

Religions and Politics IV

The critical rejection of government

Matthew 6:24 (c. 80 C.E.)

No one can serve two lords, because either he will hate the one and love the other, or adhere to one and disdain the other: you cannot serve God and mammon.

The critical toleration of government

1 Corinthians 7:20-21 (c. 55 C.E.)

Every person remain in the calling one was called in. Were you a slave when you were called? What does that matter? (Yet if you are able to become free, take the opportunity.) For the slave called is the Lord's freed person; likewise a free person called is Christ's slave.

The critical support of government

***On First Principles* 1.1.5 (220 CE)**

Having then refuted, to the best of our ability, every interpretation which suggests that we should attribute to God any material characteristics, we assert that he is in truth incomprehensible and immeasurable. For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him. For if we see a man who can scarcely look at a glimmer of the light of the smallest lamp, and if we wish to teach such a one, whose eyesight is not strong enough to receive more light than we have said, about the brightness and splendor of the sun, shall we not have to tell him that the splendor of the sun is unspeakably and immeasurably better and more glorious than all this light he can see?

***City of God* 14.28 (426 CE)**

So two loves have constituted two cities -- the earthly is formed by love of self even to contempt of God, the heavenly by love of God even to contempt of self. For the one glories in herself, the other in the Lord. The one seeks glory from man; for the other God, the witness of the conscience, is the greatest glory....

The endorsement of government

Constantine to Elpidius (3 July 321)

Just as we thought it most unfitting that the day of the Sun, with its venerable rites, should be given over to the swearing and counter-swearing of litigants and their unseemly brawls, so it is a pleasant and joyful thing to fulfill petitions of special urgency on that day. Therefore on that festal day let all be allowed to perform manumission and emancipation; and let nothing that concerns this be forbidden.

Praise of Constantine 1.6 (337 C.E.)

Our Emperor, beloved of God, bearing a kind of image of the supreme rule as it were in imitation of the greater, directs the course of all things upon earth.

Epistle 40.8 (388 C.E.)

This, I ask, Emperor: that you turn your vengeance upon me, and, if you consider this act a crime, that you impute it to me. Why order the absent to me punished? I am present here before you, and confess my guilt. I proclaim that I set the synagogue on fire, or at least ordered others to do so, that there might not be left a building in which Christ is denied. If you ask me why I have not burned the synagogue in my neighborhood, I answer that its destruction has already been begun by the judgment of God, and my work was at an end.

Theodosian Code (395 C.E.)

It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation should continue in the profession of that religion that was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition; and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damascus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment, they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches.