

JESUS OF NAZARETH

ILLEGAL-TAX PROTESTER

By Ned Netterville
And Other Contributors

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE JESUS FORBADE PAYING TAXES

“Then the entire assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor.’”–**Luke Ch. 23, ver. 1**

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WHY READ *JESUS OF NAZARETH, ILLEGAL-TAX PROTESTER?*



FOR A REFRESHING, INSIGHTFUL VIEW OF JESUS AS A MAN OF IMPECCABLE CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY

Did Pontius Pilate execute Jesus for teaching his followers that taxes violate God's commandment, "Thou shall not steal?" At the time Jesus was executed the number of his disciples was increasing daily as he worked miracles of healing among the people of Galilee and Judea. Tax collectors had abandoned their duties to follow him. Some of his disciples, endeavoring to live in accordance with the principles Jesus taught, may have begun resisting Caesar's tax. The principles of righteous living Jesus preached and practiced precluded participating in Rome's taxation scheme, whether as collector, taxpayer or beneficiary. Those principles endure.

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In addition to being governor, Pontius Pilate was the Roman *prefect* or *procurator* of taxes for Judea, a position somewhat analogous to a District Director of the Internal Revenue Service here in the United States today. He obviously dare not tolerate anyone preaching anti-tax rhetoric within his jurisdiction, lest he lose his vaunted position and perhaps even lose his head. The pragmatic course of action was to crucify Jesus, which he did.

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DEDICATED TO:

Jesus of Nazareth, the original "illegal-tax protester"

Doctor Bob and Bill, two old friends

Mr. Florida, dedicated libertarian and Ned's frequent bail bondsman

Carl Watner, voluntaryist and a true inspiration

Irwin Schiff, the Internal Revenue Service's worst nightmare
(Currently imprisoned by the IRS. Please pray for him)

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NED'S INTRODUCTION

I underwent a spiritual awakening of sorts back in 1982, which led me to read the Bible on a daily basis. On most days, I turn first to the Gospels, paying particular attention to the words Jesus spoke. I have also devoted 135 days to concentrated Gospel study while incarcerated in several jails for violating various man-made laws that impinge upon my God-given right to liberty. Because I took Jesus' principles to jail with me, my days of incarcerations were joyful and productive. My purpose in focusing on the Gospels has been to know Jesus as best I can.

Jesus spent his youth studying the Scriptures. So I read the Old Testament to gain insight into the mind of the most remarkable and influential man of all times. I read the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, paying particular attention to the words and actions attributed to Jesus in an effort to know this unique son of God as best I can. I read the Epistles, Revelation, and other ancient works relevant to Jesus by various authors to learn what others thought of him and how they have understood him. To this exercise, I bring the wisdom, education and experience God has given me, plus, I hope, enough humility to recognize and admit when I am wrong.

In the course of writing this essay, I have asked God for knowledge of His will for me and the wisdom, courage and power to carry it out. I have also solicited help from one and all who are willing and able to point out error, weakness or otherwise suggest improvements. Such generous assistance has been forthcoming and has improved the essay a hundred-fold in the course of numerous revisions, which are ongoing.

I have received many benefits from studying the Gospels and trying to live by Jesus' principles. For example, I don't have health insurance, but as

a result of what I learned about God from Jesus, I don't need it. I am remarkably healthy. I have no regular source of income, yet all my material needs are continuously met in a timely fashion on a daily basis. I have relatively few possessions, yet I am abundantly rich. I have foresworn the use of force in the conduct of my affairs, even in self-defense, yet I am invulnerable to harm from others in an often-violent world. I have no fear of going anywhere on earth or consorting with anyone if I have good cause to do so. As long as my motives are pure, God keeps me from all harm. I am a long way from sainthood, but I do have a vital, fruitful relationship with God. For these and many other benefits, I hold Jesus of Nazareth fundamentally responsible.

I have also been the beneficiary of an important revelation about the character of Jesus. It did not arrive in a vision or a blinding flash. Rather it came through a gradually growing-until-unshakable conviction that I know something about Jesus many people should know, but do not. If more people knew where Jesus stood regarding taxes and the state, the world would be a better place. Of equal import, this insight serves to negate some absurd and demeaning allegations, which continue to be made concerning the character of Jesus by many scholarly commentators on the Bible. For these reasons, I am obliged to share what has been revealed to me by Jesus. This essay, therefore, is a duty.

I (Ned Netterville) am not a Christian, but many of those who have contributed to improving this essay are. I personally do not profess any religion. However, I do have a profound faith in God, as I understand God. My faith and understanding of God are derived in large measure from the words and deeds of Jesus, which are credibly attributed to him, as well as

from personal experience. I have achieved benevolent results from trying, however haltingly, to adopt the principles Jesus preached and follow his example. My faith isn't necessarily logical, except in the sense that it passes the ultimate test of logic, a test I learned from Jesus, to wit: Does it work? Does it bear good fruit? My faith in God and in the wisdom of Jesus works so well it has become imbedded in my psyche. That doesn't mean my beliefs can't change, rather it means my faith in God is steadfast. I may not be a Christian, but I am a disciple of Jesus. I don't blame Jesus for any flaws in Christianity, and I am grateful to the many Christians who have kept the spirit of Jesus vibrant for over two millennia.

I finished the original draft of this essay in 1997 and first published a version of it on the Internet in August of 2004. Since then the essay has been frequently and extensively revised with the help of many people. Thus, I no longer claim it as my own. With generous help from people who found the essay on the Internet and submitted comments and constructive criticism, pointing out weaknesses and errors, and with the invaluable assistance in every facet of its composition from the talented members of my writers' group, the essay has vastly improved. Thanks to the help of others, I am now confident the essay fairly reflects the wisdom and character of Jesus. All remaining errors are my own. Nevertheless, I have gone through the essay from the end of this Introduction to the beginning of the Addendum, replacing the words "I" and "me" with "we" and "our" to acknowledge this as the work of a confederacy.

PREFACE: EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

Exegesis is the science of textual interpretation, usually referring to the Bible. The specific techniques employed in the exegesis of Scripture are referred to as hermeneutics. Scholars who labor in the discipline are called exegetes, a title, which for lack of adequate alternatives, is used *ad nauseam* hereinafter.

This preface was added in response to some early negative criticism. Two groups have been particularly vociferous. Christian fundamentalists don't like it at all. Nor do some people whose bread is buttered with tax revenues, who may feel threatened or perhaps antagonized by the essay for impugning the morality of tax collectors and tax beneficiaries. Curiously, both groups usually fault the essay along the same line. They protest that we rely on passages from the Bible, particularly from the Gospels, to make certain points, while ignoring, dismissing or even disputing the validity of other passages that tend to refute our theses. We confess: Guilty as charged. But we profess that all who read the Bible and reach conclusions do the same.

In its English translations, the Bible has been through many hands. Some have made alterations, if only to make it clearer—by their way of thinking. Others may have had less honorable motives. Many changes have occurred as the result of human errors in translating and transcribing. For an analysis of innumerable changes, intentional and accidental, for good cause and bad, which have been made to the New Testament, see, *Misquoting Jesus, The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, by Bart D. Ehrman (New York, Harper Collins Publisher, 2005).

The Bible is rife with confusion and contradictions. According to

Matthew's account, Jesus and his apostles are about to leave for Gethsemane where he will be arrested. He tells them, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." (Lk 22:36, King James Version--KJV) Later that night, according to John's account, when Peter uses his sword to defend Jesus, the Lord chastises him saying, "Put up your sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn 18:11 KJV) If both accounts are true, why did Jesus, the Prince of Peace, first tell his apostles to arm themselves as for a fight, then chastise Peter for using his sword? How are such conflicts to be understood without resorting to deductive reasoning aided by one's existing knowledge of what has been written or said about him, plus any personal knowledge of the risen Jesus one may have attained.

Here is another glaring contradiction in the canonical gospels' accounts of the Passion of Christ. In the accounts in Matthew, Mark and John, Pilate's soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus, place a crown of thorns on his head, and mock him, whereas in Luke, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, whose soldiers put an elegant robe on him and mock him. Matthew, Mark and John do not even mention Herod. Such glaring discrepancies might induce a jury to reject the testimony of all four evangelists as unreliable.

According to one dictionary, fundamentalism is "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of everything in the Bible and regarded as fundamental to Christian faith and morals." Some fundamentalists even hold that only the 1611 King James Version (KJV) of the Bible contains the inerrant word of God. For a discussion of why, and a flattering portrayal of King James I of England, visit <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/kinginde.htm>. For a contrary view and a scathing indictment of good king Jimmy, go to

<http://www.reformedreader.org/gbn/igb.htm>. For an elucidation of the many textual discrepancies in the KJV, but particularly in the Greek manuscripts from which it was translated, see Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus* (op cit 78-83).

One passage in the KJV that is clearly errant is in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 39 (Mt 5:39). This erroneous translation of a phrase in the KJV has become imbedded in English-language custom, literature and speech. It is this: "But I say unto you, that ye *resist not evil*." This essay posits the proposition that taxes are evil, and that the principles Jesus preached for righteous living not only condemn taxation, they even support what tax authorities in ancient Rome or modern America might describe as "illegal tax resistance." How could Jesus' principles support tax resistance if he said "resist not evil?" The answer is he didn't say it. Most modern translations of Matthew 5:39 correctly render the passage this way: "Do not resist an *evildoer*." Clearly, this is the correct translation. Jesus promulgated nonviolence in responding to a *person* bent on doing you evil to eliminate violence from human intercourse. Obviously, Jesus did not counsel nonresistance to evil itself. Resistance to taxes, which is passive, persistent and adamant, like Gandhi's *satyagraha*, never involving force or dishonesty, is perfectly in tune with the letter and spirit of Jesus' words

Although the Bible is surely inspired by God, it clearly is not inerrant. For one thing, too many men have messed with it. In addition, it is evident that God didn't intend all of it to be taken literally. The story of Creation in Genesis, while it contains Divine insight and insight into the Divine, is obviously allegorical. Many Christians who are not fundamentalists agree.

This essay contains three hypotheses. The primary thesis is that, **contrary to what most people have been led to believe by their church**

and government leaders, Jesus did not condone taxation nor endorse the concept of nation-state when he said “render unto Caesar therefore the things which are Caesar’s.” (Mt 22, Mk 12, Lk 20) If the essay succeeds in persuading some readers of that one point, and we are confident all who read it with an open mind will be persuaded, our research, writing and prayers will be vindicated.

The second hypothesis is this: **Jesus taught and lived by principles diametrically opposed to government and taxes.** If that is true, then those who would live their lives according to the principles Jesus taught will neither collect, receive, nor voluntarily pay taxes, nor be involved with the state in any way that can possibly be avoided.

Finally, although Jesus died of his own volition in compliance with his Father’s will in order to save mankind from sin, which may be the most important fact to know about Jesus, our third hypothesis holds that **it is likely and eminently logical to believe that Pontius Pilate crucified Jesus for “forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar” and teaching his disciples that taxation is condemned by God’s commandment, Thou shall not steal.** Pilate obviously didn’t kill Jesus to save mankind from sin, although Jesus died for that purpose. Did he die to save us from taxes? If, as this essay shows, taxes are sinful because they violate God’s Commandment, it follows as night follows day that indeed he did.

The first two of these theses are scripturally and logically unassailable. The third, which really generates heat among those who believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God, is grounded less in Scripture than on logical assumptions supported by historical and economic analysis of the scriptural events as well as by common sense. The Scriptural

evidence is there, but making the case requires deductive reasoning.

All four canonical-Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus either state or imply that Pilate was not persuaded by the evidence of Jesus' guilt and would have released him. However, against his better judgment and over the protests of his wife, he crucified Jesus to placate the leading Jews, who were demanding crucifixion, and/or, to appease the crowd of onlookers who were threatening to become unruly if Pilate did not bow to the priests' demand. This is said about a Roman ruler with perhaps a legion of Roman soldiers at hand, a ruler who had demonstrated contempt for the leading Jews in the past, and had once ordered his soldiers to ruthlessly extinguish the protests of a similar mob of agitating Jews when they opposed another one of his decisions, killing and wounding many of them in the process? The canonical Gospels' presumptions--and that is all they are--of Pilate's motives for executing Jesus are illogical. That he would crucify someone preaching tax resistance is indisputable.

Although scriptural support of the essay's third thesis may be minimal but not entirely lacking, we believe it is well worth our readers' thoughtful consideration. The critical tool for discerning the truth of any event in the life of Jesus that is historically unknowable is going to be the reader's own God-given intellect and life experience, including one's faith in God. Those who do not believe everything they hear from the pulpit may come to agree that Jesus was killed because Pilate dare not dismiss the inflammatory accusation that Jesus had been teaching people that taxes violated the law of God and they ought not pay them unless distraised. He had been doing so within Pilate's jurisdiction, which augured great harm to Pilate, who was accountable for imperial tax collections in Judea.

If the Bible has been altered, how can anyone know what Jesus really said or did? The prolific scholar-author John Dominic Crossan in his monumental investigation into the historical Jesus (*The Historical Jesus, The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, New York, Harper Collins, 1991), applied the tools of statistical analysis to the problem. He ranked the likelihood Jesus actually said or did what was attributed to him in the gospels and all of the other documents that mention Jesus, which were created during the first one-hundred and fifty years of the common era. The more often words or acts attributed to Jesus were mentioned by different writers, the more credence is given to their authenticity. (The designation for the common era is CE, a modern equivalent of AD. It seems to be preferred by scholars who apparently disliked using AD, which is short for *Anno Domini*, a Latin term meaning "in the year of the Lord." AD is used to indicate a date after the traditional date of the birth of Christ. BC, meaning before Christ, is now BCE among academics, meaning before the common era, which closes with the birth of Jesus.)

Another "scientific" approach to determining what Jesus really said or did, one we can recommend from our own experience, is experimentation. Determine for yourself the principles of right living Jesus purportedly endorsed, and put them to the test. Those that work to make life better may safely be considered authentically Jesus'. In our own case, for example, resisting taxes, as we believe Jesus would have us do, relieves us of a dreadful feeling of hypocrisy, which assaulted us when we docilely paid our taxes, and which we knew financed the purposeful taking of human lives in wars and other actions. As pacifists and disciples of Jesus, we would never kill nor allow our agents to kill on our behalf. Following the anti-taxpaying

principles of Jesus unburdens our consciences.

Overcoming long-standing and demeaning characterizations of Jesus by orthodox exegetes who put words in his mouth he never uttered won't be easy nor likely to occur without God's intercession. The influence of the exegetes has thoroughly corrupted the Christian church. Nevertheless, we are confident that abominable lies claiming Jesus endorsed taxes and the state will eventually be discarded by all but the most rabid fundamentalists and those who worship the state as their deity. When that comes about, chalk up another victory on Jesus' scorecard for showing the way.

CHAPTER 1: GUILTY! CRUCIFY THE TAX REBEL

When Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate by high-ranking Jews who wanted him crucified, the Gospel of Luke records the event as follows: “Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.’” Lk 23:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version Bible, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989. Note: The NRSV is quoted throughout this essay unless otherwise indicated.)

Was Jesus guilty of these charges? Most Bible scholars are of the opinion he was not. However, we intend to show that the Gospels and other reliable evidence demonstrate conclusively those scholars are wrong. The record is clear. At least on the count of forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar, Jesus was guilty! Thus, pursuant to Roman law, he was a dangerous criminal who warranted the sentence Pilate handed down.

The criminal cause of action preferred against Jesus before Pilate of “perverting our nation” must be interpreted to mean the Roman nation, not Israel. Israel at the time was not a nation but an imperial province of the Roman Empire. Moreover, the charge could hardly refer to the Jewish nation because perverting the Jewish nation would be of no concern to a Roman magistrate administering Roman law. The specification, “forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor,” was brought not only because it was likely to incite Pilate’s wrath against Jesus, but also because it could readily be supported by solid evidence. Furthermore, regarding the tax charge, his accusers were justifiably confident Jesus would not deny anything he had previously said or done that would implicate him. Resisting the emperor’s

tax augured harm to Pilate and to Rome, not Israel. One who called himself a king within the Roman Empire, without leave of the emperor, challenged Caesar's sovereign authority, not Israel's, which at the time had no sovereign authority whatsoever having been subjugated by Rome.

Let us analyze the legal case against Jesus. The cause of action was that Jesus had been perverting the Roman nation. The specifications of the charge were two-fold, or in legal terms, there were two counts. Jesus was accused of perverting the nation (the cause of action) by forbidding taxes (count one), and perverting the nation (same cause of action) by claiming to be the Messiah, which his accusers equated with calling himself a king (count two). The word pervert means, according to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2nd Ed., 1983), "to cause to turn from what is considered right, natural, or true: to misdirect: to lead astray: to corrupt." Perverting a nation-state would be equivalent to the crime of sedition in modern legal parlance. *Bouvier's Law Dictionary* (Cleveland, OH, Banks-Baldwin Law Publishing Company, 1946) defines sedition as "The raising of commotions or disturbances in the state: it is a revolt against legitimate authority." (p. 1098) The reason why Jesus' accusers brought two counts is best explained by *Bouvier's* definition of the word "count":

One object proposed in inserting two or more counts in one declaration when there is in fact but one cause of action, is, in some cases, to guard against the danger of an insufficient statement of the cause, where a doubt exists as to the legal sufficiency of one or another of two different modes of declaring (p.240).

Jesus' accusers had cause to worry about the sufficiency of the count

charging him with calling himself a king. One problem: Pilate had to accept his accusers' translation of the word "Messiah" as meaning a king, a dubious rendering for sure. Also, even if it could be shown that Jesus had called himself a king, Pilate would be reluctant to crucify him on that count, which in the event proved to be the case. The claim of kingship over the lowly Jews was more likely to elicit a good laugh than a death sentence from the haughty Roman procurator. Unless Pilate perceived Jesus' purported claim to be king of the Jews as a real threat to Caesar's sovereignty or to his own authority in Judea, which is facially ludicrous, count two was decidedly unlikely to rise to a capital offense.

Jesus never pretended to an earthly kingship, but of course he had acknowledged he was the Messiah, meaning the Christ, the anointed one of God:

He said to them (viz., his apostles), "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed art you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." (Mt 16:15-18)

Also, when Jesus was passing through Samaria, in the city of Sychar, the following was part of a conversation he had with a Samaritan woman: "The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'" (Jn 4:25-26)

According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus also acknowledged he was the Messiah after he was arrested at Gethsemane and brought before the Sanhedrin, a seventy member council comprised of the high priest, chief

priests, elders and scribes. “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ Jesus said, ‘I am.’” (Mk 14: 61-62) In the NRSV accounts of Matthew and Luke, when asked this question, Jesus responded, “You say so.”

Jesus’ adversaries among the Jews defined Messiah for Pilate because as a Roman he might not be familiar with that uniquely Hebrew word. But the word Messiah and the word king are definitely not synonymous. His accusers were being less than honest, and Pilate had lived long enough among the Jews and their language to know it. Furthermore, Jesus never claimed to be a king. As we will show, he rejected the concept of humans ruling humans, of kings and kingdoms. The only evidence, tenuous indeed, that could be adduced to show Jesus wanted to be king was when he refused to chastise his disciples, who in their exuberance impetuously referred to him as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord.” According to Luke, it happened when Jesus’ disciples triumphantly entered Jerusalem on the occasion now celebrated as Palm Sunday:

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” (Lk 19:37-40)

Because he declined to silence his disciples, it might be argued Jesus had

tacitly accepted responsibility for their words. Throughout his ministry, by word and deed, Jesus demonstrated knowledge and approval of the legal intendment of the master-servant, or principal-agent relationship. He even lectured on it (see, e.g., Mt 10:24ff, 10:40ff, 25:14ff, 25:34f). *Bouvier's Law Dictionary* provides the following definition of the master-servant relationship:

The master is answerable for every such wrong of the servant or agent as is committed by him in the course of the service and for the master's benefit, though no express command or privity of the master be proved. Such liability springs out of the relation itself, and does not depend on the stipulations of their contract. Within the scope of his authority, the servant may be said to be the medium through which the master acts; it follows, as a general rule, that for the tortious acts of the servant the master is liable. (p. 765)

So, on the questionable basis of this one incident, and by invoking the agent-principal precept, and further presuming his disciples to be his agents, all of which is really a stretch, a fitfully flawed case might be made that Jesus was guilty of indirectly calling himself a king when he did not prevent his followers from referring to him as such. However, it is evident Pilate found the charge to be frivolous or trivial.

Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you want me to do with the man you call the king of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him." Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk 15:12-14) Then Pilate asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." (Lk 23:3-4)

The first count, however, of forbidding people to pay taxes to the emperor, was clearly a capital offense supported by solid evidence. Pilate as procurator or prefect would be particularly sensitive to a charge of resisting taxes. It was a simple matter to prove Jesus' guilt. Principles he had openly preached condemn paying or receiving taxes. This man of flawless integrity would have to deny the truth and repudiate statements he had made, which impeached the legitimacy of collecting taxes. In essence, Jesus stood convicted by the principles he had preached. His flawless honesty precluded him from denying the truth to avoid conviction for violating Roman laws prohibiting tax resistance.

Pilate was personally accountable to Rome for the collection of taxes throughout the province of Judea. The position of a Roman prefect or procurator is analogous to a District Director of the Internal Revenue Service in the United States today. (See, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law*, H. F. Jolowicz, London, Cambridge University Press, 1932, pp. 344-348)

The accounts in the canon Gospels of the trial of Jesus do not record how Pilate ruled on the charge of tax resistance. There is one other vague accusation in the Gospel of Luke, which also likely refers to the fact that Jesus was teaching people to resist taxes. His accusers told Pilate, "He (Jesus) stirs up people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." (Lk 23:5) Preaching tax resistance is illegal in all places and is universally adjudged to be an infamous form of sedition. What other possible doctrine might Jesus have been teaching, which his accusers supposed would induce Pilate to crucify him? The most logical conclusion is they were referring to the principles he was preaching

that confuted Roman taxes, and to the revolutionary impact his preaching was having upon a growing number of people—stirring them to resist the emperor’s tax.

In the Gospel of John there is another passage indicating that Jesus’ accusers discerned he was preaching tax resistance. The incident occurred right after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: “So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, ‘What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.’” (Jn 11:47-48)

What, it must be asked, was Jesus saying, which, if believed by many Jews, would incite Rome to annihilate an already conquered people? Again, the only logical answer is that Jesus was teaching his followers a dangerous truth, that taxes violate God’s law. This may already have led some of his followers to resist or stop voluntarily paying their taxes. Rome could not maintain its hegemony over the lands it had conquered if it did not enforce its taxes. The leading Jews well knew that Rome would do everything in its power to protect the tax revenues upon which its mighty empire depended. If tax resistance was perceived to spring from their religion, Rome wouldn’t hesitate to extinguish both the Temple and the religious hierarchy.

