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One Hundred Years of Social Ministry —  
Now What?

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# Civic Order

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Order is a gift. It may not be taken for granted. The tensions inherent in every social situation tend toward disruption unless they are harnessed toward creative ends.

Violence on our streets and in our cities has brought us up short to the realization that the social order is much like a garden: if left untended, it will produce only the weeds of exploitation, decay, frustration, and outrage. During some of the riots in our major cities we watched our television sets in sheer disbelief that this evil could erupt in our midst. Somehow we assumed that such things could not happen here. For we did not live unaffected by the rather optimistic view of man and of society propounded by the founders of our nation.

The time has come to take a closer look at the subject of civic order as it relates to the problem of our existence, to the question of liberty, to the issue of justice, and to the subject of authority. As we go about this task in the light of recent developments, it will be helpful to keep in mind the following statement of John C. Bennett, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York: "The historic connection of democracy with an optimistic and perfectionist conception of man must be abandoned."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Bennett, *Christians and the State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 153.

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We begin with an attempt at a definition, but only after noting how rarely the subject matter has received discussion. We ought to be able to find some mention of civic order in a comprehensive work such as the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*;<sup>2</sup> yet there is no mention of it. Even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*<sup>3</sup> is silent on this subject. Among general reference works consulted during the preparation of the present study only the *Oxford English Dictionary* offered some help. It carries the following statement:

(*Civil or public order.*) The condition in which the laws or usages regulating the public relations of individuals to the community, and the public conduct of members or sections of the community to each other, are maintained and observed; the rule of law or constituted authority; law-abiding state; absence of insurrection, riot, turbulence, unruliness, or crimes of violence.<sup>4</sup>

In an older work of this kind we must expect the kind of definition which assumes a rather static order of things as a base. This conception has its source in a somewhat classical conception of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1937). Vol. III has articles on "Civic Art," "Civic Centers," "Civic Education," and "Civic Organizations," but none on "Civic Order."

<sup>3</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). Vol. III has articles on liberties and rights, but none on order. Vol. XI offers a very meager entry under "public order," devoted to obligations of travelers.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), VII, 183.

universe, where order is thought of as an arrangement of social phenomena in such a way that everything occupies its proper place. From such a perspective order is seen more in terms of the kind of orderliness which one might expect to find in the living room of a meticulous housewife, where every chair, sofa, and picture is in exactly the right place.

But, of course, we do not live in that kind of world. Our cosmos is not that of either Ptolemaeus or Copernicus but of Einstein. In our world everything is in motion. Our understanding of civic order, therefore, must take cognizance of this basic shift in man's understanding of the universe in which he lives. We cannot be content with the use of static concepts but must move beyond the definition given in the dictionary from which we quoted.

How important it is to reckon with the effects of changes in man's understanding of the world around him was made very clear some 20 years ago when Bishop Anders Nygren of Sweden published a very incisive essay entitled "The Role of the Self-Evident in History."<sup>5</sup> In this brief study the author pointed out to what extent men's language and their conception of reality are determined by an understanding of the universe which seems to be self-evident. The essay goes on to indicate that when the time comes for the self-evident to become less so, even the foundations of theological language are shaken.

When, for example, the Ptolemaic view of the cosmos began to replace the Biblical description, an age of violent controversy began. Out of these heated encounters came the great credal formulations of the

third and fourth centuries, including the Nicene Creed. The time of Copernicus was also the age of the Reformation with its burst of new thought and language. In our day some of the effects of Einstein's understanding of the universe as open and constantly in movement are being felt everywhere. Contemporary metaphysics, for example, keeps suggesting that truth comes to men from the future rather than from above. This view has been embodied in such significant theological works as Jürgen Moltmann's *The Theology of Hope*.<sup>6</sup>

The modern man of thought conceives the cosmos to be moving into an open future as a unified developmental process which involves man as intrinsically social in character. Any meaningful discussion of civic order will need to keep in mind the revolutionary dimensions of this new view. Perhaps, then, we shall not go too far astray if we suggest that civic order is that condition of society in which the many and varied tensions inherent in community life are kept in creative balance with a view to providing opportunity for fulfillment both in terms of personal life and of group enterprise.

