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Mission of Church and Role of Advocacy

Evangelical Advocacy: A Response to Global Poverty

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*The mission of
the church and the
role of advocacy*

Discussion Paper

July 2002

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Tearfund is an evangelical Christian relief and development agency working through local partners to bring help and hope to communities in need around the world.

This Tearfund *Discussion Paper* is aimed at helping Tearfund staff, partners and supporters develop a biblical approach to advocacy. It does not necessarily constitute Tearfund policy. Comments from readers are welcomed.

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Further copies are available from Tearfund's international website: www.tilz.info

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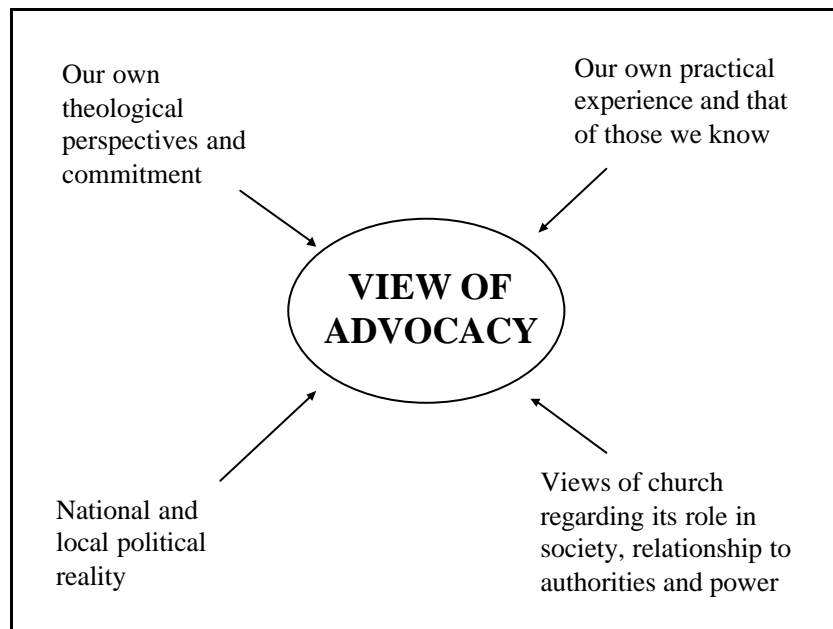
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

God is committed to justice and has a heart for the poor. As the church becomes more involved in development work, it is increasingly clear that injustice is behind much of the poverty we face, and that the causes of this injustice need to be tackled in order to bring lasting change. To do this, we often need to work with those who have the power to bring about change. Tearfund refers to this work as ‘advocacy’ and defines it as:

‘Seeking with, and on behalf of, the poor to address underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development through influencing the policies and practices of the powerful. Tearfund views advocacy as part of its mission to bring good news to the poor, motivated by the compassion of Christ.’

In everyday life, advocacy happens at all levels where there are relationships between people, including the family, the workplace and churches. Advocacy at the more formal level of government or business is in many ways an extension of these relationships and activities. For the church, this advocacy is not for selfish gain, but part of working with God to bring about his kingdom, with a particular focus on the poor and marginalised.

However, many Christians are still extremely wary of any talk of advocacy, and remain to be convinced of its biblical basis or its practical usefulness. Addressing these concerns is the aim of this paper. Views towards advocacy are likely to be influenced by a number of factors, as shown below. It is good to be aware of these from the outset.



Some see advocacy as compromising because it will often require involvement in the political sphere. They see politics as corrupt and corrupting and therefore no place for Christians who want to remain pure. This view may also be based on bad experiences of involvement of the church, eg failures in Rwanda and Nazi Germany to prevent the subsequent atrocities, church support for the Crusades.

Others see the church and state as inseparable, a view that has its roots in the actions of the Roman Emperor Constantine as he started the process of establishing the church by the Roman state. They will use passages like Romans 13 (obedience to the government) to justify lack of action or lack of criticism of those in power, or Romans 12 / Matthew 5 (loving your enemies and leaving room for God's vengeance) to argue that Christians should not seek redress for wrongs. This view is more commonly held in established churches in the West, or churches in other countries that have their origins in these established churches.

The main counter-argument to this view is based on Augustine's writings on the existence of two cities: the city of God that deals with spiritual matters, and the city of the world that deals with worldly matters. These two spheres have little overlap and the church should leave the worldly matters to the state. The state is considered to be against the church and this view is most common in non-conformist churches, which may have suffered persecution at the hands of the state. Some take this view to more extreme conclusions and focus almost exclusively on preaching the gospel for individual salvation (seen as part of the church's sphere) or on opting out of public life altogether and trying to create an alternative society.

There is also the belief that this world is in decay and is heading for total destruction, so there is little point working to make it better. Redemption is therefore limited to the personal sphere. This view will often maintain that the Kingdom of God is limited to the future, and is not being worked out in our current world.

Many churches have to function in countries with authoritarian regimes and are afraid to speak out or may be severely restricted in what they can do, due to limited religious freedom and existing persecution.

To address some of these theological, historical and practical issues, we have attempted to present a clear biblical grounding for the involvement of the church in advocacy, based on an understanding of the church's mission as working with God to bring about his kingdom. This kingdom has already come and it is the mission of the church to work with God to bring it about more fully, realising that it will only be complete when Christ comes again.

We argue that involvement in advocacy is vital, both practically and theologically, to the church's calling to bring about justice, speak out for truth, defend the poor and oppressed, and to work to redeem the whole of creation. Advocacy involves both tackling individual cases of injustice or poverty, and tackling systems and structures that allow this injustice to happen. (More details of a practical process to undertake advocacy are provided in Tearfund's Advocacy Toolkit, 2002.)

Advocacy is firmly rooted in the hope and promise we have for a better future and we do it in the confidence that God is working his purposes out. We look forward to justice, not backwards to revenge, and are involved as part of our calling to be salt and light in the world.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1 considers the nature of the kingdom of God, which is no earthly kingdom, but redeemed men and women living in community, in fellowship with God, and participating in the development of his creation. Wherever God's rule is found, there is his kingdom, and he is working to renew all of creation. It then moves on to consider the good news that is at the heart of his kingdom, including good news for the poor that will bring redemption in spiritual, physical, social and economic life. The mission of the church is to work with God to bring about his kingdom. This includes tackling injustice, bringing freedom and hope, confronting powers, working to look after creation, proclaiming truth and performing signs and wonders. Clearly, part of the church's role includes advocacy.

Justice is at the heart of God's plan for humanity. His acts and laws demonstrate his desire for justice and his compassion for those who suffer. The state and other powers, as God's servants, have a role in building his kingdom. However, this role is limited in mandate and is limited practically. All authorities suffer from the effects of sin and may also be corrupted and distorted by earthly rulers and by unseen spiritual powers behind them.

Chapter 2 looks at how God's people have historically engaged with those in authority over them. It starts by looking at the different political makeup of God's people as they moved from a family in the Patriarchal period, towards a nation, with the establishment of judges and then kings. It shows that God used all of the different systems to bring about his plans and that all systems had their good and bad points. Different systems were required for different contexts and all have their strengths and weaknesses. There is therefore no blueprint for political structures that can be applied today.

The New Testament period, when the Jews were ruled by a foreign power, saw extensive political activity from Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes. Jesus accepts many of the aims of these groups but rejects most of their methods. The early church suffered persecution for 300 years until the Emperor Constantine accepted its legitimacy and gave it a favoured position in the Empire. This led to two predominant views that Christians tend to hold towards the state. One of complete separation (based on Augustine's views) and the other of union or establishment (based on Constantine's actions). Since then many churches have been very close to those in power, whether Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Protestant), although there have always been significant numbers who have rejected this approach and have established alternative communities and withdrawn from the mainstream churches. Some examples are then given of how the church in the 20th century has engaged with the state, and some analysis is given on new forms of power that the church needs to engage with in the 21st century.

Chapter 3 considers Jesus' approach to power. He modelled servant leadership, suffered and did not use force to gain what he wanted. Unlike other leaders, he associated with those on the edges of society and accepted everyone he met, regardless of status. He challenged corruption, hypocrisy and injustice among Jewish society and was not afraid of speaking out for what he knew was right. Jesus also taught love for enemies, even if they were causing you suffering, and he taught obedience to the state. However, this was not unconditional as God's law was for him the highest law by which everything else was to be judged.

After covering this groundwork we move on to application in chapter 4. This discusses the options open to the church when engaging in advocacy. It shows the importance of developing a vision for social change, and of knowing your values before you try to engage with those in power. Another requirement is to understand the sources and manifestations of power that exist in the world, so we can engage with these powers. The church has traditionally taken very different approaches to power, with different groups focusing on prayer and exorcism, identifying with those who are suffering, constructive engagement to bring change, or civil disobedience. Certain aspects of all approaches are necessary and biblical and the church needs to make the most of its diversity and work together to bring about the greatest change possible.

This chapter moves on to a consideration of civil disobedience and violence, and suggests that violence against people should never be considered as a valid option. Finally, it looks at options open under different types of government and options open to the persecuted church.

In chapter 5 the main question addressed is how biblical principles can be applied to the laws of a modern state. There are numerous difficulties in trying to do this, not least because we live in a different world at a different time to the Jews, and the fact that there are different types of law in the Bible. However, we offer some foundational principles for interpreting the Bible and some options for involvement in policy making.

The church as a whole needs to engage in different ways in policy making. These include proclamation of the truth, prayer for change in policy makers, living as an alternative society and engaging in policy debate in the dominant (usually secular) language of the policy environment. This last option includes considering a human rights approach.

Each chapter ends with some questions for reflection or discussion.

1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

This chapter considers some of the major themes in the Bible. It starts with the idea of the Kingdom of God as central to God's overall plan for humanity, and what this means for the mission of the church. It goes on to consider the role of advocacy in the overall mission of the church and how the state fits in with God's overall plans for the world.

The kingdom of God

The kingdom or kingship of God is one of the central themes of the Bible. The phrase 'the kingdom of God' is virtually absent from the Old Testament although the concept of kingship and God's sovereignty or rule is everywhere. The Gospels are packed with teaching on the kingdom of God (or kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel). According to the Gospels, this kingdom is to be found wherever God reigns and where his reign is freely acknowledged. This includes in people's hearts, relationships, systems and structures. It was prophesied in the Old Testament and inaugurated by Jesus through his life, death and resurrection. It is the most frequently mentioned topic in the Gospels, and being '*born of the spirit*' (John 3:5), receiving eternal life and entering the kingdom of God are in fact the same thing but expressed in different ways. Focusing on the kingdom of God enables us to understand the wider implications of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He has come to restore all things to how they should be, to tackle the effects of all sin, which includes offering individual salvation as well as restoration of our society.

However, the kingdom is not everywhere and another kingdom, the kingdom of the world, has been set up in direct opposition to God's kingdom. Satan and other angelic powers have seceded from God's rule and have drawn mankind into the rebellion. God has already won the final victory through Jesus' death on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:54-55) but this victory is not fully consummated until Christ comes again and the kingdom of the world becomes once more '*the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*' (Revelation 11:15) and God's reign will be complete. It is essential to keep the fact of this final victory in mind as we approach the reality of the world that we live in. We need to look beyond the immediate world that we see to the spiritual reality behind it and also to the all-powerful God who is in control and is working his purposes out. This gives us hope for the future, which provides the motivations for current actions.

- **God's kingship in the Old Testament**

God's kingship is a central Old Testament theme and he is constantly calling on his people to give the honour and worship that is due to their King. His sovereignty stretches throughout the earth as he has power over all earthly kings (Isaiah 40:23), although he allows them to rule over their territories. Isaiah looks forward to a future kingdom in which the Messiah will reign and put all things right and bring blessing to his people (Isaiah 35:5-10, 49, 51-53, 61:1-4). John the Baptist preached that this kingdom was at hand, so by the time Jesus came, the Jewish people were full of expectation. However, they had a very different kingdom in mind - a political kingdom that would overthrow the Romans and re-establish the Jews as rulers of their land.

- **Jesus and the kingdom**

Jesus began his public ministry by announcing '*the kingdom of God is at hand*' (Mark 1:15). He gives no definition of the kingdom, but perhaps the closest we get is in the Lord's prayer: '*Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*' (Matthew 6:10). However, there are numerous things that we can learn from Jesus' actions, his parables and his teaching about the kingdom of God.

- 1 **Jesus brings in the kingdom** - he told his followers that the signs he did were a demonstration that the kingdom of God (God's rule and reign) had come upon them (Matthew 12:28). His coming actually brought about the kingdom of God in person, through his obedience to God, through the signs he performed and supremely through his death and resurrection. He is, in fact, the good news. He brought the kingdom of God to earth, offering salvation to all who welcome it.
- 2 **We enter the kingdom through Jesus** – Jesus not only brings about the kingdom of God through his life of obedience and submission to God, he is also the way to enter the kingdom, he is the way to salvation. We enter through humbly submitting to the Lordship of Christ. The kingdom is to be sought above all things (Matthew 6:33) and entering costs everything (Luke 18:29-30). God's people are a visible sign of the kingdom.
- 3 **The kingdom has come but we await its fulfilment** – it has penetrated the present in the person of Jesus, but in another sense, it is still future. Jesus talks of the age to come (Mark 4:19), a final judgement in which the righteous will be separated from the wicked (Matthew 25:31-46) and the close of this age when the Son of Man comes to judge humanity (Matthew 13:37-43). Satan is already defeated but his final destruction is 'not yet'. The battle of the two kingdoms is still being played out, with the full awareness of who has already won, and will ultimately win. We see many signs of the kingdom now, but the full glory is yet to be revealed, and awaits the second coming of Christ (Revelation 11:15).
- 4 **The kingdom is good news to the poor** (economically, emotionally, physically, spiritually) – this is outlined in more detail below (see box p7). Followers of the King are required to work with him in bringing this good news to all people, and to follow his heart for the poor. This calling to bring good news to the poor is at the heart of Tearfund's mission.
- 5 **God bringing his kingdom means putting things right, bringing redemption and reconciliation** – central to this good news is the idea of putting things back to how God originally intended, redeeming things for their original purpose (Colossians 1:20, 2 Corinthians 5:19). This redemption, brought about by Jesus' life, death and resurrection, enables individuals to be redeemed to live in a relationship with God. However, the kingdom is wider than individual salvation, as shown below, and is characterised by '*shalom*', the Hebrew word for peace (see box p7).
- 6 **Entering the kingdom produces a reformed character** – the character of the kingdom is the character of God. This means citizens call the King their father and share in his riches. Central to the kingdom is grace - God's grace to us and our grace to others. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) further outline characteristics of God's people: to be poor in spirit, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful and to be peacemakers. This

character enables Christians to be the ‘*salt and light*’ (Matthew 5:13-16) of the earth and enables others to experience the goodness of the kingdom and to enter it for themselves. We are required to have a character consistent with the message we preach.

