the laws regarding marriage are not treated like other contracts; (b) the distinction between what is legal and what is moral is regularly blurred.

⁹⁶ See Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996).

⁹⁷ See Kreider, *Patient Ferment*.

⁹⁸ The (conscious or unconscious) cross-fertilization between sexual liberty and Christian libertarianism has recently reaped some valuable fruit in the work of Preston Sprinkle. See Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); *idem.*, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013). Sprinkle has also been interviewed on *The Christian Libertarian Podcast* on the topic of homosexuality (July, 2017), which again, is not a surprise given this conceptual overlap regarding freedom in non-violent relationships.

libertarians criticizing or *supporting* various types of “feminism.” The same goes for Christians, some of which find contemporary feminism bluntly anti-Christian, while others see it as a natural and consistent extension of New Testament ethics.

Confusion largely originates through contemporary ignorance of both (a) the New Testament world and literature and (b) the meaning and historical origins of feminism. Regarding (a), there is little question that Jesus and the early church contained an implicit and explicit critique of patriarchalism.⁹⁹ There generally is hardly another credible way of reading stories and texts like John 4:1-41, Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 7,¹⁰⁰ Luke 10:38-42, or even Hebrew literature like the Song of Songs,¹⁰¹ in their ancient historical and cultural context. This is not to naïvely say that all of biblical literature was ahead of its time, uniformly pointing towards some utopian, egalitarian society or Enlightenment ideal. But it is to say that the critiques are there, as are seeds for larger movements that would unfold later over the next two thousand years.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See Leonard Swidler, *Jesus Was a Feminist* (Landham: Sheed and War, 2007); Cindy Westfall, *Paul and Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009); Ben Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *idem*, *Women and the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); *idem*, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and the many writings of Craig Keener on the subject. By “patriarchalism,” I generally mean an ideology and social structure characterized by male hegemony, especially where women are viewed as naturally and permanently subordinate. (This is perhaps most explicitly embodied in male-only or male-advantaged property rights, but also in various prohibitions of personal liberties based on sex.)

¹⁰⁰ See Ronald Pierce, “First Corinthians 7: Paul’s Neglected Treatise on Gender,” *Priscilla Papers* 23:3 (Summer 2009): 8-13.

¹⁰¹ See Tremper Longman III, *The Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 66; Arthur Lewis, “Equality of Sexes in Marriage: Exposition of the Song of Songs,” *Priscilla Papers* 11:2 (Spring 1997).

¹⁰² Note, for example, the theological concerns in the Seneca Falls Declaration—especially the resolutions.

Scholars also point to a number of redemptive-historical, theological, and ethical aspects of the Israel-Christ story that suggest a hopeful restoration of the sexes—which was perhaps a curse all along (Gen 3:16). The question for some is *the extent* of this alternative arrangement,¹⁰³ especially given the confusing patriarchal framework of the ancient world and biblical literature.¹⁰⁴ Some, of course, dismiss Christianity as hopelessly lost in a male-centered world, while others do not acknowledge the harm of sexism, androcentricism, chauvinism, misogyny, and patriarchalism at all (i.e., the world was simply made to be ruled by men). Still others see the Bible as a book that can be “salvaged,” though perhaps not entirely.¹⁰⁵

Regarding (b), the raw variety of feminism is rarely acknowledged in public discourse, which alone inhibits meaningful dialogue. Historians

¹⁰³ “Good” or “biblical” patriarchalism is known in American evangelicalism as “complementarianism.” See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), and the many books on this subject by Douglas Wilson. This ideology was largely forged by George Knight III in the 1970s. Its distinctive feature is that instead of viewing women as inferior (as the church generally did throughout history), women’s essential equality with men is affirmed but women are still to *act* as subordinates (*as if inferior*), and are thus forbidden/discouraged from occupying positions of power and authority.

¹⁰⁴ See Richard Hess, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Matthew Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling With the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Ann Loades, ed., *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984).

¹⁰⁵ This topic, along with the abortion issue, is largely what divides “Christian feminists” from “evangelical feminists” or “egalitarians” (which, in this case, has no relationship to the Marxist conception of “egalitarianism”). Contrast, for example, the works of CBE’s founders (Christians for Biblical Equality) and contributors of Ronald Pierce and Cindy Westfall, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 3rd edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, forthcoming) with the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible, Rosemary Reuther, and the contributors of Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds., *New Feminist Christianity* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths, 2010).

have traditionally framed feminism around first, second, and third “waves.”¹⁰⁶ This can greatly help clarify the discussion, but still leaves plenty of room for stereotyping and confusion. More logical intellectual scaffolding can be found in the lucid and well-researched appraisal of Tong and Botts in *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. There, readers discover a solid ten different ideological categories—many of which are mutually exclusive and vary in the extreme.¹⁰⁷ But, as so often is the case, the most distracting feature of the contemporary debates is not

¹⁰⁶ Scholars disagree on the arrangement of these historical epochs (e.g., some speak of a “fourth wave,” while others might see the first wave as early as the late Medieval period). In my own understanding, the first wave (1700s and 1800s) revolved around property rights (ownership of basic goods), labor rights (ability to work various jobs), educational rights (not being forbidden from attending schools), inheritance rights (property rights of daughters whose fathers’ left an inheritance), suffrage (voting), and often had explicit roots in Christian ethics and religious values (see the Married Women’s Property Act, Seneca Falls Declaration, and the writings of Sojourner Truth, Grimke Sisters, Elizabeth Stanton, and others like Katherine Booth and Katherine Bushnell). It also boasted, in certain spheres, a sophisticated intellectual critique (e.g., John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjugation of Women*, Mary Wollstone Craft’s *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Virginia Wolff’s *Three Guineas*, Simone Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*). The second wave (1950s-1980s) was spurred by the post-war period in which women who were working in factories and businesses were now expected to go back to “work at home.” It became associated with the sexual revolution, pro-abortion movement (“reproductive rights”), the more formal demands for (to give one example) “equal pay,” and global critique of female circumcision (see, among others, Friedan’s *Feminist Mystique*). The third wave (1990s to present) is more difficult to summarize because of its overlap with transnational, queer, existentialist, postmodern, post-structuralist, ecofeminist, and women of color (and other intersectional) feminisms. But Ralph Smith points to the strong (and perhaps predominant) ethos in the following list of ideas: “(1) all categories are falsifications, especially if they are binary and descriptive of sexuality; (2) all assertions about reality are socially constructed; (3) all human behavior can be read as textual significations; (4) texts form discourses that are exercises in power/knowledge and situated systems of regulation; (5) and deconstruction of all categories of normality and deviance can best be accomplished by queer readings of performative texts ranging from literature...to other cultural expressions.” Cited in Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts, *Feminist Thought*, 5th ed. (New York: Westview Press, 2018), 271.