Such a statement obviously starts with an understanding of society and of man that looks toward fulfillment for both. That is to say, it assumes both motion and direction. Moreover, it intends to take cognizance of the individual as being a creature made for association. Finally, it frankly recognizes the existence of tensions in any situation involving human beings.

We must take special note of this last item. We do not want to make the mis-

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of Religion*, XXVIII (1948), 225 to 241.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

take of holding that order is a condition in society from which all tensions have been eliminated. That kind of orderliness we find only in cemeteries. Wherever living human beings relate to each other, there are bound to be differences of opinion and divergences in outlook. These necessarily produce stresses and strains. Order prevails where such tensions are channeled toward creative ends.

Disharmony is part of our existence. This fundamental consideration makes it imperative to take up the question of order and existence before moving on to an analysis of order as it relates to freedom, justice, and authority. Our first chapter, then, comes under the general heading of order and existence.

#### ORDER AND EXISTENCE

Existence is here understood as a term applying to man's fallen estate. He finds himself in a dialectical position between God's "Yes" and Satan's "No." What is more, he constantly manifests a powerful propensity to move in the direction of what is self-centered. Disruption and violence have their source in this tendency on man's part to make himself the center of his own universe. His inclinations are centripetal; that is to say, he would like to have everything move in toward himself for purposes of self-aggrandizement.

One of the key concepts of Christian ethics, therefore, is a word which we translate, somewhat inappropriately, as "subordination" or "subjecting oneself." What it really suggests is ranking oneself under the needs of others. Two apostles<sup>7</sup> introduce this word into the vocabulary and life

<sup>7</sup> Paul in Rom. 13:1 and Peter in 1 Peter 2:14.

of the church as a basis for order in our fallen situation for the obvious reason that, where men are more concerned with the needs of others than with their own demands, order is bound to follow. There existence takes on the qualities of redemption as the consequences of the Fall are undone.

Unhappily, the mass of mankind by its own choice has no part in this new kind of community, where subordination is a cardinal principle. They live where men exploit each other; and civic order has to do with creating the conditions which keep all men's drives and tensions in balance toward constructive ends. For that reason the subject of order in society cannot be discussed without giving some thought to the role of political authority in establishing and maintaining such conditions as make personal fulfillment and community development possible.

At the outset we need to consider that the Scriptures suggest a cosmic background for the historical phenomenon of political authority. They indicate that the institution of government reveals its full dimensions only when it is seen with reference to both God and Satan. The state, in other words, belongs to our fallen condition, its function being that of creating and upholding order where natural forces tend toward disruption and violence.

Luther, therefore, did not hesitate to include good government in his list of items which comprise the "daily bread" we ask for in the Lord's Prayer. In explaining this particular petition at some length in his Large Catechism, Luther included the following perceptive insight:

This petition is especially directed also against our chief enemy, the devil. For

all his thought and desire is to deprive us of all that we have from God, or to hinder it; and he is not satisfied to obstruct and destroy spiritual government in leading souls astray by his lies and bringing them under his power, but he also prevents and hinders the stability of government and honorable, peaceable relations on earth.<sup>8</sup>

In light of this observation, order in society is not a matter to be taken lightly. Where it prevails, it must be thought of as an exceptional boon, made possible by the creative determination of God Himself at work in history to make community life both possible and enduring. Anyone who has any doubts on this point ought to be flown to one of the areas on our globe where order has broken down. This might give him some inkling as to what it means to live by the law of the jungle, without the possibility of laying any serious plans for the future.

If the person who sits rather loosely to the question of civic order is one who can learn something from reading, he might be asked to reflect on the following paragraphs from Macaulay's *The History of England*:

Legitimate authority there was none. All those evil passions, which it is the office of government to restrain, and which the best governments restrain but imperfectly, were on a sudden emancipated from control: avarice, licentiousness, revenge, the hatred of sect to sect, the hatred of nation to nation.