The good news of the kingdom

Jesus starts his mission in Mark’s Gospel by saying ‘*the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news*’ (Mark 1:15). In Luke’s Gospel he announces his mission in the synagogue in Capernaum by quoting from Isaiah 61: ‘*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour*’ (Luke 4:18-19).

It is therefore crucial to understand this good news, which Jesus brings and which he says is at the heart of the kingdom of God:

- Reconciliation with God - the call to repent and believe is for individuals and communities to come back to God.
- Social justice – the ‘*year of the Lord’s favour*’ in Isaiah is referring to the Jubilee laws (Leviticus 25), instructing that every 50 years slaves should be released, debts forgiven, land returned to its original owners and the land should lie fallow (some of these also happen every seventh (Sabbath) year). This law looked forward to when the Jews entered the Promised Land and was to restore things to how they were at the beginning (everyone had enough land, everyone was free, people lived in their clans and families and the land was fertile). Within this there was reconciliation between fellow men, and restoration of the land.
- Freedom from oppression - the kingdom of God is ultimately to bring about political liberation.
- Healing - when John asked if Jesus was the one to expect, he replied: ‘*tell him what you have seen and heard. The lame walk, the sick are healed*’ (Matthew 11:4-5).
- Jesus has also brought all powers under his control; so another sign of the good news of the kingdom will be structures and systems being redeemed for their original purposes (Revelation 11:15).

The kingdom is characterised by ‘*shalom*’, which includes social justice, peace and personal integrity. It is based on love and grace, submission and service. The first will be last and the last first. Everyone is equal, everyone has a role and the weakest members are treated with special care. The rich will find it hard to enter, and there is a special place for the poor. The kingdom is in fact a whole new order that is being brought about on earth.

Finally, the good news is especially good news for the poor because they suffered the most, and redemption for them will include improved economic, social, political and spiritual life (although it may involve persecution as well). However, this redemption will come about now partially, but awaits its final consummation at Jesus’ second coming. This focus on good news for the poor is at the heart of Tearfund’s mission.

- 7 **The kingdom is not an earthly political entity** - when Pilate questioned Jesus about his political ambitions, he told him that his kingship would not manifest itself like a human kingdom (John 18:36). It is not advanced by human means and is not taken by force. Jesus rejects this approach when he is tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

Suffering, denial and service, as shown by Jesus' death on the cross, are at the heart of the Kingdom of God. In the parables of the kingdom (eg the Sower, the Leaven, the Mustard Seed), we see growth from despised beginnings and growth that is inconspicuous. This shows it is not the wise, the powerful or the nobly born who enter the kingdom, but the tax collectors, the sinners and the harlots (Matthew 21:31). However, in his sovereignty, God does use 'important people' like Cyrus and Augustus, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar to bring about his plans.

- 8 **The coming of the kingdom provokes opposition** – when confronted with the kingdom of God, people are forced to make a response. Some humbly seek to enter it, but it often excites hostility from those who are opposed. Their attacks on people of the kingdom of God are part of a wider battle where Satan and his allies strive relentlessly to thwart, to corrupt and to rival God's kingdom. Persecution is a hallmark of Christians of this age, although absent from the age to come (Revelation 21:4).

In summary, Jesus brings about the kingdom of God through obedience to God's rule in his life, and through his death and resurrection. We can enter the Kingdom through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and the kingdom is therefore present wherever God freely reigns and his reign is acknowledged. However, it is wider than personal salvation and is characterised by restored relationships, social justice, peace and personal integrity – the coming of the kingdom starts to put everything right, although the final consummation is yet to come. In the meantime, the kingdom provokes opposition from the kingdom of the world.

The mission of the church

As men and women submit to the rule of the kingdom and enter into its blessings they are gathered into the fellowship of the church. The church is the people of God, called out of the world, called to God and gathered together to work with God to fulfil his purpose in bringing about his kingdom.

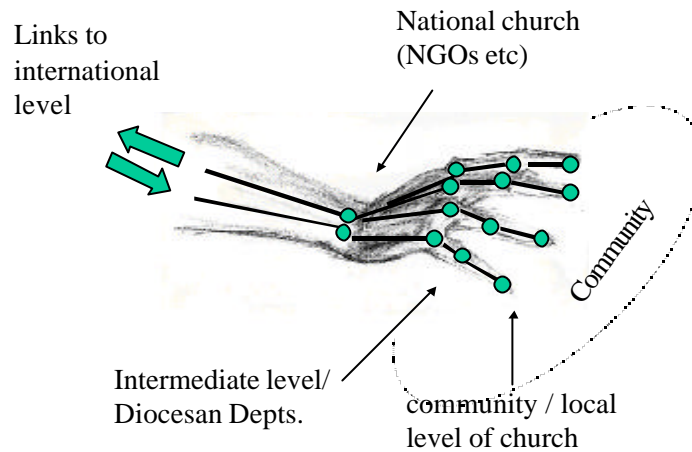
The church is therefore the visible sign of the outworking of the kingdom of God here on earth. It brings the 'good news' to all people. It is therefore responsible for bringing the good news in all of its fullness – reconciliation between man and God, restored communities, social justice, redeemed institutions, peace and reconciliation between man and creation.

There are many other images for the church, including the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31), the family of God (Ephesians 3:14), a community of covenant people (1 John 4:21) and a gathering or assembly of citizens (Hebrews 12:23).

- Different forms of church

It is clear from the New Testament that there is only one church, only one people of God. The word for church as a gathering of people (*ekklesia*) is used in many different forms, including: a local congregation (1 Thessalonians 1:1), the universal church (Galatians 1:13), small house fellowship (Romans 16:5), Hebrew congregation in Jerusalem and Gentile congregation in Antioch, a number of separate communities in distinct localities (Acts 15:41). Church therefore takes many different forms and wherever there is a gathering of God's people there is the church. This can help us think beyond seeing church as a building or church as something we do on a Sunday. Wherever God's people are, there his church is, with the responsibility to fulfil its calling to work with God to bring about his kingdom.

- **A metaphor for the way church functions with and on behalf of the poor - the church as a hand**



Some expressions of church include a congregation or denomination, others involve Christian development organisations, others focus on a group of Christians who have come together to make a difference and still others focus on Christians who are in positions of power and who can use this to help bring about God’s Kingdom. One of the strengths of the church is that it operates at all different levels and can influence all levels of society. It is therefore vital that each expression of the church is connected in with the wider body of believers for support, for accountability and to work together to bring effective change. It is also vital that the parts of the church further up the ‘knuckles’ are in contact with those at the fingertips, so that they are in touch with reality and keep a concern for the poor and marginalised.

- **Different functions of the church**

Having outlined what the church consists of, and its broad mandate in working with God to bring about his kingdom, we turn to what that may mean in practice. There are many different roles of the church, as outlined below, and these have been grouped together in different ways.

One model groups them as three inter-locking circles of worship (focused towards God), fellowship (relationships with other Christians) and mission (reaching out to those who are not part of the church).

Another model distinguishes four broad areas of worship (focus towards God), fellowship (focused on fellow Christians), service (using gifts to serve God, acts of kindness to others) and witness (proclamation of who God is).

None of these functions can be isolated from another one. They are all inseparably linked so that a healthy church will be involved in all of them. Regardless of how you split up the broad roles of the church, it is important to ensure that the whole church is fulfilling its whole mission. This is likely to include involvement in the following areas:

Functions of the church

- 1 **Worshiping God as his people** – our first responsibility is to be a people that gives God his rightful honour
- 2 **Stewardship** – of the creation God has given us to look after
- 3 **Discipleship** – helping others to grow in maturity in their faith through teaching, exercising gifts, pastoral support
- 4 **Caring for each other** – and ministering to the needs of those in the church (eg sharing possessions, caring for the sick, visiting those living alone)
- 5 **Modelling an alternative society** - and a restored community. This does not mean that the church is to opt out of the world, but that in the world it is to model a different way of life and be a light to the world
- 6 **Proclaiming the good news** - of Jesus Christ so that people may turn to him and be saved
- 7 **Prayer for God to intervene** - and bring about his purposes. This is part of the priestly role of interceding for a world that hates and rejects the church
- 8 **Listening to God** – to hear what his plans are in any given situation
- 9 **Caring for the needy and suffering** - and being with them in time of need
- 10 **Prophetic role in speaking out** - against idolatry and injustice. In Nazareth Jesus identified his mission with the prophecy of Isaiah that describes a mission to the poor, the captive and the oppressed (Luke 4:16-30)
- 11 **Social action** – engaging with a society to carry on God’s creative and redemptive acts, being salt to the world. We are called to engage with everything in the world to make it more in line with God’s will (2 Corinthians 5:19, Colossians 1:20)
- 12 **Seeking social justice** – governments and other institutions or individuals have been given roles by God to bring about his purposes, but too often they perpetuate injustice and suffering and dishonour his name. Therefore seeking justice often involves engaging with the powers of the day, eg government, business, media, international institutions
- 13 **Bringing peace and reconciliation** – to the world, which includes peace with God, with others and with the creation. Peace is at the heart of the calling of the church
- 14 **Confronting the unseen powers** - some men and women are held directly by demons that possess them, others are held by sickness and the dread of death that the evil powers exploit, others by the unjust structures that have evil powers behind them
- 15 **Performing signs and wonders** - to demonstrate God’s power and bring healing

God’s commitment to justice

God’s commitment to justice and his concern for the poor are central to his character. This is based on the fact that human beings are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) and therefore all have equal value and should have equal respect. God loves all people and has a special concern for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed, because they often experience suffering and injustice. This is shown throughout the Bible in his actions, laws and commands.

The most significant example of God working for justice is the liberation of his people from oppression in Egypt, as part of his plan to bring them to the Promised Land. This involved physical liberation from slavery, political liberation from an oppressive regime and spiritual liberation so that they could worship God freely. The Exodus shows us God’s compassion and his desire for justice and freedom (Exodus 3:7-8).

Moses and Pharaoh (Exodus 3-11)

Moses' intervention to free his people from Egypt starts when he sees a revelation of God in the burning bush: *'The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land'* (3:8-9). God commands Moses to go to Pharaoh, and promises that he will be with Moses in all that he does and will grant him success. Moses reluctantly approaches Pharaoh, with his brother Aaron as his spokesperson, and speaks on behalf of the 600,000 Israelites who are in slavery. Pharaoh, an oppressive ruler, refuses to acknowledge God and to do what Moses asks: *'I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go'* (5:2). Moses, having failed in his initial approach, performs signs and wonders and brings the ten plagues that God had promised. This eventually persuaded Pharaoh to free the Israelites from the physical, economic and spiritual oppression they had been under, a foretaste of the kingdom that Jesus was to bring.

God's commands and laws are a reflection of his character and a guide to how he wants us to live. There is a special concern for protecting those on the edge of society:

- In Deuteronomy the Israelites are commanded to walk in the ways of God. This includes recognising that he *'defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing'* (10:18).
- Isaiah speaks of true obedience to God: *'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?'* (Isaiah 58:6-7).
- Other key Old Testament passages which show God's desire for justice and mercy for his people are Leviticus 25, Amos 5:11-15 and Micah 6:8.

Concern for the poor and justice are also found in the New Testament:

- Jesus shows this concern in his actions (see Chapter 3).
- Jesus teaches that the most important commandment is to love God and love your neighbour. Loving God with all our heart means being changed to become more like him and to have his heart. Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to show what this love looks like in practice (Luke 10:25-37).
- The Pharisees are told off for neglecting justice: *'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone'* (Luke 11:42).
- James teaches Christians to treat all people equally, and in particular not to insult the poor or ignore their needs (James 2:1-26).

Advocacy and the church

The focus in this paper is to look at a biblical mandate for advocacy by the church, and how this relates to bringing about the kingdom of God. Bringing justice is a central part of advocacy, but advocacy is wider than this. Tearfund's definition is:

“Seeking with, and on behalf of, the poor to address underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development through influencing the policies and practices of the powerful. Tearfund views advocacy as part of its mission to bring good news to the poor, motivated by the compassion of Christ.”

Based on this definition, the functions of the church (p10) that relate to advocacy are:

- prayer for God to intervene
- modelling an alternative that can influence others
- social action
- seeking social justice through influencing those in power
- bringing peace and reconciliation
- prophetic role in speaking out against injustice
- confronting the unseen powers

The rest of the paper will primarily focus on these.

The advocacy roles are a necessary response in themselves if the church is to be faithful to God's calling, as this is part of the church's mission, ie there is clear theological justification for involvement. However, there are also clear practical benefits of engaging in advocacy.

- Advocacy as tackling root causes

Social action and development programmes may bring short-term help to those in need but seldom get to the root causes of the problem, eg they may alleviate the suffering of those who are unjustly treated, but not tackle the perpetrators of the injustice. Advocacy can tackle the root cause of the problem as it can bring changes in policies and practices of those with power and can even change the balance of power in a given situation.

- Advocacy as a way of leveraging change

God has given us responsibility for how we steward his creation. This includes responsibility for how we use the skills, time, money and other resources he has placed at our disposal. Advocacy work can effectively 'lever' other resources that can be used to help us achieve our mission (eg in caring for the needy, social involvement etc). One way of doing this is that we can persuade those in power to use their (much greater) resources to tackle the same problem. Another way is to bring about a change in policy or practice.

- Advocacy as changing the context and supporting development work

Advocacy work can be effective in changing the context in which we do some of our other work. It can therefore provide a situation in which it is easier for the church to fulfil its role in bringing good news to the poor. For example, if we persuade the government to allow freedom of speech and freedom of religion, the church has more freedom to preach. If we persuade the government to spend more money on health, the church can be more effective in working with communities in preventative medicine. If the government grants land rights to a particular community, the church can more easily work with them in development.

Access to health and housing, India

Over three million people in Delhi live in slums. The government has been unable to provide services as the slums grow. ASHA works in 30 slums, implementing community and health development work.

The slumlords make all the decisions about what happens in the slums and often the needs of the poorest people have been ignored. ASHA has built up a relationship with the slumlords and tried to show them that slum development should be encouraged. ASHA has helped to establish Women's Action Groups, which address health issues in the slums and have also been active in confronting slumlords. These groups now represent their concerns to the local authorities and lobby for change. As a result, most groups now have access to water points, sanitation and health services.

In 1989 ASHA mobilised 475 families to form a co-operative housing authority. ASHA represented the community to the Slum Wing of the Delhi Development Authority to arrange housing loans at low interest. As a result, the community now has houses, roads, drainage, clean water, electricity, healthcare, a school and a park. This development has become adopted as a model for the government's new housing policy.

- Advocacy as evidence of good news

Advocacy can offer evidence of the good news we are preaching and wanting people to accept. For example, persuading the local church elders to care for AIDS orphans can provide those orphans with evidence of God's love that is being spoken about.

