

CHRISTIAN REBELLION THEORIES
AS DELIVERED BY ST. PAUL FROM MARS HILL
BY AUGUSTINE, CALVIN AND ADAMS

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Abstract

This thesis explicates the rebellion theories of three renowned Christian political thinkers and evaluates the extent that each can communicate an intelligible rebellion theory to a non-Christian audience. Augustine of Hippo, at the dawn of the medieval ages, John Calvin of Geneva during the Reformation and John Adams of the USA in the midst of the Enlightenment are the three thinkers selected for consideration. These thinkers have produced ideas that have transcended time and geographical location. Rebellion is an issue of the utmost political importance as it reveals the limits, and the first principles of politics. The issues surrounding the involvement of religion in politics have created a place for confusion in minds of many people today. The issues surrounding religion and politics need further elucidation. The way these thinkers were able to translate the divine command from Romans 13:1, which decrees an absolute prohibition against rebellion, into an intelligible rebellion theory to non-Christians, is an important consideration in this thesis.

Preface

This thesis examines the rebellion theories of three different devoutly Christian thinkers. The intermingling of religion and politics is a concerning consideration for many of those in liberal western democratic nations because of the Islamic terrorist attacks. Many are also suspicious of the “Christian Right” and their agenda. However, this thesis shall aim to show that Christians can, while being committed to their Christian principles, articulate an intelligible political philosophy for anyone to appreciate. The delivery approach is modeled after Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill when he spoke to the Epicureans, Stoics and other Greek philosophers in a language that they could appreciate while he was in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:22-31.

The three thinkers chosen are dead now, but their ideas influence the way we view and interact with politics today. There are two minor wrinkles that need to be accounted for that comes with using these pre-medieval, reformation and early modern thinkers. Firstly, the pronoun renderings for God are not consistent from translator to translator. Sometimes translators will use a capital letter for a pronoun for God, such as He or His, and others will use lower case letters, he or his. For consistency’s sake, the pronouns for God will always be capitalized. Secondly, some translators use old English, which can often distract the modern reader. Where the old English is used, I have taken the liberty of making the English translation modern.

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In Ecclesiastes it is written, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (12:12b). Ted and Lily Harms, Jeremy DeLong, and Will

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This work is dedicated to my mom, Gwendolyn K. Hastings, since it is she who prompted me to write a preface and acknowledgments to this thesis. I also acknowledge my dad, Michael L. Hastings, for providing me with the courage to persevere to the end and the perspective to see that this project is more about the process. I thank my younger siblings; Kalen, Kara, and Kendon for setting aside computer game time for a big brother's homework. And for Aladdin's—every patient connoisseur waits ardently for the time to say cheers—ferment.

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1.1. At What Point to Rebel

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Introduction

This thesis will address the political philosophy of Aurelius Augustine, John Calvin, and John Adams. In particular, their perspective on rebellion and the extent that they were able to make their Christian rebellion theories intelligible to their respective non-Christian audiences shall be treated. This is a useful exercise because in considering rebellion one considers the purpose and limit of political power, as understood by each thinker, and we will see how power is understood under auspices of Christian revelation and is brought into an understandable context for the broader non-Christian culture. Romans 13 heavily influences the Christian rebellion philosophic tradition.¹ Paul's Epistle to the Romans 13:1,2, (ESV) reads as follows: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." The most basic reading one can take from this is: do not rebel because God is the one that ordained the ruler, and so rebellion is an act against God's deliberate ordination. What does a Christian political philosophy, in particular a rebellion theory, taken out of this passage look like? How do Christians articulate a rebellion theory in light of Romans 13, to an audience that believes

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament Vol 1*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 222-226. See also Walter E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors, Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 8-12; Robert H. Stein, "The Argument of Romans 13:1-7," *NovT* 30.4 (1989), 325-43; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 193-214; for their treatment on Romans 13:1,2 and its political significance.

in a different God, or no God at all? To what extent are Augustine, Calvin, and Adams able to articulate their rebellion theory, despite the reliance on Romans 13, in a way that is communicable to a non-Christian audience? To what extent can a Christian thinker articulate an intelligible rebellion theory based on reason, yet remain committed to Christian principles? From answering the rebellion question, what purpose does government serve for these thinkers? On what basis do Christians live politically with non-Christians? These are the questions that shall be considered in the following chapters.