On such occasions it will ever be found that the human vermin which, neglected by ministers of state and religion, barbarous in the midst of civilization, heathen in the midst of Christianity, burrows

among all physical and moral pollution in the cellars and garrets of great cities, will at once rise into a terrible importance. So it was now in London.

When the night, the longest night, as it chanced, of the year approached, forth came from every den of vice, from the bear garden at Hockley, and from the labyrinth of the tippling houses and brothels in the Friars, thousands of house-breakers and highwaymen, cutpurses and ringdroppers. With these were mingled thousands of idle apprentices, who wished merely for the excitement of a riot. Even men of peaceable and honest habits were impelled by religious animosity to join the lawless part of the population. For the cry of "No Popery!", a cry which has more than once endangered the existence of London, was the signal of outrage and rapine.<sup>9</sup>

These sentences describe the day of anarchy after James II had abandoned London and before William III had established his power. They are given here in the form of a long quotation not for the purpose of implying that there is necessarily any similarity in the issues that once blew London apart and the difficulties besetting our urban ghettos, but rather to point out that there is something universal about the groups of people who perpetrate such violence. They are the criminals, the seekers after excitement, and the normally sane citizens who look for some kind of scapegoat for their penned-up frustrations. All this is another way of noting how quickly and unexpectedly the demonic forces which always lie just below the surface of life can and do erupt to destroy that order which alone makes life in community possible. Luther, therefore, felt it

<sup>8</sup> *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 721.

<sup>9</sup> *Everyman's Library* edition, II, 131.

desirable to include a reference to good government in his description of "daily bread." His understanding of Scripture made him aware of the demonic dimensions of our existence.

In passing, we must note that Roman Catholic theology to this day is much more optimistic in its view of the human context. From the Second Vatican Council we have, for example, a document known as the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World." This is an eloquent exhibit of the official position of the Roman Catholic Church on this matter. Chapter IV of that message deals with the subject of "The Life of the Political Community." In commenting on this part of the constitution, Robert McAfee Brown of Stanford, an official observer at the council, makes the following point:

Although the final version is more realistic about man's sin than were earlier drafts, there needs to be more recognition of the pervasiveness of sin in men and human institutions, so that the hopes raised by the tone of the document will not be unnecessarily dimmed by the hard realities of the world. The ongoing power of evil is a theme to which more attention could have been given. If this be Protestant pessimism, it is at least a pessimism we have learned from Scripture and tradition as well as from the daily newspaper.<sup>10</sup>

Brown's comment takes us back to the Biblical view of existence under political authority as being dialectical. That is to say, government is caught in a bitter conflict between God's power and the kind of usurpation which Satan claimed in the ac-

count of our Lord's temptation; when he said: "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will."<sup>11</sup>

Walter Künneht calls the world of political life a *Zwischenexistenz*.<sup>12</sup> He points out that in this area light and darkness interpenetrate each other to the degree that it is usually impossible to draw a sharp line between the requirements of God's will and the temptations of the Evil One. This situation makes for a great deal of ambivalence; yet, despite the ambiguities of life, men are called to responsible choice and action. Being caught in this bitter contest is part of our present existence, from which we shall be completely freed only at the Lord's return.

Being an interim arrangement for the time between the Fall and the Parousia, the state belongs to what we call the orders of preservation. It exists to keep the social order from exploding into chaos. The very presence of government in the affairs of men is a reminder both of man's dependence on his Creator and of his propensity to rebel against his Lord. The need to exercise political authority for the purpose of upholding civic order stems from the fact that men, even those that have accepted God's redemption in Christ, still live in the old aeon.

To be sure, our citizenship as children of God is in heaven. While the prospect affects our present existence, the consummation of our destiny lies ahead of us as a promise to be fulfilled. Until we are fully extricated from the forces of destruc-

<sup>10</sup> Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild, America, and Association Presses, 1966), pp. 315—16.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 4:6.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Künneht, *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954), p. 32.

tion and anarchy, demonic powers have to be reckoned with as an aspect of our existence. In the social order, governments have the responsibility of restraining and even suppressing them. Functioning in this constructive way, governments are a token of God's patience and long-suffering with a created order which constantly resorts to rebellion against Him.