¹⁰⁷ Tong and Botts, *Feminist Thought*.

even the lack of qualifications or research, but extremists with microphones in a media apparatus gone wild.

The rationale behind each competing perspective(s) is not difficult to understand. “Feminism,” especially (using Tong and Botts’ categorization) popular and recent varieties (i.e., post-structuralist-Neo-Marxist, queer theory, select strands of “radical cultural feminism,” etc.), can easily be viewed as malevolent. Its orientation is largely socialist (anti-private-property and critical of economic freedom), pro-abortion (and anti-family¹⁰⁸), and anti-free speech. It also seems to lack discernment because of blurring the line between aggression (use of force) and “microaggression” (rude, but *absent* of force).¹⁰⁹ Using the term “violent” to describe both rape and cat-calls seems to cheapen the insidiousness of authentic aggression. To make matters worse, many adherents of this more recent variety of feminism appear eager to use coercion to achieve “equality” (e.g., “equal pay” laws, “non-discrimination” laws, maternity leave laws, etc.), and therefore function as conduit for statism.¹¹⁰ As many see it, then, to the extent that these efforts are radically egalitarian,

¹⁰⁸ I.e., opposed to motherhood, marriage, heterosexuality, and procreation.

¹⁰⁹ “Microaggression: a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority); also, behavior or speech that is characterized by such comments or actions.” *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*. An example of such behavior would be a white person waiting to ride the next elevator when an African-American person is on it, or saying to a foreigner, “You have good English” (which draws attention to the “otherness” of the person—in this case, not being American).

¹¹⁰ Note, of course, that I am not questioning the (im)moral status of the issues that each of these policies is trying to address, but rather the use of force to right such wrongs. (For example, I am in favor of business owners granting maternity leave for both fathers and mothers, as some companies do, but that is a right—not an obligation—of the business owner to grant.)

On a similar topic, there also appears to be an effort in some (but not all) variants of contemporary feminism to eradicate all sexual and gender differentiation (socially, linguistically, ideologically) through the public school and public university education system. (I’m not speaking about the transgender bathroom controversy, but other issues.)

feminism is “a revolt against nature”¹¹¹ and (ironically) an assault against human diversity and tolerance for public opinion.¹¹²

On the other hand, “feminism” (of the more “classic liberal” and some “radical cultural” varieties) can easily be viewed as a subset of *libertarianism*, emphasizing non-aggression and property rights for a particular demographic (in this case, women). This was the case throughout much of history. It was once “illegal” in numerous American cities and counties for women to wear “trousers” in public, “play baseball,”¹¹³ etc.¹¹⁴ In fact, in the U.S., women weren’t allowed credit cards until 1974, weren’t allowed to attend Yale and Princeton until 1969, and weren’t allowed to serve on a jury until 1973. Thus, it has been said, “Feminism is the radical notion that women are human.”¹¹⁵

Contrary to dissenters, many would argue that this (unfortunate) state of affairs remains true today. Millions of women in middle-eastern and south-eastern countries need “permission” just to appear in public

¹¹¹ See Murray Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature* (Auburn: Von Mises Institute, 2010).

¹¹² One might recall the (prophetic?) insight of Kuyper from 1898: “Modernism, which denies and abolishes every difference, cannot rest until it has made woman man and man woman, and, putting every distinction on a common level, kills life by placing it under the ban of uniformity.” Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 11. Cf. radical cultural feminism: “Just as the ultimate goal of the communist revolution is, in a classless society, to obliterate class distinction, the ultimate goal of the feminist revolution is, in an androgynous society, to obliterate sexual distinction.” Tong and Botts, *Feminist Thought*, 53.

¹¹³ See the excellent doctoral dissertation on women’s baseball in the 1800s by Deborah Shattuck, *Bloomer Girls* (Des Moines: University of Iowa Press, 2017).

¹¹⁴ “As late as 1840 there were only seven vocations outside the home into which the women of New England had entered. At this time women had no property rights...A woman was not supposed to be capable of spending her own, or of using other people’s money.” Miriam Schneir, ed. *Feminism: Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 55. This volume by Schneir serves as an excellent primary-source introduction to feminism.