Religion in politics has become an issue that is on the forefront of many people's minds as well as on the policy makers' minds with the Islamic terrorist attacks. For the Western world, religion had left the forefront of politics for the last number of decades. The Islamic terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the many subsequent attacks that followed and continue throughout the Western world, including attacks against the US, Russia, France, Germany, Indonesia and Canada leave many wondering what to think of the intermingling of religion and state.

Canada is not exempt from this philosophic inquiry. There are many contemporary religious and political issues that religious leaders and political leaders face. Religion is undeniably entrenched deep within the polity of Canada. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15.5, recognizes the rights' of Canadians to practice their religion. In the preamble of the Canadian Constitution Act, 1982, of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms it is written, "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law."² The "freedom of conscience and religion" is accounted for by section 2 (a) under the heading of Fundamental Freedoms.

Conflict arises between religion and politics, in this context, when one right interferes with or inhibits another right or freedom. There have been high profile legal battles over religious rights conflicting with other rights that have life-impacting implications.³ This thesis shall touch on the relationship between religion and politics, although the focus will be on the Christian religion.

Stockwell Day's Christianity shaped the face of the Canadian election of 2000 in a significant way and brought to the forefront the issue of faith and politics. How did Day put forth his convictions in a communicable way to the public? Day personally responds to this question in an email. "I believe that in executing one's duties in public office, one can remain true to his or her values and most deeply held beliefs. I believe that elected leaders and officials have a responsibility to provide principled leadership. That is not to say that elected representatives have the right to impose their views and faith on others, but that the perspective of all faith communities should have a place in political debate." He then referred me to an article he submitted to the Opinion-Editorial of the *Globe and Mail*, Monday, July 31, 2000, entitled, "My Faith in public life." He begins this editorial by writing, "I have absolutely no intention of making my religion into someone else's law."⁴ Day's position is frighteningly conservative for some according to today's standards, but historically his position is very moderate.⁵

² Ian Green, *The Charter of Rights* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1989), 229.

³ The case of *Adler v. Ontario* [1996] 3 S.C.R. 609 was a case that involved a Jewish couple seeking funding for the Jewish religious school their children went to. They argued that it was unconstitutional that Catholics Schools receive funding, and not Jewish schools. The most recent case involving religion and the courts is the Supreme Court ruling in favor of Bethany Hughes to legally refuse blood transfusions, overturning Alberta Court of Appeal's decision to force Hughes to undergo blood transfusion. Hughes, of Calgary, died only a short time ago because of this decision. *Trinity Western University v. British Columbia College of Teachers* [2001] 1 S.C.R. 772 is one recent case where the Supreme Court granted graduates of the Christian University full certification to teach in public schools without having to do an additional year at a secular institution.

⁴ Neither Augustine nor Calvin were above imposing their religious views on the people. Augustine was not reluctant to make his religious convictions public policy in shaping people towards Christianity. In

The activity of rebellion has the utmost political importance. Rebellion enables one to see the basis for authority, the first principles behind politics and the purpose of politics. This study focuses on rebellion because it is narrow enough to be managed for this thesis yet fundamental enough to give substantial input into the issue of religion and politics. Rebellion theory is diverse enough to provide a vein with which to branch off to touch on the broader issue, which is the relationship between Christianity and politics and what type of citizens Christians make. Rebellion is not to be understood as synonymous with revolution. To rebel is to rise in armed resistance against the established government. Hannah Arendt states that rebellion is the first step towards revolution, not that all rebels seek revolution. A revolution is a societal restructuring whereas rebellion works toward a leadership change.⁶

This thesis shall address three Christian political thinkers: Augustine, John Calvin, and John Adams. Each of these men lived in very different times, geographical locations, political environments and philosophic backdrops. Augustine lived from 354-