On this point, too, there is quite a divergence between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology. The latter begins with the insistence of Aristotle that man is a political animal and proceeds from there to argue that governments belong to the orders of creation. Accordingly, men like Rommen<sup>13</sup> and Maritain<sup>14</sup> hold that political structures would have played a role in the ordering of society even if men had not fallen into sin. In part, of course, this is a matter of definition; yet the chief reason for this difference in point of view is a divergent understanding of reality.

Governments exist because men are evil, Saint Augustine used to insist.<sup>15</sup> Echoing that point of view, Thomas Paine wrote: "Government, like dress, is the badge of our lost innocence".<sup>16</sup> Essay 51 of *The Federalist Papers*, written by either Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, embodied this point in the thinking that

went into the creation of our form of government. It contains the following observation:

What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Luther saw government from the vantage point of distinguishing between the preserving work of God through coercive political power and His saving activity as accomplished through the persuasive power of the Gospel. Here, for example, is a statement from his essay entitled "Secular Authority":

Since few believe and still fewer live a Christian life, do not resist the evil, and themselves do evil, God has provided for non-Christians a different government outside the Christian estate and God's kingdom, and has subjected them to the sword, so that, even though they would do so . . . they may not do it without fear nor in peace and prosperity. . . . If it were not so, seeing that the whole world is evil and that among thousands there is scarcely one true Christian, men would devour one another, and no one could preserve wife and child, support himself and serve God; and thus the world would be reduced to chaos. For this reason God has ordained the two governments: the spiritual, which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians and pious people, and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they must needs keep the peace outwardly, even against their will.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See *The State in Catholic Thought* (New York: Herder, 1947), pp. 259—70.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1966).

<sup>15</sup> See Sancti Aurelii Augustini *Opera Omnia* (Bassani, 1797), Pars II, Tomus Septimus, p. 398, which is *De Civitate Dei*, XII, III.

<sup>16</sup> See Howard Fast, *The Selected Works of Tom Paine and Citizen Tom Paine* (New York: Modern Library, 1945). The sentence occurs in Paine's *Common Sense*.

<sup>17</sup> "On a Just Partition of Power" in *The Federalist* (Washington, D. C.: National Home Library Foundation), p. 337.

<sup>18</sup> *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1930), III, 236. Cf. American Edition, 45, 90—91.

For statements of this kind Luther has been severely criticized as a man who dichotomized life. But his distinction between the kingdom of God's right hand and that of His left hand does not derive from some desire to indulge in sundering our existence. These are not two opposing principles; they supplement each other. They spring from the recognition that the same God deals with men in two different ways because they live in two aeons, the old and the new.

The triumph of Easter is behind us; yet our full liberation belongs to the future. We live during the interim. This period has been given to the church as the time for extending the victory Christ achieved in His resurrection. She goes about her work in a world where rebellion against God runs rampant. In the midst of the demonic forces at work in the life of individuals and of society, Christians go about their task as members of a newly created order, deriving strength from Word and Sacrament. At the same time they cannot fully escape their solidarity with Adam in his transgression. As St. Paul would put it, they live in both the old and the new aeon.

To the extent that they live in the sphere of the old Adam, they come under the kingdom of God's left hand, whose instruments are the law and power. Under that rule political structures exist to restrain men and to suppress evil. If all men lived as persons committed totally to the service of God, there would be no need of government. But people do not live that way. The demonic is still powerfully at work among them and in them. For this reason God has established the power of the state to order the affairs of men.