¹¹⁵ The citation of this quote is disputed and I was unable to verify its source; it appears in a number of publications and online sources. Note, however, the book by the similar title, Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

without a “male representative.”¹¹⁶ More seriously, there are over *one-hundred million* missing adolescent and teenage girls around the globe.¹¹⁷ Many or most are trapped in involuntary servitude. Over 1.5 million girls are currently trafficked in the United States alone. Together, this comprises one of the largest cases of systematic aggression in modern history. On the other side of the spectrum are the less serious and traceable (but no less real) prejudices and biases against women.¹¹⁸ Sexual harassment at the workplace, presumptions about women’s abilities and “roles,” objectification of women in pornography, movies, and video games, and other similar phenomena pervade contemporary culture.¹¹⁹ To speak as if sexism and the subjugation of women simply disappeared when it became legal for women to vote in the 1920s is naïve at best.¹²⁰

Much of this leaves some asking: can one legitimately say that the feminist “progressive left” of today is guilty of committing precisely the kind of power plays that it so passionately condemns—and precisely on the same grounds that are condemned (e.g., on the basis of sex, gender, ethnicity, class, etc.)? If so (as neo-conservatives would have it), are these acts against men just as serious as discrimination and oppression against women? And can one say that the “oppressive” nature of value systems (which always exclude someone) has simply reincarnated into identity politics instead of explicit metanarratives about progress, “brotherhood of

¹¹⁶ One must ask why women in Saudi Arabia have recently been allowed to wear bikinis on public beaches but are still forbidden from driving cars. (I.e., are these laws reflective of what the female population generally wants, or what the male population generally wants? And are they meant to benefit women more, or men more?). Interestingly, it was recently announced that the Saudi Arabian government may relax this law. See Ben Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees to Let Women Drive,” *New York Times* (September 26, 2017).

¹¹⁷ Amartya Sen, “The Many Faces of Gender Inequality,” *Frontline* 18:22 (2001).

¹¹⁸ For a frank look at these sexist dynamics within higher education, see Neal DeRoo, “Does Gender Matter in the Academic World?” *In All Things* (September 16, 2015).

¹¹⁹ One popular double-blind study about such bias is Corinne A. Moss-Racusin et. al., “Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students,” *PNAS* 109:41 (2012): 16474–79.

¹²⁰ An example of this attitude can be found in the innumerable, vitriolic commentaries by Milo Yiannopoulos and similarly uninformed anti-feminist personalities.

man,” or other modernist mantras?¹²¹ Or is this simply what the privileged majority *would* say in a situation where a long-time minority is finally awakening to its full humanity?

Might it also be said that subtle, systematic prejudices against various minorities exist, *and* are both powerful and regularly unnoticed, *and* require our focused attention if there is to be some kind of “social justice”?¹²² How exactly does the Christian libertarian “balance the scales” in a world of gender-based (and race-based) violence?

Ron Paul once wrote:

Racism is simply an ugly form of collectivism, the mindset that views humans strictly as members of groups rather than as individuals. By encouraging Americans to adopt a group mentality, the advocates of so-called ‘diversity’ actually perpetuate racism.¹²³

Perhaps the same can be said about sexism and similar cases.

If so, it is no wonder that many today find libertarianism a hurricane of fresh air. At least in theory, I can be me, you can be you, with no prejudice assumed or required; all parties are innocent until proven guilty, not guilty until proven innocent. While this posture may not eliminate (or even address) hidden prejudices (or immediately change anyone’s attitudes), perhaps it would at least give room for people to listen, think, and act accordingly. Such space for dialogue seems critically important in

¹²¹ Note the 1993 Symposium on Feminism and Libertarianism. Sessions of this event were published in *Reasons Papers* 18 (Fall 1993).

¹²² It is unfortunate that phrases like these have been corrupted by mainstream politics, because if the terms are more carefully defined, it would seem that Christian libertarians are the ultimate “social justice warriors,” just as Jesus and the early church were for their time. But, that is neither here nor there.

¹²³ This was originally the official racism policy of Ron Paul’s campaign in 2007. I am unable to locate this original source that is currently available; it is cited in many other websites online.

a world of cultural and ideological pressures, campus riots for holding talks on free-speech, and YouTube personality tribalisms.

Many feminists might actually find libertarianism attractive for reasons beyond property rights and equal treatment under the law. It can easily be argued that patriarchalism in feminist theory and statism in libertarian theory are two versions of the same phenomenon (e.g., “kyriarchy”).¹²⁴ The state is, in a way, the ultimate “patriarch,” privileging itself with its own standards of morality, making authoritative decrees that serve as absolute truth and the law of the land, and using coercion as the default means of maintaining monopolized power.¹²⁵ The solution, then, is not to replace the patriarch with a matriarch, or to replace male governors and leaders with female governors and leaders, but to do away with systematic violence altogether. The *arrangement* is the problem, not the one (or the skin color, sex, gender, or religion of the one) who occupies it.¹²⁶

Lest one dismiss this as hopelessly “Neo-Marxist,” it was “Mr. Libertarian” himself who said, “the very existence of taxation and the State necessarily sets up a class division between the exploiting rulers and the exploited ruled.”¹²⁷ Wilder, too, writes her *The Discovery of Freedom* in a similar framework (the subtitle of the volume is “Man’s Struggle Against Authority”). The struggle for freedom and liberty *is* between oppressed and oppressor. But it’s not a struggle between the bourgeoisie and

¹²⁴ The term “kyriarchy” was coined in Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Introduction” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*, ed. *Idem.* and Laura Nasrallah (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 9: “In antiquity, the social system of kyriarchy was institutionalized either in empire or as a democratic political form of ruling. Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression.”

¹²⁵ It can even be argued that the patriarchy exhibited in ancient marriage and polygamy functioned as the social origin of the state; the strength of the alpha male determined the order and obedience of household territory, so the state with the strongest army became (becomes) dominant over national territory.

¹²⁶ Cf. Zhand, *Farewell to Mars*.

¹²⁷ Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 30.

proletariat, or the employer and employers; it's between the state and its subjects.¹²⁸

In the end, libertarianism appears to be rather inclusive, practical, and relevant to the cause of all who desire freedom from oppression and equal representation under law. How is *this* genuine "equality" achieved? And what will steps towards communicating these realities involve?