All mission roles of the church have the same function, namely bringing good news to all people, especially the poor. If the church neglects these advocacy roles, we are being unfaithful to our calling. Conversely, if the church only concentrates on these advocacy roles, we are being unfaithful to our overall mission. Advocacy is therefore a key part of the mission of the church, but it is only one part, and needs to be integrated with the rest of the mission of the church.

Advocacy, power and politics

As shown above, advocacy involves engaging with power to bring about change. One such manifestation of this power is with governments and this is usually referred to as the 'political' arena (in the narrow sense of the word 'political'). Therefore, any involvement with the government to work for change is 'political' in this sense, and political action is part of the calling of the church. However, the distribution of power is now much wider than the government, with increasing power being focused in business, the media, international institutions etc. Therefore the 'political' side of advocacy in this narrow sense is only one aspect of engaging with power to bring about change. A broader definition of 'political' would see this as any action that engages with power or structures to bring about change. Politics is therefore engaging with power through negotiation between different interest groups, happening at all levels where there are relationships between people (including the family, workplace, churches and all institutions).

The role of government

The government is a key institution that holds and exercises power in the world. The Bible is clear from the start that the idea of government is good. It is part of God's plan and is not simply a necessary evil. God created heaven and earth and appointed human beings as stewards, to fill the earth and subdue it and to rule over all living creatures (Genesis 1:28). However, creation, human beings and government are now affected by sin and although government still has a role, it is limited and it is fallen.

Romans 13 (and 1 Peter 2:13-17) gives us some guidance into the role of government. The passage comes directly after Romans 12 in which Paul is outlining how a Christian should live as a model citizen. They must live in peace with others, bless enemies, not repay evil for evil and reject vengeance, leaving that to God, recognising that he will sometimes execute it through the state. The main functions of the state from the passage are:

- **Restraining evil.** The state is there to restrain evil, and preserve peace and good order. This is vital, because if public order is not maintained society stops being an order at all, and the very co-existence of people within society is endangered. Paul urges prayers for *'kings and all those in authority so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved'* (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Paul is not urging withdrawal from society but he considers peace to be instrumental in spreading the gospel (although, from experience, the church can grow rapidly under persecution).
- **Judging evil.** The state has a role in judging evil, ie rightly identifying it as evil and punishing it. It exists as *'God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer'* but the rulers *'hold no terror for those who do right'* (Romans 13:3-4). However, as God's purpose is always reconciliation and restoration, this should also be a key role of judging and punishing evil. Punishment should therefore hold both love and justice together, and the aim should be to make things right by administering justice and restoring things to how they were before. The aim is not revenge.
- **Promoting human well-being.** Government also has the positive task of promoting human well-being, it is there *'to do you good'* (Romans 13:4) by establishing the conditions in which the common good can flourish. Paul does not explain what he means by 'good' but a biblical idea of well-being can be found in shalom, which is material well-being, social justice in relationships and personal integrity. This means that the government should promote the necessary conditions whereby every citizen, as well as the church, can flourish. In practice, this is likely to mean religious freedom for all. It is also the church's role to ensure that the human well-being promoted by the state is based, as much as possible, on biblical principles. This is considered further in chapter 4.

The limitations of government

The state is limited, in its mandate, practically and in its essence.

- **Practically** – the state is powerless to do some things such as ensure that people truly worship God, or to bring about righteousness. It is therefore limited practically by what it is able to enforce. Paul acknowledges that the *'law is powerless'* to change people's hearts or to bring salvation (Romans 8:3). This refers to Old Testament law but also applies to all types of law. The law can judge evil and even show evil for what it is, but it

cannot change people – it can only control outward conduct. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) illustrates this. The Hebrew laws could only go so far (eg punish adultery) but they could not change the heart (eg prevent lust).

- **Mandate** – God’s governance of the universe acknowledges the importance of human freedom, within defined limits. Human responsibility is dependent on being able to choose between right and wrong. Governments therefore have a limited role in trying to dictate human behaviour, but should allow for significant freedom and responsibility. The mandate of the state is also limited by the fact that God is ultimately the king and the state only ever has delegated authority. Also, many of the functions of the state are only necessary in our fallen world (such as judging and punishing evil, including the use of force) and will no longer be needed in the age to come. So, although there is a hint that some of the components of the current political structures will continue in renewed form within the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21:24) and we know that all powers will be redeemed (Colossians 1:15-20), any form of government will look very different in God’s kingdom!
- **Essence** – although the state is good, it is also prone to corruption and is based on a different model of power to the one Jesus came to demonstrate (Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 18, Luke 22:25). The state is affected by individual and institutional sin and can become an agent of the kingdom of this world. It therefore has a limited role in that it is part of the battleground between the forces of the two kingdoms. The effects of sin mean that individuals use their God-given abilities to exploit others for their own ends, as opposed to serving them. Political structures have often been the means to satisfy the lust for power and glory of certain individuals, and therefore power has been abused for personal gain.

Being subject to the state

The most difficult verse in this passage is verse 5: ‘*it is necessary to submit to authorities*’. It has been used for centuries to justify inaction against those in power, even when they have clearly abused their God-given mandate.

However, when different passages are considered, a clear approach emerges. In Romans 13 Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome at a time when he believed that that Roman rule was just, was fulfilling its mandate and deserved the respect of Christians. Christians could therefore obey the state in its limited functions and still serve God. However, there are also examples of authorities turning their back on their mandate to serve, and ruling for their own gain at the expense of others. Revelation 18 shows ‘*Babylon the Great*’, a political power that has reached the height of arrogant independence from God with the terrible abuse of human beings that follows. The image represents the Roman Empire and reflects John’s experience of persecution of the church. It also has broader applications to any power that sets itself up in wilful independence from God’s standards. The advice of God is not to respect such an empire as the righteous instrument of God, but to ‘*Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins*’ (v 4).

We are therefore given the choice to obey the state when it is acting in line with God’s will, and to challenge the state when it is out of line. This is because we are primarily citizens of heaven and our ultimate allegiance is to God (Acts 4:18-19, 5:29, 17:6-7). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for being too close to the Roman state. His command to ‘*Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s*’ (Mark 12:13-17) was a public rebuke for

losing their distinctiveness. Any co-operation with, or allegiance to, the state needs to be secondary to our primary allegiance, which is to God.

There are various options that are therefore not open to us. One is to align ourselves so closely to the state so that we lose the ability to be distinctive and to hold the state to account. Another is to opt out of the political system altogether as the church would not be able to fulfil its mandate of holding those in authority accountable for their actions. Practically it is not possible in most societies to opt out because we have democracies (where non-participation is effectively a vote for the status quo) and we pay taxes, which mean that we are already part of a state system.

We therefore need to make the most of opportunities to influence for change, based on biblical principles (see chapter 4). We are also called to pray for those in authority so that they may rule as God intends and so that the church is free to carry out its mission (1 Timothy 2:1-4). However, in the final scheme of things, God's people will rule with God and will have authority over all powers, including the state (1 Corinthians 6:1-11).

Conclusion

The mission of the church is to work with God to bring about his kingdom. This kingdom is characterised by the 'good news' of Jesus Christ and includes social justice; reconciliation with God, fellow human beings and creation; peace and God's material blessing. The church has many roles through which it fulfils its mission and a number of them relate to advocacy, which needs to be seen as a core part of this mission. These include prayer for God to intervene, modelling an alternative that can influence others, seeking social justice through influencing those in power, bringing peace and reconciliation, a prophetic role in speaking out against injustice and confronting the unseen powers. However, any advocacy activity needs to be integrated into other parts of the church's mission. The state also has a purpose in God's plan and part of the mission of the church is to engage with the state, whilst remembering that the primary allegiance of Christians is to serve God.

Questions for reflection

- What difference does it make to the way we live our lives if we believe that God's kingdom has already come, even though we await its final fulfilment?
- What is the connection between the kingdom of God and the mission of the church?
- What do you think is the role of the church in society? What specific activities should the church be involved in?
- What prevents the church from becoming politically or socially involved in society? How would you respond to this?
- What do you think is the role of the state in your society? How does the state fit in with God's overall plans? What are the limitations of the state?
- Who has the power in your society? What do you think is the church's role in engaging with them?

2. HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE IN POWER

Introduction

This chapter outlines a history of the involvement of God's people with the state or governing authority. Involvement with the authorities is often referred to as 'political' and it is clear that political involvement is not a new issue for the church in the 20th and 21st centuries to face. It has been an integral part of the activities of God's people ever since the early days of the Old Testament, was rife when Jesus lived and has continued ever since with the church. There have been many different ways that God's people have engaged with the authorities. Some of these have been good, but others have been more questionable and often destructive. There is no blueprint for political involvement and it depends on the type of state, the size and characteristics of the church, and other cultural and social factors.

In terms of current involvement, other forms of power (eg business, media and international institutions) are increasingly important and a strategy of engagement therefore needs to be much wider than just engagement with the official governing authority.

Old Testament

- Creation and the fall

The Bible is a story of how God made the world and made men and women as the crown of his creation. His desire was that they would enter into communion with him, that they would be a community, and that they would continue his creative acts. In the creation mandate, mankind was charged with 'stewardship', ie subduing the earth, shaping it, and manifesting God's lordship over it (Genesis 1:28). Men and women were to multiply and to exercise their various gifts. They were all to serve others through co-ordinating and enabling. They were delegated authority over the Earth and were to rule it on God's behalf.

However, men and women fell into sin (Genesis 3), and their communion with God and their community with each other were both spoiled. Their stewardship of the earth was also affected by evil. Yet the creation mandate was not withdrawn, and God still intended humans to rule the Earth on his behalf. As God acted to renew human beings, he gave them the chance to become his people again and to join with him in bringing renewal and redemption to all parts of his creation: people, the environment, systems and structures.

- The Patriarchal period

During the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, God's people were focused around an extended family. They were a nomadic people and owned no real estate, they lived apart from the state but also recognised a responsibility to pray for people around (Genesis 18:16-33). Joseph found himself more closely involved, rising to high political office in Pharaoh's court in Egypt, where he had a significant impact on the history of his time (Genesis 45:7).

- Towards the promised land

The descendants of Jacob experienced a long stay in Egypt, a time characterised by oppression and powerlessness. They multiplied greatly and as Moses brought them out of

Egypt they started to see themselves more as a nation and to develop an identity as the People of God. They entered into a covenant with God, which included laws on social responsibility, property, justice, worship, rites etc, and also a promise of faithfulness and blessing on God's part. They developed a leadership structure that was top-down and was centred round the tribes, but was wider than just family responsibility (eg Moses appointed judges – Exodus 18). There was punishment for wrongdoing. For the first time in their history the people of Israel were a 'political' entity, albeit without a land to call their own.

- **Period of Judges**

Once the Israelites had taken possession of the Promised Land, they developed a political system that was decentralised and participatory. Israel was simply a loose federation of twelve tribes, with no central government. There was no king but God himself. Each tribe was made up of a number of clans, whose role it was to give protection and education to clan members in their obligations to society, to exercise a judicial function on matters such as marriage, divorce, parental discipline. The whole of Israelite society was geared towards the social health and economic viability of the 'lowest' units, not to the wealth, privilege or power of the 'highest'. The economic system was also geared towards the preservation of a broad equality and self-sufficiency, and to the protection of the weakest, eg though the Jubilee laws that returned land, cancelled debts and freed slaves, and the tithe for the poor every three years (Leviticus 25).

- **Monarchy**

However, during the period of judges, there were times when Israel's affairs dissolved into near anarchy when *'every man did what was right in his own eyes'* (Judges 21:25). Israel demanded a king. This was for many reasons, including breaking with the covenant and not trusting in God; the fact that all other nations had kings; vulnerability to armed raids by her neighbours; and the fact that Samuel's sons (next in line to be judges over Israel) were not faithful. God responded in his mercy by making concessions to Israel's *'hardness of heart'*, and used the monarchy in his overall plan to bring salvation to all people. Strict conditions were set for the King (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) and some kings did strive towards this model. However, there was an overall tendency to tyranny and corruption, which was foreseen in 1 Samuel 8:11-18. Within little more than 100 years of the monarchy, Israel had split into two separate kingdoms, and within another 200 years the northern kingdom was conquered. During this time God raised up a number of prophets who warned of his judgement for disobedience and urged a holy lifestyle and a return to true worship of God (eg Nathan sent to David, Amos to the northern kingdom and Isaiah to the southern kingdom).

- **Exile and return**

Under the monarchy, Israel drifted into social injustice and apostasy. God's dramatic judgement fell in 587 BC when the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem. There followed a period of exile when the people of God faced the threats of either assimilation and loss of identity, or persecution for being so different. They responded in different ways. Jeremiah urged not only patient acceptance of God's discipline, but also prayer for the pagan state (Jeremiah 29:7). Later, Daniel and Nehemiah followed in the footsteps of Joseph and Obadiah (1 Kings 18:1-16), and served with integrity in high offices of state. When rulers succumbed to idolatrous pride, God's men and women responded with challenge (Daniel 4:27), with intercession and action (Esther 7:3) and, in the last resort, a willingness to lay down their lives (Daniel 3:17-18). After the exile came the return to Judea and humble provincial status in a backwater of other peoples' empires. Israel was never again to be an independent state.

The story of Esther

Esther was an orphaned Jew who was brought up by her uncle Mordecai, during the rule of King Xerxes. The king, upon seeing her beauty, made her queen. Twelve years into his reign, Mordecai found out about a plot to kill the king and reported it to Esther, resulting in the plot being foiled. Soon after this, Haman, one of the king’s warriors, was honoured and all subjects were required to kneel down and pay him honour. However, Mordecai refused to do this (due to animosity between the two peoples) and Haman became furious and sought revenge. He selectively represented the activities of the Jews to the king (3:8-9) and gained agreement from him to kill them all on a specific date. Mordecai found out about this plot and persuaded Esther to use her strategic position of access to the king to try to alter the course of events and to save the Jewish people: *‘and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?’* (4:14).

The rest of the story is how Esther and Mordecai skilfully used the information available and their positions of access and favour and mobilised the people in prayer and fasting, in order to save the Jews. The Jews were saved, Haman punished and Mordecai honoured. The book of Esther then ends showing how Mordecai used his own new access to power for the good of the Jews: *‘Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, pre-eminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of the people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews’* (10:3).

- Between the two Testaments

For the three centuries before Christ, the Greek rulers over the Israelites sought to impose cultural and religious unity (often called Hellenism) on their kingdom and subjects. Some Jews forsook the faith and agreed to adopt the Hellenistic ways of the Greeks. However, the ‘Hasidim’ (spiritual ancestors of the Pharisees) refused to compromise in their loyalty to the divine law. At first they adopted a stance of non-violent resistance, and many were slaughtered. Other Jews chose to take up the sword. They were led by Mattathiah and five of his sons (of whom the most famous was Judas Maccabaeus). In the war that followed the Jews regained religious freedom and limited self-rule for almost 70 years, until the Romans took control, which is the situation at the beginning of the New Testament.