According to the four canon-Gospel accounts, Pilate was unimpressed by the charge that Jesus was calling himself a king. He astutely determined the charge was prompted by the accusers’ jealousy of Jesus. (Mt 26:18ff, Mk 15:10ff, Lk 23:iff, Jn 18:33) He wanted to release Jesus, but the leading Jews incited the on-looking crowd to demand Jesus be put to death, and

Pilate caved into their demands. (Mt 26:24, Mk 15:15, Lk 23:23, Jn 19:12) Nothing is said in any of these accounts of the trial to indicate Pilate even considered the charge of “forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor.” Yet it is logically indisputable that the man in charge of collecting taxes and accountable to Rome for doing so would not have ignored such a provocative charge. As imperial director of taxation for Judea, Pilate obviously would be more concerned by the charge of tax resistance than the trivial king-of-the-Jews count.

There is definitely something missing from the Gospel accounts, perhaps because the narratives that eventually became the four Gospels were first told by men who had fled from Jesus’ captors on the previous evening when he was arrested at Gethsemane. His apostles all deserted him, and likely avoided the trial fearing they might be caught and charged as accomplices. Some of them may also have preached tax resistance and thus had good cause to be afraid. Jesus had admonished them beforehand, “You will all become deserters because of me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” (Mt 26:31) Thus, the reports of the trial, which were not written down until considerably after the fact, and which eventually were included in the Gospels, were based on second-hand information at best. In today’s legal parlance that is hearsay, not admissible as reliable evidence in American courts of law. Our source for this sensible explanation of missing critical evidence in the canonical Gospels’ passion narratives is John Dominic Crossan. (See his books, *The Cross that Spoke*, 1988, *Jesus, a Revolutionary Biography*, 1994. and *Who Killed Jesus*, 1995, San Francisco, Harper & Rowe).

It is also possible the canon Gospels were altered to exonerate the role Rome and its taxes played in the murder of Jesus. The oldest surviving complete manuscripts of the Gospels were copied by scribes after the Christian church was subsumed by Rome--and dependent upon Roman taxes.

It is more logical to conclude that a haughty Roman procurator crucified Jesus as an illegal tax protester than it is to deduce that Pilate was frightened by a crowd of lowly Jews into doing what he would rather not do. (Note: The term "illegal tax protester" was coined by the IRS to describe and simultaneously denigrate those Americans who *openly* opposed its collection procedures. After decades of official use by the IRS, Congress ordered the Service to banish the term from its lexicon for conflicting with the First Amendment.) As district director of taxation in Judea, Pilate dare not dismiss the incendiary charge that Jesus was "forbidding" his numerous followers to pay taxes.

Without Pilate's personal memoir, we are reduced to speculating on what motivated him to convict and crucify Jesus. Likewise, the four Evangelists could only have been speculating, perhaps with less evidence and more bias than we bring to the task, when they ascribed motives to Pilate's actions. The accusation of kingship over the lowly Jews was manifestly more curiosity than concern to the arrogant procurator, whereas tax resistance posed a serious threat to the empire and to Pilate personally. It would only be pragmatic for Pilate to kill one lowly Jew rather than risk the possibility there was even a kernel of truth in the accusation that Jesus was encouraging tax resistance?

Throughout recorded history, governments have dealt harshly and

often summarily with tax resisters. Here in the United States, due-process requirements and other constitutional safeguards, which are afforded other criminals as a matter of course, are routinely denied to those who are designated illegal tax protesters by the IRS. Like Pilate, members of the federal judiciary are entirely dependent on the revenues of taxation. They brook no pity for those whose words or actions threaten their munificent emoluments and erode the foundation of their powerful jurisdiction. The Constitution with its Bill of Rights is of no consequence in the courts of tax-paid judges when the government's revenues are at stake. (See, *A Law Unto Itself*, by David Burnham, New York, Random House, 1989; and, *The Federal Mafia*, by Irwin Schiff, Las Vegas, Freedom Books, 1990)

It goes without saying that government courts will protect government revenues at all costs, justice or judicial integrity notwithstanding. As an example, in April 2003, a federal judge in Las Vegas, at the behest of the IRS, ordered author Irwin Schiff to stop criticizing the income tax or selling *The Federal Mafia*, the book we cite above. When it appeared an appellate court might overturn the lower court's decision on First-Amendment grounds, the IRS brought criminal "conspiracy" charges against the 76-year-old author. As it turned out, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower courts' manifest negation of the First Amendment, demonstrating that the principle of revenue supremacy prevails in the appellate courts as well!

Schiff's criminal case went before a judge who clearly saw the danger Schiff's preaching augured and its potential impact on his personal welfare. He flatly refused to allow Schiff to mount an effective defense. Thus, Schiff was convicted and sentenced to over 13 years in prison! Such treatment of tax resisters in the United States today is not that far removed from ancient

Rome's treatment of Jesus in terms of its brutality. We know many "loyal US citizens" will question the validity of this analysis. We urge those good folks to read the transcripts of Irwin Schiff's criminal trial and judge for themselves. (CR-S-O4-0019-KJD-LRL, United States District Court for the District of Nevada)

It is historically evident that Pilate would not be cowed by a crowd of agitating Jews into crucifying Jesus against his better judgment, as the four canonical-Gospel accounts imply. Pilate well knew how to silence such protesters. The great Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius (37-100 AD/CE), who was nearly Jesus' contemporary, provided the following account of Pilate's response to an earlier attempt by a crowd of Jews to intimidate him into acting contrary to his own best judgment. The incident is indicative of Pilate's utter contempt for Jewish law and the Jewish people.

But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem, to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws...Pilate undertook to bring a current of water to Jerusalem, and did it with the sacred money, and derived the origin of the stream from a distance of two hundred furlongs. However, the Jews were not pleased with what had been done about this water; and many ten thousands of the people got together, and made a clamor against him, and insisted that he should leave off that design. Some of them also used reproaches, and abused the man, as crowds of such people usually do. So he habited a great number of his soldiers in their habit, who carried daggers under their garments, and sent them to the place where they might surround them. So he bid the Jews himself go away; but they boldly casting reproaches upon him,

he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; who laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those who were tumultuous and those who were not; nor did they spare them in the least; and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition. (p. 575-576, Flavius, Josephus, *Josephus The Complete Works*, circa 70CE, Translated by William Whiston in 1737, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998)

In addition to the canonical Gospels, other early records of the life of Jesus include brief comments by Josephus and by the Roman historian Tacitus (55-117AD). Furthermore, archaeologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have uncovered fragmentary documents, which are generally held to be authentic, containing early accounts of Jesus and the words he spoke. Many non-canonical documents were suppressed by the Christian church after it became the official church of Rome during the reign of Constantine. The documents include such tracts as the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene. For an interesting and concise discussion on these and other important early sources concerning the life of Jesus, see the Prologue of John Dominic Crossan's *Who Killed Jesus*. For the text of the Gospel of Peter, see the Appendix of *Who Killed Jesus*. For the Gospels of Thomas and of Mary Magdalene, see *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco, CA, Harper Publishing, 1994)

In this essay we will present evidence to show Jesus was crucified for stirring up opposition to Caesar's tax by the principles of nonviolence he

was preaching. For example, the principle of doing to others only what you would have them do to you precludes the use of force in the conduct of human affairs. Taxes, of course, depend utterly on force for their collection and are thus condemned. And it follows as night follows day that the same nonviolent principles, which condemn taxation, confute the very existence of the nation-state. (Imagine a nation-state without taxes--and stop grinning.) Thus, Jesus may justly be described as an anarchist! The definition of anarchism relied on to make this point is from *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1983). It defines anarchy as "the theory that formal government of any kind is unnecessary and wrong in principle." Those, like Jesus, whose principles preclude having anything to do with the state, are anarchists. (See, "Jesus was an Anarchist," by James Redford, www.anti-state.com/redford/redford4.html. And see, "The Obviousness of Anarchy," by John Hasnas, <http://faculty.msb.edu/hasnasj/GTWebSite/AnarchyDraft.pdf>. In the latter, Georgetown University Professor Hasnas incisively rebuts the promulgated litany of objections to the real-world potential of a peaceful, abundant society flourishing in the absence of the compulsory ordering of people by the rulers of nation-states.)

All governments assert the authority to initiate the use of force without provocation in order to collect its taxes, the lifeblood of the state. Once it is sanctioned for taxes, other reasons for resorting to force are soon asserted, which explains why George Washington (reportedly) said, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force, and force like fire is a dangerous servant and a fearful master." The prerequisite of force upon which the state utterly depends for its existence is the reason why the Jesus principles

stand in stark condemnation of the state in all of its emanations.

The leading Jews of his day believed that Jesus' testimony to the truth threatened their cozy relationship with Rome. They wanted him out of the way. They repeatedly misjudged Jesus. They were often shamed and embarrassed by his words and deeds in front of crowds of people they lusted to impress. They refused to believe he was the Messiah foretold by the prophets in their ancient Scriptures.

As thoroughly as the leading Jews misunderstood Jesus, they nevertheless knew him better than most exegetes. We have checked all of the so-called "interpreter Bibles," "Bible commentaries," and "Bible expositions" found in large research libraries. The authors of these exhaustive, often multi-volume tomes, uniformly fail to comprehend, and thus misinterpret, the meaning and significance of a few words Jesus uttered on one particular and very important occasion, which are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well as in the Gospel of Thomas. In so doing, these scholars misrepresent and demean the character of Jesus to a degree bordering on character assassination.

CHAPTER 2: RENDER UNTO CAESAR

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. (Psalm 24:1)

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's (viz., nothing), and to God the things that are God's (viz., everything).

(Matthew 22:21)

We refer to the important occasion as the “render-unto-Caesar incident.” It is recounted in all three synoptic Gospels (Mt, Mk, and Lk) with near unanimity among the three authors regarding what happened and what Jesus said at the time. The nearly identical Gospel accounts suggest the significance of what transpired upon the occasion should not be lost, and the lessons contained in Jesus' words and actions should not be misconstrued. But that is exactly what has happened. This essay endeavors to correct a gross distortion of the record, which has been perpetrated by many if not most orthodox Bible exegetes. These scholars slander the character of Jesus and pervert an important principle he espoused by their unfounded misrepresentations of the intendment of what Jesus said on the occasion of this fascinating and memorable incident.

The Gospel of Matthew reports numerous encounters between Jesus and his enemies among religionist Jews prior to the render-unto-Caesar incident. (See, Mt 9:3ff, 9:11ff, 9:23ff, 9:34ff, 12:2ff, 12:14ff, 12:22ff, 12:38ff, 13:54ff, 15:1ff, 16:1ff, 19:3ff, 21:15ff, 21:13ff, 21:45) The Gospels identify his antagonists as scribes, chief priests, elders, Sadducees, Herodians and Pharisees. These frequent encounters between Jesus and his adversaries provide a preponderance of evidence that his enemies knew firsthand what Jesus was teaching and much about his character and temperament.

His enemies realized Jesus' teaching regarding taxes was seditious,

dangerous to Rome and therefore dangerous to them. Jesus' adversaries were loyal to the Roman state for the advantages Rome bestowed on them in order to secure their cooperation in subjugating and taxing their fellow Jews of lower estate who were without political clout. When Pontius Pilate hesitated to crucify Jesus at their urging, he asked sarcastically, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests replied emphatically, "We have no king but the emperor." (Jn: 19-15)

The leading Jews were on solid ground in believing they could bring Jesus to grief with the Roman authorities by inducing him to speak his mind on taxes in the wrong place. It was clear to them where Jesus stood on the issue of taxes from the principles he taught and from explicit comments he had made regarding taxes and tax collectors. They also knew from experience that Jesus would not shrink from expressing his views out of fear for his safety or because his words—the truth--would offend someone. The enemies of Jesus were therefore justifiably confident he would incriminate himself of opposing Rome's taxes if they could get him to express his opinion on the subject in the presence of potential adverse witnesses. Rome, like other nation-states throughout history, did not tolerate opposition to its taxes, which financed the empire and the many benefits of Roman citizenship.

Let us turn to the three canon-Gospel writers' accounts of the render-
unto-Caesar incident from the NRSV Bible.

MATTHEW:

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in

accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us then, what do you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard this they were amazed; and they left him and went away. (Mt 22:15-22)

MARK

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him. (Mk 12:13-17)

LUKE:

So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, *so as to hand him over to the*

jurisdiction and authority of the governor. So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor or not?” But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?” They said, “The emperor’s.” He said to them, “Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent. (Lk 20: 20-26) (emphasis added)

The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas is attributed to the apostle Thomas, called Didymus, who was known forever after as Doubting Thomas for his unbelief in Jesus’ resurrection (see, Jn 20:24-29). Thomas’ Gospel contains a much briefer account of the same incident:

They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, “Caesar’s men demand taxes from us.” He said to them, “Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine.” (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, op. cit.)

We may assume, based on the other Gospels, that “they” in this account are the spies of the canonical accounts sent to trap Jesus in speech. Thomas doesn’t provide any other details. The word “render” as opposed to “give” is used in the King James Version of the Bible (*The Holy Bible. Authorized King James Version*, National Bible Press, Philadelphia, originally translated into English in 1611).

CHAPTER 3: BLASPHEMY

These accounts of the render-unto-Caesar incident, a brief encounter between Jesus and the emissaries of those who eventually succeeded in seeing him put to death by the Roman state, provide considerable insight into the character of Jesus, and into his regard for taxes. It helps to know what transpired immediately preceding the incident. All three synoptic Gospels concur. As Matthew tells us (21:23ff), Jesus matched wits with the “chief priests and the elders of the people,” and put them to shame when they asked him where he obtained the authority to do what he was doing, which was teaching and healing in the Temple precincts. He then told his listeners several parables, which obviously condemned the behavior of the same leaders. “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd, who regarded him as a prophet.” (Mt 21:45-46). The accounts of Mark (11:27ff) and Luke (20:1ff) differ only in minor details. John’s Gospel fails to record the render-unto-Caesar incident.

With the preceding’ accounts of the render-unto-Caesar incident and its prelude in mind, let’s turn to a book that is representative of the interpretations Christendom has generally derived from the incident. The title is *The Whole Story*, by Martin J. Healy, S.T.D.. It was published in 1959 by the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, a religious organization of the Roman Catholic Church. It contains the NIHIL OBSTAT of Thomas W. Smiddy, S.T.L., Censor Librorum; and the IMPRIMATUR of Brian Iosephus McEntegart, D.D., LT.D., Bishop of Brooklyn, NY. The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are official declarations by the Catholic Church that a book or

pamphlet is free of doctrinal and moral error.

A foreword by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph B. Frey describes the book as an attempt to present “the story of man in the light of revelation.”

Although it is “written for the general reading public,” its interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident mirrors voluminous, scholarly interpretations of the incident found in so-called “interpreter Bibles” and “Bible commentaries” of both Protestant and Catholic exegetes alike. Here then is the Rev. Martin Healy’s take on the render-unto-Caesar incident, which is found on pp. 426-429 of *The Whole Story*. Quotations from Rev. Healy’s book are indented.

[Our critical comments are in bold face within brackets].

Unable to refute the claim of Jesus to be in a unique way the Son of God, and yet unwilling to accept Him as God’s Son, His enemies then tried to bring about His downfall by making Him appear to be in conflict with the ruling Roman authorities.

[They needn’t make him appear to be in conflict. The principles Jesus taught (love your enemies, do unto others, judge not, etc.) are so antithetical to the tenets of the Roman state that it was doomed to fall if Jesus’ philosophy ever gained ascendancy, and he was doomed to die by the Roman sword if, or rather when, a loyal Roman administrator became aware of the sedition he was preaching to his growing cadre of disciples and many others who were merely curious.]

They sent agents to trap him. Posing as sincere Jews, anxious to follow the law of God exactly, they asked Jesus, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” The question was chosen with great guile. To have answered simply either “Yes” or “No” would have been disastrous to the cause of Jesus.

[What cause? Would Jesus be less than forthright for any cause? Jesus taught that ends cannot justify means, and that the truth shall set you free. The truth was his only cause.]

The answer “No” would have been in accord with the sympathies of the people (though not with the sympathies of the Pharisees and Herodians who had sent these spies to ensnare Jesus, which is why Jesus called them “hypocrites”). But if Jesus had said “No,” He would have appeared to the Romans as a revolutionary inciting the people to rebellion. Moreover, and this was even more opposed to the intention of Jesus Himself, he would have appeared to His own people as a Messiah, anxious to precipitate a revolt and establish a political Jewish kingdom.

[The inescapable, demeaning implication of this interpretation is Jesus was more concerned with appearances than the truth.]

On the other hand, if Jesus had given in answer a simple “Yes,” then He would have forfeited the sympathies of His countrymen by seeming to favor the Roman domination over the Jews. To a people whose Messianic hopes were almost entirely political, this would have meant that Jesus was disclaiming any right to the title of Messiah.

[This implies Jesus avoided speaking the truth in order to curry popularity with the people. But according to the Gospel of John, Jesus readily sacrificed popularity and lost many followers by insisting, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life.” (Jn 6:41-71)

Jesus did not answer in words at once. “Show me the coin of the tribute,” He asked. When they had brought to him a silver penny, He

asked them, “Whose are this image and this inscription?” (Matthew XXII, 20) “Caesar’s,” they replied. Jesus then said, “Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew XXII, 21) The people marveled at His answer.

[The author fails to notice that Jesus did not ask the pertinent question, viz., “Whose coin is this?” If he had, the answer would not have been “Caesar’s,” for it was not Caesar’s coin. Why, then, did Jesus raise an issue irrelevant to the question whether or not to pay the tax? The solution to this conundrum is crucial to understanding the character of Jesus and the intendment of his answer.]

In replying to the question Jesus said “Yes,” but in such a way that both the rights of God and the consciences of the people were protected.

[This commentary is preposterous. How were the consciences of the people protected by hiding the truth from them? And why would their consciences need protection? From what danger? Jesus was the one in danger. He was the one they were trying to trap. Furthermore, he spent his ministry jarring consciences, not protecting them. As for protecting the rights of God, God is the Almighty; His rights need no protection.]

In effect Jesus said it is lawful to obey an existing government (even when the government is unpopular) when that government is levying taxes to insure the public order and peace.

[Where did this come from? It is plainly a giant leap from speculation to conclusion based solely on a statist mind set! (Note: Our definition

of statism is derived from Google's definition of statist religion. It is a mentality and set of beliefs inculcated by the state and meant to be upheld unquestioningly by those subject to them.) Is it lawful to obey government laws that abrogate God's law? God's Commandment, "Thou shall not steal," is unequivocal. How is it possible that forcibly taking money against a person's will, such as by taxation, for any purpose, is not stealing? What attribute of government exempts its agents who collect, its bureaucrats who spend, and its dependents who receive or otherwise gain by tax revenues, from the law of God prohibiting theft? Furthermore, Rome used its tax revenues to prosecute wars of naked aggression, to slay, enslave, conquer and otherwise subjugate people. To enforce *Pax Romana*, Rome brutally extinguished opposition and dissent throughout its vast empire. Would Jesus support such violence by paying for it and encouraging others to do so? We think not!]

It is even possible that Jesus, by asking for the coin of the tribute, a silver penny, a coin minted only by the Romans and not by the Jews, reminded his countrymen that by using this coin they recognized in fact the loss of their own independence and the legitimacy of the Roman government in fact. Thus, in paying the tax they would be only obeying a lawful authority.

[What palpable nonsense! The author cannot explain how the Roman state's *de facto* conquest by might of arms attained legitimacy in the eyes of God or Jesus. Mere use of an oppressor's coinage cannot legally nor logically be construed as conferring or recognizing a regime's legitimacy. Government-minted coins proliferate only

because legal-tender laws forcibly prevent private mints from competing. If Rome's authority was lawful, then might makes right. Jesus counseled the contrary in his Sermon on the Mount and throughout his ministry, which is why he is justifiably known as the Prince of Peace, and why his avowed principles constituted a grave threat to Rome. The one and only reason why Jesus responded to their question with a question of his own was to allow his deceitful interrogators to become befuddled by their own duplicity, effectively removing the bait from their cunning trap. Let it also be noted that the government this author decrees legitimate "in fact," did *in fact* crucify Jesus, making it perhaps the most illegitimate government ever!]

But by adding, "render to God the things that are God's," Jesus safeguarded the rights of God and of the consciences of men.

[Let us repeat, because the author repeats, God's rights have never required safeguarding, nor do men's consciences need safeguarding from the truth.]

Moreover, the reply of Jesus maintained intact His own claims. By refusing to counsel rebellion against Rome, Jesus showed once again that He had no desire to become a political Messiah and no intention of allowing His own people to cast Him in that role.

[Here the author confuses tax resistance with rebellion. Efficacious tax resistance pursuant to Jesus' principles is accomplished by nonviolent noncompliance with illicit tax laws, whereas rebellion involves violent confrontation with the forces of government. The former tends to nullify the taxing agent's authority, whereas the latter is bound to leave violent people, whether rebels or the existing state,

in charge of the practice of legalized stealing.]

This author's interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident is an egregious diminution of the character of Jesus. Unfortunately, it is also representative of a multitude of others' interpretations written by exegetes of the various Christian churches. If the establishment-church scholars do not explicitly misinterpret Jesus' words as sanctioning taxation, at the minimum they assert he put his seal of approval on the state with the words "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." In either case, most orthodox-Christian interpretations of the incident flagrantly mutilate the truth and slander the character of Jesus.

The person who wrote the above interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident does not know Jesus as well as did his enemies, who said of him, "We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of man." (Mt 22:16, KJV) It is obvious that his adversaries were relying upon these attributes of Jesus when they fashioned their plot and concocted the question intended to ensnare him. Compared to this author, his enemies knew the man Jesus very well. It is officious, Christian, bible interpreters who demonstrably do not know his impeccable character.

CHAPTER 4: THE CHARACTER OF JESUS

The religious leaders who wanted Jesus put to death did not know the most important fact about Jesus--that he was the Messiah, anointed by God to serve as personal Savior of those who would embrace the truth he taught and by which he lived and died. They did not know because they refused to hear the good news he proclaimed. They were blinded by their power and material prosperity and committed to defending the status quo. They literally could not afford to believe Jesus.

They had, however, gathered good intelligence on the man Jesus. When they sent spies to trap him in speech, they were accurate in their flattering assessment of his manly character: "Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth." (Lk 20:20) Knowing he possessed those attributes, they were safe in assuming Jesus would denounce Caesar's tax. They understood that taxation violates God's commandment, "Thou shall not steal," and they were confident Jesus would uphold God's law and condemn such theft. They certainly knew that on previous occasions Jesus had equated collecting taxes with sinfulness. Thus, they were sure his answer would be, "No! Don't pay Caesar's tax!"

The plot to trap Jesus should have worked, given his comprehensive knowledge of God's law and unflinching adherence to it, the sinful nature of taxation, and his character as a man. But their plot failed because his adversaries did not comprehend the' divine nature of Jesus. It simply wasn't in them, as it is not in us, to trick, trap or fool this son of God.

Those Bible scholars who say Jesus avoided the question, "Is it lawful to pay the tax; should we pay it?" because he did not want to offend one

group or another, do a grave injustice to his integrity. Those adversaries who tried to trap Jesus and who subsequently accused him before Pilate had a higher opinion of the character of Jesus than do the latter-day exegetes. His enemies did not take Jesus for a people pleaser, but as a courageous man of integrity who “showed deference to no one.”