VI. CAPITALISM AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Another issue that always seems to surface is the relationship between free markets and Christian ethics. Does capitalism truly have God's blessing as the ideal form of market interactions? And just what *type* of capitalism? Joseph Schumpeter (who coined the economic term "creative destruction") had an interesting point in noting how

Ceaseless innovation in the form of creative destruction brings heavy social costs. Family fortunes are destroyed, while communities are damaged, and an intellectual class becomes alienated from the very materialism that brought it in the leisure to think deep thoughts.¹²⁹

How should Christians conduct themselves in free markets? What makes Christian business and economic interactions different than non-Christian ones, especially in today's world of crypto-currency, central banking, and

¹²⁸ This (among other reasons) is precisely why "Marxist and Socialist Feminisms" (ch 3 of *Feminist Thought*) are doomed to fail. (On a related issue, some have put it frankly and colloquially to liberal feminists essentially by arguing, "Why would you want to empower Donald Trump—and a bunch of other old white guys with guns—with the task of enforcing sexual and racial equality? Because that's precisely what passing laws on those issues does.")

¹²⁹ Thomas McCraw, cited in Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008, orig. 1950), xxviii.

crowd-funding? Is it possible to live *with* capitalism and *without* consumerism?¹³⁰ If so, *how*?

Samuel Gregg tackled some of these subjects in *For God and Profit: How Money and Banking Can Serve the Common Good*.¹³¹ He addresses the conditions in which Christians might legitimately loan money, charge interest, and conduct other financial and economic activities. This is a tremendous start, but, as reviewers have noted, there are some important issues that need further attention.¹³² Many other books have also tried to address these issues, but tend to collapse into a hopeless form of democratic socialism.¹³³

Just how moral is it for Christians to be using Federal Reserve Notes— a monopolized currency that directly funds fraud while simultaneously creating poverty—as currency in their churches? What about being “registered” with the state as a “non-profit”? And at what point does paying taxes sear the Christian conscience so that it is morally justified and wise to *refuse*? 70% income tax? 80% income tax? When taxes fund two dozen illegal and unjust wars instead of only four or five? When it funds abortion *and* racism? There simply is no escaping the question of civil disobedience, and perhaps Christian libertarians have something unique and principled to offer in that regard—but this needs fleshing out in clear language.

¹³⁰ Note the review of Cavanaugh’s *Being Consumed* in this journal. For thoughtful Christian reflections on the “worldview” of consumerism, see Steve Wilkins and Mark Sandford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), ch 3.

¹³¹ Samuel Gregg, *For God and Profit: How Banking and Finance Can Serve the Common Good* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2016).

¹³² See Jamin Hübner, review of *For God and Profit* in *Faith and Economics* 68 (2016):142-146.

¹³³ E.g., James Skillen, *The Pursuit of Justice: Christian-Democratic Explorations* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Gary Waters, *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015); Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

VII. LIBERTARIANISM AND THE VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Just as libertarianism spans across religious, ethnic, and geographic boundaries, so *Christian* libertarianism spans across Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. But is it possible that one expression of Christianity is more consistent with libertarianism than another? What might this suggest regarding its future success?

It is tempting to point a lazy finger at contemporary figures, see what fits, and declare a “winner.” But this falls short even on a cursory examination. Robert Sirico, Thomas Woods, and Andrew Napolitano are (for example) deeply committed Catholics, and yet, Robert Murphy, Ron Paul, and others are Protestant/evangelicals. Is it simply the case that the property-rights and classic liberal tradition has its roots in the church-state of Western Christendom, or is the Roman magisterium merely a mirror image of statism in the realm of religion, needing abolishment just like Washington D.C.? Do the critiques against the state apply to *any* professing Christian institution at all—being that they often exhibit a monopoly of power (e.g., over the “means of grace”), centralized power structures, coercion, and unquestionable sources of authority and truth? Von Mises, Rothbard, and a number of other non-Christian libertarians seem to think along these lines, regularly comparing the institutions of religion with the institutions of government.

Questions like these are important ones since *coherency* is a key claim and motivator behind Christian libertarianism. And it would be a tragedy if something in Christians’ lives other than Jesus—whether an organization, a church institution, nonprofit, school, or ideology—functioned as Lord and Savior instead. But, at the same time, one might also be careful not to become distracted from what is held in common—a faith historically rooted in the Nicene tradition, a deep suspicion about Caesar and authoritarian hegemony, and respect for life, liberty, and property.

VIII. VIOLENCE IN THE BIBLE AND THE OLD COVENANT

Christian libertarianism is based on peace. But, how can this be reconciled with the wars, death penalties, and communal property management found in the Mosaic covenant? Were the law codes of Judaism a timeless projection of God’s unchanging holiness, a temporary institution, a shameless rip-off from surrounding law codes in the Ancient Near East, a fabrication by post-exilic scribes, a combination of these proposals, or none of the above?

Countless books have been written on this subject—many of which will be reviewed in this journal. Just how should *any* Christian approach the “strange” world of the Old Testament?¹³⁴ Is Israel’s story really *our* story today, and if so, how? What is actually being revealed by the violence in the OT? Are proposals, like those in Copan’s *Did God Really Command Genocide?* and Boyd’s *Crucifixion of the Warrior God* legitimate, or failed attempts at trying to redeem a primitive and barbaric religion?¹³⁵ What is so “new” about the “new covenant,” and how does this inform one’s theology of violence and evil in the world?

The jury is still out on many of these questions, partly because the answers depend on differing starting points. The most important starting point is perhaps the Bible’s nature and purpose. What exactly does it mean for the Bible to be “God’s Word”? There are countless answers to the question as one surveys the relevant literature,¹³⁶ and there is hardly a

¹³⁴ Cf. Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture*.

¹³⁵ See Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?* (Grand Rapids: Backer, 2014) and Greg Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017). Cf. the broader perspectives in Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, Michael Jerryson, *Violence in the World’s Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹³⁶ For a variety of enlightening Bible introductions, see Andrew Arterbury, W. H. Bellinger, Derek Dodson, *Engaging the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Joel Kaminsky, Mark Reasoner, Joel Nohr, *The Abingdon Introduction to the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014). For other helpful works on bibliography and doctrine of scripture, see most of all John

“traditional view” that can be attached to any of them, whether verbal, verbal plenary, organic, mechanic, a “spiritual truth” perspective, or otherwise. Contending for a “high” view of scripture is also inadequate, as fundamentalist treatments of biblical literature (supposedly the “highest” view of the Bible)¹³⁷ can often be found to be *abusive*—whether

Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Toronto: Clements, 2004), but also John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); Bavinck, Herman. Trans. John Vriend (*Reformed Dogmatics, Vol 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); Christopher Bryan, *And God Spoke: The Authority of the Bible for the Church Today* (Cambridge: Cowley, 2002); C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*. London: Fontana, 1960); Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009); John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.)