Good aspects in Israel’s history	Bad aspects in Israel’s history
Participation (Judges), Delegation (Moses)	Lack of cohesion (Judges)
Obedience to laws of economic justice, concern for social welfare (Judges)	Lavish lifestyle of King, heavy taxes, growing inequality (Monarchy)
Action against paganism (Monarchy), Obedience to God (patriarchs)	Disobedience and idolatry (Judges, Monarchy)
Key people acting with integrity in high political office (Daniel, Obadiah, Joseph)	Insecurity due to external threat (Judges, Monarchy)
Concern for purity and unwillingness to compromise (Maccabaeans)	Compromise (between the testaments)
Concern for people outside Israel (Patriarchs)	Violence against enemies (Maccabaeans)
Impartial judgement (Monarchy, Judges)	

As can be seen from Israel's chequered history, there are significant difficulties in drawing a blueprint for any 'ideal' political structures, and this should warn us against adopting any particular model as the right one. The entity of Israel had very different structures and systems during the period of the Exodus, Judges, Monarchy and post Exile. No system was perfect and each had good and bad points, as shown in the table above. Within each system the people and rulers tended towards disobedience and apostasy. However, God, in his grace, used all the different situations and structures to bring about his purpose. No matter the system, faithfulness to him, holy living, concern for outsiders and social justice were central to the laws and requirements during each period of Israel's history. Therefore, when looking to the Old Testament for inspiration about political involvement, it is vital to look at the context of each of the periods before we try to apply the situations to our modern day politics. It is also useful to consider these common themes that can be traced throughout each period.

New Testament

The Romans and the Herodian dynasty ended the limited autonomy that the Jews had. The Jews responded in a variety of ways to their renewed subject status:

- The **Pharisees** were chiefly interested in mastering and teaching the Law and aimed to interpret the Torah into everyday speech and life. They devoted themselves to practising and teaching holiness and obedience to God's commands as laid out in his covenants. However, in time their interpretation of the Law became so rigorous that they actually intensified its requirements, and turned it into a matter of outward forms. They did not engage with the powers of the day, and did not see themselves as a political force, particularly after they had suffered harsh persecution under Antipater and his son Herod the Great. They tried to rebuild a Jewish society.
- The **Sadducees** predominated in the Jewish Sanhedrin and were drawn from the wealthy aristocracy, merchants and government officials. They were a tiny minority, were politically and religiously conservative, and were supportive of the existing regime. They acknowledged the supremacy of the Torah but thought that many of the Roman practices of the time could find a place within it. They stood for accommodation with the Roman state, became involved in its activities, and compromised.
- The **Zealots** saw God's people under pagan domination and thought this sufficient cause to justify armed rebellion to re-establish the kingdom of God. Indeed they regarded this as their duty, and thought God was bound to prosper their arms. Their name comes from their zeal for the law and they refused to call anyone Lord, would not pay tax to any king and were willing to suffer and die for their beliefs. They led a number of uprisings against Rome, culminating in the war of AD 66-73 which led to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.
- The **Essenes** withdrew from general society, living in a separated close-knit community in the desert and concentrating on personal purity. They took no part in politics in terms of engaging with the state. They were looking forward to the establishment of a Jewish Kingdom and were waiting to play their decisive part in the end-time war, in which they would be victorious over evil.

Jesus had a distinct reaction towards each separate group:

- *Pharisees* – He rejected their intensification of the Law’s requirements, while not rejecting the Law itself, with its emphasis on love, forgiveness and social justice.
- *Sadducees* – He rejected their compromises with Rome, while acknowledging that Rome had a legitimate role to play in God’s plans, thus affirming engagement with the political powers.
- *Zealots* – He rejected their military option, while upholding the goal of liberation for all people, from spiritual, economic or social oppression.
- *Essenes* – He rejected their option of withdrawal from society, while making renewal of the people of God primary in his ministry, centred on holy living and restored relationships.

The question is not ‘which is the right approach to take’ but the challenge is to take the positive aspects from each one, and for different groups, favouring different approaches, to work together to bring about maximum change.

The last 2000 years

- The early church

In the early centuries of the Christian era the church lived as supportive communities, sharing everything they had (Acts 2:42-47) and growing through what others saw. By the end of the 1st Century they were despised and misunderstood by the majority and suffered persecution. The Bible does not record them engaging politically with the state or other powers, except to argue that they would continue to speak about God (Acts 4:18-19, 5:29) and to pray for the rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-4). They asserted their supreme allegiance to God, not to the state, although they were happy to obey laws if they did not contravene God’s laws. Many of the church leaders were focused on missionary activity and on teaching sound theology to a new church. The spirit of that age is captured well in the 2nd century AD *Letter to Diognetus*. The writer tells how the Christians live.

“They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign ... Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all ... In a word, what the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world.”

- Development of the Christian state

The conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 312 AD led to the adoption of Christianity as the favoured religion of the Roman Empire and then later (380 AD under Theodosius) as the state religion. After three centuries of persecution, most Christians readily welcomed this new situation. They saw the Roman Empire as God’s intended instrument for the establishment of Christianity in the world (allowing this to be done by force and coercion), with the church called upon to mould its public life and institutions. Constantine united the East and West of the Roman Empire in 324 AD and he built a new Rome (Constantinople) in the East (Turkey) from which he ruled. This new capital attracted Christians whose language was Greek, stretching the already existing tensions between them and the Latin speaking Christians of the West. This sowed the seeds of the division of the church, East and West, Orthodox and Catholic, which dominated church history for the following centuries.

This model of church-state relations remained throughout the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. It has proved a mixed blessing ever since. It resulted in religious freedom for Christians, persecution fell dramatically and many pagan practices stopped. There were also many more humane laws introduced. However, state support for the orthodox faith meant that heretics were persecuted (as much as pagans), the Emperor became the Supreme Governor of the church and could intervene in its affairs and the state apparatus was used to promote Christianity through coercion.

- **Separation of church and state**

At the time of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West (395 AD) Augustine challenged the view that the state was the instrument for the establishment of Christianity. In his book, *The City of God*, he portrays the history of human society in terms of two cities: the City of God and the earthly city. The earthly empire has a very limited function to minimise disorder and maintain peace, as opposed to achieving the right order or promoting the welfare of its citizens. The main concern of Christians (living in the City of God) is to worship the true God and they will only participate in activities of the earthly city that are necessary for the maintenance of peace, and only become concerned if laws present a hindrance to their worship. Augustine maintained that there is some overlap between the two cities but he still had a very low opinion of the state and therefore saw any 'political' activity in this sense as futile. He effectively opted out of engagement with the state.

(However, he saw the church as having a role in forcing people to behave virtuously, and, given that the political rulers of his day were Christians, he thought that the church could apply coercion through the laws and discipline of the state. He therefore sanctioned the persecution of heretics by the state and extensive moral prescriptions within state law, with punishment for disobedience.)

Augustine's model and Constantine's model have produced the two main views held by Christians with regard to engaging with the state. Even in countries where Christianity has been the official religion, there have usually been significant groups of Christians who have opted out of the main church, because they feel that it has become too close to power, too corrupt and has been complicit in the use of force.

- **Rise of Islam**

At the start of the 7th Century, according to Islamic history, Mohammed received revelations from Allah and in 622 he established the first Muslim community in Medina (Saudi Arabia). Within 100 years Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Persia and many other places were Muslim, defeated by Arab armies. The Arab conquerors did not separate state and religion so these new countries became Muslim countries, resulting in persecution of the church. Churches in the East collapsed under them and the centre of gravity of the church moved north and west from the Mediterranean. In the West, Islam was seen as the great enemy of the church, which led to the justification for the Crusades.

- **Spread of Eastern Orthodoxy**

The Roman Empire diminished in the east and what was left was a much smaller, Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire. There were still links with the West but a Christianity was developing which was much more dependent on ritual, liturgy and icons than the intellectual or moral Western Catholicism. This Byzantine Empire was the cultural centre of its day and by the end of the 9th Century icons were accepted as central to eastern worship. Orthodoxy spread to Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania and by the end of the 10th Century it took hold

further east in Russia and was established as the state religion there (which it remained until 1917). The Orthodox Church became established as the state religion and saw itself as the 'true church' in a similar way to Catholicism in the West.

- **Power of the Pope, the Crusades and the Inquisition**

By the 11th Century most of Western Europe was considered Christian and the church and state were seen to be the spiritual and temporal aspects of the same reality (a situation known as Christendom). The papacy increased its strength and decrees were established that the Pope could depose emperors, could be judged by no one and was inerrant. Effectively, the Pope was the highest authority and had power over the state apparatus and the church and even had power to produce decrees with the same authority as scripture. The church used its military might to expand, to insist on doctrinal purity and to strengthen its control over all aspects of people's lives.

Armies from the West set out on the first Crusade to recapture lands from the Muslims for Christianity (such as Syria, Palestine etc) and to expand the Western Christian Empire further east. Successive and bloody crusades regained key states or holy sites but, just under 200 years later, by the end of the crusades, Arab armies again ruled the East. Small groups of crusaders remained in the East, but established themselves as separate communities and did not mix with the Eastern Orthodox churches.

This period also signified the growth of the Inquisition, during which the state and church worked together within their own jurisdiction to punish heretics, usually with death. The Inquisition spread as far as the new Spanish Empire of Latin America and Lima served as the centre of the Inquisition for many years from the 16th Century.

- **Reformation and non-conformism**

At the start of the 16th Century there was little confidence in the Western Catholic church as an institution, with moral and pastoral corruption, papal extravagance and increasing questioning of doctrine. Martin Luther spearheaded the main reformation that spread across Europe. He taught that salvation was based on grace alone and was not by works, and challenged the sale of indulgences (where people paid priests for a shortening of the punishments to be endured after death in purgatory). His *95 Theses* (on indulgences), written in 1517, provoked widespread debate throughout Europe and Luther was excommunicated in 1521. His initial intention had not been to call for a reformation but seeds of religious and political dissent were sown and by the end of the 17th century Protestantism had replaced Catholicism as the state religion in most northern European countries, while in many southern European countries reformers were persecuted. Much theology changed but the model of church-state relations remained largely untouched with the church and state still inseparable and effectively ruling together.

Other groups, who had also been arguing for radical reform of the Catholic Church, thought that the reforms of the Reformation did not go far enough to separate the church and the state, with the state retaining too much power over the church (appointing bishops etc) and thus compromising God's people. In England, The Puritans considered the established church as incapable of reform. They formed their own churches (effectively the start of the Independent and Congregationalist church movement), which led to many of the leaders being persecuted and fleeing to Holland. A Puritan community from Holland formed the basis of the Pilgrim Fathers, bringing the first wave of missionaries to North America.

The Anabaptists (starting in Switzerland and spreading to Germany) were another separatist group. They believed that the state existed for non-Christians and that Christians were to have as little to do with it as possible. They rejected the use of power, refused to serve in the armed forces or in political office, and refused to obey the state where they thought it contradicted scripture (particularly over adult baptism). This initially brought persecution although these non-conformist groups were eventually accepted within Protestant European countries, as were Catholics, and freedom of religion was established as a basic tenet of Western democracy. However, established churches still maintain certain privileges.

- **Missionary movements**

The approach to church-state relations has varied in Western Europe, between countries and within countries, and over time. Different churches have then been involved in missionary activities and have tended to 'export' their teachings and their political theology, whether this is an explicit theology of co-operation or separation, or an implicit theology of non-involvement, due to lack of engagement by the churches. However, no theology tends to remain exactly as it has been exported to a new culture so many churches throughout Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe are developing new political theologies more appropriate to their particular contexts. Some of these are mentioned below.

The twentieth century

At the end of the twentieth century, there seem to be six basic models of church-state relations that emerge. These are:

1. **Complete unity** - of church and state (Orthodox Christianity, eg Ethiopia).
2. **Establishment** - the church is the official state religion and has special privileges, eg many Latin American countries, England.
3. **Significant symbolic or other commitment** - some countries acknowledge the authority of God in their foundational constitutional document, eg Germany (1949). Zambia has declared itself a 'Christian' nation.
4. **Neutral co-operation** - the state recognises the ultimate significance of religious faith and, where there is overlap, seeks to work with religious organisations. This is the case in many African countries.
5. **Complete separation** - which may come about through the deliberate choice of the church, or by the decision of the state, eg France (1789), USSR (1917).
6. **Church not recognised as legitimate** - and is persecuted, eg the Maldives, some Muslim states.

However, the 20th century witnessed some of the most traumatic failures in relations between the church and the state, usually when the church has been too close to the state and has compromised its prophetic and challenging voice.

The church in Germany under the Nazis

This has a long tradition of political conservatism and close alignment with the state. It proved unable to give a clear lead in opposing the rise of Nazism in the 1930s. The Roman Catholic Church, too, was concerned to maintain institutional Christianity, and signed a Concordat with the Nazi government in 1933. It was promised independence in religious affairs and confirmation of its role in pastoral care and education. In return it undertook to keep out of politics.

Rwanda 1959-94

The church failed to challenge a state that fostered ethnic hatred. Rwanda experienced revival in the 1930s, and again in the 1970s, yet the Christianity that emerged failed to challenge structural evil or corporate sin. No voice was raised on behalf of the 250,000 Tutsi driven into more than 30 years' exile in Uganda after the Hutu revolt of 1959, and the church, although reaching into all aspects of life in the country, seemed to do little to try to prevent the Genocide in 1994, and many church members were complicit in it.

- Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology developed in Latin America in the late 1960s as a response to the poverty that is so prevalent in many societies there. It is based on the belief that poverty is contrary to God's will and we can have hope for a better society now as well as a transformed society when Christ comes again. Much of Liberation Theology bases its social analysis on Marxist thought and traces poverty and oppression to the concentration of power and economic wealth in the hands of a few. In the 1970s it started in the universities but now is a populist movement with the growth of the 'Base Ecclesial Communities'. These are small, grass-roots, lay groups of the poor or the ordinary people, meeting to pray, conduct Bible studies and discuss their social and political obligations in their settings. It is oriented towards the liberation of the oppressed, concerns itself with questions of social, political and economic analysis and roots its theology in the current context. Initially it developed as a reaction to the conservative Catholicism in Latin America, and was the interest of a minority, but now is more a part of mainstream Catholicism. This movement has helped to refocus the worldwide church on the importance of working with the poor, on trying to contextualise biblical theology to current situations and on seeing the wider social implications of liberation that Jesus came to bring. However, in its focus on changing society, some advocates underplay the importance of individual salvation and a personal relationship with God, and are in danger of providing a narrow view of sin and of idealising the poor and oppressed due to the situation they find themselves in. Churches in Latin America need to guard themselves against either a wholesale rejection or wholesale acceptance of Liberation Theology.