All of the accounts of the render-unto-Caesar incident make it clear that Jesus did not obfuscate, nor dissemble, nor endorse taxation, nor sanction the state, nor exonerate Caesar of theft. He did not answer their question yes or no, but his response boldly conveyed his position. He explicitly told them what God’s law requires, to wit--Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Period! No more, no less! That is the only way for one to treat another’s property in accordance with God’s unequivocal command not to steal. And it is the only way his words can be construed. Jesus meant precisely what he said! He did not tell them to give David’s coin to Caesar, and no doubt the coin went back into David’s pocket. Those who witnessed the incident knew that the coin belonged to David. Surely many of them, although not his duplicitous, befuddled interrogators, realized his answer constituted a resounding denunciation of Caesar’s tax.

To many who were present Jesus’ words conveyed this--If you believe your money belongs to Caesar because his face and seal are on it, then give it to him. And, by obvious inference, otherwise keep it. No one familiar with the attributes of circulating coins believed their money belonged to Caesar because his face and inscription were imprinted on it. Like Washington’s face on a present-day quarter, or Cadillac’s emblem on your car, Caesar’s face and inscription on Roman coins--the coin-maker’s mark--had no bearing on the ownership of Roman coins. Any other

arrangement would destroy their value as a medium of exchange, which is the common, indispensable attribute of any commodity serving as money. (Would you accept coins in exchange for your goat if the goat became the property of the buyer but the coins remained the property of a third party, subject to arbitrary recall at any time?)

Even Jesus' inquisitors may have realized he had condemned Caesar's tax exactly as they anticipated he would. If so, however, they would also have realized that his response, removed from the context of the incident and repeated against him later at a trial before the Roman governor for resisting Rome's tax, could serve to exonerate rather than convict him. In other words, they worried Pilate would be confused by Jesus' response in much the same way his Christian interpreters have long been bamboozled. Which may be why his answer so amazed and disconcerted those "spies" who thought for sure they would trap him. It certainly helps to explain why so many church exegetes, neglecting to take the character of Jesus into account, have misinterpreted the incident and Jesus' answer.

To lend a semblance of credence to the incredible proposition that Jesus endorsed paying taxes when he said give Caesar what is Caesar's, some church scholars resort to the absurdity mentioned above. They posit the untenable hypothesis as if it were historical fact, that Roman coins were understood to be the property of the emperor. Thus, David's coin was Caesar's property, not David's, and Caesar was only taking back what he already owned when he taxed David. Utter nonsense!

Unfortunately for these commentators, we have recourse to basic logic, monetary theory, and archaeology to refute their silly hypothesis. Logic tells us we would never accept money in exchange for something of

value if the money we received in the transaction belonged to a third party while what we gave became the property of the other party with no strings attached. Monetary theory (see, for example, *The Theory of Money and Credit*, by Ludwig von Mises, Irvington, NY, The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1971) proves that it is beyond the power of any state to ensure by law, which is to say, by force, the things it designates as money will in fact be employed as a common medium of exchange. Coins and currencies may be designated as money by governments, but they only become money by usage among those who engage in commerce. One absolute prerequisite to an item being accepted as money in exchange transactions is that ownership of the item by the bearer is presumed.

Archaeologists have found silver Roman denarii throughout what was the Roman Empire during the time of Jesus, indicating the coins circulated freely as a medium of exchange. Thus, it was understood by people far and wide that possession--not Caesar's image or superscription--conferred ownership. (See *Roman Coins. from the Earliest Coins to the Fall of the Western Empire*, by Harold Mattingly, London, Spinks and Sons Ltd., 1977)

A short time before the render-unto-Caesar event, Jesus refused to answer another question asked of him by the Jewish leaders. The incident is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Luke's account will suffice:

One day, as he was teaching the people in the temple and telling the good news, the chief priests and the scribes came with the elders and said to him, "Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?" He answered them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell me: Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" They discussed it with one

another saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, Why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us; for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” So they answered that they did not know where it came from. Then Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Lk 20:1-8)

This is an instructive episode, which provides further insight into the character of Jesus. It can also help us understand the true meaning of his answer to the subsequent question about paying Caesar’s tax, and why he responded in the way he did. Jesus had already revealed that his authority to teach and heal came from God, his Father in heaven (Jn 5:25ff). Reports of his claim must have reached his interrogators. So, as in the render-unto-Caesar incident, his opponents were posing a superfluous question, thinking they knew beforehand what his answer would be. Their purpose in this instance was to prod him to publicly say he was the Messiah whose authority came from God.

Unlike his disciples, the leading Jews did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. If Jesus responded as they expected, in their eyes he would be incriminating himself of blasphemy by professing such a personal relationship to God. Blasphemy was punishable by death under Jewish law. However, in the time of Jesus the subjugated Jews had to bow to Roman law, by which only Rome could carry out an execution. Roman law was not concerned with Jewish blasphemy. Undoubtedly, that is why the tax issue was soon thereafter chosen as more reliable bait to “trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the Roman governor.” (Lk 20:20) On this occasion, as in the render-unto-Caesar

incident, Jesus responded to their question with a question of his own, which had the same result. His adversaries were discomfited.

There were two possible answers to the question of where Jesus received his authority to teach and preach. It obviously did not come from the religious authorities since they were the ones asking Jesus the question, so it either came from God or from the secular authority. The leading Jews knew full well Jesus was not licensed by Rome to preach. They fully anticipated he would tell them his authority came from God, just as they later anticipated he would answer their question on taxes by saying, No, pursuant to God's law, you are not to pay the tax; don't pay it. Every Christian should be able to understand that if Jesus had answered either question directly, his answer in both cases would have been the answer his enemies expected. His enemies knew what they were doing, and they knew Jesus, the man. He did not answer them directly in either instance because in so doing he would have been outwitted by his foes, a turn of events that could never happen.

The hallmark characteristic of Jesus was the truth. Among the four Gospel authors, John mentions this quality most often:

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (1:17) Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (8:31) Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God." (8:39-40) "But because I tell the truth, you do not believe

me.” (8:45) “If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” (8-46) “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (14:6) “Sanctify them in the truth; As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in the truth.” (17:18-19) Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (18:37)

Pilate responded to that last remark by asking Jesus, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38) Anyone suggesting Jesus would refrain from stating the truth firmly and publicly for fear, “He would have appeared to his own people as a political Messiah,” or because, “He would have forfeited the sympathies of His countrymen by seeming to favor Roman domination over the Jews,” knows not Jesus nor his relation to truth. Jesus never avoided the truth. Would he refrain from stating the truth because it would compromise his mission? Revealing the Truth *was* his mission.

CHAPTER 5: TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES

No man, no matter how skilled in multitudinous disciplines, can survive entirely on his own resources. To live, one must acquire the fruits of others' labor. Only three methods of acquisition are possible. We can acquire resources we can't produce ourselves through voluntary exchange, as gifts, or by force, including coercion. Variations of the latter include fraud, theft, robbery, plunder, extortion, slavery and taxation. All such aggressive means of acquisition are proscribed by God's law, Thou shall not steal, and violate Jesus' Golden Rule, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Lk 6:31). Only the imprimatur of the state distinguishes taxation from the other forms of aggressive acquisition, which is why French economist Frederic Bastiat could coin the term "legal plunder" to precisely describe taxation. A law making taxation legal is not God's law. Such law violates God's law. On the other hand, the statutes of legislatures affirming God's law are merely pretentious and entirely redundant.

God's law is unequivocal, "Thou shall not steal." Jesus was not duped by the sophistry required to distinguish taxation from other palpably sinful means of acquisition. On several occasions before the render-unto-Caesar incident, Jesus had openly expressed his negative regard for taxation. His attitude toward the act of tax collecting is reflected in remarks recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (5:46) When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...I

have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (9:11-13) If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile, and a tax collector.” (18:15-17) Jesus said to them (viz., the chief priests and the elders of the people), “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.” (21:32)

Why did Jesus repeatedly point to tax collectors as prototypical sinners? Probably because the tax collectors’ sin, theft by taxation, was perpetrated openly, committed publicly under the carnal sanction of illicit law. It was, therefore, the most conspicuous of all sins at the time of Jesus, just as it is today. Clearly, even prostitutes practice their trade and commit their sins with greater discretion than tax collectors.

Given the destitute and declining economic circumstances of poor Jews under Rome’s rule, given the substantial role taxes played in their impoverishment, given the brutality of Roman tax collectors and their methods, and given Jesus’ compassionate regard for the poor, the most conspicuous archetypical sinner in the eyes of Jesus and many others was the disreputable tax collector. Tax collectors cannot live by Jesus’ Golden Rule. Their job requires them to take their neighbors’ property by force or coercion. They certainly don’t want their neighbors doing the same unto them. Based on the tax collector Levi’s unhesitating response to Jesus’

call, and chief tax collector Zacchaeus' immediate repentance upon meeting Jesus, it is likely that more than just these two unloved creatures responded to Jesus' loving ministrations by quitting their jobs, which would certainly tend to infuriate the men in charge of collections—Pilate in Judea, Herod in Galilee.

Jesus knew Rome's man-made tax laws stood God's law on its head. However, tax laws were not a Roman invention. Taxes had been collected in Sumer and by Egypt's pharaohs since at least 2500 BC. (See, *For Good or Evil, the Impact of Taxes on the Course of Civilization*, by Charles Adams, Lanham, MD, Madison Books, 1993, pp. 5ff) According to Adams, who is the leading authority on the history of taxes, it is likely that while the Jews were dwelling in Egypt they were reduced from affluence in Joseph's time to abject poverty by the time of Moses by means of Egyptian tax laws specifically intended to impoverish, humble and ultimately enslave them (ibid, p. 29).

Long before the time of Jesus, Israel initiated its own internal taxation under its first human ruler. Mention of this is found in 1 Samuel 17:25: "He **[Saul]** will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel." (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 1984) (Note: Until the Jews of Israel made Saul their king and lawmaker in place of God, they had not been subjected to taxation since their exodus from Egypt four-hundred years earlier. The tithes that Moses initiated were not taxes. They were not enforced by the state. There was no state of Israel.)

Jesus castigated the Pharisees and lawyers for nullifying God's law by means of human ordinances. When the Jewish leaders criticized Jesus'

followers for disregarding their man-made rules, he called them hypocrites and warned that even tax collectors and prostitutes would enter heaven before they did. (Mt 15:1ff, 16:3, Lk 7:30ff, 11:39ff, 13:10ff, 14:3f)

While there can be no doubt then as to exactly where Jesus stood on the evil of collecting or receiving tax booty, the question asked by the spies of the render-unto-Caesar incident solicited his opinion as to the legality, pursuant to God's law, of *paying* taxes, whether they should or *should not pay*. Is it possible Jesus deemed it sinful to *pay* taxes, never mind collecting taxes, which we know he condemned? How would Jesus have answered their question if it wasn't a design to trap him?

During the render-unto-Caesar incident, Jesus could and would have avoided the trap by answering, "Yes, it is lawful to pay the tax, you should pay it." If Jesus believed paying taxes was in accord with God's law, he certainly would have taken the opportunity to openly instruct his followers on the truth of the matter. If that was his position, as virtually all of the renowned Christian exegetes have proclaimed ever since the amalgamation of the church and the Roman state, there was no reason for Jesus not to answer directly. On the other hand, if he had said, "No, taxes violate God's law; it is wrong to collect or pay; do not pay Caesar's tax," as his enemies wanted and fully expected him to say, he would have been outwitted, duped, victimized by their ploy, caught in the Pharisees' cunning trap. Instead, Jesus maintained his impeccable integrity, confounded his cunning adversaries, and yet clearly enunciated his principled stance on the issue of paying taxes, to wit, an implacable foe. Give Caesar what belongs to him, no more, no less, no tax.

Only two possible positions exist on the question. In Mark the

question is asked, then rephrased. “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” (Mk 12:14) Refusing to endorse paying taxes, which he could have done without being harmed by their treachery, Jesus *de facto* endorsed the only other alternative in words that “utterly amazed” them. On another occasion under different circumstances Jesus was explicit:

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?” He said, “Yes, he does.” And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?” When Peter said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “***Then the children are free.*** However, so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me.” (Mt 17:24-27, NRSV, emphasis added)

This incident reveals Jesus’ attitude regarding taxes. It may help in the context of this essay to provide another version of the same passage. The following is from *The New American Bible* (New York, Catholic Press, 1970).

When they entered Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax approached Peter and said, “Does your master not pay the temple tax?” “Of course he does,” Peter replied. Then Jesus on entering the house asked, without giving him time to speak: “What is your opinion, Simon? Do the kings of the world take tax or toll from their own sons, or from foreigners?” When he replied, “From foreigners,” Jesus

observed: “*Then their sons are exempt.* But for fear of disedifying them, go to the lake, throw in a line, and take out the first fish you catch. Open its mouth and you will discover a coin worth twice the temple tax. Take it and give it to them for you and me.” (Mt 17:24-27 NAB, emphasis added)

The first thing to notice about this astonishing incident is the highly unusual negative context in which the tax collector posed the question to Peter.

“Does your teacher *not* pay the tax?” No self-respecting tax collector would ask that question—unless he had some indication that Jesus in fact did not pay. Otherwise, and ordinarily, he would simply *tell* Peter to *tell* Jesus to pay the tax. Tax collectors don’t ask if you do pay, and they most emphatically don’t ask whether you do not pay. Tax collectors don’t ask; they tell you to pay up—or else.

Jesus chided Peter for committing him to pay a tax, which Jesus would never pay voluntarily. But since Peter had committed him, however impetuously and imprudently, it would now be even worse than paying the tax to go back on his word, as pledged by Peter, his servant/agent in the full legal sense of the master/servant-principal/agent relationship, which Jesus understood perfectly as his parables demonstrate. To do so would have scandalized Jesus, made Peter a liar, and possibly harmed the tax collector, who took Peter at his word.

Jesus’ principled stance on taxes may be extrapolated by combining his words and actions during this “go-fishing” incident with what he said and did during the “render-unto-Caesar” incident, and summarized as follows: One is not to participate in any way in the evil practice of taxation, including paying taxes, unless not paying can only be accomplished by resorting to

dishonesty or the use of force. It is counterproductive and compounds the evil to resort to force or lies to oppose or escape a tax. Good ends (not participating in taxation) cannot justify sinful means (lying/violence). In this case, Peter would have been made a liar. But Jesus would not condone paying a tax from the common purse. Only a miracle could save Peter from the bedeviling consequences of shooting off his mouth before engaging his brain. Jesus graciously afforded him one.

Obviously, only *willing* compliance with taxation is sinful. Voluntarily submitting to theft is almost as deleterious as partaking in the booty. Both acts serve to validate and perpetuate stealing. As with prostitution, wherein it takes two to fornicate or commit adultery, one cannot commit the sin of tax collecting without a taxpayer as one's partner, the counterpart of a prostitute's john when a tax is paid voluntarily. Prostitute and john, tax collector and taxpayer—each is guilty when they are acting voluntarily. The contradictory modern term, “voluntary compliance,” is an oxymoron invented by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which euphemistically describes the act of docilely submitting to theft

One reason why Jesus would oppose *paying* a tax is because those who abjectly submit to theft by taxation are usually eager to join in the looting themselves and become tax collectors or receivers of looted benefits when an opportunity presents itself. We know some good people who are not blind to the evils of taxation, yet they partake of tax-paid amenities such as Social Security, Medicare, welfare payments, government unemployment compensation, tuition loans and grants, business subsidies or protection, and so forth, benefits requiring the state to initiate force against innocent people on behalf of the recipients. Their justification for knowingly partaking

of ill-gotten gains inevitably relies on their having been forced to pay taxes themselves. Because their own property was stolen, they feel justified in stealing themselves.

Who can doubt the aphorism, violence begets violence? Who can doubt that Jesus would condemn a variation of theft that turns victims into perpetrators with such alacrity and spreads responsibility for the violence throughout society? When children are raised in a society where theft and violence are endemic and routinely perpetrated by their elders and their nation's leaders under the aegis of illicit laws, will they not turn to violence at an early age themselves? Violence begets violence as surely as corn produces corn and nettles beget nettles. The course violence takes as its offspring germinate, mutate and proliferate is entirely unpredictable, but nonetheless certain. Incomprehensible incidents of egregious youth violence, such as the Columbine-school massacre, may begin to be understood in the context of ubiquitous state violence.

Having devoted most of four chapters to refuting the prevailing Christian interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident, we want to share the comments of a valued critic who accomplishes the same objective--in one economical paragraph! Paul Farah (cab498@earthlink.net) wrote:

Here is the question: Precisely what is Caesar's, and what exactly is God's? An Important component of a Jew's training in those days included studying Scripture and memorizing the Pentateuch. (Viz., the Torah, also called the Law, which comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.) Jesus was learned in the Law, as were the Pharisees. But they were trying to trap him, not learn from him. If they were paying attention to what he said, their knowledge of the Bible would

have told them that Jesus had condemned Caesar's tax, because as least five times Hebrew Scripture attests that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and the people in it. If everything belongs to God, nothing is left for Caesar. (Mr. Farah substantiates his contention with five citations from the bible, to wit: Exodus, 9:29, Deuteronomy 10:14, 1 Samuel 2:8, Nehemiah 9:6, Psalms 24:1.)

CHAPTER 6: GOD'S LAW OR MAN'S LAW, PEACE OR WAR

Why was Jesus, by virtue of his principles, an anarchist opposed to government as we know it? Why was he opposed to taxes of every stripe? The answers to these questions are more readily understood in light of the role of God in the affairs of the Israelites as revealed in Holy Scripture.

Jesus knew the Scriptures by heart, and it is likely he is the only man who ever fully understood them. We know from Luke's account (Lk 2:42-60) that at the age of twelve, Jesus was already engrossed and advanced in the study of Scripture. He often referred to Scripture to explain himself, and after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted (i.e., to two of his disciples) all the things about himself in all the scriptures." (Lk 24:27, and see, Mt 21:42, 22:29, 26:54, Lk 4:21, 32, 45; Jn 5:39; 7:38; and 10:35)

Scripture records that from the time the descendants of Jacob escaped subjugation under Pharaoh in Egypt until Samuel appointed Saul king of Israel, a period of four-hundred years, the only lawmaker the Jews recognized was God. This fact is mentioned in the Book of Judges. "Then the Israelites said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also: for you have delivered us out of the hand of Median.' Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you: the Lord will rule over you.'" (Jg 8:22-23) And again, "In those days there was no king in Israel, all the people did what was right in their own eyes." (Jg 21:25) As Thomas Paine correctly points out in his Revolutionary essay, *Common Sense*, Gideon did not decline to rule but rather affirmed the fact that the Israelites had no right or authority to make him or any other man their lawmaker in place of God. (See, *Selected Writings of Thomas*

Paine (New York, Everybody's Vacation Publishing, Richard Roberts, Ed. 1945) (Note: *Common Sense* is available on the web at, <http://www.bartleby.com/133/2.html>.)

The state, through its monopolies on violence and taxation, exponentially increases the ability of individuals to kill, maim, and enslave others. Throughout recorded history men have used the enhanced macabre capabilities of government to slaughter their fellows, usually pursuant to laws made by kings and legislatures. The number of murders committed by the state over the course of its existence is truly incomprehensible. Historian R. J. Rummel, who is the leading—if not the only—authority on the subject, in his exhaustive statistical compilation and analysis entitled *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 1994), makes the following calculations based on his meticulous research and data compilations:

In total, during the first eighty-eight years of this **[twentieth]** century, almost 170 million “men, women, and children have been shot, beaten, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, frozen, crushed, or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed or killed in any other of the myriad ways governments have inflicted death on unarmed, helpless citizens and foreigners. The dead could conceivably be 360 million people. It is as though our species has been devastated by a modern Black Plague. And indeed it has, but a plague of Power, not germs. (p. 9)

Extrapolating from the rate of democide (viz., murders by governments) for the first 88 years of the twentieth century and applying it to the period 3000 BC to 1900 AD, Rummel concludes that governments may have murdered

as many as 1.1 billion people or more during those earlier centuries! These figures do not include combatants killed in wars between governments, which would add hundreds of millions in not billions more to what is truly a satanic total. Given man's natural inclination to live off the fruits of others' labor rather than the sweat of his own brow, and given the willingness of some men to kill for that purpose, it is counterproductive to a peaceful, civilized, and prosperous society to create an instrument--the state--which is so efficient at murder and plunder. It is also irrational. God's law, on the other hand, is never irrational.

The account of how the Israelites went from a stateless people to a nation under a king is enlightening. It is recounted in the Bible in the First Book of Samuel:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations. But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice, only--you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and

appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen; and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards, and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.” But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us.” (1 Sam 8:4-19)

It is only reasonable to assume Jesus would be offended by man’s usurpation of God’s prerogative as lawmaker just as his Father was offended in Samuel’s day. Jesus would not sanction man-made laws nor the rule of men over men. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Mt 5:17) It is God’s law, not man’s, that he came to fulfill. God’s law does not sanction man’s laws. If the principles Jesus expounded in his Sermon on the Mount are ever embraced by those who profess Christianity, the era of governments and democide will be on the road to oblivion.

God’s frightening description in 1 Samuel of how a king would reign over the Israelites was realized during the reigns of the subsequent kings of

Israel and Judah. Even worse misfortunes befell the Jews during those times when they were ruled by foreign kings or councils, including Rome's emperor. A king, as lawmaker, usurps a role reserved exclusively to God for people living under His dominion. The human act of making laws is a rejection of God's law.

Today's legislators are the successors of kings. They maintain and entrench man's usurpation of God's prerogative. The one-tenth tax on the Israelites, which made them slaves in the words of 1 Samuel, is far less than most Americans pay today in taxes to their government. The illicit activity of men making laws, even with the approval of one-hundred percent of a plebiscite, is proscribed by Jesus' principles, just as it was by his Father. It is wistful thinking to refer to any nation-state as "Christian," whether ruled by king or legislature. The principles Jesus espoused proscribe exercising control of others by means of human legislation, because such laws are always sustained by force. Jesus would never approve such a system, an arrangement denounced by his heavenly Father through Samuel.

All the laws necessary to maintain a peaceful, prosperous society are contained in the Ten Commandments. Rational men and women have the ability to interpret and apply God's law to the most recondite circumstances in a highly complex community. With the Decalogue as foundation, mankind will develop and refine continuously evolving and effective standards of social conduct and efficient procedures for justly resolving disputes peacefully without recourse to legislated statutes or statist police powers. That in essence was the original, custom-based methodology of English Common Law, which was subsequently corrupted by royal and

parliamentary enactments.

Only God has the divine wisdom necessary to create laws that can serve for all time. More than a hint of idolatry is involved in statutory lawmaking. It is an arrogant human presumption that kings or legislatures at a moment in time possess the requisite wisdom and foresight to make laws capable of serving innumerable, diverse, unknown people for the unknowable future. That is what God did when he promulgated the timeless Decalogue, but it is beyond our abilities to emulate God's creative wisdom.