Luther saw this aspect of our existence

much more clearly than Calvin did. The latter was considerably more generous in his appraisal of the role of government in the affairs of men. Said he:

It has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinance. For God was pleased so to rule the affairs of men, inasmuch as He is present with them and also presides over the making of laws and the exercising of equity in courts of justice.<sup>19</sup>

The problems of disorder and violence which confront our society today may have as one of their by-products a deeper appreciation of Luther's insight into the dark abyss of our existence. For it is becoming increasingly apparent that a major fallacy lies at the base of a view of life which would hold that men by nature tend to develop a society that is good. The consequences of the demonic at work among us are all too patent. They are seen even in the fact that we have often been misled in our understanding of human existence.

We have been at pains to establish the point that the state belongs to the orders of preservation, established by our Creator to make community life possible despite the demonic forces which threaten to destroy men's associations with each other. The Biblical symbol of political authority, therefore, is the sword.<sup>20</sup> The apostle's use of this term is a reminder that governments are expected to use the resources of power to restrain and frustrate evil in its

<sup>19</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, xx, 4, edited by John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. xxi of the *Library of Christian Classics* (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1961), p. 1489.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 13:4.



determination to fragmentize society, inciting a man against his neighbor.

From the Scriptural point of view the existence of government as a bulwark against anarchy is an institution of that God who, at the beginning of time, created order out of chaos. Hence political structures in and of themselves are not to be thought of as evil. In fact, the apostle Paul calls them God's servant for good.<sup>21</sup> For that reason members of the church do not dream of a stateless society, knowing full well that the elimination of the power of the state could only open the floodgates to anarchy.

Government is a servant of God as it goes about its task of punishing the evil and rewarding those who do well. In this context "good" and "evil" stand for actions undertaken in response to the will and demands of political authority. Here "evil" stands for acts of resistance and "good" for the stance of what is usually translated as "subordination," signifying that frame of mind which ranks itself under the needs of others.

From the Biblical point of view, angelic beings are involved in the application of political power. In the book of Daniel, for example, Michael represents the nation of Israel.<sup>22</sup> This is a way of saying that governments do not come into being as purely sociological phenomena. Behind them stands the creative will of God. Accordingly, Jesus took the time to remind Pontius Pilate that he would have no power at all to exercise if it had not been given to the Roman procurator from above.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dan. 10:13, 21 and 12:1.

<sup>23</sup> John 19:11.

We must see the action of the Lutheran churches of East Germany against this kind of background. When they felt the need to spell out some principles of action for their members in confronting the problems of life in a totalitarian system, they accepted as their very first principle the assertion that governments are established of God.<sup>24</sup> They chose this way to declare their faith to their godless overlords. At the same time, these harassed church bodies meant to imply that civic order, even in a tyrannical system, is better than social anarchy. In this way they expressed their willingness to endure inconvenience and even persecution in order to help hold back the demonic forces of chaos. In so doing they articulated an insight which was once expressed by Prof. Eduard Heimann as follows: "Men cannot live, in the sense of physical existence, without order for a single day, while they can live, if need be, without freedom for a long time."<sup>25</sup>

Such an observation does not in any sense want to deprecate the significance of freedom. But it does intend to make the point that conditions of freedom can be established and maintained only where order has first come into being. Much the same relationship prevails between order and justice. Civic order is basic to both freedom and justice.

That statement leads us to look at another aspect of order as an element in our existence. Whatever has been said

<sup>24</sup> See "Theological Observer" in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXIX (1958), 298 to 299.

<sup>25</sup> Eduard Heimann, *Freedom and Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 10.

about the function of political structures in the social order must be understood also against the background of Rev. 13:1-10. There we have a description of some of the demonic facets of totalitarian power. Here is how John puts it:

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with a crown on each of its horns, and a wicked name written on its heads. . . . The dragon gave the beast his own power, his throne, and his vast authority. . . . The whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast. All people worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. They worshiped the beast also, saying: "Who is like the beast? Who can fight against it?"