¹³⁷ Attempts at having the “highest” view of scripture can be found in recent works such as Steven Cowan and Terry Wilder, eds. *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2013); Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?: An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014); Wayne Grudem, Thomas Schreiner, and John Collins, eds., *Understanding Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); John Piper, *A Particular Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), but also other related works such as Gleason Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Gregory Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008); D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); *idem.*, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Harvie Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); David Dockery, *Christian Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004); David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010); Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); *idem.*, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1986); Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Norman Geisler and William Roach *Defending Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); Norman Geisler and F. Farnell. *Vital Issues in the Inerrancy Debate* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016); Ken Ham, *Demolishing Supposed Bible Contradictions*. 2 vols (Master Books, 2010, 2012); Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, eds., *How Do We Know the Bible is True?* 2 vols. (Master Books, 2011, 2012); John Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy*

through proof-texting, poor scholarship, superficial hermeneutics, or outright distortion. Criticisms of such biblicism are now vast.¹³⁸

and the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); R. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969); Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999); Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013); *idem.*, *Canon Revisited* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); Eta Linnemann, Trans. Robert Yarbrough, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology: Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical* (Louisville: Kregel, 2001); *idem.*, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); *idem.*, trans Robert Yarbrough, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is Scientific Theology?* (Louisville: Kregel, 2001); Robert Lightner, *The Case for Total Inerrancy* (Louisville: Kregel, 1997); John MacArthur, John, ed. *The Inerrant Word: Biblical Historical, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016); John Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006); Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Vern Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); *idem.*, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, eds. *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967); B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980); James Williams, *God’s Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us* (Ambassador International, 2016); John Woodbridge and D. A. Carson, eds. *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); *idem.*, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

¹³⁸ A short sampling of these critiques should include Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture?: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Carlos Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007); *idem.*, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011); *idem.*, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012); James Dunn, *The Living Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); *idem.*, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York: HarperOne, 2014); Christopher Hays and Christopher Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012); Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); *idem.*, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Thom Stark, *The Human Faces of*

Many assert that this entire debate is part of the problem: looking for a single correct theory. John Goldingay, for example, argues in his seminal book *Models for Scripture* that multiple frameworks are necessary for properly understanding the Bible's significance and purpose.¹³⁹ It is precisely in reducing the Bible to a single concept, purpose, or genre (e.g. "teaching") that blinds readers from seeing its rich colors and dimensions. It does no good, for example, to restrict one's use of a national map to a road map, nor is it comprehensible to overlay the same road map with a topographical map, temperature and wind map, terrain map, and population map of the same area at the same time. It would be best to have multiple maps of different kinds available for viewing (not necessarily at the same time). Goldingay suggests that the scriptures can be primarily viewed and used as a "witnessing tradition," "authoritative canon," "inspired word," and "experienced revelation." Restricting Christians' language and description of the scriptures into a single metaphor, Goldingay suggests, will only limit our perspective and ruin the story.¹⁴⁰

Another starting point has to do with God's covenants through redemptive history. What does it mean for the Hebrew scriptures to be "God's Word" today? Theologians have contrived a number of hermeneutical and heuristic devices to answer this question in relation to the Old Testament. Dispensationalism—defunct but still influential in many churches—asserts a sharp distinction between Israel and the church,

God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (And Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It) (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011); Ben Witherington, *The Living Word: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). Earlier efforts can be found in the seminal work by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) and James Barr's three volumes on scripture and additional three volumes on fundamentalism. Daniel Finn, who offers a Catholic proposal of economic ethics in *Christian Economic Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), also wisely distances himself from biblicism.

¹³⁹ Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*.

¹⁴⁰ This proposal might be labeled "perspectivalism" in a broad, but not philosophically narrow sense (e.g., in the eccentric "perspectivalism" of John Frame and Vern Poythress).

a literal hermeneutic (especially for Old Testament prophecies), and a program of salvation enacted through seven dispensations.¹⁴¹ Christian theonomism sees little distinction between God’s law and its *contextual expression* (e.g., Sinai), and therefore sees the Mosaic Covenant as permanent, binding, and only partially modified since Christ.¹⁴² “Old Covenant Theology” sees the commands in the Old Covenant as “in force”¹⁴³ except what is explicitly abolished in the New Covenant (e.g., a category “ceremonial” and/or “civil” law).¹⁴⁴ “New Covenant Theology” asserts the reverse—that everything in the Old Covenant is abolished except what is explicitly “renewed” in the New Covenant (e.g., a category of “moral law”).¹⁴⁵

Others plainly reject this entire way of thinking. N. T. Wright, for example, says in *Scripture and the Authority of God* that, not only would “most ancient Jews...not have recognized such a distinction” of three law categories, but furthermore, “all scripture is ‘culturally conditioned.’ It is naïve to pretend that some parts are not, and can therefore be treated as in some sense ‘primary’ or ‘universal,’ while other parts are, and can therefore safely be set aside.”¹⁴⁶ Instead, “all of that scripture had been summed up in Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17, itself summing up much of the

¹⁴¹ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007). The updated version, “progressive dispensationalism,” is outlined in Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

¹⁴² See Greg Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Powder Springs: American Vision, 2008) and R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

¹⁴³ I.e., “applies.”

¹⁴⁴ See John Murray, *Principles of Ethical Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

¹⁴⁵ A. Blake White, *What is New Covenant Theology?* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2012); Fred Zaspel and Tom Wells, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2002).