Augustine's 93rd Letter to Vincentius, written in 408 A.D., he explains that he is not above imposing his religious views on other groups, "But we are precluded from this rest by the Donatists, the repression and correction of whom, by the powers which are ordained of God, appears to me to be labor not in vain. For we already rejoice in the correction of many who hold and defend the Catholic unity with such sincerity, and are so glad to have been delivered from their former error, that we admire them with great thankfulness and pleasure" (Letter 93.1.1). In the same address Augustine explains that the Rogatist heretics were inclined towards violence, as a justification for Augustine's position (Letter 93.3.11). *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Volume I, The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine, edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974). See John R. Bowlin's "Augustine on Justifying Coercion," 49-70; and John von Heyking's, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 222-257; for their treatment of Augustine's justification for coercion. Calvin endorsed the burning of Servetus for heresy in 1553. Calvin writes in his most well-known work, the *Institutes of a Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), "For since the church does not have the power to coerce, and ought not to seek it (I am speaking of civil coercion), it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments" 4.11.16.

³ However, there are contemporary Christian thinkers that rival these "extreme," as their opponents refer to them, ideas of those 500 years ago. See Gary North, *Backward Christian Soldiers* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1986); Dennis Peacocke, *Winning the Battle for the Minds of Men* (Santa Rosa: Strategic Christian Services, 2000); and Rousas John Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State* (Ross House Books, 1986).

429 AD in northern Africa, for the most part, during the decline of the Roman Empire.⁷ Augustine recognizes the pertinence of Plato's thought, as non-Christians can, through natural reason, come to imitate, know and love God. Augustine and other early Church Fathers recognized "many areas of compatibility between Christianity and the Greek philosophers."⁸

John Calvin lived from 1509-1564 in France and Switzerland in the midst of the Reformation, perceiving the compatibility of Christianity and Greek philosophy differently.⁹ Calvin establishes in the reformation tradition the idea that people should be informed of God by the Scriptures only, *Sola Scriptura*. This position stands in stark contrast to the Catholic tradition, stemming from Augustine's recognition of the compatibility of Christianity and Greek philosophy, that philosophic tradition informed by natural reason can also produce accurate knowledge of God.¹⁰

John Adams lived during the Enlightenment from 1735-1826 in eastern United States surrounding the time of the birth of the United States.¹¹ Adams is influenced by enlightened thinkers like John Locke, Isaac Newton, and Francis Bacon and rejects Calvin's epistemological theory and adheres to a more Lockean one. C. Bradley

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (The Viking Press, New York, 1962), 140.

⁷ See the biographical works of Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, Revised Edition with a New Epilogue* (University of California Press: 2000); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (University of Notre Dame Pr.: 1998) to find out more about the life and times of Augustine.

⁸ John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter, *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Inc., 1997) 159.

⁹ John Calvin's biographical works include, Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in Shaping of Western Culture* (Blackwell Publishers: 1993).

¹⁰ See Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.6.1-4.

¹¹ See Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2001); Gilbert Chinard, *Honest John Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964); John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992) for biographical work on John Adams.

Thompson states, “[T]he God of Locke and Adams could be known only through rules of evidence that approximated mathematical demonstration.”¹²

The way the three authors thought about the permissibility of rebellion is important because it gives insight into how each author could justify rebellion in very different environments and different presumptions. These three thinkers were chosen for similar reasons. All are prominent reputable figures with large volumes of writings. The three authors present a Christian perspective on how citizens should treat their government. Each of the authors views the Christian Scriptures as a relevant information source to direct thinking and behavior towards and in politics. These three individuals profoundly influenced the Western intellectual community and are philosophically connected. Augustine influenced Calvin’s thinking in a profound way, for Calvin quoted Augustine more than any other author.¹³ B.B. Warfield states that “The problem which Augustine bequeathed to the Church for solution, the Church required a thousand years to solve. But even so, it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation.”¹⁴ Calvin was a central figure in the reformation. It was Calvin and the Reformation that profoundly impacted Adams and the American Revolution. George Bancroft states that “The influence of Calvin can be traced in every New England village.”¹⁵ These three thinkers are connected to one another in thought though significantly distant in time and geography.

¹² C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 13.