A rough equivalent of taxation called "tribute" in the Scriptures was one of the early unlawful practices of the Israelites. Slavery, taxation and military conscription are all forms of involuntary servitude prohibited by the commandment, "Thou shall not steal." The tribute of the Jews violated God's law and rejected his rule. It was exacted from people living in territories the Israelites conquered when they took control of the Promised Land. The covenant God made with the Israelites through Moses proclaimed:

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

When the Israelites, with God's assistance, did take possession of the Promised Land, they were commanded by God to drive out all the old inhabitants lest they corrupt God's chosen people with their practices of idolatry. (Exodus 23:23-33) But the temptation to live off the fruits of other

men's labor was too great. We are told in the Scriptures, "Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out." (Joshua 17:13 KJV) The tribute the Israelites exacted from the Canaanites may have served as a model for the Roman tax of the render-unto-Caesar incident. It is called tribute in the KJV, a tax the Jews were required to pay to their conquerors, from which Roman citizens were exempt. A taste of their own medicine so to speak, perhaps just deserts for their treatment of the Canaanites after God had rescued them from similar oppression at the hands of the Egyptians.

Just as God the Father proscribed the Israelites from exacting tribute, we can be sure that the principles Jesus espoused precluded his followers from collecting or paying taxes. In doing so, Jesus was guilty of violating Roman law but upholding God's law against stealing and his own principle of nonviolence. Pursuant to man-made laws, not paying taxes is a crime in every state; counseling others to resist has been a capital offense under many regimes. The crucifixion of Jesus--the Messiah, the Anointed One of God--pursuant to man-made laws ought to be sufficient cause for his followers to abstain from making laws and levying or paying taxes.

The Jewish leaders could not crucify Jesus on their own authority. Rome's government reserved that God-like power over life and death to its sovereign self. So, Luke tells us, the Sanhedrin dragged Jesus before the district director of taxation for Judea (Pontius Pilate) where they accused him of "forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor." (Lk 23:2) It is virtually certain that on the basis of that accusation alone the man in charge of taxes for the district of Judea was persuaded to execute Jesus. Many Christians,

dependent on tax-paid government benefits to supply their wants and needs, stand shoulder to shoulder in spirit with Pilate in favor of strict enforcement of tax laws, which fund their precious benefits. And why not? Their exegetes have told them that paying taxes is a Christian duty. And like the Pharisees before them, many Christians today cannot afford to accept Jesus' words as they pertain to taxation because adopting his principles would jeopardize their entitlements. It is, as Jesus said, "because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (Mt 13:13, KJV) Today such deaf and blind ignorance is called cognitive dissonance in polite company.

Government and taxes are like the two sides of one coin. You can't have one without the other. The virus that infects both, and places them beyond the pale of God's law or Jesus' sanction, is violence. Violence is an indispensable element of their respective natures. A tax that did not ultimately rely on government force or coercion for its collection would not be a tax. And a government that did not assert the right to enforce its edicts by initiating violence, if for no other reason than to collect taxes, would not be government as we know it. A state's sovereignty depends on the government's superior force, which depends utterly on its tax revenues.

Throughout most of the world, the institution of kings "governing by divine right" has been supplanted by republics or democracies--rule by the people. Sovereign power in the United States is said to reside in the people, whereas in Israel in the time of Judges it resided in God. This usurpation by many rather than by one, based on the numbers alone, must constitute a greater affront to the Almighty than the singular arrogance of a lone dictator or monarch. Furthermore, people ruled by an autocrat are

more likely to renounce their allegiance and restore the reign of God than are people engaged in imperiously legislating for themselves, who may be irredeemably corrupted by their unholy power.

The practice of taxation is more grievous and deeply entrenched in a democracy than under a monarchy or dictatorship. More people partake of the booty of taxation under the former. Thus, the evil is more pervasive. With the advent and unremitting augmentation of the income tax and other creative forms of taxation in America, and the concomitant proliferation of tax-paid benefits, many Americans have become so dependent on government and taxes, which is to say addicted to the use of force to obtain their daily bread, that withdrawal, if it is even possible, is bound to be traumatic. Our society has been likened to an unbroken circle of pickpockets, each with one hand in his neighbor's pocket and his neighbor's hand in his. Dependence on state violence has become ubiquitous in America. It shows in our foreign policy and our treatment of one another at home.

The state and its taxes can also be likened to the head and tail of a serpent, and war is the fodder on which the reptile feeds. One need only look at the history of the United States to see a parallel, symbiotic growth of government, taxes, and wars, with a concomitant erosion of liberty. (See, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government*, by Robert Higgs, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987) Nothing is as effective as war to justify increasing government's size and the level of taxation. And there is nothing like size and abundant revenues to justify war. Without taxes there could be no government, and without government there could be no wars. War and death are among the few

things the state is capable of producing more efficiently and abundantly than private enterprise. Taxes, war and the state *all* violate God's law violently.

CHAPTER 7: JESUS CHRIST, ANARCHO-CAPITALIST

In his famous 1776 treatise on economics, *The Wealth of Nations* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, Edwin Cannan, ed., 1976), Adam Smith, defending free markets, argued as follows **[Our summation is in boldface inside brackets]**:

[An individual working for his own gain is] led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention...By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it...The statesman, who would attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would...assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever. (p.477-78).

The truth of this observation is manifest in the generally greater affluence of the people of capitalist lands versus those living under socialism. Central planning assumes the central planners know better and are more concerned and adept at providing for the general welfare than are other people, yet no one has ever been able to explain whence the planners' special genius, concern and skills are derived. Attributing superhuman powers to those who govern is idolatrous. For politicians and bureaucrats, their idolatry constitutes self worship, and it is ludicrous. They really believe they and their "experts" know better than other people—all other people! Under capitalism, the experts are all of the people expressing themselves in the market by buying and selling or by refraining from buying or selling.

No doubt governments can do some things by resorting to force that individuals are unable to accomplish through voluntary cooperation and

association. Murdering their own citizens and foreigners and making wars of aggression are two of those things. In addition, states can pursue prohibitively expensive projects funded by taxes, which no voluntary organization could afford nor would rationally undertake. But the science of economics demonstrates conclusively that in the long run such projects are always detrimental to the general welfare of the people for whom they are purportedly undertaken, and who are made to pay for the hapless ventures.

Economic analysis differs from the methodology employed by the advocates of government spending. Economists weigh hidden “opportunity costs” of government initiatives, which are never even acknowledged by the statist, as well as visible expenses. Opportunity costs include the lost purchases, savings and investments that individuals would have made if the state hadn’t taxed away their resources to fund its projects. When missed opportunities are factored into the costs-vs-benefits analysis of state-funded projects, state-the projects invariably come up losers. The reason why politicians and bureaucrats are inclined to ridicule economists, or, alternatively, hire their own pseudo economists to justify government spending, is because the true science of economics consistently reveals the emperor has no clothes.

Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973) was a brilliant scientist of the same caliber as his contemporary, physicist Albert Einstein. The state, vonMises opined, ought to protect individuals from violence and fraud and defend against foreign enemies, but that is all it should do. Anything else, he argued, interferes with the smooth operation of the market economy to the detriment of society. VonMises showed that any government action in the milieu of the market economy always results in a

state of affairs worse than the one the advocates of the intervention sought to remedy. To address the self-inflicted damage caused by intervention, resort to further intervention is virtually inevitable with compounding deleterious results. Inevitable, because people who wield such power are loath to admit their mistakes and rescind their bold initiatives gone awry.

This is an astounding assertion. According to vonMises, all government initiatives, except those limited to protecting individual rights, are doomed to be counterproductive. Whatever government does, outside its limited sphere of securing rights, only makes matters worse. VonMises made the case for his assertion with flawless logic and seamless economic analysis. In so doing, he provides scientific proof of an elementary truth, which Jesus depicted so simply but vividly when he asked rhetorically, “Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” (Mt 7:16-17) Jesus and vonMises would certainly agree: State violence cannot produce a peaceful, abundant society.

Unfortunately, in his magnum opus, *Human Action* (New Haven, CN, Yale University Press, 1949, Contemporary Books Edition, 1966), vonMises dismissed anarchism as impractical:

Anarchism believes that education could make all people comprehend what their own interests require them to do...The anarchists overlook the undeniable fact that some people are either too narrow minded or too weak to adjust themselves spontaneously to the conditions of social life...Society cannot exist if the majority is not ready to hinder, by the application or threat of violent action, minorities from destroying the social order...Government is the social apparatus of compulsion

and coercion. It has the monopoly of violent action...The state is essentially an institution for the preservation of peaceful inter-human relations. However, for the preservation of peace it must be prepared to crush the onslaughts of peace breakers. (p.149)

In *Human Action* and other books, vonMises makes a persuasive case for restraint of government action. His intellectual contributions to the cause of human freedom may be unmatched in the past one-hundred years. He has done yeoman service in the cause of liberty by debunking myriad vacuous proposals, including so-called “Christian” reforms of market operations often recommended by churchmen. VonMises was first to scientifically prove that socialism cannot possibly work for the betterment of a society. He also pointed out to the chagrin of supporters of a so-called mixed economy that “No deviation from the unhampered market economy is thinkable without authoritarian regimentation.” Such regimentation, he further showed, produces economic and social regression

VonMises description of the market economy invokes the spirit of Adam Smith’s invisible hand and explains its operation: **[Our comments are in bold inside brackets]:**

The market economy is the social system of the division of labor under private ownership of the means of production. Everybody acts on his own behalf; but everybody’s actions aim at the satisfaction of other people’s needs as well as the satisfaction of his own. Everybody in acting serves his fellow citizens...This system is steered by the market. The market directs the individual’s activities into those channels in which he best serves the wants of his fellow men. There is in the operation of the market no compulsion or coercion. **[This**

sounds like the invisible hand of God at work for the benefit of people adhering to Jesus' counsel to practice nonviolence.] The state...does not interfere with the market. It employs its power to beat people into submission solely for the prevention of actions destructive to the preservation and smooth operation of the market economy. It protects the individual's life, health and property against violent or fraudulent aggression on the part of domestic gangsters and external foes. Thus the state creates and preserves the environment in which the market economy can safely operate." (*Human Action*, p. 257)

Sadly, in vonMises' objection to anarchy, and thus his support of severely limited government, this noble giant erred! To borrow a Jesus metaphor, the mistake vonMises made was in thinking that a bad tree (viz., the state, with its reliance on violence), can bear good fruit (viz., the preservation of the market economy). His description of the role of the state fails to notice an obvious problem. In order to prevent or punish acts that threaten the market's smooth operation, the state must first initiate, without provocation, force or coercion against innocent people to collect taxes to pay for the security apparatus. As one James Allen said, paraphrasing Jesus, in his profound little book, *As a Man Thinketh*, "Nothing comes from corn but corn, nothing from nettles but nettles." (Originally published in circa 1902, it is now available on the web at: <http://jamesallen.wwwhubs.com/think.htm>)

Because the nation-state is founded upon the tenet that it may initiate the use of force to support itself, it can never secure the benevolent market economy vonMises envisions. Violence begets violence; it cannot suppress it without generating even more violence. Bad means cannot serve good ends. Furthermore, history has proven conclusively here in America that

limited government is a notorious oxymoron. With sanctioned force at hand for crime suppression and national defense, the temptation to use it for other “good” purposes is simply too great to entrust to fallible human beings. Even the judicious statesmen who founded the United States and gave it the power to tax, abused their statist authority from the outset by endorsing enforcement of slavery in the Constitution.

VonMises argued, “The anarchists overlook the undeniable fact that some people are either too narrow minded or too weak to adjust themselves spontaneously to the conditions of social life.” On this point, vonMises is plainly wrong. It is the anarchists who are the realists. Precisely because men are not angels anarchists are opposed to the state. The crushing power and machinery of nation-states makes it possible for weak, narrow-minded people to inflict widespread violence upon countless others far beyond what they could possibly do absent the deadly apparatus of an existing state at their command. Furthermore, that superior force, which is the defining attribute of a nation-state, tempts people with aggressive aspirations and violent dispositions to grasp the reins of government.

The most cunning and dangerous among weak and narrow-minded people are attracted to, not repelled by, the high offices of nation-states. Modern examples who merely prove an entirely predictable phenomenon include Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Adolph Hitler, Chiang Kai-shek, Vladimir Illich Lenin, Tojo Hideki, Pol Pot, Yahya Khan and Joseph Broz Tito, to name only the worst of many, who combined to murder at least 124,736,000 of their own citizens and foreigners (not counting myriad soldiers lost in wars these thugs precipitated) with the force of their respective states’ governments during their administrations. (See, *Death by*

Government, op cit, p. 8, table) In an anarchic society, these monsters might have been dangerous criminals, but they could have murdered only a few people compared to the hundreds of millions they slaughtered with weaponry wielded by agents of the nation-states they ruled.

Ludwig von Mises coined a wonderfully descriptive word, “statolatry,” to depict the practice of attributing superhuman properties to the state. Those who believe they cannot obtain the benefits of good roads and bridges, an educated public, old-age security, clean air and water, medical insurance, a safe food supply, space exploration, mass transit, fair housing, community and national security, poor relief, the just resolution of civil disputes, crime suppression and restitution, or any other benefit routinely monopolized by government, without the agency of a violent state, engage in the practice of statolatry. They fail to comprehend the benevolent, all-needs-fulfilling effect of living in accord with Jesus’ principles, relying on God, freedom and the marketplace for all of these things.

Statolatry is the most common form of idolatry extant in the world today. In the eyes of a pacifistic Jesus, it may well be the most reprehensible form of idolatry, because the unique characteristic that distinguishes the state from all other associations of human beings, and from other pagan idols, is organized violence. Dependency upon the nation-state and its inherent violence for one’s wants and needs is perhaps as far astray from the way of living prescribed by Jesus as one can possibly go. His advice on how to acquire all of our material needs included a promise, which negates the need for the violent nation-state and its benefits. “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” Jesus proclaimed, “and all of these things will be given to you as well.” (Mt 6:33) Those who have tried to

follow his advise uniformly attest to the fulfillment of his promise.

Are we suggesting Jesus endorsed capitalism, in the same way the orthodox exegetes assert he sanctioned government and taxes? No, not exactly, but yes, in a manner of speaking. What Jesus endorsed is nonviolence and strict adherence by individuals to God's law. However, the only way for individual members of society to acquire the fruits of others' labors on which their lives depend without resorting to aggression or depending on charity is through voluntary exchange in a market economy.

How, then, shall we resolve the apparent conflict between the spirit of generosity and active care for "the least" or our fellows, which Jesus urged upon us, with the fiercely competitive, self-seeking aspect of capitalism?

In the first place, the comparison is onerous because Jesus did not urge his principles on mankind for the betterment of society; he urged them on individuals for the salvation of their souls, which is why he is called Savior. Society clearly benefits when individuals practice nonviolence and exhibit love and care for their fellows, but that is merely a benevolent side effect of adherence to the wisdom of Jesus for the good of one's soul. If all members of society conformed to Jesus' principles, the market economy would undoubtedly be profoundly impacted, but it would not change its nature. It would remain a market economy, beneficial to society just as the Jesus principles are beneficial to an individual's eternal soul. Moreover, in the absence of the dangerous prerogative of the state to initiate force, capitalism is the only imaginable societal arrangement. It alone thrives naturally in the absence of force. All of the other social formulations that have been concocted require the initiation of force at some point for their implementation, which is why they don't work well and why Jesus' principles

condemn them.

In the second place, capitalism often rewards with *extravagant* profits entrepreneurs who best fulfill the demands of people who comprise the market. However, and by the same token, it simultaneously benefits the consumers, who purchase the desirable products and services created by the entrepreneurs' genius, risk taking and effort. The cumulative advantage to consumers is invariably exponentially greater than the profit realized by the entrepreneurs responsible for the innovations. The work of entrepreneurs lowers the total cost to society of all goods and services, leaving more money in the hands of consumers, which they can then use for other purposes, charitable or frivolous. "Cutthroat" competition by capitalism's entrepreneurs bestows great benefits upon society as a whole, especially its poorest members.

Another indispensable feature of cutthroat competition is regulation. Free-market competition is far more efficient and efficacious at regulating entrepreneurs and capitalists than any government. Government regulators inevitably become corrupt simply because their authority and their emoluments are predicated on the state and its violence. Like all nettles, state regulators produce only nettles.

Finally, the comparison is onerous because the market economy is neither moral nor immoral. Like a hammer or mathematics or nuclear fusion, it is a tool individuals can use for good or evil. However, because the market economy is the only alternative to a command economy, and since command economies require the initiation of force, the free market is clearly the moral choice. The way in which a model free-market economy operates, as elucidated by Ludwig von Mises in *Human Action*, appears to be under

the influence of Divine Providence.

The market directs the individual's activities into those channels in which he best serves the wants of his fellow men. There is in the operation of the market no compulsion or coercion...Each man is free; nobody is subject to a despot. Of his own accord the individual integrates himself into the cooperative system. The market directs him and reveals to him in what way he can best promote his own welfare as well as that of other people. The market is supreme. The market alone puts the whole social system in order and provides it with sense and meaning. (P. 257)

Thus, a person not guided by the selfless principles advocated by Jesus is nevertheless directed into the service of others by his own self-interest in a market economy. In the same way a human social system is efficaciously ordered by free markets, so the planets, stars and galaxies of the universe are controlled by laws incompletely comprehended by man's limited knowledge. Although men may learn to comprehend them, such laws are not of human origin. The unwritten laws that give order to the operation of the market economy without aid or hindrance from human laws are like the laws that order the universe. Both seem to be the handiwork of an Almighty Legislator, author of the Decalogue, the law of marginal utility, Gresham's law, and the law of gravity.

Those who fear multi-national corporations, business monopolies, and commodity cartels would proliferate at the expense of individuals in a capitalist economy without state regulation, overlook the fact that corporations are government-created entities. Without government, no corporation nor similar legal fiction can exist. Regarding monopolies and

cartels, vonMises explained:

The important place that cartels occupy in our time is an outcome of the interventionist policies adopted by the governments of all countries. The monopoly problem mankind has to face today is not an outgrowth of the operation of the market economy. It is a product of the purposive action on the part of governments. It is not one of the evils inherent in capitalism, as the demagogues trumpet. It is, on the contrary, the fruit of policies hostile to capitalism and intent upon sabotaging and destroying its operation. (*Human Action*, op cit, p. 366. For a concise analysis of the monopoly phenomenon, see Chapter XVI on prices. For more information on vonMises and his many fine books, visit: <http://www.mises.org/>

CHAPTER 8: THE INTERPRETERS' GUILT

In teaching his principles for right living, Jesus effectively instructed his followers not to participate in theft by taxation in any way, be it collecting, receiving or paying taxes. The reason Jesus did not directly respond to the question, "Should we pay the tax or not?" by saying, "No, don't pay it!" was because in teaching his principles he had already in essence told his disciples not to pay, and restating his position in those words on this occasion would only have been redundant. And, it would have resulted in Jesus being duped by his enemies and falling into their trap, a state of affairs that simply could not happen. So when he responded, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (KJV), he stated emphatically that Caesar, qua tax collector, was entitled to nothing more nor less than that which belonged to Caesar, which is to say, nothing belonging to others. His position on the issue was entirely unbiased, fair to Caesar and everyone else on the face of the earth.

Neither the coin in question nor any money coerced for the payment of taxes belongs to the state. The most sophisticated sophistry ever contrived could not fool Jesus into believing tax collectors only take what already belongs to the state. The statement, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, is a plain statement of truth regarding the righteous treatment of other-people's property, including the emperor's. The truth of the statement is plainly self-evident. It defies challenge and precludes interpretation.

We have supported our case with the words Jesus spoke on other occasions regarding taxes and tax collectors, and by logical assumptions based on his character and the principles he espoused. So far we have presented the position of only one orthodox author. We now provide the

interpretations of the render-unto-Caesar incident by many other Christian scholars. Their arguments on behalf of the proposition that Jesus put his stamp of approval on Caesar's tax and Rome's oppressive government with his words, "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," often are so blatantly contrived and farfetched that they effectively disprove themselves and tend to make our point. Nevertheless, these false interpretations of Jesus' plain-spoken words have survived for many centuries and are still being spoken as if they were true on a daily basis in the sermons of Christian ministers around the world. In the following analysis, the interpretations of the exegetes are indented. **[Our editorial comments are in bold face inside brackets.]**

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (London, Hendrickson Publishers, Vol.11, pp 256-259, commenting on Mt 22:15-22, and at pp 641-42, commenting on Lk 20:9-40, first published *circa* 1706):

The design was to bring him into such a dilemma that he must make himself liable to the displeasure either of the Jewish multitude or of the Roman magistrates; let him take which side of the question he will, he shall run himself into a praemunire; and so they will gain their point, and make his own tongue to fall upon him...If he should countenance the paying of tribute, the Pharisees would incense the people against him; if he should discountenance or disallow it, the Herodians would incense the government against him.

[At this point in his commentary Henry is interpreting Matthew's account of the incident. His analysis ignores illuminating commentary contained in Luke's account. Neither Matthew nor Mark explains the

design of the Pharisee's trap, but Luke is very clear about it. It was designed, Luke says, "to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor." His adversaries astutely anticipated that he would tell them not to pay. Henry's proposition that if Jesus endorsed the tax it would incense the people against him has no foundation in the Gospels whatsoever.

Furthermore, it contradicts the interrogators' own proclamation that Jesus "showed deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality." At another point, Henry heartily endorses the interrogators' flattering remarks as right on target, and he enlarges upon Jesus' impeccable credentials, saying of him:]

That he was a bold Reprover. In preaching he cared not for any; he valued no man's frowns or smiles, he did not court, he did not dread, either the great or the many, for he regarded not the person of man. In his evangelical judgment he did not know faces; that Lion of the tribe of Judah, turned not away from any (Prov. 30:30), turned not a step from the truth, nor from his work, for fear of the most formidable. He reproved with equity (Isa. 11:4), and never with partiality

[If this description of Jesus' character is accurate, and all who read of him are likely to agree it is, why would Jesus care what the masses would think of him if he stated an unpleasant truth regarding whether or not it was in accord with God's law to pay the tax? Obviously, he did not care. Nor did he fear the Roman authorities, as he would later demonstrate. But on this occasion, under the circumstance of spies attempting to trick him in order to "trap" him, he did not say, "No, don't pay the tax." If he had, he would have been duped by the Pharisees and

fallen into their trap, which wasn't about to happen. Instead Jesus told all who were present to give Caesar *only* what belongs to Caesar, which obviously would not include the coin in question, nor any other property in the possession of those in attendance. In words so straight forward they dumbfounded his deceitful enemies then, and most of his Christian interpreters later, Jesus said, give Caesar nothing—and yet he foiled their trap.]

Now the question was, Whether it was lawful to pay the taxes voluntarily, or, Whether they should not insist upon the ancient liberty of their nation, and rather suffer themselves to be distrained upon?

[This definitely is not the question recorded in any of the Gospels. It is, however, a fair depiction of the choice most people face when confronted with a tax. Distrain means to take someone's property by legal means, which is to say by force, and can include jailing a tax delinquent until he or she coughs up sufficient funds to pay the tax. Any "ancient liberty" relative to paying their taxes, which the Jews may have enjoyed when their nation was independent, was lost to Roman conquest. Under Rome's rule, evasion of the most arbitrary tax could result in the precipitous loss of one's property and even one's life, as in the case of Jesus. Jews enjoyed no liberty whatsoever in the matter of paying Roman taxes. In America today, vigorous tax resistance can still get you killed. (Do a Google search on the Internet for accounts of the life and death of Gordon Kahl.) However, most taxes are paid without resistance long before distraint comes into play. And how, according to this author, did Jesus avoid their trap?]