The beast was allowed to say terribly wicked things, and it was permitted to have authority for forty-two months. It began to curse God, and God's name, and the place where he lives, including all those who live in heaven. It was allowed to fight against God's people and to defeat them, and it was given authority over every tribe and people, every language and nation. All people living on earth will worship it, that is, everyone whose name has not been written, before the world began, in the book of the living that belongs to the Lamb that was killed. (TEV)

When St. John the Divine wrote these words, he had in mind the imperial system of Rome with its demand that the emperor be reckoned as divine. John saw in this political development an instance of the way in which political structures can and do become instruments of the devil himself. As such the Roman state had become a weird and wild messiah of Satan, determined to uproot the effects of the

redemptive activity of the true Messiah.<sup>26</sup>

The author of the Apocalypse saw this turn of events not as a one-time political phenomenon but as a symbol of the way in which governments become demonic when they set out to impose totalitarian control. In their pursuit of absolute mastery they blank out all those responsibilities which men were created to render not to Caesar but to God.

We refer to such nations as being demonic. They are to be distinguished from secular states. The latter simply ignore the existence of God in their public life and in official language. A demonic government, on the contrary, is one that goes out of its way to displace God. It draws a circle around itself, as the Roman state did under the later Caesars, and insists that there is nothing above that circle. Something supernatural is at work in such drives for total control. The angelic powers behind these political structures belong to the realm of the evil.

Now we are assured by our Lord's ascension that He has been victorious also over such beings. Hence He is called the "ruler of the kings of the earth."<sup>27</sup> In Eastern basilicas the exalted Christ is often depicted, therefore, as the *pantokrator*, the One who has overcome those beings referred to in Ephesians as "the authorities and potentates of this dark world."<sup>28</sup> This is an impressive way of using architecture

<sup>26</sup> James Moffatt in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n. d.) V, 429.

<sup>27</sup> Rev. 1:5.

<sup>28</sup> Eph. 6:12; cf., for example, plate 457 in Vol. II of *Encyclopedia of World Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), which shows the Christ Pantokrator from the apse mosaic of the Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily.

to express a most profound insight into our existence, namely, that Christ is indeed the ruler of all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

The full effects of that victory, to be sure, are still concealed. Christ's power is at work only in hidden form. The only certain sign we have of His triumphant rule are Word and Sacrament, to which our individual service and our personal witness testify.

Is it not right here that much of the theology used to support and encourage social renewal and even revolution goes awry? It often proceeds on the apparent assumption that the achievement of broader areas of freedom and justice somehow constitute the signs of our Lord's gracious rule, when, in point of fact, the consequences of Christ's victory at Easter for the political affairs of men were never intended to be that obvious. As a matter of fact, the consequences of Easter may be at work most powerfully just there where the kind of injustice and hypocrisy prevail which sent Jesus of Nazareth to a cross. The kingdom of God does not yet come with observation.

All this does not mean that we have an excuse for condoning tyranny and the perversion of justice. As Christians we get involved in these issues for a reason other than believing that order, justice, and freedom pertain to the ultimate values of life. Christians remain fully aware that political and social configurations are tentative and belong at best to the penultimate matters of our existence. Whatever measure of civic order, with its concomitants of justice and freedom, may prevail at a given moment are viewed as token blessings of that God who is Himself just and free, and

who created men to be persons and so live in a society that is reasonably open. Any institutions which keep men from being what they were created to be are to that extent demonic and must, for that reason, be resisted for their distortion and perversion of God's will.

As a *Zwischenexistenz* political authority wears two faces. On the one hand, the state is a divine institution. Yet the persons who are invested with power can readily be drawn into the service of the demonic, as witness the men to whom Jesus responded in Gethsemane with the incisive observation, "This is your hour and the power of darkness."<sup>29</sup> Here we see the stark tragedy of our existence, when an instrument for order itself becomes a source of disorder and grave injustice.

In this kind of context we must give some thought to the relationship of law to order. The question of *nomos* as it relates to the *kosmos* came up in a rather philosophical form among the ancient Greeks of Ionia, some six centuries before the Christian era. These men confronted the problem directly as they set about their task of dealing with the phenomenon of personal caprice as practiced by tyrants strong enough to enforce their will. Such arbitrariness, the Greeks argued, violates the *logos* behind the universe. There ought to be *nomos*, they said, to bring to the city-state the kind of rationality which the Greeks believed prevailed throughout the *kosmos*. For them law belonged to the ultimates of existence.

