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Dialectic Essay

1,055 words

How do politics and religion relate to one another? On which foundations did God institute them? How do these foundations differ from one another? Although some might argue that God instituted religion, while man instituted politics; God instituted both for the benefit of man.

Let man first examine the foundation on which God placed politics. Politics primarily relates to the government. For what purpose did God institute government and by extension, politics? The state or country arguably contains two primary populations, the rulers and the ruled. God has given the rulers the task of making and administering laws in order that the people might treat one another justly. The government should follow a rule when instituting these laws. A father does not institute rules or punishments among his household for his own benefit; his rules benefit his children and the people under his care. The government should treat its citizens in the same way; making rules for the benefit of the people instead of its own. Therefore the rulers should treat the people with justice, because citizens benefit the most from the government treating them justly.

How should man define justice? Polemarchus, in the Republic of Plato, made the claim, “justice is the art which gives good to friends and evil to enemies.”¹ This definition, although it satisfied Socrates, requires more thought on the nature of bias in relation to justice. In a courtroom, if the judge has an acquaintance or friendship with the accused, should the judge rule in favor of the accused? No, the judge should condemn the guilty because of their actions; if the accused has murdered, the judge should give him over to the government so that the government can punish him as a murderer. In light of this illustration, Polemarchus should change his definition to, “Justice is the art which rewards or punishes a man according to the merit of his actions.”²

If justice rewards or punishes a person by the nature of his actions, what defines the nature of man's actions? Hammurabi, the ancient Sumerian king, wrote a system of laws based upon the concept of natural law, which aligned itself with the Ten Commandments. God commanded Noah in Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."³ God later gave the Israelites His divine and revealed will to follow by the means of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, if God's Ten Commandments define good and evil, and the government administers justice based on good and evil, then God ordained the office of the government for the purpose punishing or rewarding man be merit of his actions.

On what foundation did God place the church? Firstly God built the church on Christ. Matthew 16:15-18 says, "He said to them, 'But who do you say I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"⁴ Many theologians explained that Jesus never built His church on the authority of man, but on the confession that Peter gave.⁵ For this reason the church stands on the confession that Christ is the Son of God.

God's foundations for both the church and government stand as proven, but what of the benefits they impart? If the foundation of government consists of the correct institution of justice, anyone could argue that the government gives the benefits of justice in order that man might dwell with his neighbor peaceably. Firstly, justice punishes criminals by the merit of their actions. Therefore, criminals fear the law and the punishment it entails. Paul wrote in Romans 13:3-4, "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the

one who is in authority? Then do what is good and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on a wrongdoer."⁶ This passage shows that God gave authority to the government to punish wrongdoers in order that, out of fear of the government, man might refrain from committing crimes against his neighbor. Therefore, the benefits of a good government include peace and order; a peaceful society requires order to function.

The government appears to institute the benefits of politics, but all good things proceed from God. Therefore, God uses and works through the government to establish peace in the earthly kingdom. By what means then does God impart the benefits of religion? God solely imparts the countless benefits through religion. Firstly, the free gift of forgiveness of all sins and transgressions through the death of His son, Jesus Christ. Jesus took on the flesh of man so that He could stand in the place of man. He stood in the place of sinners as he hung from the cross and emptied the cup of God's wrath. These acts wrought the forgiveness of sins. Secondly, God gives the gift of eternal life. In the same way that Christ stood in the place of sinners, sinners now stand as heirs of eternal life. Altogether, God gives the benefits of religion in the form of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Throughout the course of this essay, the readers have examined the foundations of religion and politics, namely that the foundation of good government includes the punishment of man by merit of his actions and the keeping man at peace with his neighbors. The foundation of religion primarily consists of the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The benefits of the government reflect the foundation; keeping man at peace with his neighbors. The benefits of religion, on the other hand, include the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. At the

conclusion, the readers should come to see that God instituted the foundation of good government and uses it as a means of keeping order among mankind.

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, book I, paragraph 57

² Not a copyrighted quote, author's work.

³ Genesis 9:6, ESV

⁴ Matthew 16:15-18, ESV

⁵ Luther, *The Power and Primacy of the Pope*, Treatise Compiled By Theologians Assembled at Smalcald 1537, paragraph 27

⁶ Romans 13:3-4, ESV

Works Cited

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