He evaded it; his convicting them of hypocrisy might have served for

an answer...but our Lord gave a full answer to their question...so as to lay down a rule for his church in this matter, and yet to avoid giving offense, and to break the snare.

[The enemies of Jesus believed he would speak the truth without concern whether it might offend someone. Henry, on the other hand, notwithstanding his many flattering words, convicts Jesus of evasion. Bouvier's Law Dictionary defines evasion as "A subtle device to set aside the truth or escape the punishment of the law." (p. 370) Set aside the truth? Jesus?]

The coinage of money has always been looked upon as a branch of the prerogative, a flower of the crown, a royalty belonging to the sovereign powers; and the admitting of that as the good and lawful money of a country is an implicit submission to those powers, and an owning of them in money matters. How happy is our constitution, and how happy we, who live in a nation [**viz., England**] where, though the image and the superscription be the sovereign's, the property is the subject's, under the protection of the laws, and what we have we can call our own.

[The author cleverly exempts his own country from the effects of his fictional monetary theory, which holds that circulating coins belong to the state and the use of such coins constitutes an act of submission and recognition of the legitimacy of the regime and its taxes. We have coined a new word—*theorytales*—to describe such fantastic illusions masquerading as economic theories.]

Christ asked them, Whose image is this? They owned it to be Caesar's...From thence he inferred the lawfulness of paying tribute to

Caesar.

[Why would Jesus infer circuitously what he could have said candidly without falling into their trap? Did he evade the truth because he feared the adverse judgment of the crowd, as Henry alleges? That is not the way of a “Bold Reprover,” “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” who Henry purports to revere. It is the behavior of a people-pleasing pussyfooter, and a dishonest one at that.]

His disciples were instructed, and standing rules left to the church.

First, That the Christian religion is no enemy to civil government, but a friend to it...The higher powers, entrusted with the public welfare...are entitled, in consideration thereof, to a just proportion of the public wealth, and the revenue of the nation...and it is doubtless a greater sin to cheat the government than to cheat a private person.

[All that from “render unto Caesar.” Notice the author employs a sophism to justify taxation, which, if true, negates the concept of private property, which is recognized in two of God’s laws: Thou shall not steal, and, Thou shall not covet thy neighbor’s goods. The sophism holds that the wealth and income of individuals belong to whatever *sovereign* happens to possess sufficient force to inflict its authority over the territory in which an unlucky taxpayer happens to reside. What Henry deceptively refers to as “a just proportion of the *public* wealth and revenue of the *nation*,” is the amount the state confiscates from the *private* wealth of *individuals*. Note also that Henry refers to the state as possessing “higher powers.” Those who truly esteem the wisdom of Jesus ascribe all higher-than-human powers exclusively to God. Some even refer to God as their Higher

Power. Henry, on the other hand, adorns the state with superhuman (viz., divine) qualities. His philosophy is a vivid example of that form of idolatry von Mises dubbed statolatry.]

**[Curiously, when Henry interprets Luke’s version of the render-
unto-Caesar incident, he refers to the versions of Matthew and Mark to
fill in some details. Why, then, does he not refer to Luke for an
important detail, which is missing from the other accounts, but clearly
only by ellipsis? Luke tells us the trap was designed to “take hold of
his words so that they might deliver him unto the power and authority
of the governor?” (KJV) Accordingly, there was no reason for Jesus to
decline to say, “pay the tax,” if that was his true belief. It is expressly
stated by Luke, and implicit in Mark and Matthew, that his adversaries
meant to use his words to paint him as an illegal tax protester before
the Roman procurator. If Jesus had said, yes, you should pay the tax,
rather than crucify him, Pilate (or Herod) would have thanked him for
supporting the emperor’s tax and perhaps given him a good-taxpayer
medal. Here is how Henry tries in vain to extricate himself from the
trap Luke’s Gospel sprung on him]:**

**Their pride and covetousness made them loath to pay taxes, and then
they would have it a question of whether it was lawful or no.**

**[People are loath to pay taxes because they feel they can put their
hard-earned wealth to better use for their own welfare or that of others,
and because taxes are taken from them by force or coercion. Their
loathing stems from an innate sense of the blatant injustice involved.]**

**Now if Christ should say that it was lawful the people would take it ill,
for they expected that he who set up to be the Messiah should in the**

first place free them from the Roman yoke, and stand by them in denying tribute to Caesar. But if he should say that it was not lawful, as they expected he would (for if he had not been of that mind they thought he could not have been so much the darling of the people as he was), then they should have something to accuse him to the governor, which was what they wanted.

[So, Matthew Henry insists Jesus' answer was yes, but he didn't come out and say so directly in order to safeguard his popularity among his followers. Case closed! Matthew Henry is guilty of misinterpreting Jesus and demeaning his character in the process!]

To be fair, the above passages from Matthew Henry's exposition on the Bible constitute much the smaller part of a lengthy dissertation on the render-unto-Caesar incident. Our editing severely detracts from the graceful literary motif of his essay, which, but for this absurd misinterpretation, pays eloquent homage to Jesus. Unfortunately, the one flaw is ruinous. We urge readers to visit Mr. Henry's commentary on this incident to ensure we haven't misled, and perhaps savor his skills as a masterful essayist if not as an exegete.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, An Exposition of the Scriptures by the Dallas Seminary Faculty. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983):

Their question was, Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Their cleverly devised question appeared to have no clear cut answer.

[What about yes or no?] They thought they had him trapped. If he answered that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, He would be siding

with the Romans against Israel and most Jews, including the Pharisees, would consider him a traitor.

[So what? The Pharisees already considered him their worst enemy. Jesus had often demonstrated he cared not one jot or one tittle about their approbation or condemnation. Why, then, would Jesus pander to anyone who might have been present?]

If, however, He said taxes should not be paid to Rome, He could be accused of being a rebel who opposed the authority of Rome and the authorities would be against him.

[Here yet another author neglects to check the Gospel of Luke, where he would have learned that the question was designed to elicit the answer, no, so Jesus could be charged before Pilate with forbidding payment of the tax. Those who sought to destroy him never even considered that Jesus would say, yes, pay the tax, because the oft-stated principles he advocated forbade paying taxes. All who had heard him convey his principles would know he opposed taxes. The Pharisees knew Jesus' principles, and they knew he was not a liar, nor a hypocrite, nor a mealy-mouthed panderer afraid to speak his mind.]

Jesus was aware of the hypocrisy of their approach and also of the implications of His answer. He therefore answered their question by demonstrating that government does have a rightful place in everyone's life and that one can be in subjection to government and God at the same time.

[In his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:24), Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters."]

He asked them to give him a coin used to pay the tax. A Roman

denarius, with its image of Caesar, the Roman emperor, made it obvious they were under Roman authority and taxation. (One coin inscription reads, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus.”) Therefore the taxes must be paid: Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. (vol II, pp 71- 72, 161-162, 255-256)

[Since Caesar claimed to be divine, God’s first Commandment precludes having anything to do with Caesar or his idolatrous regime, least of all paying tribute to it or him. Only someone who cannot conceive of life without the state could adopt such stilted reasoning, or rather lack of reasoning, and come to such a warped conclusion. Jesus, of course, concluded otherwise.]

The tediously reiterated monetary theorytale, which posits that the face on the coins in your pocket determines whose vassal you are, exists only in the minds of church scholars trying to explain away Jesus’ opposition to taxation. In any case, it sounds like it was concocted by the same people who devised the theorytale of the “divine right of kings” to rule their domains. In fact, “your money and your homage, or your life,” is the only *truth* that has ever supported either theorytale.

Aside from the interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident we propose, there is only one other possible interpretation of the intendment of the actions and words of Jesus during the incident that isn’t silly on its face. Because of the blasphemous inscription on the denarius (“Son of the Divine Augustus”), which purportedly (viz., according to some exegetes) was required in payment of the emperor’s tax, Jesus and his followers would have disdained to even touch the coin, much less use it to pay the emperor’s tax. Thus, when he asked to see the coin used for the tax, it could only have

been produced by one of the Pharisees or Herodians. Without handling the coin, Jesus asked his adversaries whose face and inscription were on it? When they said “Caesar’s,” in effect he told them that, since they were in possession of the coin and aware of its idolatrous inscription referring to a mere mortal as divine, they should give the coin to their false god, particularly if they were naive enough to believe their coins really belonged to Caesar anyway. Having been reassured by Jesus that they were exempt under God’s law from paying Caesar’s tax, his disciples knew Jesus was not talking to them, but only to those interrogators who possessed Caesar’s idolatrous coins. This explanation makes far more sense than the incongruous hypotheses of most orthodox-church exegetes. The hypothesis, however, has a fatal flaw. It is logically incredible that only one specific coin would be acceptable in payment of a tax. If anything of equal or greater value was tendered in lieu of the designated coin, no rational tax collector would refuse it.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing Corp. 1981)

The trap, then, put Jesus into the position where he would either alienate a major part of the population or else lay himself open to a charge of treason...Superficially Jesus’ answer accords with Jewish teaching that men ought to pay taxes to their foreign overlords, since the great, even the pagan great, owe their position to God. (cf. Prov 8:15, Dan 2:21, 37-38)

[According to 1 Sam 8, the rule of Jews by earthly kings, whether foreign or home bred, was a usurpation of God’s authority. And, as we

will discuss later, the Gospel of Luke implies heads of state owe their position to Satan, not God. Finally, readers are well advised to check out an author's biblical citations, which in this instance do not clearly support this author's contention.]

The messianic community he determines to build must render to whatever Caesar who is in power whatever belongs to that Caesar.

[Statements such as this attributed to Jesus may have enabled many Christian Germans to close their eyes to the slaughter of six-million Jews by their government agents. It is certainly sufficient cause to make Jews weary of Christianity.]

Jesus' pithy words not only answer his enemies but also lay down the basis for the proper relationship of his people to government.

[The basis for Christians' relationship to the state is spelled out in the principles Jesus enunciated in his Sermon on the Mount. These principles require his followers to have nothing to do with violence, including the state, which is predicated on violence.]

Jesus' interrogators were sure his answer would alienate either the government officials or the pious people and zealots who opposed foreign domination.

[This sentence purports to explain the render-unto-Caesar pericope found in Luke and is manifestly false. Luke states clearly that his questioners intended to induce Jesus to voice his well-known condemnation of taxation in the presence of unfriendly witnesses who would then betray his position to the Roman procurator. They did not consider how a positive answer would impact opponents of the tax. They knew Jesus would never endorse paying it.]

To give what the government requires is not antithetical to religious duty, but part of it. (pp 458-460, 734-735, 1015-1016)

Statements like this create a suspicion that the author is an over-zealous IRS agent posing as a bible scholar.]

The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN, Abington Press, 1994), also see, *The Interpreter's one-volume Commentary on the Bible*, Charles M. Laymon, Ed. (Nashville, Abington Press)

Thus they are asking a trick question, calculated either to alienate the nationalists (if Jesus replied in the affirmative) or to make him subject to arrest by the Romans (if he declared against paying the tax)...Jesus asks for the "legal tender" with which the tax is paid. He does not have it, but *the Pharisees, in the sacred precincts of the Temple, produce the coin with its idolatrous image and inscription and acknowledged that they are Caesar's.*

[The exegetes' first theory tale rears its ugly head .]

When Jesus pronounces that *what is already the emperor's* should be given to him, while avoiding either a direct yes or no, he in fact gives an indirect yes. (vol VIII, pp 419-421, 672-674, vol IX 385-387)

[The exegetes' second theory tale rises from the dead and is presented as fact in support of a fiction. The repetition of these illogical theses makes it appear that many of Jesus' Christian-church interpreters relied on each other to come to the same erroneous conclusions.]

Peake's Commentary on the Bible (The Authority of the Bible by the Archbishop of Canterbury, circa, 1919):

[The tax] was paid directly into their emperor's treasury, and the coinage used was stamped with the name and image of the emperor, so that on both accounts it symbolized subjection. **[Jesus]** does recognize that obligations due to the State are within the divine order. Loyalty to the emperor need not be inconsistent with loyalty to God.
(pp. 812, 839)

[Theorytale number two. Of course God told Samuel that loyalty to a king was a rejection of God, and Jesus added that no man can serve two masters.]

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary. Everett F. Harrison, Ed. (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1990)

For the privileges provided by the Roman government, the people were indebted to help support that government.

[The Roman government ruled the Jews' homeland by force and held its people to tribute by means of an occupying army enforcing a heavy tax burden. Jews were allowed to live in order to create wealth, which the emperor then taxed to finance the opulence of the elite and the benefits of Roman citizenship. Jews enjoyed no privileges whatsoever, only concessions to the fact of life that it is easier and cheaper to collect taxes from slaves than it is to bind them with chains and press them to forced labor. It also made sense to tax them rather than kill them and thus lose the fruits of their labor .]

If he said, "Yes," he would be regarded as a collaborator with Rome and would lose favor with the public.

[Another author infers that Jesus curried favor with the public. Many of

these orthodox Christian exegetes evidently believe Jesus was running for public office.]

NIV Bible Commentary, Kenneth L. Barker, John Kohlenberger III, Consulting Editors (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1994):

Their purpose was to trip Jesus up in his word so that he would lose the support of the people, leaving the way open for them to destroy him. (p 183)

[How were they to destroy him? Only Rome had the power to execute Jesus, and Pilate had demonstrated that he didn't give a damn what the Jewish people or their leaders wanted. The truth, as Luke reveals, is that their purpose was to make Jesus' opposition to Caesar's tax manifest, and then present the evidence to Pilate, who was certain to snuff an acknowledged tax protester.]

Hard Sayings of the Bible, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1996):

However he answered it, it would be almost impossible to avoid giving offense. If he said that it was lawful, he would offend those who maintained the ideals of Judas the Galilean, and many would think him unpatriotic. This would lose him much of his following in Judea. Caesar's coins were best used for paying Caesar's tribute. If that was what Caesar wanted, let him have it; the claims of God were not transgressed by such use of Caesar's money. (pp 443-445)

[Ho hum. Another Jesus-was-a-politician interpretation.]

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, John MacArthur, Jr.
(Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1988)

Taxes are of major importance in any developed society, and without them government could not function.

[Finally, a logical statement regarding taxes. The fact that violent governments could not exist without taxes explains why the Jesus principles forbid paying them. Taxes are not, as some assert, the price we pay for civilization. Rather, taxes demonstrate a dearth of civility among people who find it easier to use state force rather than friendly persuasion or honest exchange to obtain what they need or desire.]

Jesus here declared the divinely-ordained obligation of citizens to pay taxes to whatever government is over them. Paying taxes is a legitimate duty of every person, but is specially binding on believers because they are specially bound to God's Word...The state has the divine right to assess taxes that are within its sphere of responsibility, and its citizens have the divine obligation to pay them...To resist government is therefore to resist God. To refuse to pay taxes is to disobey God's command. By God's own declaration, to pay taxes to Caesar honors God. (pp 315-323)

[Apparently this author believes God is the Commissioner of Internal Revenue. His "divinely ordained obligation to pay taxes" sounds like the divine right of kings and reflects the same idolatry. Imagine, however, how happy the IRS must be to see such words attributed to Jesus. To increase compliance it should reprint them in the booklet it sends taxpayers each year. This work contains more in the same vein. Reproducing it merely to subject it to deserving outrage would be

flogging a dead horse.]

The Jerome Biblical Commentary , Raymond F. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. Editors (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1998, vol II, pp 48, 100, 154); also see, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1990):

The question was hotly debated among the Jews, and the attempt to make Jesus voice a decision was calculated to discredit him with adherents of one or the other side. Since coins were considered as the monarch's personal property, their having the coin of the census was an implicit recognition of the emperor's sovereignty over them.

Jesus accordingly retorts that they have an obligation to pay the tax.

[Jerome may have originated those bizarre twin theorytales, adopted by so many others, that your money belongs to the guy whose face is on it, and that use of it constitutes subjection to whatever sovereign bozo issued it. The latter theory is disproved by the fact that the coins and currency from one jurisdiction often circulate in another where the coin maker has no authority. Like those Roman coins of old, the U.S. dollar today circulates freely and even serves as the preferred currency in places around the globe where the US does not pretend to rule, or at least, given our attachment to imperialist hegemony, not yet.]

Jerome (a.k.a., Eusebius, *circa.* 340-420 AD) was an early Bible scholar but clearly not an economist. Many Bible commentators mimic Jerome, which may account for the monotonous repetition of the inane twin theorytales. *The Historical Handbook of Major Bible Interpreters*

(InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, Donald M. Kim, Ed, 1998), says of Jerome:

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus is better known as Jerome, doctor of the church, and one of the most important interpreters of the Bible in the early centuries of Christianity...The Roman Empire into which Jerome was born had been changing rapidly...The Christian emperor Constantine the Great had pushed through policies that favored Christianity, and many churches were built throughout the empire.

[Using tax revenues, no doubt.] Constantine's benevolent actions, and those of his successors, had a dramatic effect on the church.

Instead of being persecuted, the church now enjoyed many privileges, and it was to increasingly have an influential role in society...Scholars like Jerome had an important function to fulfill by writing commentaries to explain the biblical books...In the centuries following Jerome's death he was universally acknowledged as the prince of Christian biblical scholars, and his work became fertile ground for the labors of subsequent exegetes. (pp 42-47)

[That last-stated fact seems obvious because virtually all subsequent interpretations of the render-unto-Caesar incident adopt the patently false premise introduced by Jerome that the Pharisees' trap was designed to snare Jesus whether he answered yes or no.]

After the amalgamation of the Christian church with Rome, scholars like Jerome were government dependents. Ever since Emperor Constantine, the Christian church, in one way or another somewhere in the world, has allied itself with the state (or states) to share in the booty of the

state's plunder. Surely this dependence on the state accounts for the many misinterpretations of the render-unto-Caesar incident by orthodox church exegetes, who claim Jesus endorsed taxation and the state. It is no surprise Jerome and his successors misinterpreted the Gospels in favor of their benefactor state at the expense of the reputation of the man they call Savior. As the man from Galilee warned, "No man can serve two masters."

Two other early Bible commentators whose influence is still felt are Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD) and the profoundly influential Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD). *The Historical Handbook of Major Bible Interpreters* says, "Origen is still acclaimed as the founder of biblical criticism in the church, the most influential Christian interpreter of Scripture, and the founder of systematic theology." Origen preceded the alliance between the church and the Roman Empire. In a scholarly treatise entitled *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 1994), author Lisa Sowle Cahill says of him, "Origen counsels the Christian to refrain from violence and even from military service."

After its alliance with Rome, the church was not so peace loving. Augustine was a bishop of the Roman church, early proponent of the insidious "just-war theory," and an ardent statist. Frederick W. Loetscher, in his essay, "St. Augustine's Conception of the State," published in *Studies in Early Christianity*, (New York, Garland publishing, 1993, Everett Furgeson, Editor) said this:

Broadly speaking, the relation of church and state is determined, according to Augustine, by the principle stated by Jesus in these terms, "Then render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Augustine developed his theory...that the state, under the divine

guidance of the Church, the divinely appointed teacher of revealed truth, must perform a pedagogical and disciplinary function that involves the use of the civil power for the conversion of heretics and schismatics or for their adequate punishment. **['Nuff said.]**

Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, in his stridently-pacifist essay, *Christian Just War Theory, The Logic of Deceit* (Wilmington, DE, Center for Christian Nonviolence, Revised 2003), points out that the Roman pagan Cicero originated the just-war theory. McCarthy believes the theory negates everything Jesus said and did throughout his time on earth including his pacifist's death on the cross.

Other learned Bible commentaries that misinterpret the render-unto-Caesar incident much like the preceding include: *Sacra Pagina* Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., Editor (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1991); *The Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, by W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr. (Edinburgh, T&T Clark Ltd., 1997); *Harmonized Exposition of the Four Gospels*, by A.E. Breen (Rochester, NY, The John Smith Printing House, Vol.II, 1902); *A Practical Commentary on Holy Scripture*, by Frederick Justus Knecht (London, B. Herder, 1923); *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, William R. Former, Editor, 1998); *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, by Ralph Earle, Harvey J.S. Blaney, and Charles W. Carter, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964); *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, Robert S. Harris, Editor, 1992); *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953).

All these commentaries by eminent scholars on the render-unto-

Caesar incident are statist, some more so than others. They all demean the character of the man Jesus, and make him less than he really was. It is a tribute to his Divine nature that his reputation has withstood their handiwork. But both the state and its taxes, which Jesus' principles condemn, have survived as well, and much of the blame for that can be laid at the feet of the Christian-church exegetes.

CHAPTER 9: THE PETER AND PAUL PROBLEM

Anyone contending that Jesus' principles forbid voluntary compliance with taxation and condemn the violent state, as we do, must wrestle not only with early and modern commentators but also with two contemporaries of Jesus who have been canonized, namely Saints Peter and Paul. Specific comments by Paul in his Letter to the Romans, and comments by Peter in The First Letter of Peter cannot be ignored. Indeed, the pertinent words of the two saints undoubtedly and unfortunately have influenced those who misinterpret Jesus on the issues of taxation and the state.

Here is what Paul *purportedly* said in his epistle to a budding Christian community taking shape in Rome. According to many scholars, this letter was written in 58 AD from Corinth before Paul's eventual journey to Rome.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God and those authorities who exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good and you will receive its approval, for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them--taxes to whom taxes are due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Romans 13:1-7)

It is generally agreed that Peter's First Letter (1 Peter) was written by him at Babylon in the year 63 AD. It was addressed to Christians throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. (1 Peter 2:13-18)

For the purpose of this treatise, we shall assume these passages are, in fact, the authentic words of their purported authors. In which case, note that neither Peter nor Paul cite Jesus as their authority for the position they *seem* to take in these epistles. The texts, however, appear so singularly contrary to principles Jesus embraced that the proposition that these passages were not written by Peter or Paul, but rather inserted by a translator or transcriber with a Roman axe to grind after the Christian church became enthralled to Rome, cannot be ruled out. In *The Journal of New Testament Studies*, Vol.11 (1964), p. 365-374, in an article entitled "Romans 13:1-7, An Interpolation," author John Kallas argued just such a theory regarding Paul's admonitions in Romans 13.

Not only is this section independent of its context, but it actually interrupts the text. A careful examination of the closing parts of Chapter 12 on the one hand and 13:8f on the other reveals that the

two chapters would read more smoothly if this strangely intrusive section were omitted...These seven verses...contradict basic Pauline expressions. This short little parenthesis has packed into it at least four ideas which go against all we see elsewhere in Paul...The whole emphasis and approach of the section indicates a later date than Paul's life...The person who wrote Romans 13:1-7 has an entirely different world view than Paul...Paul could not have ascribed such an exalted status to Rome without being hypocritical and servile and untrue to his whole theological position...The only conceivable answer to the dilemma is found in assuming that this passage was written later than Paul at a time when the church was obliged, by the failure of the end to come, to re-evaluate the nature of the world. That failure of the world to end forced the church to the conclusion that perhaps the world order--since it had not ceased--was not demonic as had earlier been supposed and was therefore to be obeyed.