¹⁴⁶ N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 57, 128. Emphasis mine. Contrast with the “literal” vs. “historically contextual” in Hughey, “What Does the Bible say about Government?” in *Called to Freedom*.

book; Romans 3:31; 2 Corinthians 1:20) and now God's project of new covenant and new creation had begun, necessarily taking a new mode."¹⁴⁷ "Progressive Covenantalism" largely concurs, stressing the centrality of Christ and the newness of the New Covenant but without restricting the Old Testament to historical usage.¹⁴⁸

Yet, James Dunn does this very thing when saying, "...the Old Testament commandments...*were* the word of God to millions of Israelites down through many centuries. But they no longer are so for us—certainly not in their obvious and intended sense. We honor these passages as God's word in a historic sense."¹⁴⁹ God's Word is *living*, Dunn contends, a script that changes and grows with time.¹⁵⁰ This is precisely what makes it meaningful. The conservative overreaction to Modernism's criticism of the Bible killed this living Word and made it a dead letter:

...a primary feeder of fundamentalism is the lust for certainty and security. It is the certainty that God has spoken in particular words and formulations which are clear-cut and fixed for all time...The lust for certainty turns the icon into an idol, pulls the living word from the soil in which it was rooted, turns the metaphor into a mathematical formula, and abuses the scriptural authority it seeks to affirm.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁸ See Stephen Wellum and Brent Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2016); Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015); cf. the articles in Barcellos, *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*.

¹⁴⁹ James Dunn, *The Living Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 51. Cf. Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982), 60-63.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), ch 2, as well as John Goldingay, *Models for the Interpretation of Scripture* (Toronto: Clements, 2004); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009); contributions by Merold Westphal in Stanley Porter and Beth Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012).

¹⁵¹ Dunn, *The Living Word*, 7, 147.

The point, then, is that one’s view of the Bible and framework of interpretation is going to determine one’s views on violence in theology. While no one may simply have the “right” interpretation or “right” bibliology, there are certainly boundaries as to what are legitimate perspectives. The question is, what are these boundaries? And how can they be effectively communicated for those who wield the scriptures for war, wield them for empire, or throw them out altogether?

IX. LIBERTARIANISM: A PHENOMENON OF MODERNITY OR POSTMODERNITY?

Sometime in the heyday of the twentieth century, a renowned intellectual and author complained during an interview about “these uniformed men, who have the exclusive right to carry arms, who demand our papers, who come and prowl on our doorsteps.”¹⁵² The comment sounds rather “libertarian,” or at least like someone suffering from a communist project of that era.

It actually comes from the French historian Michel Foucault. Foucault’s work on the dehumanizing prison system is enough to rally a cheer from libertarians—as is his critique of the surveillance state, the government’s need for “criminals,”¹⁵³ and his exposure of centralized, manufactured “truth” and “knowledge” as an instrument of social

¹⁵² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Vintage Books), 47.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*: “At the end of the eighteenth century, people dreamed of a society without crime. And then the dream evaporated. Crime was too useful for them to dream of anything as crazy—or ultimately as dangerous—as a society without crime. No crime means no police. What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable for the population, if not fear of the criminal? This institution of the police, which is so recent and so oppressive, is only justified by that fear. If we accept the presence in our midst of these uniformed men, who have the exclusive right to carry arms, who demand our papers, who come and prowl on our doorsteps, how would any of this be possible if there were no criminals? And if there weren’t articles everyday in the newspapers telling us how numerous and dangerous our criminals are?”

power.¹⁵⁴ So strong was his critique of the state, at times, that he had to say:

I don't claim at all that the State apparatus is unimportant, but it seems to me that among all the conditions for avoiding a repetition of the Soviet experience and preventing the revolutionary process from running into the ground, one of the first things that has to be understood is that power isn't localized in the State apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, "a postmodern social theory...demands the dissolution of the state as a construct of social life and brings to the fore the multiplicity and heterogeneity of relationships in and through society as the 'immanence' of culture."¹⁵⁶

Foucault is just *one* of the many "post-modern" authors and scholars that sound all too much like Von Mises, Spooner, Mencken, or Rothbard. Perhaps it's no surprise why: late/post-modern intellectuals lived during the same era and shared some of the same discontents—many of them critical of modernism.

But it still causes one to at least ask about the ideological origins of today's contemporary libertarianism, as it is too simplistic to draw a straight line to it from Locke, Bastiat, Mill, or others. This is especially true

¹⁵⁴ "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. This is the case for every society, but I believe that in ours the relationship between power, right and truth is organized in a highly specific fashion....Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place." *Ibid.*, 93-94. Compare these ideas with those of the critique of democracy in Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 262-263.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵⁶ Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 151.

when one finds someone like Von Mises performing brilliant deconstruction of intentionally-deceptive terms (e.g., “inflation”) years before the French post-structuralists even began forming this literary and philosophical enterprise.¹⁵⁷ Beside the linguistic turn, the social power of metanarratives (whether Marxism, Darwinism, or a story of “progress” via state machinery), the intrusion of empiricism on the social sciences and humanities,¹⁵⁸ and importance of local knowledge for both social identity and economic flourishing are deeply rooted concerns in the writings of early and mid-twentieth century libertarians *and*, say, the contributors in volumes like *The Post-Modern Reader*.¹⁵⁹ It is no surprise, then, that Rothbard goes out of his way to spotlight the work of psychiatrist Thomas Szasz in his seminal *For a New Liberty*, or that experts in sociology—a field that some view as wholly opposed to liberty—like Anthony Giddens, plainly define the state apparatus as “a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence,”¹⁶⁰ or that Hans Herman Hoppe’s *Democracy: The God that Failed* stands alongside a growing “interrogation of consensus” in contemporary philosophical, literary, and social studies.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ E.g., Von Mises, *Human Action*, 419-421. Cf. “the linguistic turn” to Mises’ “the semantic revolution” in *Human Action*, 420.