¹³ See Gordon Payne, “Augustinianism in Calvin and Bonaventure” (*Westminster Theological Journal*: 1982, 44, 1-30) and Anthony Lane, “Calvin’s use of the fathers and medievals” (*Calvin Theological Journal*: 1981, 16, 149-205).

¹⁴ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1956), 322.

¹⁵ George Bancroft, *History of the United States*, Volume 2 (Chicago Ill.: University Chicago Press, 1967), 138-139.

The first chapter will provide a general discussion of Augustine's views towards rebellion. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan O'Donovan express Augustine's importance well, "Like a mountain that assumes different shapes when seen from different angles yet always dominates the landscape, Augustine towers over the development of Christian political thought in the West."¹⁶ Augustine has amassed over five million words of work that have been preserved, along with many of the ideas disclosed within the writings, to this day. He dealt with Romans 13:1 on more than one occasion. The works that will be taken into consideration include the *City of God*, *Confessions*, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, his general letters, his *Tractates from the Gospel of John*, his apologetic writings against the Manichaeans, Donatists, and Pelagians, and his unfinished commentary on Romans. Secondary sources such as Peter Burnell, Peter Brown, Herbert Deane, John von Heyking, and R.A. Markus will also be considered. Augustine held that God ordained all government, in accordance with Romans 13. The way that he understood this shall be examined. Augustine's appeal to many different philosophical and religious groups including the Donatists, Manichaeans, Neo-Platonists, Pelagians, and Roman philosophers shall be considered.

John Calvin's rebellion theory will consume the discussion of the second chapter. Augustine heavily influenced Calvin. Calvin's thought is a foundation pillar for modernity.¹⁷ Calvin is considered one of the influential figures during the Reformation. Calvin traveled from France to Switzerland and settled in the city of Geneva where he did most of his work. He is well known for his *Institutes of a Christian Religion*, for pre-

¹⁶ Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius -- A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mi., Cambridge, U.K.: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 104.

destination and his influence in Geneva. Calvin wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible and developed an extensive Christian political philosophy from his studies. Relevant secondary sources like Ralph Hancock, Harro Hopfl, Alister McGrath, Quentin Skinner, and William Stevenson Jr. will also be considered. Between Augustine, Calvin and Adams, Romans 13 had the deepest influence on Calvin. He writes, "If we have continually present to our minds and before our eyes the fact that even the most worthless kings are appointed by the same decree by which the authority of all kings is established, those seditious thoughts will never enter our minds that a king should be treated according to his merits."¹⁸ Despite this very pre-modern view of the duty of subject to ruler relationship, Calvin is viewed as one who helped lay the foundation for modern politics and this chapter will explain how this is so. Calvin addressed various audiences, including the king that expelled him from his home country, various other people in authority, the Libertines, Anabaptists, and rebellious evangelicals. The way that he communicated his rebellion theory to these groups shall be explored.

The third chapter shall address the political philosophy of John Adams. Adams was the second president of the United States, and is considered by some to be more of a political philosopher than a politician. Thompson contends that "John Adams was America's finest eighteenth-century student of the political science."¹⁹ Adams, a Harvard-educated lawyer, was sympathetic towards and influential in the movement towards an American independence. Adams served two terms as Vice President and one term as President. Adams spent much time writing when he retired from his political life.

¹⁷ See Ralph C. Hancock's, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁸ *Institutes*, 4.20.27.

¹⁹ Thompson, xiii.

His well known works include, *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, the *Novanglus* paper, and *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*. Secondary sources will also be taken into consideration, like works by John Bowen, Gilbert Chinard, Joseph J. Ellis, John Ferling, Jurgen Gebhardt, and C. Bradley Thompson. John Adams was heavily influenced by the Calvinist tradition. Adams appealed to Romans 13 the least of the three thinkers under consideration. Adams subscribed to a social contract theory. Of the three thinkers of this project, Adams has the greatest appeal to an audience of the twenty-first century, due in large part to the time he lived in.

Following the explication of the respective rebellion theories, the question, to what extent were Augustine, Calvin, and Adams able to successfully articulate an intelligible rebellion theory based out of Romans 13 to their respective interlocutors, can be successfully answered. After reading through this thesis, one should be able to see that the ideas of Christians about politics can be employed and made intelligible to any audience at any time, transcending time and geographical location. Christians today can provide substantive input into the political philosophic dialogue.