The editors of the respected *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press,, Michael D. Coogan, Ed., 3rd edition,2001), have their own problem with Romans 13:1-7. Here are two of their editorial notations:

Sometimes read as Paul's 'theology of the state,' these verses stand in tension with his view elsewhere of the 'rulers of this age,' and his own willingness to suffer punishment from civil authorities. (p. 261 New Testament, note 13:1-7, biblical citations omitted)

Given the recent horror of an anti-Jewish pogrom in Alexandria (38-41 CE), and even more recent tax riots that had turned deadly in nearby

Puteoli, Paul is concerned to prevent in Rome the sort of civil disturbances in which the city's minority Jewish population might be especially vulnerable. This is at least one explanation for the notorious exhortation to be "subject to the governing authorities". (Editors Introduction to Romans, p. 242 New Testament)

We find Kalas' analysis more compelling than that of the Oxford editors. Nevertheless, we proceed here on the basis that Paul did write Romans 13:1-7, with the proviso that nothing Paul or Peter may have said can negate the principles Jesus espoused.

While the comments of the saints in these two passages do not purport to explain the words and actions of Jesus on the occasion of the render-unto-Caesar incident, the authors were devoted disciples who would not knowingly eviscerate principles proclaimed true by Jesus, as they appear to do in these passages. (Note: More than a few critics of Paul have argued that he did eviscerate the words and works of Jesus, but we needn't examine that debate in this essay.) Because of the prestige of the two revered saints, and because these passages are in the Bible, their comments regarding taxes and the state deserve our thoughtful consideration. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the principles of Jesus should always prevail among his disciples.

Peter was one of twelve apostles personally chosen by Jesus (Mt 4:19). He was close to Jesus throughout Jesus' ministry and was the first person to realize Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah (Mt 16:16, Mk 8:29, Lk 9:20, Jn 6:). From a safe distance, Peter watched as Jesus was brought by guards before the high priest after he had been arrested, although he fled the scene before Jesus was taken to Pilate and tried. (Mt

26:75, Lk 22:62). Peter was among those visited by Jesus after his resurrection (Mt 28:16ff, Mk 16:16ff, Lk 24:34ff, Jn 21:1f) and one of those transformed by the Holy Spirit on the occasion now celebrated as Pentecost (Acts 2:1f). After that first Pentecost, Peter performed miracles in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:1f). His words must carry great weight, for while Jesus walked the earth Peter may have been permitted to speak for Jesus, as he did in Capernaum when he mistakenly told a tax collector that Jesus did pay taxes (Mt 17:24-7). (On the other hand, and far more likely given Peter's manifest impetuosity, he probably overstepped the bounds of his personal relationship on that occasion, which was why Jesus chastised him.) Peter's comments in his first epistle constitute the penultimate challenge to proving a contrarian interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident such as ours, in which Jesus is portrayed as an anarchist unambiguously opposed to taxation

Paul, a Pharisee, and--significantly--a Roman citizen, was the former persecutor of members of the early Jewish-Christian sect. After his remarkable conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3f), Paul became the disciple who personally carried the good news of Jesus primarily to Gentiles throughout much of the Roman Empire.

Paul's epistles comprise thirty percent of the New Testament. His explicit instructions on taxes in Romans 13 constitute the ultimate obstacle one confronts in trying to prove Jesus himself would never endorse theft by taxation, nor condone the state and its monopoly on legalized violence as Paul seems to do in Romans 13. We say "seems" because John Howard Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MT. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972) argues that Romans 13 is not the blanket endorsement of

government and taxes it may appear to be. Basically, Yoder's argument is that when Paul said "pay taxes to whom taxes are due," he meant it in the same way Jesus meant "give to Caesar what is Caesar's." If nothing is due, nothing is exactly what Jesus and Paul said should be paid.

Of course taxes are never "due," until someone is lawfully assessed, or confesses to owing a tax, as when Peter mistakenly acknowledged that Jesus would pay the temple tax. In a similar fashion today, a taxpayer's federal income tax is assessed and becomes due when a taxpayer creates a tax liability by signing and filing a tax return. The taxpayer becomes liable for the tax (viz., it is due) by *confessing* the specified amount that is owed.

Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 create a problem even for those statisticians who support the proposition that Jesus endorsed taxation and a role for the state when he said, "render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." (KJV) Here, for example, is a comment from the *Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1954): "Those who contend for the 'divine right' of existing institutions have always found their strongest support in Ch. 13, and it could reasonably be claimed that no part of Scripture has afforded such solace to unscrupulous men."

If colonial Americans who thought of themselves as Christians, which would include most of the Founding Fathers, had heeded the counsel of Paul in Romans 13, the new American nation would have died aborning, and the Declaration of Independence would have been denounced as blasphemy. Slavery, which many people fought to abolish on religious grounds--but which *Christian* America embraced in its Constitution--might well have persisted throughout the Western world if Peter's words were heeded. While these observations only support our thesis tangentially, we

mention them because they reveal the weakness of the authority of Peter's and Paul's comments regarding the legitimacy of government. Christians have ignored the pertinent comments while overthrowing governments, and, more often, brandished them on high when defending existing states.

It is reasonable to argue that Peter and Paul failed to comprehend Jesus on the issue of taxes and the state if it can be shown they failed to understand him on other important issues. One of the obvious and better-known errors in interpreting Jesus, which was committed by Peter and Paul and by virtually all of their contemporary brethren, concerns the timing of Jesus' second coming. Most of his followers, including Peter and Paul, believed Jesus had said the Parousia would occur within their lifetime. In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians he said, "So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:7-8) Peter urged his contemporaries, "Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed." (1 Pet 1:13) And, again, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...what sort of person ought you to be waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things..." (2 Pet 3:10-14)

Peter and Paul obviously misunderstood Jesus on this matter. Today we know Jesus could not have meant he would be returning triumphantly in the flesh within the lifetime of his listeners when he *reportedly* uttered words to that effect. (See, Mt 16:27-28, Mk 8:38, Lk 9:26-27) Of course we have the advantage of twenty-twenty hindsight and the passage of 2000 years

without any evidence that Jesus has physically returned. The point is, if Peter and Paul misinterpreted Jesus on the timing of his return, they could have similarly misunderstood him on the issues of taxes and the illegitimacy of Roman civil authority.

Peter often misunderstood Jesus to the point of vexation. Jesus was miffed when Peter presumptuously committed Jesus to pay the temple tax. On that occasion, recorded in Matthew 17, Peter exhibited knee-jerk obeisance to civil authority, just as he does in 1 Peter. Unfortunately, Jesus was no longer around to chastise him for evincing a misguided reverence of civil authority when Peter was writing his first epistle.

Peter misinterpreted Jesus on many other occasions. When Jesus first began to tell his apostles he would have to suffer and die and be raised from the dead, Peter attempted to counsel against such a course, and Jesus severely rebuked him for doing so. (Mt 16:21-23) When Jesus told Peter that before the cock crowed twice he would deny Jesus three times, Peter “vehemently” professed he never would, although later he did just that. (Mk 14:30-31) When Jesus was arrested, Peter, seriously misunderstanding the pacific nature of Jesus, severed the ear of Malchus with his sword, and was again rebuked by Jesus. (Jn 18:10-11) If Peter was with Jesus during the render-unto-Caesar incident, he may well have failed to understand the Lord on that occasion too. And then there is this:

[Jesus] poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Then Jesus answered, “You do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You will never wash my

feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”...**[Jesus]** said to them, “Do you know what I have done? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (Jn 13:5-8)

Now add these words of Jesus to the brew:

[After serving the apostles bread and wine at the Last Supper, Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest; and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves? But I am among you as one who serves.” (Lk 22:25-26)

Jesus gave his apostles, including Peter, these explicit instructions and dramatic examples in an effort to teach them that a true leader selflessly serves his followers. The occasion was their Last Supper together. Now, contrast Jesus’ instructions with Peter’s and the other apostles’ behavior when Jesus was no longer with them.

And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom you may appoint to this task, while we for our part will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” (Acts 6:2-4)

This devolution of menial tasks by the apostles to others, now subordinates,

evidently with the approval if not at the urging of Peter, was a precursor to rigid hierarchy in the church after it allied itself with Rome, with its popes and cardinals and bishops and monseigneurs and abbots. It demonstrates that Peter failed to learn another lesson Jesus took great pains to teach him. Author Lance deHaven-Smith (about whom more will be said below) goes so far as to suggest the possibility that Peter was a “false prophet” because he strayed from the ways of Jesus after Jesus was gone, and because the church Peter established has caused so much human suffering. (Only after it affiliated with the state, we would add.) DeHaven-Smith points to the Inquisition and the Crusades, with their wholesale slaughter of human lives, as examples of the bitter fruits that ripened in Peter’s hierarchical church.

Pope John Paul II has belatedly apologized for the crimes of the Catholic church over the past two millennia, but he made no amends nor any changes in that church’s hierarchy, which is so inimical to the teaching and example set by Jesus. DeHaven-Smith undoubtedly had these words of Jesus in mind in questioning Peter’s integrity: “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing...you will know them by their fruits.” (Mt 7:15-16) Our own observation is that Peter was not a false prophet. Rather, he was a good but impetuous man who was prone to rash judgments, which often resulted in errors. The fact that Jesus kept Peter on as an apostle in spite of his glaring ineptitude affords comfort to those of us who slip and fall woefully short in our efforts to mimic Jesus.

Paul did not know Jesus and did not become a disciple until after Jesus died. Although he was not one of the Twelve, he referred to himself as an apostle, which implies a modicum of conceit. Because the Gospels had not yet been written down and certainly were not universally known

when Paul penned his Epistles to the Romans, he may not have realized that Jesus frequently pointed to tax collectors in general as exemplars of sinfulness merely because they collected taxes. Unlike Jesus, Paul was a Roman citizen and proud of it. In advocating the payment of taxes, he may have stumbled on his pride in his Roman citizenship. Two incidents recorded in The Acts of the Apostles are revealing. The first took place in Philippi and the second in Jerusalem.

When morning came, the magistrate sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported the message to Paul saying, "The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul replied, "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now they are going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. (Acts 16:35-39)

And again:

The tribune directed that he was to be brought into the barracks, and ordered him to be examined by flogging, to find out the reason for this outcry against him. But when he had tied him up with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?" When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen." The tribune came and asked Paul, "Tell

me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "It cost me a large sum of money to get my citizenship." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." Immediately those who were about to examine him drew back from him; and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him." (22:24-29)

Now that is clout! Paul obviously viewed the civil authority of Rome in a different light than did Jesus, who Rome unceremoniously crucified. Paul's Roman citizenship, which he brandished like a vampire-repelling amulet in times of danger, probably saved him from death at the hands of his fellow Pharisees and their Roman comrades in Jerusalem. Jesus, on the other hand, was murdered by a Roman civil servant enforcing Roman law against resisting Roman taxes, taxes that made possible the esteem Paul enjoyed as a Roman citizen, a prize the tribunal paid dearly to possess.

Because he was a Roman citizen, Paul was exempt from the imperial tribute tax, which literally brutalized most poor Jews, who constituted the bulk of Jesus' followers. For essentially the same reason that many Christian churches in the United States today endorse taxation, Roman citizens like Paul were likewise seduced into supporting the emperor's oppressive tax on the Jews. Paul himself, like U.S. churches, was exempt.

It is easy to comprehend why Paul would misinterpret Jesus on taxes and civil government. Good people, like Paul, who depend upon government for their security or welfare, are almost always unable or unwilling to even consider the proposition that taxation is theft and that utilizing government benefits is partaking in the booty. It is a case of what Jesus described as "seeing, they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither

do they understand.” (Mt 13:13 KJV) Today this phenomenon is called cognitive dissonance.

At the inception of his ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness fasting, and there he was tempted by Satan. Here, in pertinent part, is how Luke reports what took place:

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority, *for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.* If you then will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only. (Lk 4:5-8, emphasis added, and see, Mt 4:8-10, Mk 1:13)

Satan’s claim of ownership and authority over all of the kingdoms of the world, which Jesus pointedly did not dispute, surely follows from the fact that all earthly kingdoms had then as now dethroned God as their lawmaker in favor of human monarchs or legislators. This passage categorically rebuts Paul’s astonishing contention that government authority comes from God. It also trumps Peter’s fawning exhortation to honor the emperor, a man whose predecessor was ultimately responsible for slaying his beloved master. How or why so many learned Bible commentators could have been led to declare that Jesus endorsed the state seems incomprehensible in light of this Lucan pericope. The decisive fact of Jesus’ crucifixion at the hands of the Roman state would alone appear to be sufficient cause to dissuade any disciple of Jesus from endorsing the nation-state, unless the disciple was trying to serve more than one master.

Is it possible all nation states, even democracies, are Satan’s domains,

as the passage in Luke seems to assert? A variation of the master/servant relationship is a fundamental precept of our democratic government.

Bouvier's Law Dictionary says a representative is "one who represents or is in the place of another." Thus, we speak of politicians, bureaucrats, and soldiers as "our public servants" who "represent us." But recall the previously quoted description of the master-servant relationship. ("The master is answerable for every such wrong of the servant as is committed by him in the course of the service.") It logically follows that the citizens of a democracy or republic ought to be held fully accountable for any and all crimes their government servants commit in the course of their duties.

Unfortunately, Americans do not hold themselves personally responsible for damaging legislative acts, unjust judicial decisions, unwarranted and deadly military actions, merciless executive orders, nor any of the rampant bureaucratic misdeeds committed by their lawful agents. Under United States laws, usually no one at all is held responsible, thanks to an unholy doctrine called "sovereign immunity." For example, a federal judge found, based on the evidence, that the Army Corps of Engineers was negligent in maintaining its levees, which caused the disastrous flood of New Orleans when its levees failed in the wake of hurricane Katrina, but not liable nor responsible for the horrific damages resulting from its negligence--because federal law makes the Corps immune. Author Lance deHaven-Smith (see the next chapter) astutely observes that all political systems "are inhuman and demonic because, in essence, they are decision-making processes that disperse responsibility and make accountability impossible."

And finally, regarding the question of whether or not the two saints actually wrote the pertinent passages, we refer our readers to the previously

cited essay of Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus, The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*:

But there is far more to the textual tradition of the New Testament than merely establishing what its authors actually wrote. There is also the question of *why* these words came to be changed, and how these changes affect the meanings of their writings. This question of the modification of scripture in the early Christian church will be the subject of the next two chapters, as I try to show how scribes who were not altogether satisfied with what the New Testament books said modified their words to make them more clearly support orthodox Christianity and more vigorously oppose heretics, women, Jews, and pagans. (P. 149)

The point is the offending passages in Romans and 1 Peter could well have been changed or inserted in the canonical manuscripts after the Church was enthralled by its Roman-government masters, whose taxes supported both the state and its official church. It would certainly help the cause of tax collecting if non-compliance was made mortally sinful according to Christian-church doctrine. Ehrman's essay shows that it wouldn't be the only time the Gospel authors' words were changed for self-serving reasons.

CHAPTER 10: SCHOLARS WHO SUPPORT OUR THESIS

No subject has attracted as many authors and as many books as Jesus. So far, we have not found another author who interprets the render-unto-Caesar incident precisely as we do. We say Jesus' words, "Give the emperor the things that are the emperor's," mean precisely what they say. If his plain words must be interpreted, then the correct interpretation is this: Give the emperor nothing that isn't his! Rome is evil. Taxes are evil. The taxes you pay Rome finance evil deeds. Don't pay them!

It is hard to believe others have not found what we believe is the true meaning of the words Jesus spoke during the render-unto-Caesar incident, particularly since our interpretation depends on the proposition that Jesus said what he meant and meant what he said on that occasion--as always. The fact that we are unlettered neophytes compared to the learned scholars whose works we have criticized cautions prudence but does not deter. There is a passage in Luke that explains why we are confident our interpretation is true, and was revealed to us rather than those learned bible scholars. "At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants, yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.'" (Lk 10:15)

We have found a few Gospel interpreters whose commentaries generally support our thesis. While not minutely analyzing and interpreting the render-unto-Caesar incident exactly as we do, nor focusing narrowly on Jesus' denunciations of taxes and tax collectors as we have here, these scholars more or less agree with our conclusion that Jesus would not and did not put his imprimatur on taxes nor on the state. These commentators

are in close harmony with us regarding Jesus' attitude toward the state, although they do not cite the render-unto-Caesar incident as paramount to their conclusions. In reaching their judgments, they draw on a broad range of sources and authorities. By and large, their works are eminently more scholarly than ours.

John Dominic Crossan is a highly respected Bible scholar whose work is often cited by others. His numerous exegetical books include *Who Killed Jesus* (op cit), which is subtitled, "Exposing the roots of anti-semitism in the Gospel story of the death of Jesus." One of Crossan's contentions is that the passion narrative as told in the four Gospels is not historically accurate. The apostles of Jesus deserted him upon his arrest at Gethsemane and were not witness to the narrative's defining events--trial, crucifixion, burial, resurrection--that immediately followed. The canonical Gospel accounts of what transpired were derived from attempts by his followers to understand what happened to Jesus and what the phenomena of his life and death meant to themselves, their future, and mankind, by searching the Scriptures for understanding. As a result, Crossan argues with anthropological, sociological, and historical evidence in support of his logical assumption, that the passion narratives the canonical Gospel writers constructed are "prophesy historicized" as opposed to "history remembered." Furthermore, Crossan posits, some parts of the four narratives are creative parables, composed by the authors to instruct Christians in the latter half of the first century, when the Christian sect of Jews was locked in ideological combat with mosaic Jews for adherents to their respective beliefs at the time the canonical Gospel accounts were set to writing. According to Crossan, because of these factors the popular passion narratives of Matthew, Mark,

Luke, and John erroneously fixed primary blame for the crucifixion of Jesus on the Jewish leaders, whereas the historical truth is that the state of Rome, represented by Pilate's administration, was singularly responsible for the death of Jesus.

Rome's responsibility for the death of Jesus does not detract from the fact that Jesus died willingly in compliance with God's will in order to redeem mankind from sin. He did not resist Pilate's death sentence, which he could have done as readily as he avoided the Pharisees' trap. When he was arrested and Peter drew a sword to defend him, Jesus said, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus could easily have thwarted Pilate, but then he wouldn't be our Savior. Should we thank Pilate for his part in our salvation? We think not, but neither do we condemn him, for condemnation of anyone is not be in accord with Jesus' principles. "Then Jesus said [**as he hung on the cross**], 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" (Lk 23:34)

The charge the Jewish leaders preferred against Jesus, that he had been forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar, was factual. After the spies walked away from Jesus, undoubtedly befuddled by his render-unto-Caesar response, and reported back to the Pharisees, the well-educated chief priests undoubtedly exclaimed, "You buffoons! You had him! How can you fail to realize he told you not to pay the emperor's tax?" And that is exactly what they charged him with doing when they dragged him before Pilate a day or two later.

Jesus was guilty of violating Roman law, and thus he was a common criminal in the judgment of the sovereign authority of the nation-state in

which he lived. The Romans killed Jesus because their illicit, man-made laws sanctioned the use of lethal force against those who refused to recognize Rome's sovereignty or who openly opposed its taxes. Living in territory under Roman rule, Jesus was doomed to die by the Roman sword whether some Jews interceded against him or not, because his principles were in conflict with Roman law. He would face the same dilemma if he lived in the United States today.

According to Crossan, one bitter consequence of the Gospels' passion narratives blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus is that they became "the matrix for anti-Semitism." Crossan argues:

Those first Christians were relatively powerless Jews, and compared with them the Jewish authorities represented serious and threatening power. As long as Christians were the marginalized and disenfranchised ones, such passion fiction about Jewish responsibility and Roman innocence did nobody much harm. But once the Roman Empire became Christian, that fiction turned lethal...If all this had stayed on the religious level, each side could have accused and denigrated the other quite safely forever. But by the fourth century, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire, and with the dawn of Christian Europe, anti-Judaism moved from theological debate to lethal possibility. Think, now, of those passion-resurrection stories as heard in a predominantly Christian world. Did those stories of ours send certain people out to kill? (*Who Killed Jesus*, op cit, p. xii)

Crossan makes a valid point. However, the Gospels' passion narratives arguably could not have served to ignite violent anti-Semitism if Jesus' message of nonviolence had not been egregiously distorted by the exegetes'

misinterpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident. False assurances that Jesus put his imprimatur on the force-based constructs of taxation and the state clearly facilitated the fateful affiliation of the Christian church with Rome. A church following the way of Jesus would never have aligned itself with Rome if it understood that Jesus was adamantly anti-statist. Crossan points out the fact that religious rhetoric only becomes lethal when it is amalgamated with the power of the state. We would point out that the state is an equally deadly force when combined with atheism or humanism, as the blood-drenched histories of the Soviet Union and communist China vividly demonstrate. The true cause of the problem is not the errant blame-placing of the Gospels' passion narratives; it is the violent nature of the state, whether aligned with religion or actively suppressing it as communist states often do

A conspicuous example of a lethal mix of state and religion pre-dating any Christian anti-Semitism was Jesus' own murder. Jewish religious leaders had misinterpreted and warped God's laws to accommodate their profitable alliance with Rome. They worried, and rightly so, that if Jesus' principles strictly upholding the law of God were accepted by the Jewish people, Rome would be obliged to crush the people and their leaders to enforce its sovereignty and ensure its revenues. They were spiritually incapacitated and thus incapable of believing God could or would intervene to save them if they upheld His' laws. They were also jealous of the people's embrace of Jesus and his principles. The religious leaders believed their condition of preferment would vanish if he continued. From early in his ministry, the leading Jews had wanted to kill Jesus. They were thwarted by their fear of the people, who were convinced Jesus was a

prophet, and by Roman law, which reserved the subjugating power of a “legal” execution to the almighty state. They needed Rome to carry out their desire to eliminate Jesus for purely selfish reasons, which they cloaked in religious fervor. Rome’s motive, on the other hand, was purely pragmatic. It needed its taxes to survive.

Professor Crossan, in summary of his life-long studies of the historical Jesus, states:

The Kingdom of God movement was Jesus’ program of empowerment for a peasantry becoming steadily more hard pressed, in the first-century Jewish homeland, through insistent taxation, attendant indebtedness, and eventual land expropriation...under Augustan peace...Jesus lived against the systemic injustice and structural evil of that situation...Jesus could have been executed for his activities at any time...(*Who Killed Jesus*, op cit, pp 211, 212)

Crossan identifies the systemic injustice (viz., taxation), and the structural evil (viz., the state), and points out that Jesus’ very life was directed against that evil dyad. It is only a small step from Crossan’s analysis to our contention that Jesus’ principles utterly condemned taxation and the state. Crossan no doubt would agree that it is wrong to assert, as do the orthodox exegetes, that Jesus condoned Caesar’s tax or endorsed the state that crucified him.

