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Christians are good citizens

The New Testament is very clear on the duty of Christians to be good citizens. But how many people in the UK political elite know this?

As Britain becomes increasingly secular, there is an urgent need for prayer and evangelism. But we must also make clear to our political rulers that Christians are taught to respect the governing



authorities, to pray for them and to be obedient citizens.

There is widespread ignorance about biblical beliefs, so we must let those in authority know they have nothing to fear from Christians. Even if this is obvious to you, it may not be obvious to key people in the civil service, Parliament or the media.

The Government deserves our full support in tackling the growing threat of terrorism. Yet its general extremism policy must not use vague language which could catch anyone with strong beliefs, including Christians, or curtail the historic liberties of churches.

Christians must obey their rulers

Christianity is not a religion of political revolution, though it has massively influenced the course of history. Many New Testament passages teach that Christians must obey their government. Jesus famously said: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17, KJV).

From the birth of Christ, when Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register at the demand of Caesar Augustus, to Jesus' trial before Pilate and his death on a Roman cross, our faith demonstrates the need for submission to the governing authorities – whether they are virtuous or corrupt.

Romans 13:1 plainly says: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." 1 Peter 2:13 explains: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men".

R C Sproul comments that "there is a fundamental obligation of the Christian to be a model of civil obedience. We as the people of God are called upon to be as obedient as we possibly can in good conscience to the powers that be."¹



Christian influence on history



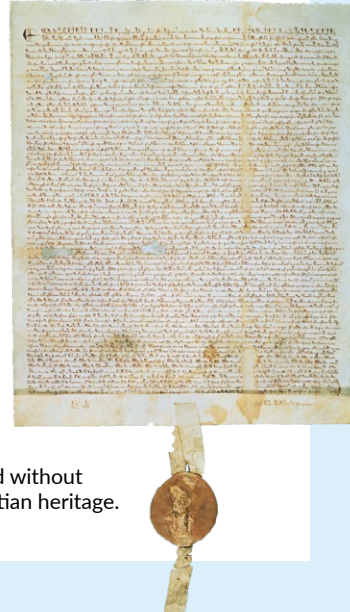
The Roman Empire outlawed gladiatorial contests

Christians should not be silent in the face of evil. We can submit to governing authorities and still speak out against what is wrong. The Bible provides the examples of John the Baptist confronting King Herod and Daniel's wise advice to King Nebuchadnezzar (see Mark 6:18 and Daniel 4:27).

History shows the good influence Christians have had on their respective governments. Christian influence in the Roman Empire led to it outlawing infanticide, abortion and gladiatorial contests. Christian conviction was the impetus behind the law in India prohibiting suttee (the burning of women alive with their husbands) in 1829.²

The abolition of the slave trade throughout most of Europe and the United States was driven by Christian motivation. William Wilberforce laboured throughout his life to win the battle against slavery. He was a committed, passionate Bible-believing Christian.

In Britain the Christian faith has been the bedrock of our development as a nation over centuries. Magna Carta (right), the 1689 Bill of Rights and the freedoms of the common law were not the product of enlightened 20th century atheists. Secularism is not the foundation of our liberties. True 'British values' cannot be understood without considering our Christian heritage.



'BRITISH VALUES' AND THE DEFINITION OF EXTREMISM

The Government says that extremism is "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values". Its *Prevent* strategy defines 'British values' as: "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs".

But the Government's definition is wide open to interpretation. It has so far failed to make the crucial distinction between respect for *people* and respect for *ideas*. The Bible clearly teaches

that everyone is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and so Christians respect and love all people, whatever their background or beliefs.

But no-one can say in good conscience that they respect the beliefs of everyone about everything. For example, an atheist does not respect belief in God and a capitalist does not respect Marxist beliefs. Anyone with strong views risks being caught by the 'British values' agenda, however law-abiding or

innocent they are.

Christians are the primary victims of extremism around the world - facing global harassment, intimidation and violence. It is estimated that 80% of acts of religious discrimination worldwide are against Christians.³ The Government's extremism policy needs to recognise that Christians are the victims and not the perpetrators of extremism.

JUSTIN MARTYR



Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165)

Justin, from the city of Nablus near Jerusalem, was martyred for his Christian faith around 165AD.

In his 'First Apology', written to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, Justin argues that Christians are the best of citizens and should not be treated as outlaws.

He wrote: "more than all other people we are your helpers and allies in the cause of peace, convinced as we are that it is alike impossible for the wicked... and the virtuous to escape the notice of God, and that everyone goes to eternal punishment or salvation in accordance with the character of his acts."⁶

'The Obedience of a Christian Man'

William Tyndale published *The Obedience of a Christian Man* in 1528. His biographer David Daniell has called this work "Tyndale's most important book outside his translations."⁷

Tyndale strongly refutes the slander that the Reformers were fomenting civil disobedience, saying in the Prologue: "the peaceable doctrine of Christ teacheth to obey, and to suffer for the word of God, and to remit the vengeance and the defence of the word to God..."⁸

In the book, Tyndale cites Romans 13:1-10 (see overleaf) on submission to governing authorities and continues: "God therefore hath given laws unto all nations, and in all lands

hath put kings, governors and rulers in his own stead, to rule the world through them... Whosoever therefore resisteth them, resisteth God, for they are in the room of God".⁹

David Daniell draws attention to a vital and complementary teaching in the work: "Tyndale did not offer Henry VIII or anyone else a sovereignty not subject to natural law".