Chapter 1
The Rebellion Theory of Augustine
of Hippo, Africa, 354-430 AD

Augustine's position on rebellion, his two attempts at communicating his position and the extent that his position is intelligible to non-Christians are the issues of consideration for this chapter. This chapter will be organized into two main sections covering two aspects of Augustine's political philosophy regarding rebellion including, I Augustine's position on the moral permissibility of rebellion and II his ability to communicate his Christian political ideas to his respective audience. To state his position on rebellion briefly, Augustine rejects rebellion as a morally permissible political activity in all cases. There are four evidences for attributing this position to Augustine. Firstly, he arrives at his position through the revelation of the divine command of Romans 13:1,2, which is, in summary, do not rebel because rebellion undermines God's established authorities. Secondly, evil rulers, ordained by God, serve a purpose and human good through their existence. Thirdly, although Augustine expects subjects to remain in positional subordination at all times, he does not expect to aid rulers in their evil acts or comply with their evil laws. Fourthly, although some recent research has attempted to show that Augustine identifies certain historical cases where rebellion is morally permissible, this study shall argue that he does not. Augustine attempts to communicate his position on rebellion from two approaches, from the top down, and from bottom up.

Although these two approaches are paradoxical in their assumptions, they both purport the same position. The top down approach is derived from God's command and personal involvement in raising and debasing all authority, as it is revealed to those who hear and observe Him. The problem with Augustine's top down approach is that it is largely unintelligible to non-Christians. Augustine does try to show, through natural reason, that rebellion is never morally permissible by speaking of the good that politics serve based on his broader understanding of political philosophy. Augustine attempts to work from the ground level up to the ideal position on rebellion. He is unable, due to the limitation of natural reason, to establish an absolute prohibition against rebellion by this approach, however.

What can a bishop from Hippo, who lived during the fall of Rome 1500 years ago, tell us about political theory today?²⁰ Augustine is an important thinker to consider because he is a foundation pillar in the Western intellectual tradition. Both Protestants and Catholics appeal to his theology. Augustine deeply influenced Calvin who had a deep impact on the foundation of modern politics²¹ and in turn, on the founding fathers of the United States of America. Although Augustine does not write a focused treatise on politics, his political thoughts are found spread throughout his prolific writings. The first principles of politics can be extracted from the deluge of his writings that deal with theological matters primarily. The *City of God*²², which he began in 413 and finished in

²⁰ See the following scholars for their answers to this question: Atkins and Dodaro, *Augustine Political Writings*; Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, 1-12; Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 1-18; Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 2; von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 1-16; Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 307-324.

²¹ See Ralph C. Hancock's, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) for his argument.

²² Augustine, *City of God, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, NPNFI-02 Volume II., ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), Shall be cited as CD, Book, Chapter henceforth.

426, is considered “the masterpiece of the greatest genius among the Latin Fathers.”²³

The *City of God* will be the primary work of consideration, although his other writings will be considered also. We shall now turn to address these writings looking to his perspective on rebellion.

I. Augustine’s Position on the Moral Permissibility of Rebellion

According to Augustine, rebellion is a morally impermissible political activity without exception, due to his reading of Romans 13:1. The divine command, as it is expressed in Romans 13:1, revealed by revelation, is the major impetus behind Augustine’s position on rebellion. While his position on rebellion is unintelligible to non-Christians, his broader political philosophy is intelligible to non-Christians due to his understanding of the political goods that can be produced through politics. Augustine’s position on rebellion is strongly influenced by his understanding of providence. But Augustine’s absolute prohibition against rebellion, based on revelation and special providence, cannot be reconciled with his right-by-nature view of politics²⁴ based on general providence and natural reason. Two terms are used to typify Augustine’s understanding of providence. These two terms are applied to help us to separate his two approaches of communicating his rebellion theory. Augustine’s providence will be categorized into two, namely, special and general. Briefly, special or particular providence is God’s personal involvement in his creation. God’s special providence can be seen in miraculous events, signs and wonders. Special providence is where God reaches into our reality and does something. General providence is God’s rule of the universe through various laws that are at work in creation. Physical or natural laws, like

²³ Philip Schaff, *City of God*, editors preface, v.