- African Independence movements

During the 1940s–1960s many liberation movements developed in Africa to seek independence from the colonial powers. These movements were often engaged in violent struggles and the church publicly dis-associated itself from them and from most political activity. The church saw itself as working towards a more 'spiritual' kingdom and therefore needed to keep out of this corrupt and compromising politics. In some countries the church still holds this view, whereas in others it has started to engage with the political system and does not want to leave 'politics' to the politicians.

- New forms of power

In many countries the power of the state is decreasing and there are new forms of power emerging.

Business, especially multinational corporations, has increasing power to influence how the world works. In a drive to create jobs and secure foreign investment, governments have been willing to relax rules (including labour laws and environmental standards) about how companies operate. In many countries, people also expect these businesses to take many of the old roles of the state, eg in provision of some basic services (health, education).

International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO) are taking power from the state. These bodies formally operate by ‘pooling’ democracy of states (ie state decision-making power) and by all member states coming to a consensus agreement. In practice, however, America has a veto in the IMF and World Bank and controls many decisions (their headquarters are also located in the US). The WTO has a one-member one-vote policy for the 133 member states but decisions are often ‘agreed’ beforehand by America, Western Europe, Canada and Japan, who are heavily influenced by the business lobby. Developing countries often have negligible negotiating capacity compared with the large teams of negotiators fielded by the rich countries.

The media (global, national and local) now almost have no boundaries with the proliferation of the internet and the spread of satellite television. They increasingly set the values of the younger generations and therefore have significant ‘unofficial’ power in influencing what people think and how they behave. They are also a very powerful lobby group with governments.

Therefore, when considering how to deal with power, we would be blind to focus all of our efforts on the state, as this is just one axis of visible power in an increasingly complex world.

Conclusion

There have been various approaches to church-state relations over the past 2000 years, some of which have been uneasy or compromising for the church, others of which have produced significant societal reform. The two broad models have been some form of establishment of the church by the state, or a complete separation of the two institutions. The main question for any church considering how it relates to the state is not ‘what model is best for us?’ but ‘how can the church best be faithful to its calling, given the constraints that are placed on it and the opportunities that arise?’ The political challenge for the 21st century church could therefore be outlined as follows:

- to learn from the past mistakes of churches throughout the world, and to learn from good examples
- to build up a biblical understanding of the role of the church in society and the role of the state, and for Christians to work to fulfil the purpose that God has given them within whatever kind of state that they find themselves in.

Questions for reflection

- Of the four different approaches to power among the Jews in Jesus’ day (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes), which one would you most closely identify with?
- What ‘political’ role do you think the church has in your country?
- Should the church seek to be established by the state?
- How is the political theology of your church influenced by church history?
- How has the church in your country engaged with politics in the past 20 years? Do you agree with this approach? What has been good and bad about this approach?
- What safeguards can the church put in place to stop it being compromised when becoming involved in political activity?

3. JESUS' APPROACH TO POWER AND POLITICS

Introduction

This chapter aims to give some insights into how Jesus approached politics and engaged with power. Jesus was not involved in party politics and did not hold an official position of power. However, if politics is seen as engaging with power through negotiation between different interest groups, and happening at all levels where there are relationships between people (including the family, workplace, churches and all institutions), then Jesus was political to the core of his being. It is this sense of politics and power that we address here and, given this understanding, everyone is political. Choosing not to be involved is actually a very political decision.

Jesus' approach to power and politics

Jesus' approach to power was very different to the approach of those around him. He:

- modelled servant leadership and was willing to suffer for the sake of others
- did not use force
- associated with everyone, especially with those on the edges of society
- trained others to carry on his work
- challenged corruption, hypocrisy and injustice among Jewish society
- taught love for enemies
- obeyed the law
- eschewed popularity for doing what was right

- **He modelled servant leadership and suffered**

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus did not lord his authority or power over others but stressed the fact that he had come to serve. In Matthew (8:17) he identifies himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53: *'He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.'* When James and John ask Jesus if one could sit on his right and the other on his left in his kingdom (Mark 10:37), Jesus restated why he had come (v45): *'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'* He also says that this is the path for those who are following him (v42): *'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.'* His kingdom is characterized by service and humility, not lording power over others. He demonstrated his servant nature by washing his disciples feet, and challenged them: *'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you'* (John 13:14-15). However, Jesus also demanded absolute loyalty so servant leadership does not preclude the exercise of authority, but focuses on how it is used.

- **He did not use force to gain what he wanted**

He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey as a sign of humility, identifying with the king in the book of Zechariah and stressing his peaceful aims (Matthew 21:5 cf Zechariah 9:9): *'See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a*

colt, the foal of a donkey'. Jesus rebukes one of his followers for lashing out with his sword when he is being arrested (Luke 22:51) and challenges his attackers: *'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?'* (v52). When called before Pilate to answer his accusation of being the King of the Jews, Jesus has a very different kingship in mind: *'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place'* (John 18:36). His kingdom was to come about by love and not by force.

- **He associated with others, especially those on the edges of society**

Jesus went out of his way to accept everyone he met and to associate with those who were on the edges of society. His disciples were largely uneducated and were from Galilee, considered a backwater in Israel. He was accused by the Pharisees of associating with 'tax collectors and sinners' who were viewed as the worst people in society. Associating with them was seen as polluting the character of anyone who did so. Jesus again showed how different he was to other leaders. He accepts the anointing by a 'sinful woman' (Luke 7:36-50) and says that God accepts her for her faith and her love. He also states that his mission was specifically for 'sinners': *'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'* (Luke 5:31). When the disciples stopped people bringing children to Jesus, he rebukes them: *'Let the little children come to me'* (Luke 18:16). He also healed the blind, the sick, those who were possessed by demons and those who no one else would speak to, such as the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years and the man who was chained outside the city. Even in his death, he spoke with love and compassion to one of the men who was crucified with him (Luke 23:43).

- **He trained others to carry on his work**

Jesus did not focus all power on himself, but trained others to carry on his work. He spent three years with 12 disciples, explaining things to them that he did not explain to others (Luke 8:10) and giving them unique insights into his mission. Within this 12 he chose three to have even more personal training (Peter, James and John). He also used other disciples and sent out the seventy-two to do his work. He trusted those who were following him and allowed them to learn through getting involved (Luke 9:1-9). At the same time, he made it very clear what the cost of following in his footsteps would be: *'Those who do not take up their cross and follow me are not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it'* (Matt 10:38-39).

- **He challenged corruption, hypocrisy and injustice amongst Jewish society**

Jesus was not afraid of the Jewish authorities and challenged them and the behaviour they encouraged. When entering the temple in Jerusalem, the seat of Jewish religious power, he did not hold back: *'Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves...And as he taught them he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers'"* (Mark 11:15-17). He could not stand the hypocrisy of the ruling Jewish powers and the way their teaching misled the people. He warned his disciples to: *'Be on your guard against the yeast [teaching] of the Sadducees and Pharisees.'* (Matthew 16:6). Perhaps one of the harshest criticisms of the Pharisees is found in Luke 11 when Jesus prophetically speaks out against them: *'Woe to you Pharisees because you... neglect justice and the love of God... love the most important seats in the synagogues... are like unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it... load people down with burdens they can hardly carry... build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them... have taken away the key to*

knowledge' (Luke 42-52). Jesus condemns their disregard for justice, their use of power for gain, and their leading people astray. These 'political' acts, and the fact that Jesus' words threatened continued respect for their authority, were ultimately what provoked the Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law to plot a way to kill him (Luke 20:19).

- **He taught love for enemies**

When Jesus was in Israel, the Jewish people loathed the Romans who had ended their earlier freedom and were now their occupying force. They spoke against them, some of the Zealots killed Roman soldiers, and nearly all people were expecting a Messiah to come and re-establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish people. However, Jesus taught love for enemies instead of hate, something which would have shocked all but the most faithful of Jews. He taught his followers to '*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*' (Matthew 5:44), and said that '*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*' (5:7). The most profound example of love and forgiveness was on the cross when Jesus cried out: '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*' (Luke 23:34). Jesus taught love as the centre of all that he did, which included a love for enemies and those on the margins of society. This was a dramatic way to challenge the very basis of power in his day.

- **Jesus obeyed the law of the land**

In his teaching about Roman authority, Jesus made it clear that he obeyed the law of the land where this did not conflict with God's law. When questioned about taxes (Mark 12:13-17) he concludes by saying '*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's*'. He is thus acknowledging a legitimate role for the state (expounded further in Romans 13 by Paul) and encouraging Jews to be model citizens in obeying the state. However, the main emphasis of this instruction in Mark's Gospel was to 'give to God what is God's'. Jesus said this just after he had overturned the tables in the temple and rebuked the Jews for making the temple into a 'den of robbers'. He makes it clear that his primary allegiance is to God the Father. In the garden of Gethsemane he prays, '*Abba, Father. Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*' (Mark 14:36). He calls on his followers to submit to God's will, which involves being model citizens and living at peace with others, but also upholding justice and righteousness for God's glory.

- **Being right before God was more important than being popular**

Jesus was clear about his task on earth and that his primary responsibility was to God and not to people. He resisted the devil's temptation to gain power by a shortcut (Luke 4:1-13). He resisted proclaiming that he was the Messiah and calling on the powers available to him to overthrow the Roman oppressors. He asked people not to tell others that he was the Messiah, because he knew of the political expectations and did not want people to try and make him king by force. For many people, he had a very unpopular message of repentance, love for enemies, humility and service. However, he knew that this was at the heart of his kingdom and this is what he needed to preach.

Conclusion

When considering how we approach power, we should first go to Jesus' example and then look at all other Old and New Testament examples from this perspective. Jesus was driven by love for everyone whom he came across. He had reconciliation at the heart of his message – reconciliation to God and to others. He preached and demonstrated service and the deep desire for righteousness and justice. He told his disciples to obey the earthly authorities but

that their primary allegiance was to God. However, he was not afraid to challenge all authority when it was unjust and disobedient to God. He knew that he was not going to gain power by force. He ultimately defeated all powers, on earth as well as in heaven, through his sacrificial death on the cross. This is the example we are called to as Christians, as we seek to follow the political example of Jesus.

Questions for reflection

- What do you understand by the word 'political'?
- How would you answer those who say that Jesus was not political?
- What are the main characteristics of Jesus' approach to power? (John 13:1-17, John 8:1-11 and Matthew 21:12-17 provide good passages for a Bible study to answer this question.)
- How well do we follow Jesus' approach to power? What do we need to change?

4. HOW CAN WE BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

Introduction

This chapter aims to help you consider some of the options open to the church in the light of what has already been discussed in the document. It can only give a very brief overview of these options and does not aim to provide a detailed action plan for change. It starts with the necessity of having a clear vision for social change, based on an understanding of what God wants to do with his world. Then it emphasises the importance of Christian character in any advocacy. It continues with a consideration of different options open to engaging with power, and a recognition that the methods used will vary according to the type of government, culture, structure and strength of the church, and methods are likely to change over time. This is particularly related to the persecuted church and explains how to interpret setbacks. Next there is a discussion on the role of civil disobedience and violence in trying to bring about change. Finally, we outline some options that are not open to the church. (For a more detailed planning process for advocacy work see Tearfund's *Advocacy Toolkit Part 2: Practical action in advocacy*.)

Know what you want to happen – developing a vision for change

It is vital that you have an idea of what the world could be like and what you are trying to do before you engage in any activity that is involved in transforming society. A vision for social change is therefore a dream of 'how the world could be' or 'how we want the world to be'. When Jesus speaks in the synagogue in Nazareth, he refers to Isaiah's vision of the coming of the kingdom of God (ie, the fullness of salvation), which has already come in part and waits for its final fulfilment: *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'* (Luke 4:18-19). When John the Baptist asked if Jesus was *'the one who was to come'* Jesus responds by referring to the signs of the kingdom: *'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is preached to the poor'* (Matt 11:4-5).

The vision that Christians have is the fullness of salvation. This salvation is 'putting things right' and reversing the effects of sin, bringing healing at all levels: individual, societal and political. It is the restoration of the earth and its people to the glory and joy that God intended from the beginning. It is something that God has already started and we are given glimpses of the final state (Revelation 21:1-5; Isaiah 11:1-9; 25:1-8; Ezekiel 47:1-12).

This future hope is not just wishful thinking, but is based on God's promises and on the fact that God already has victory over Satan and all the evil powers of this world (1 Peter 3:22, Colossians 2:15). Any actions we undertake to bring about change are therefore based on the understanding of who has already won, and motivated by the hope that comes from the faith in an all-powerful God. As indicated in Tearfund's definition, we are motivated by love and compassion, not anger. We look forward to justice, not backwards to revenge:

FAITH -----> HOPE -----> ACTION -----> CHANGE

A vision for social change considers what the kingdom of God will look like in our own context, what the characteristics of the good news will be in our village, city or country. This may be that:

- everyone has the chance to know God, and the choice of whether to accept him
- everyone has the necessities in life including food, water, shelter, healthcare
- everyone has access to education so that they can reach their full potential
- everyone can participate in decisions that affect their lives
- leaders serve the people and are accountable to them
- families and communities are healthy and supportive
- there is no violence or war and all groups live at peace with one another
- everyone has the chance to work and fulfil their creative potential and duty to the rest of society
- all lives are respected as equal and valuable and the most vulnerable are cared for.

Know what you stand for – Christian values

Before engaging in advocacy, we need to know what we stand for – what values or principles we want to see at the heart of any society and therefore the focus of any change we are seeking to bring. Below we offer some of the key principles and underlying ethics in the Old Testament, which Jesus affirms in the New Testament.

Compassion - for the vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed. The Israelites were told not to '*take advantage of a widow or an orphan*' (Exodus 22:22) and to look after the poor (Leviticus 23:22). The psalmist speaks of God as being: '*compassionate and gracious*' (Psalm 86:15) who is '*slow to anger and abounding in love.*' The general principle is that the needs of those worse off should come before the needs of the comfortable.

Social and economic justice - many of the laws in Leviticus were written to promote justice, such as using fair measurements for trade (19:36), not charging interest (25:36), fair distribution of land (25:8-54) and paying fair wages to labourers (Malachi 3:5).

Love and active responsibility to others - Jesus placed love at the heart of all commandments (Matthew 22:37-40) and says that we will be judged according to how we treat others (Matthew 25:31-46).

Freedom and empowerment - God intends men and women to enjoy a high degree of freedom, which includes freedom to know God and to pursue a life as they choose, within the limits of their responsibilities towards others. It also includes a freedom to grow and to realize their God-given potential to create, love and achieve. Jesus has come to give us '*life to the full*' (John 10:10).

Wise stewardship of resources - which means treating the environment with respect, taking proper care of all animals, fish and birds, and using the earth's natural resources to the benefit of all people, not just a few (Genesis 1-2).