Not so in Scripture. There law belongs to the provisional arrangements of God, designed to bring a fallen world and history itself to its predetermined goal. Law

<sup>29</sup> Luke 22:53.

serves the interest of order by providing the possibility of stability for life in community by striking the proper point of balance among the various and equal rights of the individuals living there. In an open society, means exist to challenge any specific law for not achieving this kind of balance.

The right to test such a law in the interest of greater justice belongs to every citizen of a responsible society. It ought to be used, however, out of respect for law and not for the purpose of encouraging a careless and even a hostile attitude toward law and order. For law is still a necessary ingredient of civic order. In fact, it is part of God's *kosmos*, as a serving instrument for both freedom and justice. We may here quote the words of Justice Hugo Black on this point:

Governments like ours were formed to substitute the rule of law for the rule of force. . . . The peaceful songs of love can become as stirring and provocative as the "Marsellaise" did in the days when a noble revolution gave way to rule by successive mobs until chaos set in.<sup>30</sup>

We cannot leave the subject of civic order without some reference to the problem of war. Much of what is said and written today would seem to imply that wars are the result of some kind of accidental disarray among the forces that create history. Perhaps, therefore, the point needs to be made that every war serves as a reminder of how fragile the basic structure of the old aeon is in which we still live, and from which we shall not be liberated until the end of history. Until such

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in "Civil Disobedience: Prelude to Revolution" in *U.S. News and World Report*, Oct. 30, 1967, p. 66.

time the second horseman of the Apocalypse will ride out often "to take peace from the earth."<sup>31</sup> We are specifically told that there will be wars and rumors of wars until the end, and that, in fact, their fury will grow as the demonic forces we have alluded to realize how little time is left for their work of destruction.<sup>32</sup> Any absence of destructive conflict in history is a sign of God's patience with His rebellious creatures.

Both the need for law and the eruption of war point beyond themselves to the eschatological change God has in mind for His creation. This will come with the victory described in Rev. 17:13-14, where we read: "These [ten kings] are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and king of kings, and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful." Until that moment arrives we live in a situation of strong tensions created by the fact that our existence is caught between God's creative intent and Satan's delight in destruction. Whatever conflicts and disorders arise from this historical dialectic constitute the birth pangs of the new age. Of that our Lord's resurrection and ascension assure us.

We have attempted thus far to discuss the subject of civic order as a problem of existence. We have looked to see life as it is with its blatant contradictions between what is and what ought to be. We set out to suggest how we might think of such

<sup>31</sup> Revelation 6:4.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Matt. 8:29, where the evil spirits are described as being surprised by what they felt to be a premature confrontation with Jesus, whom they recognized as God's "Holy One."

order in our present conception of the universe as open and in movement. We proceeded from there to describe the role of political authority in the task of preserving order where tensions prevail due to the dialectical nature of our present existence. Being creatures of God redeemed to be His children, we are still exposed to the forces of the demonic, whose aim it is to distort and destroy what God designs. We hinted that civic order is not something to be taken for granted, but that it is in fact a gift from that God who works to uphold order against everything that threatens anarchy. Tentatively and in passing, we suggested something of the connection between order and freedom as well as between order and justice. We pointed to Christ's victory over the rulers of the darkness of this world but at once injected the caution that the results of this

conquest are still hidden and will remain so until the consummation. Finally, we were most anxious to make the point that the only signs we have of Christ's lordship are Word and Sacrament. Our interest in calling attention to this basic Biblical position arose from the conviction that it is imperative to keep intact the distinction between final values and those which at best belong to the category of penultimates. We found this to be another way of insisting that also civic order must be discussed on the basis of a distinction between Law and Gospel on the awareness that the only source for the continuity in whatever measure of order may be given us from day to day is to be found more in God's good and gracious will than in man's small achieving.

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