¹⁵⁸ The take-over of economics by mathematics is essential to note here.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany: State of University New York Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁰ Anthony Giddens in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 35. Cf. Murray Rothbard, *Anatomy of the State* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 2009), 59: “that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion.”

¹⁶¹ See the essays by Lyotard, Hutcheon, and Herman in *The Post-Modern Reader* for more on the problems of “consensus.”

Then again, some strands of post-modern thought are notorious for radically rejecting *all* forms of authority, universal truth claims and standards of rationality, and moral absolutes without any coherent, positive direction forward—at least in a way that provides a firm footing for societal justice and organization.¹⁶² This directly contrasts with the idea of “inalienable rights” or individuals’ “absolute freedom.” So then, is the libertarian enterprise really just another power-play for the privileged? A false-call to universal truths of reason? Or is there something more limited and fixed, like natural law or universal principles of human nature that the Enlightenment got right? (And what about the “laws” of economics?) Habermas may speak for those, like Von Mises, who had a foot in both the old world of Enlightenment dreams and new world of social construction when he said, “I think that instead of giving up modernity and its project as a lost cause, we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity.”¹⁶³

Whatever the case, it is important to study this subject further before assuming a simple polarity between progressive, Neo-Marxist post-modernism and Christian libertarianism. It was, after all, the Christian anarchist and scholar Jacques Ellul who said:

...the Christian should desacralize the idols of modern society—whether politics, the state, or the marketplace—and create alternative zones of “free life.” In other words, Christians should be ‘troublemakers, creators of uncertainty, agents of a dimension incompatible with society.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See *Post-Modern Reader*, esp. 3-66. As a case study, see Placher’s remarks about Foucault and Rorty’s contributions in William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989). In passing, one should note that “post-modernism” and “moral relativism” are not the same thing—and one does not necessitate the other. This has been pointed out countless times by Christian scholars on the subject (e.g., Carl Raschke, James K.A. Smith, Kevin Vanhoozer, Stanley Grenz, John Franke, et. al.).

¹⁶³ Cited in *Post-Modern Reader*, 101.

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Ellul, cited in Shane Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 231.

X. THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF LIBERTARIANISM

If human beings are made free and meant to live peacefully, and if all human beings are God’s images, what might this suggest about God’s nature—and our knowledge of God?

It is precisely in the wake of modernity’s violence¹⁶⁵ that theologians have begun to shift their understanding about God’s attributes and relation to creation. Theology in Western Christendom was shaped all too much in the eyes of the West—colonial, hierarchical, coercive, masculine, demanding blind obedience by divine right.¹⁶⁶ Thus, to avoid this idolatry,¹⁶⁷ the twentieth century charted new courses with the “social Trinity,” liberation theology, feminist theology, process theology, post-liberalism, interfaith pluralism, and a number of other inquiries. These proposals are still being debated, but there are undoubtedly results emerging.

Even for the most committed thinkers in the classic Reformed or Catholic tradition, the primacy of *peace* in speaking of God’s relationship to people and creation has gained a foothold. Herman Bavinck, for example, plainly says at the turn of the twentieth century in his magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics*, “...coercion is alien to the essence of God.”¹⁶⁸ He says the kingdom of Jesus is “not a kingship of violence and weapons; it rules by Word and Spirit, by grace and truth, by justice and righteousness.”¹⁶⁹ Earlier on Bavinck reiterates this point when talking of covenant theology: “covenant honors the fact that God created men and women as rational

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, the review of *Stalin* in this volume.

¹⁶⁶ It was this God that modernism largely (and to an extent, legitimately) rejected.

¹⁶⁷ See Raschke, *The Next Reformation* and McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* for a powerful indictment regarding those who would unwittingly idolize their theologies and ideological constructs of God (which were supposedly just “truth” or “reality”) over and against the living God as actually revealed in scripture, tradition, history, and experience.

¹⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 519.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 434.

and moral beings. He treats us as such by not coercing us but using persuasion; he wants us freely and willingly to serve him in love (Ps. 100:3f.).”¹⁷⁰ For someone so deeply indebted to the Western intellectual tradition, the tenor of reflections are noteworthy.

This “libertarian” impulse in theology from the late 1800s can be traced all the way to one of today’s leading theological texts, *Faith Seeking Understanding* by Daniel Migliore (Princeton).¹⁷¹ As if copying and pasting from Bavinck, Migliore says “God’s grace is not coercive but gives humanity time.”¹⁷² Furthermore,

...God raised the crucified Jesus and made him the chief cornerstone of a new humanity that no longer espouses acts and systems of violence, that no longer needs scapegoats, that no longer wills to live at the expense of victims, that no longer imagines or worships a bloodthirsty God, that is no longer interested in legitimations of violence, but instead follows Jesus in the power of a new and Holy Spirit.¹⁷³

...true apostolic witness to the gospel eschews force, intimidation, and deception as strategies to win adherents, whether in the form of a blatant appeal for state power to secure the church’s position and influence or the more covert forms of threat and coercion or narrow appeals to self-interest employed in certain kinds of evangelism, both on and off television.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 332.

¹⁷¹ Paterson’s *The God of the Machine* vigorously argues that it was the Christian concept of free-will that gave rise to free society in the first place: “The United States is the Age of the Dynamo. By carrying over the axiom of free will from religious to political doctrines, a Niagara of kinetic energy was released.” Paterson, *The God of the Machine*, 157. This subject has recently been explored in Timothy Shah and Alan Hertske, eds., *Christianity and Freedom*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁷² Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 298.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

In-line with some of these twentieth century developments, Cambridge University’s *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (written by three professors at Calvin College) openly questions several of the “traditional” attributes of God—from immutability, to impassibility, to simplicity.¹⁷⁵ Greek philosophy and other currents of Medieval scholasticism seems to have slipped into the category of “dogma”—and perhaps, through the state-church, assisted in the suppression of liberty along the way.

