

SOCIAL & ETHICAL ISSUES GROUP

TO CONFORM OR NOT TO CONFORM?***Church and Government***

The interaction between Government and Church is a complex issue which cannot be covered fully in the relatively short space provided in this newsletter, but it is a matter about which we need to have a considered opinion. The following hopefully highlights some of the issues which merit our prayerful consideration.

It is, perhaps, stating the obvious to say that our ultimate responsibility is to obey God. He is the only authority to which we owe a comprehensive allegiance and any other authority which exists derives its authority from Him. The Bible is clear that wherever authority rests it does so because God, the only absolute authority, allows it. (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17). The spheres of authority could be in the Church (pastors/deacons/elders who exercise authority over the congregation), in the home (parents exercising authority over their children, husbands over their wife) or in the state (heads of state/governments - elected or otherwise - exercising lawful authority on their countrymen).

What is 'lawful authority'?

There is much to be said about what constitutes 'lawful authority' and about the responsibilities of government to restrain and/or punish evil and to approve what is good. However it has to be acknowledged that, whatever we think about the current condition of our country or those who lead us, and whatever our personal political allegiances or views might be, the Bible was written in times of occupation. It was written in times of repeated - if not constant - oppression to an extent which none of us has to face personally (albeit some of our brothers and sisters across our world experience similar things still) and yet the clear and unambiguous teaching is that we are to be good citizens, something which clearly applies even when we think the government is bad. The passages from Romans and 1 Peter make that clear and Jesus taught as much in Mark 12 (quoted above).

That doesn't diminish in any way our primary responsibility but it does make it clear that we ought to fulfil our duties to those in civil authority so long as those duties do not infringe on that primary responsibility to God. If government derives its authority from God then honouring that derived authority actually honours the ultimate authority, God Himself. The Church and the state are, of course, separate entities but that does not mean that they are always competing entities. John Calvin commenting on the passage from Mark said, 'It lays down a clear distinction between spiritual and civil government, in order to inform us that outward subjection does not prevent us from having within us a conscience free in the sight of God....In short, Christ declares that it is no violation of the authority of



And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Mark 12:17 NKJV

God, or any injury done to His service, if, in respect of outward government, the Jews obey the Romans' (or we obey our government).

Spheres of authority

What Jesus says in Mark 12:17 makes it clear that the things which we 'render to Caesar' and the things which we 'render to God' are not the same but, as Lord of all, God rules over the different spheres of church and state in different ways - at least for now until He comes again. Christianity does not bind itself to one form of government or to any particular country or nationality.

We are all exiles, we are subjects of a Kingdom within many different kingdoms. From the very first book of the Bible (the promise to Abraham in Genesis that God will bless the whole world through his family) to the very last (those worshipping around the throne in Revelation are people from every tribe, language and culture) the Bible demonstrates that our love of God is not determined by where we are from; it is not dependent on our being subjects of a government which supports our worship of Him; nor is it prevented by being subject to a government which bans that worship.

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To conform or not to conform?

In order to 'render to God the things that are God's' then we have to give Him our lives because we are made in His image. That is what gives us value and meaning and no government can provide that, nor remove it. So, like Peter and John in Acts 4 & 5, if forced to choose we must obey God and not man but otherwise we demonstrate our love of God and our love for our neighbour by our humble submission to those whom God has placed in authority over us.

Abortions during Covid



Last month we highlighted proposals from Scottish and English Governments to change the process of supervising abortion procedures. This is a more precise description of what that process currently is: the changes have centred on allowing women with pregnancies of up to 12 weeks in Scotland and 10 weeks in England, having a video or telephone consultation by a health care professional in a hospital facility to assess the patient. Medication is then delivered to her home for home treatment to be carried out by herself. She is given a telephone number to phone in case problems arise.

In addition, there have been no formal clinical studies into the outcomes from home abortions, but rather a number of difficult outcomes have been reported.

The Scottish Government consultation on the proposal to continue with these home abortion procedures is open until 5th January and you can get advice on how to respond to the consultation [here](#).

The Westminster Government has just opened a similar consultation for England.

Ethics of the Covid Vaccine



Should Christians be concerned that some of the Covid vaccines being developed have their origins in tissue purposely harvested from human abortions, even if it was several decades ago?

Read an article from Christianity Magazine [here](#)

View a video [here](#).

Read an article from eminent Christian bioethicist John Wyatt [here](#).

See which of the vaccines being developed have a source in aborted tissue [here](#).

Hate Crime Bill



The Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament is hearing evidence from a range of individuals and organisations on the proposed Hate Crime Bill.

Recently a group of people from a faith background – Christian, Muslim and Jewish – were invited to present their views to the Committee. Representatives from the Scottish Secular Society were also present.

You can view the whole session in the Parliament [here](#). (Contributions from faith representatives begin 10.50)



ENGAGING WITH SCIENCE – Keswick Convention Conference, 23-24 April

'If you're a Church leader, a Christian working in a science-related profession, or a Christian with a strong interest in learning how to approach scientific questions through biblical lenses, then this event is especially for you!' Organised in conjunction with the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. Further details [here](#). (Dependent on government Covid guidelines)