In his memoir (*A Long Way From Tipperary*, San Francisco, HarperCollins, 2000), Crossan provides a humorous interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident, which only misses the target as we see it by a hair:

Remember the incident in which Jesus was asked to take a stand for

or against Roman tribute? “I myself,” he said, “do not carry Caesar’s coinage, so show me yours, and I’ll tell you where to put it.” (that’s my own [viz., **Crossan’s**] translation). He gets it and says, “Right, then, since this is Caesar’s image, give it back to him.” He and his companions walked away holding back their laughter while the puzzled questioners argued about his answer. Was it yes or no? Did it mean that they were to pay their coins dutifully into Caesar’s coffers or cast them defiantly into Caesar’s face? **[Or, as we would argue, not use Roman coins nor pay Roman taxes.]** (pp. 199-200)

Another Bible commentator whose understanding of Jesus’ contempt for taxes and the state comes close to our own was the great Russian novelist, Lev Nickolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910). Tolstoy first taught himself Greek then translated the Gospels from early manuscripts and eventually produced his own consolidated Gospel. Naturally, among orthodox Christians critics of his effort abound.

Tolstoy’s rendition of the incident in Matthew 17 when Simon Peter committed Jesus to pay the Temple tax refutes the interpretations of the orthodox exegetes.

If we are sons of God, then we are not obligated for anything to anyone except God; we are free before everyone. We are not obligated for anything, but if taxes are demanded of you, then offer them, not because you are bound but because you must not resist evil.”—*The Gospel According to Tolstoy*, edited and translated by David Patterson, p. 110. (Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1992) (or, see, Tolstoy, Leo, *The Gospel in Brief*, (Translated by Aylmer Maude, first published, 1921, available on Internet at:

<http://www.biblicalproportions.com>)

We have two niggling disagreements with Tolstoy's analysis. We believe Jesus had Peter pay the tax because he pitied Peter's predicament brought about because Peter had impetuously committed Jesus to pay a tax he would not otherwise have paid. Or, perhaps Jesus accepted responsibility for his defacto agent's unwarranted promise on his behalf, and made Peter live up to what was in effect Jesus' own commitment to pay the tax. Tolstoy also missed the mark with his comment on evil. It is the evildoer--not evil itself--that Jesus instructed us not to resist.

Tolstoy gleaned from the Gospels the facts that Jesus renounced the state and rejected the teaching authority of organized Jewish religion vested in priests, scribes, Pharisees and "teachers of the law." Those who accept any Christian church's bogus teaching authority are likely to be stuck with the overtly statist presumptions of Jesus' orthodox apologists, and their demeaning assessment of his character as a people-pleasing politician. In his introduction to *The Gospel According to Tolstoy* (op cit), translator and editor David Patterson says, "Tolstoy believed that the Gospel itself, in fact, rejects all earthly authority, both religious and political. Among the five rules for living laid down by Tolstoy's Jesus is the injunction to make no distinctions between one nation and another, that is, to acknowledge no kings or kingdoms."--(p. xxiv) Right on, brother Leo!

Belatedly searching the Internet after substantially completing this essay, we discovered a few more scholars who either explicitly or implicitly contend Jesus was an anarchist. Perhaps some of these would trace their position to Tolstoy. The individuals along with websites that can lead one to discover their understanding of Jesus' character are as follows: Karl Barth,

www.island-of-freedom.com; Jacques Ellul, www.ellul.org; Alphonse Maillot, www.jesusradicals.com; James Redford, www.anti-state.com; Roderick W. Marling, www.kamakala.com.

There is one scholar who is in virtual agreement with our thesis, whose studies of canonical and non-canonical Gospel literature compelled him to write a book entitled, *The Hidden Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, Phanes Press, 1994). Author Lance deHaven-Smith is identified—rather incongruously it would seem—as “Professor of Political Philosophy and Associate Director of the Institute of Government for the State University System of Florida.” The following quotations, chapter titles, and section headings, extracted from deHaven’s book, serve to demonstrate his anarchic analysis, and need no elaborating commentary from us.

[In addition to the canonical Gospels], I have relied on the Nag Hammadi Library, a set of fourth-century manuscripts unearthed in Egypt in 1945...These manuscripts contain many of Jesus’ most explicit political statements, and presumably this is why they were suppressed by the Church after it was absorbed into the political system of the Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine...Jesus could not preach this manifesto openly, because it implied that both the Roman Empire and the glory-demanding priests of Judaism should be overthrown. **[p. 13]**...The politics preached by Jesus is political only in the sense that it is anti-political. It is opposed to all forms of government that we know...Our fear of doing without collective force...has been woven into Western civilization for three millennia. **[p. 18]**...Jesus presented under the very nose of the Roman Empire [the

view] that the only peaceful and enduring social order is one ruled by divine law. [p. 19]...I believe, when Jesus said human laws and status are satanic, he was being entirely consistent with the Old Testament. [p. 89]...Obeying the Romans *or paying taxes*...were obvious transgressions against God's domain. [p. 1] THE POSSIBILITY OF ORDERLY ANARCHY [P. 86] THE EVIL SPIRIT OF THE STATE [P. 88] JESUS WANTED TO FREE US FROM SIN BY PUTTING AN END TO HUMAN LAW. [P. 104] [Note: The capitalized quotations represent chapter titles or section headings in Mr. deHaven-Smith's book.]

Another authority containing some elements of our interpretation of the render-unto-Caesar incident is *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (op cit). One pertinent annotation explaining the render-unto-Caesar incident as recorded in the Gospel of Mark is as follows:

[T]he representatives of both the Jerusalem priestly establishment and Herod Antipas's regime conspire to entrap Jesus into giving some pretext to arrest and kill him. They preface the entrapping question with heavy, insincere flattery. *Is it lawful to pay tax to the emperor?* A genuine dilemma. In the strict adherence to the law of Moses, supposedly advocated by the Pharisees themselves, it was not lawful because God was their exclusive sovereign. Yet the Romans treated nonpayment of tribute as rebellion. Turning the trick question back upon the questioners, Jesus exposes their own collaboration with the Romans by asking them to show him a coin—literally forcing their hand. Jesus ingeniously gives an ambiguous answer that does not literally

advocate nonpayment of tribute to the emperor, but could be understood that way by those committed to the first commandment of the Mosaic law: *the things that are the emperor's*, i.e., nothing; *the things that are God's*, i.e., everything. (Note, p. 81, New Testament)

Unfortunately, detracting from this realistic assessment, the Oxford editor's annotations for the render-unto-Caesar incident in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke repeat the same tired interpretive fantasies that we have been exploding. Their brief comment about the incident in Matthew repeats the palpably false proposition that Jesus would avoid a "yes" answer to assuage the sensibilities of some of his listeners. "To approve the tax would be offensive to Jewish nationalists; to disapprove would be treasonous." (Note, p. 42, New Testament)

Commenting on the incident in Luke, where the text itself refutes the notion that a yes answer was even considered a possibility, the Oxford editors say of the incident that when Jesus' accusers dragged him before Pilate they lied about what had transpired during the coin incident. The Oxford editors comment, "A falsified version of this incident lies behind the charge against Jesus before Pilate." (note, p. 136, New Testament) Wrong, oh learned editors! The charge, that Jesus was "forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor," as we have shown here and as you have acknowledged elsewhere in your notations, was factual, not falsified.

CHAPTER 11: SEPARATE CHRISTIANS FROM THE STATE

Having lived preponderantly according to man-made laws for thousands of years, it is natural that most people can scarcely imagine living by God's laws. Many people have become utterly dependent on their government's use of force to secure desirable benefits and advantages. They cannot see that everything worthwhile that government provides by dint of force could be supplied by means of cooperation, persuasion, or voluntary exchange on the free market, and that it would be delivered at a lower cost without the concomitant loss of freedom and morality the state always exacts in exchange for its favors.

Quitting any addiction, however, whether to alcohol, drugs, gambling or government benefits, is a daunting prospect because the fix is visible and instantly available, whereas the enormous long-term benefits of being sober, staying clean, or living righteously and free are obscure and only attainable through perseverance over the long run. Ask a number of recovered alcoholics and addicts about quitting their addiction. Many will declare that it required an act of faith in God to get through withdrawal and sustain their recovery. Without exception, however, they agree it was worth the effort. Unfortunately, a Twelve-Step recovery program for addiction to government dependency does not yet exist.

Jesus warned his disciples, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:6) The Pharisees and Sadducees may be gone, but their spiritual descendants abound. If Jesus ministered to America today, his admonition might well be, "Beware of the yeast of politicians and bureaucrats!" Government benefits are the yeast of these latter-day Pharisees, corrupting so many people that entitlements may accurately be

described as earthly manifestations of Satan's temptations.

Given Jesus' teaching and his palpable example of the virtue of nonviolence by his death on the cross at the hands of the Roman state, how can Christians have anything to do with the violent state? Rome was by no means unique in its violent nature. A monopoly on organized violence is the one unchanging characteristic of all governments. Many Christians have been misled by the exegetes, but Bible interpreters are not the only scholars pandering subserviently to the state. Many political scientists also play a part in the deception. Consider the following observation by one very exceptional political scientist, R. J. Rummel, in his meticulously researched masterpiece, *Death by Government* (op cit):

One university course I teach **[at the University of Hawaii]** is an introduction to political science. Each semester I review several possible introductory texts (the best measure of the discipline) for the course...They just do not fit or explain, or are even contradictory to the existence of a hell state like Pol Pot's Cambodia, a gulag state like Stalin's Soviet Union, or a genocide state like Hitler's Germany. For instance, one textbook I recently read spends a chapter describing the functions of government. Among these were law and order, individual security, cultural maintenance, and social welfare. Political scientists are still writing this stuff, when we have numerous examples of governments that kill hundreds of thousands and even millions of their own citizens, enslave the rest, and abolish traditional culture...Then there is the common and fundamental justification of government that it exists to protect citizens against the anarchic jungle that would otherwise threaten their lives and property. Such archaic or sterile

views show no appreciation of *democide's* existence and all its related horrors and suffering. **[Note: Rummel defines democide as murder by government, including genocide, politicide and mass murder.]** They are inconsistent with a regime that stands astride society like a gang of thugs over hikers they have captured in the woods, robbing all, raping some, torturing others for fun, murdering those they don't like, and terrorizing the rest into servile obedience...A preeminent fact about government is that some of them murder millions in cold blood. (P. 26, 27)

Americans who shake their heads and say, "Not my government," can only dispute the numbers. Yes, the governments that have murdered by the tens of millions have generally been totalitarian, and those that have slaughtered by the millions have usually been authoritarian or totalitarian, but democracies, including the United States, are equally guilty of democide, if only on a smaller scale. Unfortunately for Christians, murder is murder. God's command is not, Thou shall not kill more than a million. God's command is, Thou shall not kill--period! Americans who use the terms "my government," or "my nation" acknowledge their personal responsibility as principals for their agents' terrorist attacks that slaughtered hundreds-of-thousands of civilian Japanese by A-bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki and fire bombing residential areas of Tokyo, and murdering hundreds of Koreans civilians fleeing the Red-Chinese Army, and hundreds of innocent villagers in Vietnam, and noncombatant Somalians, and civilian Iraqis who got too close to "smart" bombs, and Serbians and Albanian Kosovars, including women and children in most cases, and on and on. Add to this digest of US government atrocities the enslavement of blacks, the annihilation of entire

tribes of American Indians and the theft of much of the nation's land from the Indians by force or fraud, and it may be truthfully stated that the US government has one of the worst record of crimes against innocent civilians of any government in the world. Most of the other truly evil regimes of the twentieth century except China's communists have fallen.

For a fuller catalogue of American atrocities overseas, the reader is directed to author/journalist/historian William Blum's book, *Rogue State* (Monroe, Maine, Common Courage Press, 3rd Edition, 2005). In the introduction, Blum writes,

Between 1945 and 2005 the United States has attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, and to crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes. In the process, the US has caused the end of life for several million people, and condemned many more to a life of agony and despair. Sales of *Rogue State*, initially published in 2000, were languishing when in January, 2006, Osama bin Laden recommended that American's read Blum's work and mentioned *Rogue State* by name in a taped message broadcast by Aljazeera and replayed by the Western news media. As a result of bin Laden's endorsement, *Rogue State* went from 205,763rd to 26th on Amazon.com's index of the most-ordered books within a matter of hours. *Freeing the World to Death, Essays on the American Empire*, (Common Courage Press, 2005) is another Blum books and a must-read for those who view the United States through rose-colored glasses.

Blum performs a valuable service to history by bringing together in one place for all the world to see a doleful compilation of America's crimes against people in other lands. Unfortunately, Blum is a socialist who fails to

perceive the root cause of American atrocities, which is the American people's acquiescence in the initiation of force by their government to obtain their wants and needs and accomplish their national objectives. Blum says in *Freeing the World to Death*, "What most of the countries on the receiving end of twentieth-century-American imperialism had in common was their attempt to establish a society that offered an alternative to the capitalist model." [viz., **socialism**] (P.10) Blum mistakenly blames *laissez-faire* capitalism and particularly US corporations operating internationally for America's imperialist offences, while failing to recognize the fatal flaw that infects capitalist and socialist societies alike, which is their respective governments' use of force.

Blum could benefit from Jesus' wisdom. To well-meaning socialists like Blum we say, We love all of your uplifting plans and programs for the betterment of society, and would endorse them one and all if they could be accomplished without being *enforced*. But, government is force. Whether that force is used to charter and protect corporations pursuing *unholy* profits, which, by the way, is corporatism not capitalism, or used to provide *benevolent* social programs, *all* such statist activities are doomed to produce only evil for the same reason that nettles produce only nettles.

It is truly incredible that Christian-church interpreters of the Bible claim Jesus sanctioned human government, which must include the homicidal regimes of Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and the Hutus of Rwanda to mention but a few, when he said render to Caesar what is Caesar's. Their contention is palpable nonsense! It is indisputable that Jesus had nothing good to say about government. His principles condemn the cornerstone tenet of all governments (viz., the *right* to initiate force), a tenet that

distinguishes the state from all other human institutions. Jesus did, however, endorse the legal maxim that a principal is responsible for the acts of his or her agents. Those who embrace any democratic government are personally responsible for the murders and mayhem their government agents commit. Although most people won't accept this, the analysis that finds them guilty cannot be logically resisted.

Students of the Gospels are familiar with the term "hard sayings." It is from the Gospel of John:

Then Jesus said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this said, *This is a hard saying; who can hear it?* From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (Jn 6:53-66, KJV. Italics added.)

"Hard sayings" has come to mean any of the teachings Jesus espoused that appear difficult to accept and put into practice. The Sermon on the Mount is rife with hard sayings:

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth...Whoever marries

a divorced woman commits adultery...Do not swear **[an oath]** at all...Do not resist an evildoer. But if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you...Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. (Mt 5:5-44)

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” rightly understood, is another hard saying. It may appear that resisting taxes is a profitable pastime, but not so. As Jesus’ crucifixion shows, it is a dangerous stance to take, particularly for those tax resisters who voice their objections publicly. Irwin Schiff, to whom this book is dedicated and whose writing we have used here as a reference, was forbidden by the federal government to sell his book. He is now languishing in prison for what will probably be the rest of his life because he refused to render to Caesar that which is not Caesar’s. Many, like Jesus, have paid the ultimate price for opposing taxes. Peacefully and honestly resisting taxes is materially impoverishing although spiritually uplifting. Cutting the octopus state’s leash is neither free nor easy. The state does not willingly relinquish control of its citizens and their taxes, lest it shrivel and die.

Resisting taxes, however, is a cakewalk compared to resisting the state’s alluring inducements to government dependency. Social Security and Medicare “entitlements” seduce retirees. “I paid for it,” is proffered in defense. But the truth of the matter is that what one contributed was not paid voluntarily, rather it was taken by force (of law)—viz., stolen. Being a victim of theft, however, does not justify nor exonerate stealing. For words of encouragement on spurning these inducements to dependency, visit the following link on the Internet for a wonderful essay entitled, “I’m Spartacus:”

<http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch/sparacus.htm>.

We think improvement in one's condition of dependency on the state should be the primary objective of committed, nonviolent voluntaryists and modern disciples of Jesus. The word voluntaryist (alternatively spelled, voluntarist) describes one who is a pacifistic anarchist. It is a useful word in the English vocabulary to distinguish nonviolent anarchists from those deluded hoodlums who refer to themselves as anarchists yet engage in violence to protest whatever it is they don't like about the state or about life in general. These pseudo-anarchists have hijacked a once-noble word and besmirched it beyond rehabilitation.

Other disciples of Jesus, like us, who find they cannot sever all ties to the violent state, may take comfort in the Gospel story of Jesus and the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, which is recorded in Luke's Gospel.

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not see him, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much. Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,

because he too is a son of Abraham. For the son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (Lk 19:1-10)

Zacchaeus, a notorious sinner because he was a tax collector, was moved to repent by his brief encounter with Jesus. Jesus saw something special in Zacchaeus. It may have been the humility or audacity he demonstrated in climbing a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus, or perhaps it was the tenacity and ingenuity of his resolve to see Jesus. More likely, Jesus knew that in his heart Zacchaeus longed for righteousness, but his work as a tax collector corrupted him.

Perhaps the most important lesson this passage teaches us is to treat tax collectors as people who can become particularly effective disciples of Jesus. One cannot go wrong pursuing peaceful tax resistance with the same patient love for tax collectors that Jesus exhibited. Relying on the wisdom of Jesus and striving to put his principles to work in our lives, we will surely become better at resisting Satan’s inducements to partake of government’s enticing benefits, and at resisting taxes. After all, Zacchaeus’ initial attempt at righteous living was really rather insipid, for he merely gave up a job and only gave away half of his accumulated wealth, even though he apparently got rich collecting taxes. Nevertheless, Jesus approved of Zacchaeus’ inaugural-if-attenuated effort to reform his character. We think Jesus would approve of our own incipient efforts as long as we are trying to be true to his principles

Jesus concluded his Sermon on the Mount with these encouraging words:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rocks. The rain fell, the

floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.” (Mt 7:24-25)

Those who heed the words of Jesus are his disciples. All knowledge of Jesus and the most steadfast belief that he is the Christ and one’s personal Savior is of no avail without adopting and living by the principles he preached and practiced. Jesus said, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, no more, no less, and unto God the things that are God’s. In order to do so, surely we must renounce the use of force in the conduct of our affairs and sever our relationship with the violent state. Complying with Jesus’ principles is the truth that will set us free.

French philosopher and economist, Frederic Bastiat, observed that freedom is an act of faith in God and in his handiwork. Voluntaryist Carl Watner, combining the wisdom of Jesus and Gandhi, made the profound observation that the faith that moves mountains is simply recognition that “if one takes care of the means, the ends will take care of themselves.” The way and the truth Jesus espoused can set any individual free, even from chronic government dependency. His way is paved with love and persuasion--not force.

If the task of establishing a stateless society appears insurmountable, if the withering away of the state seems like a far-fetched utopian dream, imagine how very much harder it must have been for a man called Jesus to overcome doubt and death to achieve his resurrection--thereby saving our souls and so very many others in the process.

The kingdom of God that Jesus so often mentioned is undoubtedly a stateless society. We can contribute to its emergence by steadfastly renouncing the use of force in all our affairs, resolutely rejecting all

inducements to partake of the evanescent benefits proffered by the violent state, and relentlessly resisting taxes.

CHAPTER 12: SLAVERY AND TAXATION

This chapter was a late addition. It came about because an anonymous critic of this essay argued that taxes could not be sinful because neither God nor any of the prophets or authors of the Old Testament ever denounced taxes or those who levied them, which would include all of the kings of Israel and Judah from the first king to the last. In further support of his contention, the critic pointed out a passage from the Gospel of Luke in which taxation apparently meets with the tacit approval of John the Baptist, to wit: “Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Exact no more than that which is appointed you.’” (Lk 3:12-13, KJV) Furthermore, the critic reminded us that Jesus’ praised John the Baptist with these words, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.” (Mt 11:11)

On the other hand, another critic we think is more enlightened recently pointed out to us that John the Baptist never said to the tax collectors, “exact no more than that which is appointed to you.” The Greek manuscript from which the King James Version was translated literally reads in English as follows: “the one (referring to John the Baptist) said to them, ‘nothing more from the having been directed to you practice.’” (This literal translation is from the *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, Paul R. McReynolds, Editor, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL, 1999, p. 212) As our worthy critic pointed out, these words make sense only if they refer back to what John had just told the crowd to do in order to save themselves from “the wrath (of the Christ) to come.” (3-7) John had said, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do

likewise.” (3:11) In the very next verse (3:12) the tax collectors appear to have been greatly convicted of their multiple sins of tax collecting in which six of the ten commandments had been breached. In consideration of their evils it is likely they would have felt unworthy to receive forgiveness. In order to satisfy their anxiety they felt it necessary to ask John to restate his command explicitly saying what *they* must do. John rebuked them telling them they were to do exactly what he had just told all of them to do. Rather than telling the tax collectors to collect no more than the amount prescribed, John told them, in effect, “Didn’t you hear what I just said? Give half of your material wealth to those who have not!.” Effectively, he told them they could no longer be predatory tax collectors if they desired the redemption of the Christ. The kindly advisor who illuminated this difficult passage for us by his very reasonable interpretation of what John the Baptist actually said to the tax collectors is a Mr. John J. of Victoria, Australia.

The first critic’s defense of taxation against the charge of sinfulness on the basis of the Old Testament is essentially the same as the defense of slavery that misguided, Christian, slave owners employed. It is true that nowhere in the Bible is slavery explicitly condemned as sinful. And it is likely all the kings of Israel kept slaves. Indeed, it can be argued, based on the Old Testament, God himself condoned slavery. In Exodus (21:20-21), God, allegedly speaking through Moses, proclaimed the following ordinance. “When a slave owner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; *for the slave is the owner’s property.*” And in Leviticus, God purportedly tells the Israelites, again through Moses:

As for the male and female slaves you may have, it is from the nations

around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. You may also acquire them from the aliens residing with you, and from their families that are with you, who have been born in your land; and they may be your property. You may keep them as possessions for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. (Lev. 25:44-46)

These and many other passages, by the way, afford solid ground for not taking the Bible literally. Such passages are contrary to the explicit instructions for righteous living Jesus prescribed for his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount, and are opposed to the way he lived and died. Nevertheless, Christians relied on them to justify their part in slavery over the course of many centuries.

The Apostle Peter also appears to have found the practice of slavery unexceptional and even quite acceptable. In Peter's first epistle he even seems to lend slavery his tacit support. To the exiles of the dispersion he wrote, "Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle, but also those who are harsh." (1 Peter 2:18)

Paul was even more sympathetic with the practice of slavery, lending his influential support to slave owners. To the Ephesians (6:5) he wrote, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ, not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart." Paul repeats this theme in his letter to the Colossians (3:21-23). In his letter to Titus (2:9-10) he advises Titus to, "Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything

they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Thus, on the basis of the Bible, one is on much firmer ground condemning taxation than slavery. At least regarding taxes, Jesus implicitly condemned them and explicitly pointed to tax collectors as prototypical sinners. One cannot find such criticism of slavery or slavers in the Old Testament or the New. Precisely the same Bible-based argument our critic proposed in defense of taxation was raised by American slavers defending their evil practice prior to its belated abolition from “the land of the free.” It would be redundant to recite here the decisive arguments against slavery based on the teachings of Jesus that the renowned abolitionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought to bear against slavery and its apologists, which eventually carried the day. The same Jesus principles previously cited in condemnation of taxation apply with equal vigor to that peculiar and treacherous institution called slavery. Jesus’ principles underpinned the abolitionist arguments throughout a campaign that took more than a century to achieve its objective. One can only hope and pray that taxation’s demise will be swifter!