Reconciliation and peace within communities - God intends that all people should live at peace with each other and reconciliation is at the heart of his plan (Matthew 5:9). We need to promote peaceful and supportive relationships within communities, and to seek reconciliation in all situations.

Equality of all human beings before God - this includes equality regardless of age, gender, race, or intelligence and recognises human beings as made in the image of God (Genesis 1-2).

Participation - and responsibility of people in determining their own lives and the lives of those in the community and nations.

Know who you are – Christian character

As Christians, our character is central to how we go about bringing change. How we undertake advocacy is as important as the results. There are various characteristics that are central to a Christian approach to advocacy:

Prayer – we are seeking to bring about God's kingdom '*on earth as it is in heaven*' (Matthew 6:10) and need God's guidance and wisdom on what this means, as well as his powerful intervention. All advocacy, like any other Christian work, needs to be underpinned by prayer.

Hope – we are motivated by hope for a better world, based on faith in a God who already has supremacy over the powers (Colossians 1:16) and who promises that he is bringing about his kingdom.

Compassion and justice – we have God's compassion for those who are suffering and his heart for justice. We therefore look forward to justice not backwards to revenge. We also seek to love all those whom we come across, whether they are perpetrators of injustice or those who are suffering.

Lifestyle – we seek to live lives that are consistent with the policies we are asking others to implement, and which are consistent with the values that we speak about. For example, when we ask companies to have responsible environmental policies, we need to ensure that we are also being responsible stewards of creation.

Truthfulness – we aim to speak the truth at all times and to communicate the truth in such a way that others understand it and accept it.

Service – we are involved in advocacy to serve others, not to seek power for ourselves (John 13:14-15).

Reconciliation – we are seeking reconciliation at all levels: between those who are suffering and those who are causing them to suffer, between people and their environment and between people and God. Our ministry is one of reconciliation and therefore any justice will punish wrongdoing and focus on reconciliation and not revenge.

Know what you are up against – sources and manifestations of power

To engage with power we first need to understand the sources and manifestations of this power.

- sources of the powers

Powers are part of God's good creation. Paul tells us that through Christ: *'all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him'* (Colossians 1:16). The creation narrative (Genesis 1-2) shows us God's intentions with order (seven days), boundaries for the garden, ethical structures (tree of good and evil), limited sovereignty (naming the animals), basic structure of covenant marriage and God's gracious provision in the cherubim to protect Adam and Eve from making their fallen state immortal.

Through the fall, these structures, systems, institutions and spiritual beings have become fallen themselves are hostile to God's rule. Paul tells us that our battle is now *'against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms'* (Ephesians 6:12). These earthly powers, systems and structures have been taken over by evil forces (systemic or structural evil) and are operating as if they are self-ordained, without reference to God. The book of Revelation gives further insight, showing the many different structures of power working together against God: governments which claims to have the role of God (chapter 13), the influences of pagan culture which take people away from God (chapter 17) and the whole world system which is in direct opposition to God (chapter 18). In our own experience this may manifest itself in unfair global trading systems, pressure to conform to secular culture (eg through the education system) and corrupt business practices. On a more personal note, it could result in direct satanic attack.

So in grappling with the powers we are facing two main types of manifestations: structural evil and evil beings directly operating against God and against other people. We also need to take into account our own sinful nature and other people's sinful nature, when trying to bring about change.

However, Jesus has the supreme authority and final victory over all of these powers. He casts out demons (Luke 11:20), destroys the power of Satan (Mark 3:23-6) and rules over every power (Colossians 2:10). Christ's death on the cross was a victory not only over the sin of humankind but over the powers as well. These powers are bound, although they still rule the kingdom of this world for the time being (1 Corinthians 15:24-27). However, God's kingdom has broken into this world and the final battle is being played out. We need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and his ultimate victory if we are not to be overwhelmed by the rulers of this world.

- Visible faces of power

As mentioned in chapter 2, the power of the state is decreasing and there are new forms of power emerging. The visible faces of power therefore include:

- the state (government, legislature and judiciary)
- business, especially multinational corporations
- international institutions
- the media (global, national and local)

Know your options - grappling with the powers

In the past, different Christian groups have tried to grapple with the powers in different ways, depending on how they have understood the powers and which sources and manifestations of the powers they have seen as most important.

The four historic approaches to the powers can be represented as follows (adapted from *Stevens 1999, Abolition of the Laity*):

approach	exorcism and intercession	suffering and powerlessness	creative participation	just revolution
view of power	demonic influence on people (ignores structures)	evil forces have taken over structures (so they are now inherently bad)	structures are fallen (but can be redeemed)	structures are oppressive (but no spiritual view of power)
means to deal with power	prayer – exorcism and intercession	identify with suffering and model powerlessness	work and political involvement	civil disobedience
aim in dealing with power	spiritual liberation of people	to witness to fallen-ness and shame powers into change	participation in redemption of structures – social change	social change
denominations	charismatic	anabaptist	mainline	liberation theology

Each approach, applied in isolation from the others, will only bring about limited change. Extreme interpretations of all approaches could even bring harm (we consider violent actions on p40 and show why we do not consider such actions open to Christians). Therefore the best aspects of each of these different ways of dealing with power can therefore work together to bring about lasting change.

We cannot simply deal with the powers by prayer and exorcism because they manifest themselves in social and political ways that oppress people. We cannot just identify with suffering and show powers the wrongs they have done, because we have been charged with stewardship of the earth and creative participation in bringing about change. Social and political action is not enough because it fails to recognise the evil behind the earthly manifestations of power. Finally, civil disobedience, although valid to consider in some situations, fails to address the spiritual nature of power, and by itself may fail to offer any godly alternatives.

So, based on the table above, and considering the functions of the church to fulfil its mission (p10), a Christian approach to power could include the following elements (this list is not meant to be exhaustive):

1. **Intercession** – praying for God to intervene in our society, praying for those in authority and those with power, and praying for individual people who are suffering.
2. **Confronting the unseen powers directly** – including exorcisms and engaging in the spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12).
3. **Identifying with suffering and modelling powerlessness** – in order to show the powers their wrongs, to model Jesus’ servant nature, to shame the powers and bring about change from outside the system.
4. **Working to model an alternative** – and demonstrate that there is a better way of living.
5. **Speaking out prophetically** – against injustice or idolatry, and proclaiming of God’s truth in any situation.
6. **Exposing corruption** – and bringing things out into the open so there can be greater pressure for change and those in power can be held accountable for their actions.
7. **Directly influencing policy and practice** – to bring about social justice through constructive engagement with structures and institutions.
8. **Standing for election** – to make a difference from within the political system.
9. **Bringing peace and reconciliation** – to the world, which includes peace with God, with others and with the creation. Peace is at the heart of the calling of the church.
10. **Networking with others** – so that you have a larger group of people calling for change. This is also likely to involve awareness raising so that people understand the reasons for the change that is needed, and the options open to them.
11. **Undertaking research** – in order to better understand the situation and to develop realistic proposals for change.
12. **Civil disobedience** – when the methods of constructive engagement with the political and social powers do not bring the desired result and the situation is offensive to God (for more on this see below).
13. **Building capacity** – for those who are directly affected by a situation to bring about change themselves.

Often, when becoming engaged in advocacy, it can seem like an enormous task ahead. That is why it is essential to work with others to have a greater chance of bringing change. The obvious groups to consider first are Christian groups, but you should consider all groups as God uses many different ways to bring about his kingdom. For more details on understanding your context, undertaking research, building networks, analysing the key people and organisations involved and planning an advocacy strategy see Tearfund’s *Advocacy Toolkit (2002)* – available from www.tilz.info

Protecting children’s health, Sri Lanka

Tearfund partner Navajeevana is a group of people who live together in Christian communities, supporting each other as they seek freedom from drug addiction. They wanted to respond to a major cigarette advertising campaign that was targeting the ports of Galle and Colombo. An international tobacco company was using a yacht as their main promotional strategy as well as distributing branded promotional materials. Schools were invited to take their children on the yacht and Navajeevana felt this was exploitation that promoted a glamorous image of smoking.

Navajeevana visited schools and encouraged them to cancel any proposed visits to the yacht in order to benefit and protect the children. They decorated a bus to make it look like a yacht and drove it round the local area, performing street drama and mocking the cigarette company’s advertising slogans. When the yacht eventually arrived, there was little interest. Local people also became more aware of risks associated with smoking.

Standing up to abuses of power, Kenya

St. John's Community Centre works with the slum dwellers of Pumwani, Kenya. One of its objectives is to work with the community to empower them with information on human rights issues, to enable them to take action against cases of Human Rights violations. For a long time the community has been prone to police harassment and brutality. They had no confidence in the law enforcers, or confidence in themselves to be able to act. In 2000, Pumwani Arts Academy, a group involved in educating the community on human rights, started to work with St John's Community Centre to address the police harassment.

They informed the local police that they were going to have shows and invited them to attend. The performances involved a play and dances to inform the community about their rights and to encourage them to rise up against any form of police harassment. The audience was given an opportunity to ask questions about the issue. St. John's liaised with an organisation dealing with human rights and democracy, which responded to questions and issues raised. Unknown to the group, plain-clothed policemen watched the plays and reported what was going on to their seniors. The police brutality and harassment reduced drastically and the community is now safer.

Initially, many people were afraid that the play would make the relationship between the police and the community worse. However, due to the transparent way it was done, and the involvement of the whole community, relationships have in fact improved. The community also discovered the potential of the individual and collective resources that it possesses, which had not yet been used.

Know your limits – how far you can go

Civil disobedience

We have mentioned above that civil disobedience, in certain very specific circumstances, may be one option open to the church when engaging with power. We have also mentioned that we do not consider any violent actions to be options open to Christians. But how far can we go? When can disobeying the government be legitimate from a biblical standpoint?

- What is civil disobedience?

Civil disobedience is when people deliberately disobey rules or laws of the government or other institutions, as a way of trying to bring about change, or showing dissatisfaction with the current situation. However, even if they disobey the laws of other institutions, for instance trespassing on business property, prosecution is only possible through government courts because governments are the only ones who can make laws. It is therefore helpful to consider civil disobedience as breaking the rules or laws of the government, even if they are not the main targets of the action. It is a way of acting within the current system by deliberately breaking the laws of that system. By recognising the laws of the system, you are also recognising the validity of the system and are operating within it.

- What does not count as civil disobedience?

Any activities that are lawful are not a form of civil disobedience. They can be seen as a way of constructive engagement with the powers. These includes strikes (if they are legal in the country), boycotting certain companies due to their unethical behaviour, marches and rallies, meetings, visiting members of parliament, awareness-raising campaigns, and stunts to get media attention. Some of these activities (strikes, boycotts, some media stunts) are a form of

legal ‘direct action’ that targets companies and governments, hoping to cause damage to their profits or reputation, but still operating within the limits of the law; and not causing damage to property or people. The rest may be referred to as ‘conventional’ activities (though this term is slightly misleading as many other types of action, including civil disobedience, have been in use for just as long, if not longer).

We are not classing any activity that constitutes violence against people or is part of a violent revolution that seeks to overthrow the existing rulers as civil disobedience. We consider these violent actions later, and show why they are not an option open to Christians.

- **Different types of civil disobedience**

It is hard to be precise about what actions constitute civil disobedience. However, it may be useful to see activities on a continuum from conventional actions at one end to revolution at the other, with civil disobedience accounting for some of the actions in the middle.

LEGAL ACTION	- conventional action - direct action (legal)
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (SEEKING CHANGE WITHIN THE SYSTEM)	- direct action (illegal) - damage to property (non-violent) - damage to property (violent)
REVOLUTION (AGAINST THE SYSTEM)	- violence against people - uprising / revolution

We have covered legal action (conventional action and direct action (legal)) above, and said that these may be part of any ‘normal’ advocacy activity.

When it comes to civil disobedience, the answers are less clear and there is more scope for individual conscience to come into play. Below we consider the three different types of civil disobedience: (direct action (illegal), damage to property (non-violent) and damage to property (violent)); and suggest that civil disobedience is a valid option to consider, but only when it is non-violent.

Direct action (illegal) could include obstructing a right of way, non-payment of taxes to the government, organising a political meeting or publishing literature where this is banned, becoming a conscientious objector to a war etcetera. It flouts the law or rule to show that it is wrong, or to make a point about immoral behaviour (eg of companies) when this seems to be the only way left to try and change the situation.

Damage of property (non-violent) could include puncturing an oil pipeline if the drilling company is engaged in human rights abuses (although you need to consider the environmental consequences) or damaging weapons of mass destruction if you think they will be abused. The ‘non-violent’ nature of this action means no violence against people, and a commitment not to hurt people in your actions. This will mean that activities are carefully planned and that you are causing strategic damage to property to make your point. It will not lead to wanton destruction and will mean that any anger against injustice will be carefully channelled into your activities, and not allowed to explode into random acts of violence against property or people. It will inevitably mean a willingness to be arrested and be subject to the necessary punishment for your actions.

Damage of property (violent) – although, as mentioned, we would not condone it - includes all actions against property but with three key differences to the non-violent approach. Firstly, people involved in this action consider violence against people as an option if they are prevented from doing what they have set out to do. For example, if police or security prevent them from trespassing, they would consider using force to continue their activities. Hence they are not willing to give themselves over to arrest and suffer the consequences of their actions. Secondly, this form of action is less controlled and the anger against injustice may be closer to hatred. Thirdly, as a result of less controlled anger, this action may lead to indiscriminate damage and violence which is excessive to the point being made.

Symbolic actions

Many of the actions that would be included in the table above (p35) are symbolic actions that aim to highlight injustices but do not necessarily engage directly in the policy debate. These may include actions such as sending back a product to a supermarket if they are treating their workers badly, silent vigil for those who have ‘disappeared’, staging a media stunt outside an arms fair, tearing up call-up papers for the Vietnam war, non-payment of tax, damage to a nuclear warhead. Symbolic actions can be a powerful and important part of campaigning.

Martin Luther King and the US civil rights movement

Martin Luther King led the civil-rights movement in the USA from the mid-1950s until his death in 1968. He upheld the right to disobey unjust laws, but was convinced that non-violent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people. This was because resistance brought on a crisis and forced the community and those in power to face an issue it had hitherto failed to confront. Protests included sit-ins, marches and boycotts.

In 1955/56 a small civil rights group in Montgomery, Alabama, decided to challenge segregation on the city’s public bus system. A black woman named Rosa Parks was arrested after refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger. King organised a boycott of the buses. To sustain the protest, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed and it organised a fleet of 300 cars to get black people to and from work. To protect the members of the MIA, the possibility of keeping the association a secret was considered but the idea was dismissed as a concession to fear.

In 1960 King backed a sit-in by black college students protesting at segregation in the student canteen. In 1963 he joined other civil-rights leaders in organising the 200,000 strong march on Washington to demand equal justice for all citizens under the law. This was the occasion when he delivered his famous ‘I have a dream’ speech. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 followed, authorising the federal government to enforce desegregation in publicly owned facilities and outlawing discrimination in employment.