Those not committed to traditional Protestantism or Catholicism do more than crack open the windows to God’s vulnerability. Sallie McFague’s process theology has gained considerable traction since it was first introduced in the 1980s.¹⁷⁶ In addition to her pioneering work on religious language, she proposes that the universe be thought of as “God’s body,” thus alleviating a number of problems created by a radical (or perverse) transcendence.¹⁷⁷ One of her colleagues expresses a strong sentiment sympathetic of McFague’s perspective:

It is time for Christianity to outgrow its dishonest deployment of the rhetoric of divine transcendence. This pseudo-transcendence in the name of its “personal relationship to the Lord” conveniently declares Him [sic] radically other than bodily creatures while surreptitiously uploading a masculine autonomy onto “Him.” For we can imagine no personal relationship with the bottomless mystery of life if we seal it off with all-too-human images of power as paternity or royalty...our...affirmations will need to come from the best metaphors of relationship, not the worst (the dominative, oppressive, the patriarchal).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Richard Plantinga, Thomas Thompson, and Matthew Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁷⁶ Her predecessors are Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.

¹⁷⁷ See Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987) and *Metaphorical Theology*.

¹⁷⁸ Katherine Keller, “The Flesh of God,” in *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, ed. Darby Ray (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 102.

This last point was given attention in a review of Matthew Bates' book *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, which—like similar works of its kind¹⁷⁹—stresses kingship as a defining metaphor for Christology and soteriology. The review suggests that Christians should not let the state determine their discourse about God.¹⁸⁰ This was the important thesis in Rieger's *Christ and Empire*, but it has largely gone unheard:

From the very beginning, our images of Jesus Christ have developed in the context of empire. Jesus was born under the rule of the Roman Emperor Augustus, lived under the auspices of the Roman Empire, and was executed by a common means of punishment for political rebels in unruly provinces: the cross. Empire in one form or another has been the context in which some of the most important later images of Christ developed: the notion of Jesus' lordship gained prominence at a time when the Roman emperors would claim to be the only lords; the idea of Jesus' equality with God and with humanity developed at a time when the Roman emperors had become Christians and drew their authority from the Christian God: Christ's role as God-human in salvation was clarified during the early years of the Norman conquest of England; the way of Jesus Christ was further explicated in the midst of the Spanish conquest of the New World; Jesus' roles as prophet, priest, and king were picked up during the heydays of Northern European colonialism; Christ victorious was proclaimed in neocolonialist circumstances; and even the cosmic Christ is tied to another empire. Yet the images of the Christ of

¹⁷⁹ E.g., the popular books by Scot McKnight and N. T. Wright.

¹⁸⁰ Matthew Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). "It is important that Jesus Christ is not only King, but the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God, the true Vine, the Light of the World, Temple, and so forth. Kingship was stressed in the New Testament because of the contemporary context of the Roman emperor and Jewish Messiah (a perfect backdrop, by the way, to show Jesus' divinity). This should not overpower Christ as the *logos* or other, non-Jewish and non-nationalist titles, images, and metaphors." Jamin Hübner, review of Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* in *The Canadian-American Theological Review* 5:2 (2016).

empire have not managed to block out alternative visions of Christ completely; Christ continues to assert a different reality.¹⁸¹

Yes, in statist environments (like the first-century), it is both necessary and appropriate to pit “King” Jesus against Caesar, and to unravel all that is contained in such royal descriptions (especially given the Jewish background of Davidic Kingship). The same is true today where the state reigns supreme in many minds. But without caution, might the church run the serious risk of becoming polluted by the language, ideas, and culture of government in its theological discourse?¹⁸²

This “nonviolent” perspective in theology has even led systematians to reassess traditional dogmas like the Trinity. As a case in point, Migliore says:

God is not the supreme will-to-power over others but the supreme will-to-communion in which power and life are shared. To speak of God as the ultimate power whose being is in giving, receiving, and sharing love, who gives life to others and wills to live in communion, is to turn upside down our understandings of both divine and human power. The reign of the triune God is the rule of sovereign love rather than the rule of force.¹⁸³

What does one make of these revisions? Is there something to process theology, or is it a trendy heresy? To what extent should God be conceived as “non-coercive” and “vulnerable”—and might these questions be best answered upon reflection of the cross once more?

¹⁸¹ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

¹⁸² After all, “it is necessary to reinterpret the language of Christian faith—its stories, doctrines, and symbols—for our own time and place if we are faithfully to serve the gospel rather than uncritically to endorse the cultural forms in which it has been mediated to us.” Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 14.

¹⁸³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 74-75.

XI. CONCLUSION

Christian libertarianism is not complicated. Creation was designed to operate harmoniously without multiple layers of coercion. Like two children playing checkers, human societies need only recognize and uphold a few simple principles to enable a culture of peace, prosperity, and liberty. What continually ruins this restful and productive state is not freedom, but its opposite: the age-old desire to control and dominate.

We were warned about this ages ago: “Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:7b, NRSV); and again in the first-century: “my kingdom is not of this world,” “all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Jn 18:36; Mt 26:52, NIV); and again in countless stories across the ages (the ring of power *cannot be wielded*). A Christian politic, properly understood, appears to be the only perspective that gives full justice to this realization and others. As Bastiat eloquently reflected,

If the natural tendencies of mankind are so bad that it is not safe to permit people to be free, how is it that the tendencies of these organizers are always good? Do not the legislators and their appointed agents also belong to the human race? Or do they believe themselves to be made of finer clay than the rest of mankind?¹⁸⁴

Nevertheless, within such “Christian libertarianism,” there are a number of areas that could use considerable attention and clarification. This article outlined just a handful of these. Hopefully this introduction will serve to refine our thinking and living so we can better serve others as Christ’s Body, here and now.

¹⁸⁴ Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law*, trans. Dean Russell, forward Walter E. Williams, introduction Richard Ebeling, afterward Sheldon Richman (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, 1998), 63.