It is manifestly impossible for slavers to practice the Jesus principle known as the Golden Rule (“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”--Lk 6:31), or to adhere to Jesus’ principle of renouncing the use of force in the conduct of one’s human affairs (“Pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.--Lk 6:27-28; and see Mt 5:38ff). Of course, what is said of slavers is equally true of tax collectors. Neither slavers nor tax collectors allow their respective victims to do unto them what they do to their victims. Both slavery and taxation depend completely on force and violence being embedded in and upheld by the laws

of a reigning government. These twin evils have at times been embraced by statist Christians, although never by true disciples of Jesus.

The closer one examines slavery from the perspective of its immorality, the more it looks like taxation--and vice versa. During the course of history, taxation has supplanted slavery as a more effective means of exploiting subjugated people. It happens because taxation is easier to impose, cheaper to administer, and produces heftier returns. Fortunately, from the standpoint of slaves and taxpayers, the Jesus principles stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims, condemning both techniques of forcibly expropriating the fruits of the victims' labors.

The fact that the canonical gospels fail to record that Jesus explicitly denounced taxation or slavery does not reveal any moral weakness in his philosophy or character. What it reveals is the paucity of his chroniclers' reports as well as the inability of Christian exegetes to comprehend, explain and apply the principles of right conduct Jesus prescribed. His principles are universal in their application, and they unequivocally forbid both taxation and slavery with equal force to those who would follow him, any Old-Testament, pre-Jesus, biblical gibberish to the contrary notwithstanding.

In citing John the Baptist's ambiguous advice to tax collectors and pointing out Jesus' high regard for John, our critic omitted the second half of the verse he cited in which Jesus praised John. As great as John was, Jesus qualified his praise for him by adding, "Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Mt 11:11) As folks who are counted among the least in the kingdom of God, disciples of Jesus have the benefit of his divine-like wisdom to help us evaluate taxes and tax collectors, which John the Baptizer had not. The true moral compass on taxes and slavery is Jesus.

No doubt John, too, would have followed Jesus on these and all other spiritual questions if he'd had the benefit of Jesus' teaching. But John was a herald, not a disciple. He never heard the Sermon on the Mount.

Whether spoken by Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, or John Baptist, when anyone's words appear to conflict with the principles Jesus taught and lived by, Jesus' disciples will adhere to his principles. Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus to "collect no more than the amount proscribed." The Lord's mere presence in his house influenced Zacchaeus to resign his post as chief tax collector, give half of his wealth to the poor (just as John the Baptist told those other tax collectors to do), and make restitution of four times any amount he had stolen for himself beyond what the law required him to steal for Rome. Only then did Jesus declare that Zacchaeus had achieved salvation. Jesus did not tell Levi to go easy on his victims. He required him to abandon his post as a tax collector in order to follow Jesus. (Mt 9:9, Mk 2:14, Lk 5:27) It is entirely logical based on Jesus' well-known and friendly association with tax collectors (Mt 9:10, Mt 11:19, Mt 21:32, Mk2:15, Lk 5:29, Lk 7:29, Lk 7:34, Lk 15:1) to suppose that many besides Levi and Zacchaeus renounced their unholy profession in order to follow Jesus. If so, that alone would be sufficient cause for a Roman procurator of taxes like Pilate to crucify Jesus as a rebel, which is exactly what he did, for crucifixion was reserved for such criminals.

John concludes his gospel by acknowledging the paucity of the record setting forth Jesus prolific accomplishments. "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them down, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could

not contain the books that would be written.” (21:24-25) So in wonder we ask ourselves: How many miracles did Jesus perform? How many tax collectors did Jesus reform?

Writing this chapter required revisiting the abominable institution that was slavery, as well as the bold thinking of the noble abolitionists who brought about its demise. Many of the leaders of the abolition movement both in England and America were disciples of Jesus. Some were early anarchists. On the other hand, the vast majority of orthodox Christian churches throughout the period of the American government’s sanction of slavery opposed abolition, often for purely pragmatic reasons. The bottom line is that Christian churches in general closed their eyes to slavery until after it was abolished, just as they sanction taxation now for its benefits to them.

We have been harsh on post-Constantine Christianity throughout this essay because of its alliance with government and its embrace of taxes. The inducements offered by slavery’s evil twin are likely to continue to pervert Christianity until the sacerdotal order is replaced by true disciples of Jesus. Most priests, preachers and ministers in America today are dependent on tax-deductible contributions for their daily bread, and, as they see it, for the survival of their congregations. Their slavish tax-code dependency compromises their integrity and makes them servants of the almighty state instead of the Lord, for, as Jesus said, “no man can serve two masters.”

CHAPTER 13: *MALUM IN SE VERSUS MALUM PROHIBITUM* (THE IMMORALITY OF TAXATION VERSUS THE MORALITY OF RESISTING)

The address of a website providing a treasure trove of information is http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page. This Internet encyclopedia has been judged by some scholars to be as good as Britannica. Better yet, it's free! The following definitions are derived from *Wiki*, as it is called:

Malum in se (plural *mala in se*) is a Latin phrase meaning wrong in itself; it is an act that is illegal from the nature of the act, i.e. it is inherently evil without any fact of its being noticed or punished; such crimes as larceny rape and murder are considered *malum in se*. This concept was used to develop the various common law crimes.

This term is to be distinguished from *Malum prohibitum*, which simply means wrongs that are prohibited, i.e., not necessarily inherently immoral or hurtful, but only wrong by statute, such as parking violations, or smuggling, or selling products without a licence, or selling prohibited products.

It should be apparent to anyone that tax evasion, tax resistance, and willful failure to file a tax return, are all in the category *mala prohibitum*. No one, except perhaps some rapacious people who depend for their welfare on the proceeds of taxation, believes it is evil or wrong for an individual to keep the fruits of his or her own labors. Indeed, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus, instructing his disciples by parable, has his righteous protagonist in the story ask rhetorically, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" (Mt 20:15) In the context of the parable, the unstated answer is obvious: "Of course you are." Only when men enact perverse laws does benign behavior such as retaining one's own property become a crime. But

then, of course, the true criminals are the freedom-robbing legislators.

The act of collecting a tax involves taking someone's property without his or her consent by means of force or coercion. It is patently *malum in se*—evil by its very nature. The act fits *Wikipedia's* definition of the crime of theft like a glove. "In the criminal law theft (also known as stealing) is the wrongful taking of someone else's property without that person's freely given consent." Thus, it is self-evident that the only reason tax collectors do not go to jail for their morally repugnant behavior is because a legislature has enacted laws legalizing their plunder. However, no legislature on earth, no subterfuge nor sophistry, can transform taxation from an evil institution—a *malum in se*--into something moral or beneficial. (For an insightful, delightful essay on the web entitled, "Taxation is Robbery," by Frank Chodorov, visit: <http://www.mises.org/etexts/taxrob.asp>)

Tax evasion, on the other hand, can be *malum in se* or *malum prohibitum*. There would be nothing wrong with tax evasion if human laws did not prohibit it. However, one must be cautious here. The word evasion, according to *Webster*, means avoiding something by deceit or cleverness. Cleverness is not immoral, but deceit for any purpose certainly is.

The federal income tax requires and depends on self-reporting, which has the effect of encouraging dishonesty among individuals who only want "to do what [they] choose with what belongs to [them]," as Jesus so succinctly put it, but in the singular. Because of this inducement to dishonesty, Will Rogers could insightfully observe, "The income tax has made more liars out of the American people than golf has." The only sure way for most people to remain entirely honest in relation to the income tax is to refrain from making any declarations whatsoever on a tax return. Given

the incomprehensible complexity of the tax code, any declaration made under oath is likely to be false, which is why Mr. Rogers added, “Even when you make a tax form out on the level, you don't know when it's through if you are a crook or a martyr.”

Unlike tax evasion, forthright tax resistance, so long as it is nonviolent, is never immoral. Jesus certainly appears to have advocated resistance when, in response to the question in the Gospel of Mark whether they should pay Caesar's tax or not, he told an audience of Jews whose religion taught them that everything on earth belongs to God, “Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar (nothing), and give God what belongs to God (everything).” Taxation has become so deeply rooted in our culture that it is unlikely that anything short of righteous, adamant resistance will dislodge it, which further explains why Jesus would have ventured to urge tax resistance.

For perhaps as long as several millennia, taxation's apologists have engaged in cunning sophistry to make their evil institution appear, if not moral, at least necessary. Some of the more famous defenses would include Founding Father Ben Franklin, “In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.” Or, Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., “Taxes are the price we pay for civilization.” And, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Taxes, after all, are dues we pay for the privileges of membership in an organized society.” Of course Holmes and Roosevelt were dependent on tax revenues. In making such statements they were serving their master, Uncle Sam.

Moral glosses of recent vintage applied to taxation include the concept of paying one's “fair share,” and the oft-reiterated platitude that the only thing Americans despise more than paying taxes is “freeloading” tax protesters who refuse to pay. Of course what is “fair” is never defined and impossible to

determine. The concept that something “fair” must be imposed by force is ludicrous on its face. Nothing fair involves force. Furthermore, the vast majority of Americans reap tax “benefits” more costly than they are willing to pay for with their tax dollars, imposing the excess cost on future generations through the elixir of deficit spending. For an American taxpayer to call anyone a freeloader for resisting taxes is unadulterated hypocrisy.

The Internal Revenue Service recently performed intensive, line-by-line examinations of 46,000 tax returns for the year 2001. Based on this sampling, the agency determined American taxpayers under reported their tax liability by \$345 billion for that one year! The survey (IRS National Research Program) showed that where the taxpayers’ prospects of being caught were lowest, the highest rates of cheating occurred. It found fifty-seven percent of income not reported to the IRS by a third party went unreported! The only reason the number isn’t closer to one-hundred percent is that most self-employed taxpayers who do submit more-or-less honest returns do so only because they fear the IRS. Based on the IRS’s survey, the sum total of American taxpayers’ morality can readily be deduced: they have none! And therein lies the greatest tragedy of embracing taxation as a means of financing one’s wants and needs.

CHAPTER 14: JESUS' PRINCIPLES

Throughout this essay we have repeatedly referred to Jesus' principles. What are the principles Jesus promulgated, many of which derive from traditional Jewish morality? First and foremost, he urged the love of God, which includes and requires the love of all of God's children:

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commands hang all the law and the prophets." (Mt 22:36-40)

One cannot love one's neighbors and simultaneously send an IRS agent to take the fruits of their labor, by force if necessary, to pay the college tuition of one's children.

In the marvelously radical Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11) leading off his great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed his followers to be meek and merciful, righteous and pure of heart, and to be peacemakers. One cannot employ a standing army and send it to do violence in foreign lands while endeavoring to live by the virtues Jesus preached.

On the mountain, Jesus urged his followers to observe God's commandments, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (Mt 5:17) God's two commandments, "Thou shall not steal," and, "Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods," implicitly but unequivocally proscribe taxation. One simply cannot consume tax booty and adhere to Jesus' principles.

On the mount, Jesus preached, "You have heard that it was said to

those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' but I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister you are liable to judgment." (Mt 5:21-22) One simply cannot employ government agents of death--soldiers, sailors, airmen, CIA officers, prison executioners, etc.--to kill other human beings and pretend to abide by Jesus' principles of love and forgiveness.

Jesus also said, "You have heard that it was said of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows that you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all...Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." (Mt 5:33-37) One cannot follow the way of Jesus and sign a federal income tax return, or take an oath of office, or swear allegiance to the state, or put one's hand upon the Bible in a court of law.

Jesus said, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'...Your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things will be given to you as well." (Mt 6:31-33) One cannot rely upon the state's monopoly on violence to procure one's needs while being guided by Jesus' principles. The "daily bread" of The Lord's Prayer includes everything a body and soul needs.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith...Go, let it be done for you according to your faith." (Mt 8:10-13) "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Mt 8:26) "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven." (Mt 9:3) "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well." (Mt 9:22) "Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched

their eyes and said, According to your faith let it be done to you. And their eyes were opened.” (Mt 9:28-9) “You of little faith. Why do you doubt?” (Mt 14:31) “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” (Mt. 15:28) “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Mt 17:20) “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.”

The faith required to adhere to all of Jesus’ principles is faith in God--not in the nanny state.

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NED'S ADDENDUM

One of the better aids I have found to understanding Jesus is a small book by Emmet Fox entitled, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York, Harper & Row, 1934). In Chapter I, Fox states:

I propose to show that the message which Jesus brought has a unique value because it is...the only perfect statement of the Truth of the nature of God and man, and of life, and of the world; and of the relationships that exist between them. And far more than this...it constitutes a practical method for the development of the soul and for the shaping of our lives and destinies into the things we really wish them to be...The plain fact is that Jesus taught no theology whatsoever. His teaching is entirely spiritual and metaphysical...What he insisted on was a certain spirit of one's conduct, and he was careful to teach principles only.

Jesus may not have explicitly preached tax resistance or anarchy, but the spiritual principles he expounded require that we practice them. One statement in Fox's book is particularly pertinent to our objective here.

Either Jesus is to be taken seriously, or he is not to be taken seriously, in which case his teachings should be dropped altogether and people should cease to call themselves Christians. To pay lip service to his name, to say that Christianity is the divinely inspired Truth, to boast of being Christian, and then to quietly evade all the definite implications of his teaching, is hypocrisy and weakness of the most utterly fatal kind...The trouble and sorrow that humanity suffers are really due to the very fact that our mode of life is opposed to the Truth, that the things that he taught and the things that he said seem to us at first sight to be

foolish and wild.

Whereas I heartily endorse Fox's Sermon on the Mount as an aid to understanding Jesus, I think he erred interpreting one of Jesus' wilder statements. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." (Mt 5:38-39) Of this passage Fox says:

[Jesus...concerns] himself only with states of consciousness, with the thoughts and beliefs that men accept: for these are the things that matter, the things that are causative. He gives no instructions for details of external conduct, and so the references here to...turning the other cheek, are illustrative and symbolic of mental states, and not to be taken in the narrow, literal sense...Turning the other cheek...would be in the last degree unlikely to do anything but harm to both parties; and we should note particularly that Jesus, when he was struck in the room of Pilate, did not do this himself; on the contrary, he met his enemies with grave dignity. This instruction about turning the other cheek refers to the changing of one's thoughts.

I disagree with Fox. I am confident that Jesus meant exactly what he said both literally and figuratively, physically and spiritually. Furthermore, Fox is wrong about what he says happened when Jesus "was in the room of Pilate." I have read and reread all four Gospels in several translations, and checked the non-canonical accounts as well. Thus, I know that when Jesus was before the chief priest prior to his trial he was slapped in the face (Mt 26:67, Mk 14:65, Lk 22:63-64, Jn 18:22-23), and before Pilate he was struck in the face and spit upon (Mt 27:30, Mk 15:19, Jn 19:3). I also know that there is

nothing in the record of any of the Gospels to indicate that when Jesus was struck he did not turn the other cheek--undoubtedly with grave dignity--to the ones who struck him. Fox is speculating on how Jesus responded because the Gospels fail to report whether Jesus turned his cheek or not. I am confident that he did.

For a better perspective on the wisdom of turning the other cheek, I recommend the book, *I Must Speak Out* by Carl Watner (San Francisco, Fox & Wilkes, 1999). It contains several chapters on nonviolent resistance to aggression. Watner says:

I do believe that violent self-defense is a departure from the principle of non-violence...A person of integrity is more concerned with the means than the ends. Such a person would rather give up his own life than take the life of another. As the ancient Stoics put it, we must all die some time. It is more important how we live and deport ourselves, than whether we preserve our existence temporarily. The Biblical commandment did not say, 'Thou shall not kill, except in self-defense of the family or for the common good.' A person simply has to have faith that 'if one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself,' and let the chips fall where they may." (p. 82-83)

Jesus was a man of unblemished integrity. Even those who wanted him dead acknowledged that fact. He did indeed teach, as Fox argues, spiritual principles, and that attention to one's thoughts is the path to righteousness because out of one's thoughts comes action. But literally turning the other cheek to an aggressor is a daunting challenge of both spiritual and physical dimensions. If, as I choose to presume, Jesus did turn the other cheek to the blows he received before the chief priests' and from Pilate's henchmen,

nothing detrimental to his mission came of his action. Oh, yes, he was put to death, but only to rise from the dead and thereby fulfill his mission on earth as Savior. And he set an example of nonviolent human behavior that will live on as long as the human species survives.

The most common consequence of making the commitment to turn the other cheek by adopting an attitude of non-aggressive humility in the face of violence may be that those who do so are kept safe from violence by God. According to John Hostetler in *Hutterite Society* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University, 1974) Hutterite religious communities have been around for over 400 years, and there has never been a single homicide among them. In their North-American villages there are no police forces. These benefits, it seems, are spiritual consequences of the Hutterites consistently practicing nonviolence including abstaining from government benefits. God could and most assuredly would secure from harm any nation of people who acknowledged Him as their lawmaker, rather than a monarch or legislature relying on force to accomplish its ends, and followed through by obeying His laws—the Ten Commandments.

It is September 1984. I am northbound on Interstate 271 at 60 mph, on the way home after driving my daughter to her college dorm. My wife is sleeping lying across the back seat, and my youngest son is curled up asleep on the front bench seat his head next to my hip. Their seat belts are fastened, mine foolishly is not. For some unremembered reason, I am reciting the Lord's Prayer. Unnoticed by me, a speeding car is overtaking me with a drunk driver behind the wheel attempting to elude pursuing police at over 100 mph. The driver doesn't quite make it around my car. Impact is at

the left rear, and his car proceeds along the left side of the compact Buick I am driving, removing the left-rear fender, left-rear door, driver's door and left-front fender. Absent these parts, the little Buick is impelled by the force of the collision to the right across two lanes of traffic, a paved berm, and onto a flat grassy strip of earth made soft by a heavy, all-day rain. Soft sod grasps the right-front tire first, causing the car to swerve sharply right. Centrifugal force pulls me from behind the wheel and out through the space where a door used to be. By this time the car may have slowed from 60 to perhaps 50 or 40 miles per hour.

My memory of the next few seconds is vivid regarding certain aspects of the event. I recall trying to hold on to the steering wheel, but it jerks from my grasp. I sense myself tumbling head over heels in somersault position. Astonishingly, I perceive rolling to a stop on my feet, my body bent over and my hands on the ground. My first thought is selfish: "Oh my God, I'm alive! Thanks!" My next thought is that my wife and child are in that wreck of a car a hundred feet in front of me. As I stumble forward, I see first my wife and then my son exit through the space where front and back left-side doors used to be. They appear uninjured, and their words confirm this marvelous fact. The drunk's car is upside down in the grass a thousand feet further down the highway. He is also uninjured. Both cars are totaled. I have a headache, many minor scrapes, cuts and bruises, and mud all over me. An emergency room cleans me up, bandages some contusions on my head, and sends me home. Every place on my body is sore the next day, but I am otherwise unharmed.

April 1, 2001. I roll out of bed onto my knees for a perfunctory recitation of The Lord's Prayer. Then I am on my feet and on my way before I even get

to amen. My mind is racing ahead to last-minute preparations I need to make. It is Sunday and one of my brothers is coming over to relieve me of caring for our aged mother so that I can go riding. This will be my last long training ride before the mountain-bike racing season begins in earnest the following weekend. I am anxious to try out some fancy new components I've added to my custom racing bike over the past days and weeks.

I feel strong as I begin my ride. I've been working out by climbing and descending progressively more flights of stairs, taking the steps two at a time while carrying thirty-six pounds of weights. I do this in the back stairwell of the 3-story apartment building where I live with mom. I've been doing it three or four times a week for five or six weeks now, and the effort is reflected in my riding. I will ride a 12-mile loop this morning on trails that encompass a wide range of technical difficulty, from beginner level to several long sections demanding expert skills. I negotiate the hardest sections by dismounting and running with the bike lest I perform what is picturesquely called a face plant.

The outbound leg of the loop is generally downhill, uphill on the return. One road, a one-way, three-lane thoroughfare, divides the loop into upper and lower sections. My off-road approach to crossing that avenue is down a long, steep, grassy embankment and onto the roadway at about a 45-degree angle to, and in the same direction as the traffic. The speed limit there is twenty five mph, but very few drivers adhere to it. My view to the left of approaching traffic is unhindered. There are oncoming cars in the first two lanes, but I have plenty of speed to beat them across with room to spare, although not enough that I can stop to clear the curb on the opposite side. I will jump it by lifting the front and rear wheels simultaneously, allowing the bike's forward momentum to carry it over the low obstacle.

My eyes focus on the curb until I am in the middle of the center lane, when I steal a glance to my left. A large SUV that wasn't there when I last looked has materialized in the far lane, which I am about to enter. It is moving fast, and about to occupy the same space where I will be momentarily. I swerve right and the driver of the Ford Explorer must have swerved left at the same instant, but nothing can avoid the collision. The top corner of the right-front fender strikes my left buttocks and the saddle of the bike, hurling us both forward. For a brief moment I remain upright on the bike impelled to a higher speed by the impact, and straight down the center of the lane directly in front of the speeding SUV that just hit me. I hear screeching tires, crunching metal, and an explosion of glass as I go down still clipped into my pedals. I hit the pavement, slide and roll at least once with the bike still attached to my shoe cleats. I realize that in a fraction of a second the SUV will run or roll over me and I will be dead. I commit my soul to God.

Everything is quiet and I am lying in the middle of that third lane. My bike has finally detached from my shoes and is lying fifteen or twenty feet beyond me down the lane. I hear voices. I am not dead! I struggle to my feet and hurry to see if I can be of any help to whoever is in the SUV. It has gone over the curb that I was about to jump in the course of rolling or flipping three hundred and sixty degrees. The driver, who was alone, thank God, is exiting the demolished SUV through the passenger-side door and being helped by people who stopped to assist. He was wearing his seat belt and is uninjured--nary a scratch.

I have road burns on my elbows, knees and shins, a sore left shoulder, some sore left ribs that are obviously cracked, and a severely lacerated left buttocks. By the next day an area fifteen by eight inches on my fanny and

left thigh will be deeply discolored, black and blue and red. I refuse the repeated offer of the emergency-rescue personnel to transport me to a hospital. Miraculously, I am able to ride my bike--very slowly--the five miles back to my apartment. The following Sunday I participate in the season-opening, cross-country mountain-bike race, although I finish dead last for favoring my injuries. The SUV is totaled. My bike, into which I had just poured over \$900 in new parts and upgraded equipment for the 2001 racing season, has minor damage to a saddle I acquired on close out for \$15, plus a few small chips and scratches on the frame's new paint.

I can't prove it, but I think God spared me on these two occasions so that I could complete this essay, and, possibly, so that I could continue to care for my mother. Mom has passed away now, so I've been a bit hesitant to finish and publish this work. Ah, well, here goes.

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