In *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale argues that kings are answerable to God, not the Pope.

Daniell explains that Tyndale "zooms in on the condition of the king himself before his God... The ruler is under a religious and moral duty to act in accordance with God's law."¹⁰



William Tyndale (1494–1536)

Biblical teaching for leaders and citizens

Human authorities are instituted by God for the good of everyone. Governments are vital for civilisation. They are ordained by God to punish the wrongdoer and to commend those who do right (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:14). Biblical teaching provides the framework for life in a democratic country and teaches Christians to be model citizens.

SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good" (Titus 3:1; also Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17).

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AND LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

"Love your neighbour as yourself" (see Luke 10:25-37). *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44).

GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO LAW

"By justice a king gives a country stability" (Proverbs 29:4; also Daniel 4:27; Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

JESUS DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SPHERES

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17, KJV).

ONLY THE STATE SHOULD USE FORCE

A king or government official is *"God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer"* (Romans 13:4).

PAYMENT OF TAXES

"This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue" (Romans 13:6-7; also Mark 12:17).

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13; also Genesis 9:5-6).

RESPECT FOR PRIVATE PROPERTY

"You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15; also Ephesians 4:28).

CORRUPTION IS WRONG

"A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice" (Proverbs 17:23; also Exodus 23:8).

HONESTY IN BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS

"The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight" (Proverbs 11:1; also Proverbs 20:10, 23).

These values have shaped Britain's national life, our laws and our institutions. Christians being obedient to the Bible's teaching are faithful citizens.

Romans 13:1-10

1. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. **2.** Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. **3.** For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. **4.** For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. **5.** Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because

of possible punishment but also because of conscience. **6.** This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. **7.** Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour. **8.** Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. **9.** The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself". **10.** Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

The authority of Jesus Christ

Christians must never exalt any human authority above the authority of Christ, who is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5). If the state should command what God forbids or forbid what God commands then the duty of the Christian must be to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

Matthew Henry strikes a helpful note of caution for us: "We must not be forward to find fault with the public administration, or quarrel with every thing that is not just according to our mind" (commenting on Ecclesiastes 8:2-5).⁴

It is plainly wrong for the state to intrude into the separate God-given spheres of the church or the family;

for example, by threatening to close church youth work that does not conform to political correctness.

How could Christians comply if, for example, the state tried to censor pastors' sermons or ban people bringing Bibles into the country or prohibit a Christian parent praying with their adopted child?

John Bunyan (right), the renowned 17th century pastor, refused orders from the governing elite to stop preaching and was imprisoned for many years. Bunyan said of his non-violent resistance: "where I cannot obey [my rulers] actively, there I am willing to lie down and to suffer what they shall do unto me."⁵



John Bunyan (1628 - 1688)

The supreme example of Jesus Christ teaches that Christians will experience persecution and injustice in this life.

GOVERNMENT EXTREMISM AGENDA NEEDS MORE FOCUS

The Government talks about the need to tackle 'non-violent extremism' which draws individuals into terrorism. But its definition of extremism is very vague (see overleaf). This means many innocent people – including Christians – could be labelled as extremists.

So the idea of giving Ofsted power to inspect church youth work for signs of 'extremism' is very alarming. Likewise the proposal to force all public office holders – such

as school governors or councillors – to swear an oath upholding equality and 'British values'.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has said he could be viewed as an extremist because he believes the "kingdom of God outweighs everything else".¹¹

Many heroic men and women of the past, people who rejected violence, were labelled extremists simply because their beliefs shook the cultural consensus – people like

William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury, Josephine Butler and Rosa Parks.

A former head of MI5, Lord Evans, has warned that Christians in particular could fall victim to the extremism agenda – because authorities don't want to appear to focus only on one religion. Christians must oppose this 'secular extremism'. The real danger in the Government's current approach is to treat secular equality laws as the solution to the Islamist threat.

Christian teaching down the centuries

Augustine: (354-430)

The people of God have "no scruples in conforming to the laws of the earthly city which regulate things designed for the support of mortal life".¹²



John Wycliffe: (c. 1330-1384)

"Evilly disposed kings deserve honour in the first place because they are rational creatures in whom not only the traces but also the image of the Trinity is visible, and in the second place because they have the power conferred on them by God to benefit his church and so render God effective service, however damnably they may abuse it."¹³



Martin Luther: (1483-1546)

"Christians readily submit themselves to be governed by the Sword; they pay taxes, honour those in authority, serve and help them, and do what they can to uphold their power, so that they may continue their work, and that honour and fear of authority may be maintained."¹⁴



John Calvin: (1509-1564)

"Subjects should be led not by fear alone of princes and rulers to remain in subjection under them... but because they are showing obedience to God himself when they give it to them; since the rulers' power is from God."¹⁵



References available at christian.org.uk/COG-ref



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