So what options in civil disobedience are possible? Answers will differ for different situations, but is it vital to have some clear way of assessing each option so that you are consistent in your approach. Below we offer some possible criteria for civil disobedience:

- the law opposed is immoral
- every possible non-disobedient resource has been exhausted
- God’s will has been sought and all objections have been adequately addressed
- the action is not excessive
- there is no violence against people

- the action is public and aiming to find a solution
- there is likelihood of success
- there is awareness of what the penalty is, and of potential repercussions, and a willingness to accept these
- actions are in line with Christian character.

Using these criteria, the dividing line clearly comes between non-violent and violent damage to property. Anything that considers violence against people is excluded. However, in many countries, even non-violent acts of civil disobedience may be too dangerous for those involved. In other countries, even ‘conventional’ actions may be impossible if the government does not allow political participation.

Consideration of violence

The final two activities are violence against people and a revolution or uprising. These are not classed as civil disobedience as they do not accept the current system and are seeking to undermine and ultimately to overthrow it. Activities here tend to be secret (assassinations, bombs, kidnapping and torture), will not accept the punishment determined by the state and may go to any length to achieve set aims. In these situations violence against people is accepted as a means to an end. There has been a significant amount of writing about the use of force and consideration of revolutions so will just offer brief reflections here.

Theological considerations	Practical considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jesus prohibited the use of force in bringing about his kingdom (Matthew 26:50-56) and instead chose to model servant leadership. He brought about change through suffering and through challenging the authorities - Christians are called to be peacemakers and peace is at the heart of God’s mission (Matthew 5:7) - We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44) - Murder is forbidden and hatred of others will be judged by God (Matthew 5:21-22) - We are instructed by God not to take revenge (Matthew 5:38-42). God says it is his role to avenge (Romans 12:19) and that we need to overcome evil by good - Immediately after this Paul talks about the role of the state in punishing evil (13:3-4) - God’s authority is higher than the state’s (Colossians 1:16) - We are to be motivated by love in all we do (Colossians 3:14, 1 Corinthians 13). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using violence is no guarantee that the situation will be any better after you have achieved what you aim to do – it may cause more suffering and injustice in the process than would have been caused otherwise - Violence is often conducted on behalf of others (terrorist groups, violent revolutionaries) with little consultation with the people they are claiming to represent. If a new group comes to power through violent actions, they may simply replace an old oppressive regime with a new one, claiming to speak for the people but not allowing the people to participate in decision-making - Violence dehumanises the person who is doing it and reduces them to the level of the oppressor. By doing this, the oppressor has, in one respect, won, as their morals have dictated the course of action. Those who are fighting for justice have right on their side, and this should not be compromised by actions that simply emulate the oppressors and perpetrators of injustice.

Approaches to avoid

In considering all of these actions, it is important to keep in mind the different roles of the state and the church. It is not the role of the church to take power (whether by force or not) and not the role of the church to support the maintenance of power by force. The church has a role of being 'salt and light', both speaking prophetically and actively working for change. The church therefore has to be careful that it does not try and overstep its mandate and try and rule a country. It needs to remain a healthy distance from the state in order to preserve its integrity and ability to influence. Failure to do this has often resulted in disaster, as shown in Rwanda and Germany. Approaches that are not open to the church are therefore:

- Submission to authorities degenerating into subservience to the state. It is right for individual Christians to accept roles in the state, but the church as an institution needs to keep the state at arm's length, retaining the freedom to challenge tyranny, injustice and unrighteousness.
- Trespassing into the state's area of responsibility, and seeking to run the country. The church and the state have been assigned specific roles by God, and it is the responsibility of God's people to ensure that both the church and state stick to these. Earthly power tends to corrupt the church.
- Using violence or coercion to achieve its aims. The church is to model love and service to all people, challenging injustice and working for change. However, this is through constructive engagement, loving action, prayer and prophetic ministry. Violence is a weapon of this world order, and creates new problems even as it seeks to solve old ones.
- Withdrawing into a separate domain of the 'church' as opposed to the 'state'. The church has been called to stewardship of the whole of creation, to work for justice and to work with God to redeem everything he has created. Withdrawal (except perhaps when forced to in extreme cases of persecution) fails to be faithful to the church's calling and mission.

Know your context – working with different types of government

- Dealing with different types of government

All governments are different and you will approach different governments in different ways. These approaches are likely to vary over time in your country or local area. They will depend on:

- how the government views the church (eg whether the church is established, is seen as a legitimate civil society organization, is well-respected, is tolerated but not supported, is illegal, is persecuted etc)
- how the government makes decisions (eg it is democratic but few groups can really participate, open and accountable, threatened by criticism, authoritarian and controls dissent violently etc)
- culture of politics (eg does it operate by formal process, links with close friends and family members, behind closed doors, based on favours etc)
- the political and economic ideologies of the governments (eg is it Marxist, socialist, free market, mixed economy)
- the priorities and vision of the church (eg is it a small, struggling church whose immediate priority is to disciple new Christians, an older church that needs to deal with its own corruption first, a church with divisions that needs to focus on reconciliation and peace-building)

- priorities of the country (eg peace and reconciliation so that main concern is to build good relationships with all groups, an accountable government so the church needs to speak out etc)
- the skills and ability of the church (see Tearfund *Advocacy Toolkit: Practical Action in Advocacy*, p47 for a skills self-assessment tool).

Marching for solidarity, Cambodia

The Government of Cambodia is concerned over the issue of pornography. The church and many other groups agree with the Government's stance and want to show that they support it. This not only gives the Government confidence to act in a stronger way, but also encourages churches to co-operate and have detailed discussions about how to achieve this joint aim.

The Youth Commission, a working group of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia, made up of Cambodian Pastors, Christian professionals and Christian youth, are encouraging the churches to organise a March Against Pornography. Women's groups from churches in the city of Phnom Penh and beyond will be invited to the march to protest against the rapid increase in explicit videos and magazines. Many talks are planned in churches before the march. The march includes the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia Youth Commission, the Women's Commissions and the public.

Forestry law reform, Honduras

The Association for a Fairer Society (ASJ) is a social justice organisation working in Honduras. In 1999, the president of Honduras presented a proposal for reform of forestry legislation that would have allowed large sections of national forest to be sold to logging companies who could choose whether or not to reforest the land. The importance of Honduras' national forests for poor farmers and indigenous groups that live in these areas was ignored. Seeing the potentially devastating consequences, ASJ joined with representatives from various sectors (indigenous groups, co-operatives, an evangelical network, agricultural ecologists and farmers groups) to form an alliance called the Honduran Agro-forestry Alliance (AHA) to try to amend the proposed legislation.

AHA hired consultants to analyse the proposal and present reasonable counterproposals to the government. They initiated a media campaign to educate the public about the problem and to pressure the government into negotiating. The media campaign included press conferences, forums on television and radio, press reports, and a web page with detailed analysis and reports.

The government agreed that no reform of the forestry legislation would be brought to Congress until it had been approved by a committee consisting of representatives from AHA, as well the government and logging companies. For 18 months AHA was involved in negotiations within this committee and continued to use consultants to educate the public, the media and committee members about the counterproposals. Not only were all the proposals of AHA accepted, but marginal groups such as poor farmers, co-operatives and indigenous groups have been able to participate for the first time in law-making that affects them directly.

- **Engaging as a persecuted church**

Many Christians live in countries without a democratic government and where the church is persecuted. This persecution can range from imprisonment under false accusations (eg Peru), discrimination in finding jobs (eg India), no freedom to meet together (eg Sudan) to threats of death for becoming a Christian or for telling others about Christ (Afghanistan). In the face of such persecution, what options are open to Christians to engage with the powers?

As each situation is so different, we do not attempt to offer a blueprint for involvement, or even detailed guidelines. On p36 we have suggested various possible ways of engaging with the powers. In a healthy democracy it is likely that the church as a whole would use all of these methods over time. However, in the situation of persecution, you are likely to be limited. It may be useful to re-order the ways of engagement along a line where one end represents what may be possible under the most restrictive and oppressive regime, and other options become available as the government becomes more tolerant of Christians and allows their democratic participation in all forms of social and political activity.

**most oppressive
government**



**least oppressive
government**

intercession

confronting the unseen powers directly

networking with others

identifying with suffering and modelling powerlessness

working to model an alternative

undertaking research

building the capacity of others to bring about change

bringing peace and reconciliation

influencing policy and practice

standing for election

speaking out prophetically

exposing corruption

civil disobedience

In some situations any political activity could be extremely dangerous and even life threatening for you or for others involved. You cannot avoid all danger but you can do a great deal to minimise the risks and make sure that everyone is aware of the possible consequences of any activity. A few options are:

- talk about the possible consequences with all those likely to be affected. Ensure they are happy with any activity taking place, and are aware of what could happen
- always act in love and with integrity and avoid any deliberately inflammatory statements or actions that you know will get you into trouble
- pray at all times for God's intervention and protection
- seek God's will for your actions
- build good contacts with other groups who may be persecuted in the same way, and with groups in the country who may be able to help (eg human rights lawyers)
- try to build good contacts with 'insiders' in the government or ruling authority who may be able to exert pressure on others if something happens to threaten your security
- build good relationships with organisations outside of the country that may be able to help you in times of need
- remember that you are operating as one part of the global church. Seek help from other parts of the church. Work with other parts so that each part can play to their strengths

- build your legitimacy with the government, so that it is clear that the church plays an important role in society (whether in caring for those in need, providing education, undertaking development work etc).

Building alliances in Sudan

The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC in the north) and the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC in the south) represent the majority of Christian denominations in Sudan. They have information and advocacy departments and collect information on issues such as food shortages, fighting, human rights abuses, the peace process and movement of refugees. They use this information to alert the world media, the Sudanese Government and the international community about their situation. They also pass the information on to a network of development and human rights agencies in Europe and North America that will lobby and campaign on their behalf, especially when it is difficult for the churches in Sudan to make public statements or speak to decision-makers in their country.

Questions for reflection

- What is your 'social vision' for what you want your community, region or country to be like in five, ten or 20 years' time? What role do you think the church can have in bringing this about?
- What forms of power do you need to engage with in your country? What are the different options open to the church in general or individual Christians in your country?
- Where would the church in your country fit in the table on p35?
- Would you ever consider breaking the law (ie civil disobedience)? Under what circumstances?
- Would you ever consider using violence? Under what circumstances?

5. APPLYING BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO POLICY-MAKING

Introduction

This chapter offers some ideas on how we can apply biblical principles to the laws of a modern state and to the public policies of powerful institutions (such as businesses). It starts by considering some problems to overcome in using the Bible to inform the policy debate today and then considers potential options. Finally, there is a consideration of the scope for using a human rights approach to bringing about change.

Policies, policy-making and the law

A *policy* - is a statement of what an organisation, institution or person believes about a particular issue and how this should be acted upon, either by themselves or by other people or organisations.

The law – is the written code by which citizens of any country are required to live, and by which businesses and other bodies are required to operate. This law is usually agreed by the parliament, and the interpretation and administration of it decided in the law courts.

Policy-making or the *policy process* is therefore how a particular government or business goes about determining its policies. In the case of the state, these may then be enacted as laws of the land.

The role of law

Any consideration of the role of the state has to be closely linked with the role of the law, because this is the main means by which the state will exercise its authority, through restraining evil, judging evil and promoting well being. From an understanding of the role of the state and the role of law (chapter 1) we can conclude the following:

- The Old Testament Law was part of a covenant of mutual responsibility and was an act of grace to show people how to live fulfilled and faithful lives
- it is a reflection of God's character
- it is powerless to change people's hearts - salvation is found only through faith in Christ
- it cannot deal with many different types of sin (eg lust, anger, covetousness)
- it was given to protect the vulnerable and to ensure social justice
- it is necessary to maintain peace and social order
- it can both encourage and discourage wrongdoing
- it should provide a framework in which God's people can flourish
- it is there to highlight evil and to punish wrongdoing, with the aim of restoration

Although the situation we find ourselves in now is far removed from the Jewish people or early church, our challenge is to understand the role of the law and its requirements and apply them to our own situations.

Problems with applying biblical principles to modern situations

Over the last 2000 years, Christians have used Old and New Testament laws and principles to argue a wide range of policies and actions. Christians have often found themselves on opposing sides of a debate (eg on the abolition of slavery in the UK in the early 19th century) with both sides using the Bible to justify their own positions. While it is important to recognise that Christians can come to differing views on a debate and both be faithfully

seeking a correct interpretation, we should also seek to avoid disagreements over misinterpretation or lazy or naïve uses of the Bible in policy work.

Below are some difficulties we face in this task, which may help us to be more cautious to pronounce that we have found the true way forward and that everyone else is wrong!

- **Different worlds** - The national life of ancient Israel is separated from our life today by distance and time. Some aspects of the culture of Israel are clearly present today in some countries, for instance the important role of the extended family, the existence of a state that oppresses the church, a male dominated society etcetera. However, most of our societies are very different from Jewish society.
- **Different times** - the biblical material applies to the people of God at different times in their development. God progressively reveals himself throughout the Old Testament and no laws can be considered as a full revelation. There are some major events which are key to interpreting God's will for his people, such as the Exodus, giving of the Ten Commandments and other laws, settling in the promised land, appointing of judges and kings. However, the laws and events need to be seen in the context of their time as well as in their ongoing role. The Patriarchs, Judges, Monarchy and Exile are very different periods, and God spoke to his people in different ways during each of them.
- **Old testament and New Testament differences** - the people of God in the Old Testament are a political entity and have a geographic identity. The Old Testament law addresses political life, economic, judicial and foreign affairs, the responsibilities of rulers, family and personal relationships, and worship and ritual. In the New Testament the people of God are a minority group within the Roman Empire, having no political power and no geographic identity, so teaching concerning political issues in the New Testament covers the responsibilities of Christians as citizens.
- **Focused on God's people** - the ethical and political material in the Bible is primarily addressed to God's people. It is still the ideal for all people, but non-Christians lack the motivation and the spiritual resources to order either their own lives or the common life of society according to biblical ideals. It is important to remember this as we consider how far the biblical law could and should be applied in our own states.
- **Different types of law**- there are different types of law in the Old Testament, some of which still apply today and others that do not. The principles behind the *ethical* (including *social* and *economic*) laws still apply because God does not change his character. However, Jesus has fulfilled many of the requirements of the *ritual* or *sacrificial* law, and has therefore declared this redundant. A new covenant was introduced with Jesus' ministry and sacrifice and he has brought the true meaning to some of the Old Testament laws (Matthew 5-7). However, it is not always obvious which laws are which and we need to be consistent in our approach to interpretation. We need to avoid personal preference dictating which laws still apply and which do not!
- **Limited role of law**- law cannot change people's hearts and recognising this is vital in ensuring that it is applied in its most effective way. Governments are there to limit evil, punish evil and promote human well being, but with the caveat that all laws need to be enforceable, and that the state cannot enforce morality or produce righteous people.

Some foundational principles for interpretation of the Bible

Having outlined some of the problems, we need to proceed with developing some principles for interpretation:

- **Source of truth** - the Bible is God's authoritative and trustworthy word containing objective and relevant truth (2 Timothy 3:15-17), but not *every* kind of truth for *every* situation. Biblical truth is key for our understanding of God, humanity, morality, the goal of history, and the fundamental realities lying behind the tangible world.
- **Bible as a story** - The Bible is a story where God reveals his character and his will for the world. By treating the Bible as a whole we can see God's plan for the whole of history, how the state and the church fit into this, and what God requires of both institutions. We have outlined this approach earlier (chapter 1) through the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. It may also be helpful to see this through the four major events of a) creation, b) fall, c) redemption (including calling of Abraham, the Exodus and development of the nation of Israel, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit and life of the church), and d) the new creation.
- **Missionary role but universal** - The law was given to Israel to enable it to fulfil its missionary role, being a light to the nations by serving as a model. We cannot therefore address our society in the terms God addressed Israel. It is nevertheless valid to argue that what God required of Israel as a fully human society is *morally consistent* with what God requires of all human societies. Israel's prophets appear to assume so when they pass judgement on the actions of the nations.
- **Underlying principles** - The unity and continuity of Scripture is a greater reality than the historical discontinuities and changing cultural contexts. In fact, the variety of historical situations that shape the moral teaching of the Bible makes it easier to identify underlying principles and how they might be applied in different contexts.
- **Law does not bring righteousness** - and we should avoid the temptation of trying to bring about a change in people's morality or values through enforcing laws upon them.
- **Jesus as central** - to understand how we apply Old Testament law to current situations, we need primarily to look at Jesus' approach. Whatever he affirms as continuing from the Old Testament is clearly relevant for the church (and the world) today. We can therefore have confidence to apply those principles to our lives and society. He also said that he was not here to do away with the law, but to give it its true meaning and to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17), so we need to understand how he viewed the different types of law and what importance or relevance he placed on them.

Understanding the functions of any Old Testament law, the values and priorities it embodies, its relevance in the light of Jesus' life and its purposes in the final creation can give us some pointers on how to interpret it for our own situation. For some issues this may be reasonably straightforward, but for others, it may take considerable study. Before undertaking any policy work, it is vital to have a clear idea of biblical principles that will form the basis of any contribution to policy-making (see chapter 4 for more details). However, in some circumstances Christians can faithfully apply biblical principles to a given law or policy and come up with different conclusions, for instance on the approach to social welfare. In some instances, one side may be clearly in the wrong. In others, both may be valid interpretations

but with different emphases. The priority in this situation is open communication and respect for each other's views in an effort to come to a common understanding. Recriminations and accusations of compromise will not help anyone.

The way forward in a pluralistic society

- Engaging in a pluralistic society

Many of us live in a pluralistic society, where there are many competing interests from different groups. From a Christian perspective, we know God's plan for humanity, and we know the principles by which he would like his people to live and the principles that he would like to see enshrined in the laws of the state. However, these are not necessarily the same eg God wants everyone to worship him but through choice and not through coercion. We need to engage with the policy makers to ensure our concerns are heard, and to recognise that we live in a democracy and that the law has a limited role in changing people.

The primary aims for Christian engagement in the public policy debate will be:

- filling gaps – in laws, vision, hope or policy
- supporting wholesome aspects of public life and policy
- confronting harmful public life and policy, making a case for the laws of the state to be brought more in line with God's law.

- Ways to contribute towards policy making

Before engaging in any policy making it is necessary to emphasise that there will be inevitable compromise involved. Biblical principles are pure and are reflections of God's character. The state and the laws it enacts are God's instruments to help bring about his kingdom, but the state is fallen and will never be able to produce laws that are a perfect reflection of God's laws. Compromise is also inevitable because we do not live in a Christian state. The laws will therefore be produced through democratic discussion and agreement.

There are many ways of contributing and one is not necessarily right and another wrong. These different ways will be dependent on different contexts and on the nature of the group that is engaging, for instance a Christian development agency is likely to influence the policy debate by participating in discussions with the government, a particular denomination may speak out prophetically against an injustice and a group of Christians may meet together regularly to pray for the situation. In this context the diverse role and nature of the church is a strength to play to, as it can engage on all different levels. Options for engagement include:

1. **Proclamation of truth and dialogue** - proclamation is the confident declaration of Christian truth in all its fullness, based on the conviction that Christianity provides the only adequate account of reality. It will involve speaking out against injustice and oppression and so showing the powers the error of their ways, and encouraging change. It will seek dialogue to win over others with arguments based on biblical truth. It will also bring the spiritual nature of life into the debate, which is often missing. In this situation there will be a clear understanding of the biblical basis of your arguments (chapter 4) and you are likely to argue from a moral ('this is right') as opposed to a practical ('this works') standpoint. This is the church acting in a prophetic role, with a clear articulation that it is speaking truth and encouraging righteousness. It could include comment on lack of concern for the poor, concern at levels of family breakdown, and worry at the rise in AIDS and prostitution etcetera. In this approach the church seldom

becomes involved in the detail of policy change, but seeks to provide guiding principles for laws, policies and behaviour.

2. **Contextualisation** - of biblical values into secular language and seeking to find agreement with others. This approach is connected to proclamation and dialogue, but the main difference is that you do not necessarily cite the Bible in your discussions. You will use the common (usually secular) language of debate but the Bible clearly informs your position. This will involve dialogue, but will take a pragmatic approach to policy making by trying to tie in your policy recommendations with an understanding of what works.
3. **Example** - the embodiment of biblical values by a community of Christians or an individual Christian, representing the body of Christ and seeking to explain their actions and influence decision-makers. The church shows itself that obedience to God's requirements brings the best results in life and encourages the state to emulate this.
4. **Prayer** - that policy-makers will change their minds, or that they will come to know God and base decisions on the truth of the Bible. This may also include confronting the unseen powers that are influencing the institutions or people making the policies.
5. **Disobedience** - of the law of the land if it is unjust and clearly against God's law and no other way of trying to bring about change has worked.

These five approaches (although proclamation/dialogue and contextualisation are two parts of the same approach) to engaging with the law and policy-making are all important in different contexts. They will often be used together and too much reliance on one approach can be counterproductive. It is also important to remember that we are only dealing here with the mission of the church that is relevant to contributing to policy-making. The church will still be involved in preaching the good news, caring for the needy, contributing to social development etcetera.

- **Contextualisation strategy**

When contributing to practical law-making and policy-making, we cannot just present policies (based on biblical principles) to the state and merely support them by claiming: "This is what it says in the Bible," unless everyone (or the vast majority) in that country see biblical principles as a valid basis for policy-making. We usually need to couch it in language that others understand and would agree with, and for that we need a strategy for 'contextualising' biblical values into policies. It is a way of participating in the debate in a language that others understand but without compromising our own principles. It relies on developing a Christian mindset so that we are confident that we are being faithful to God's truth, even if we are not directly quoting from the Bible. We do not deny the origin of our principles nor do we try and deceive others, but the aim is ensure that our proposals make sense to those who have different beliefs and values.

Contextualisation promotes policy ideas on pragmatic grounds, and wins arguments by showing that the proposals are best for everyone involved (eg through preventing family breakdown, encouraging work, rebuilding communities etcetera). This is particularly important in a democracy. It is possible to reach substantial agreement with others on many issues (eg the injustice of continuing debt burden) but the difference lies in the justification for those principles, and the respective weight attached to each one. Contextualisation focuses on truth or principles from the Bible, without necessarily identifying the ultimate

origin of those ideas. We can talk about the responsibility of humans to one another without saying that that this responsibility is ultimately to God. We can talk about the inherent value of human beings, without saying that that value comes from being made in God's image.

The anti-slavery campaign in Britain

In 18th century Britain, the West Indian slave lobby was powerful and active, defending their right to engage in the slave trade, due to substantial profits possible. The planters and merchants carried on a vigorous campaign of rallies, petitions, and parliamentary lobbying. Propaganda was placed in libraries, reading rooms, and coffee houses. Frightening estimates of the costs of compensating the planters were suggested and the risk of French competition was raised – abolition would not benefit the slaves, it was claimed, because the French would simply take over the trade.

The abolitionists responded with a widespread campaign, involving people from many walks of life. Wilberforce and hundreds of others, great and small, participated in the campaign. Some invested time and energy in meticulous research. Others wrote pamphlets, lobbied MPs, collected signatures on petitions, organised meetings, and provided financial resources. At the heart of the campaign were local support groups and thousands of ordinary people, channelling information and adding their names to the petitions.

The abolitionists had to show that the trade was costly to Britain (in terms of seamen's lives lost), and that there were profitable alternatives in trade with Africa. They also had to show that to abolish slavery was not only just, but also safe (ie that it would not lead to chaos). They needed to know when to stand firm, and when to compromise. They stood against the government promise of 'gradual extinction of slavery.' In fact, full mobilisation of public opinion only came when the objective was radicalised to call for total and immediate abolition. However, Wilberforce's successor in the parliamentary leadership, T F Buxton, compromised by accepting that there would have to be compensation for slave owners, and he agreed to a more gradual approach to abolition (though he got the transition period reduced). Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in the British Empire in 1833.

Preventing abortion, South Africa

Section 9 of the South African Constitution on non-discrimination has been used by women to argue for greater freedom to have abortions. The law before 1996 allowed abortion only when pregnancy resulted from rape or when the birth would be a danger to the woman. New proposed legislation suggested that abortion should be made available on demand for any pregnancy up to 12 weeks. The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa was against the new legislation because they thought it would result in increased numbers of abortions. They therefore started a campaign to prevent the proposed legislation being passed in Parliament, and to keep the old legislation, even though it was not perfect. They lobbied Parliament through an email petition and raised awareness of the issue in churches. They also opened shelters for women who wanted to take their pregnancy to full term and then offer the baby for adoption. The church was unsuccessful in preventing the legislation but continues to try to change it by lobbying parliament.

- Only a partial response

However, a contextualisation strategy cannot communicate the transcendent aspects of a biblical vision for human living. It can only make a muted challenge to idolatry, pointing out

false gods but not necessarily pointing to the one true God. In this way it can be seen as a necessary compromise, that is, not the ideal we want, but realistic in a fallen world and only one part of a response by the church. If the church's contribution to the policy debate was all (or even mainly) through a method of 'contextualising' biblical values into secular language and concepts, the church would not be faithful to its calling of proclaiming truth, offering hope and working for change. The public arena would also miss an important contribution, as it needs to be reminded of the transcendent.

- **Things to avoid when contributing to policy-making:**
 - lacking adequate theological grounding, and so failing to make clear links between theology and policy
 - trying to transplant the Old Testament law directly into the modern state
 - having a hidden agenda of giving the church a privileged position
 - proposals lacking professional competence, or being too vague
 - proposals that are undermined either by being based more on political presuppositions, or by church divisions on the issue
 - decisions being made in a context of a clash of views, which favour too much compromise and seeking the lowest common denominator
 - proposals that are purely utilitarian

Human rights approach

The concept of human rights often causes problems for Christians. Some Christians maintain that we have no rights (we have been saved by grace) so we cannot talk of human rights. Others say that human rights are a secular concept and Christians should therefore steer well clear of using them. Still others are reacting to an individualistic interpretation of human rights (without any ensuing responsibility) and therefore reject all aspects of the approach.

Whatever Christians do, we cannot ignore the human rights debate and cannot ignore the fact that much policy-making is now taking place in the language of human rights.

In fact, applying a human rights approach to policy debates on development issues is actually a good example of how to 'contextualise' biblical principles into secular contexts, because many basic human rights can be supported from scripture. The 1951 Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines entitlements that most Christians would regard as basic human needs, including the right to practice one's own faith (Article 18).

Below are a few thoughts on how to engage as a Christian with this debate and approach:

- Every person has a relationship with God, defined in terms of their responsibility to him and their responsibility towards other human beings. We are ultimately accountable to God, but this does not exclude the notion of rights. People do have rights due to the fact that God has given all of us responsibility for each other. These rights are not because we deserve or are owed them, but because God demands it. Responsibility towards others is therefore primarily a responsibility towards God (Exodus 22:22, James 1:27).
- The realisation of our rights is therefore dependent on the active obedience of others. This task cannot be left solely to the state (although it has a role). Everyone needs to take his or her own responsibility seriously.

- We have rights because God has made promises towards us, and God is faithful. Israel had covenant rights because God made a promise to them when they agreed the covenant (Genesis 12:3). This was not based on their intrinsic worth, but based on God's love and his initiative. We also have a right to become children of God (Genesis 12:3 and reiterated in John 1:12): *'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'*. Again, this right is not based on what we have done, but on what God has done in Christ, and on his faithfulness to his promise.
- The focus of a Christian approach to human rights is that we are primarily seeking to ensure and defend the rights of others. However, in cases of persecution the church may seek its right to exist and Christians their right to public worship and to have equal access to jobs, public services etcetera.
- Using a 'contextualisation' strategy will involve adopting the language of human rights when we agree with the principles involved (eg the right to life, the right to education) and the aim of the policy change. It therefore becomes a way of securing policy change in the secular arena, using the common language of the day. However, we would not agree with some human rights when taken to their extreme conclusions for instance the right to choose when it sanctions abortion on demand.
- Another approach is to emphasise the collective nature of rights (rather than the current emphasis on individual rights) and the rights of communities as a way of ensuring poor and oppressed people receive justice. For instance for people have been unjustly removed from their land, we can lobby on the basis of a right to security or a right to land, which is one way of ensuring justice is done. We could also engage with the human rights debate and stress the individual and collective responsibility that we have for others.
- Christians are sometimes called to give up their rights (as Paul did – 1 Corinthians 9) for the sake of obedience to God or furtherance of the gospel. God promises Christians a life of suffering and we can choose to accept that as an act of obedience. This does not mean we no longer have rights, just that we choose not to exercise them.
- Human rights provides a very clear legal framework which seeks to avoid the worst forms of abuse and ensure that people have a basic standard of living and can live, as far as possible, in peace and dignity. When lobbying for change, this legal framework is very useful and is a good way to get governments to take their responsibilities more seriously.

Questions for reflection

- What are the problems with applying biblical law to modern situations?
- What options are open to engaging in policy debate in a pluralistic society?
- How would you answer someone who says any Christian involvement in law-making inevitably leads to compromise? How can you avoid this compromise?
- Do you think a Christian should use a human rights approach to policy-making? If so, how and when?
- How would you formulate a biblical perspective on issues such as divorce, social security, and asylum? How would you 'contextualise' these into the law of your country?

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