²⁴ See von Heyking’s argument in *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 1.

the law of gravity, are examples of God's general providence. Both types of providence shall be expounded upon below.²⁵

A. Special Providence and the Absolute Prohibition against Rebellion

The reason Augustine argues for an absolute prohibition against rebellion is because God says so. Augustine finds this divine command in Paul's letter to the Romans of chapter 13:1,2. Reason cannot alone inform one of the absolute prohibition against rebellion. The principle that all rebellion is immoral is based on the revelation that God personally places every ruler in his position. Augustine sees God personally establishing all authority, in a special providential kind of way. If anyone opposes authority, they are in fact opposing the very ruler ordained by God. Each ordination of authority is a special act of God. Just as God parted the Red Sea before Moses, or shut the mouths of the lions for Daniel in the lion's den, or raised Jesus from the dead, God raises every ruler to his position of authority. The way Augustine knows this is through revelation based on God's command in Romans 13. Although natural reason might suggest that rebellion is permissible in some cases, revelation tells us that it is absolutely prohibited. In this case of rebellion, revelation trumps reason.

The following section will be divided into the four parts, each part represents evidence of Augustine's position on rebellion. The first part shall deal with Augustine's interpretation of Romans 13:1,2, revelation and his understanding of particular providence as it pertains to rebellion. The second part shall deal with the purpose of evil

²⁵ Fredrick Crossan's work, "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*" (*The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, 27-38. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), provides a different and unique interpretation of Augustine's providence derived from Augustine's commentary of the knowledge of God in the *Confessions*. Sadly, this discussion must end only as a footnote as this inquiry

rulers, as Augustine sees it. The third part shall deal with appropriate behavior towards laws made by evil ruler that contradict those laws of God. The fourth part shall deal with recent research that provides special cases where Augustine allows for rebellion in special circumstances. These examples will be presented and then explicated. If cases are found where Augustine allows for rebellion in certain circumstances, then the three aforementioned evidences would have to be rejected or modified, and thus the whole position rejected or modified.

1. God's command, Romans 13, Revelation, Special Providence & Rebellion

Romans 13:1,2 is influential passage of Scripture that affect every Christian political thinker in a profound way. Augustine is no exception. He uses the passage many times in his writings, although never the *City of God*.²⁶ Romans 13:1,2 reads as follows, "Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God. Therefore whoever resists the authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."²⁷

Augustine comments: "Most rightly Paul warns lest anyone, because his Lord has called him to liberty and made him a Christian, be exalted by pride. And let him not suppose that in this life's journey he should not keep his place, nor let him suppose he ought not be subordinate to these higher authorities who, for the time being, may govern temporal things."²⁸ Augustine reaffirms Paul's statement and warns his readers of pride. He does not want them to think themselves above and beyond this command for subjection

would require another grant to properly elucidate and explicate Augustine's understanding of providence and the implications to his political philosophy.

²⁶ This may be due to his predominant non-Christian target audience, and the unintelligibility of his interpretation Romans 13:1 to non-Christians.

²⁷ Landes, Paula, Fredriksen, *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Scholars Press Chico, California, 1982), 72.1-74.3. Referred to as, *Epistle to Romans* from henceforth.

because of their liberty in Christ. Augustine states that everyone is to be subject, even Christians, and that these subjects should remain in their subordinate position while on earth. God has chosen that governmental authorities will govern temporal matters. Augustine says, “[L]et us endure our condition for the sake of everyday social order, doing nothing falsely and rendering obedience not so much to men as to God, who commands these things.”²⁹ Subjection preserves “everyday social order.”

Augustine comments on Jesus’ conversation with Pilate and provides further insight into his interpretation of Romans 13:1: “And then expanding still further how it was that the Father should be glorified by the Son, He says: ‘As You have given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to all that You have given Him.’ By all flesh, He meant every man, signifying the whole by a part; as, on the other hand, the whole man is signified by the superior part, when the apostle says, ‘Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.’ For what else did He mean by ‘every soul,’ save every man?”³⁰ Augustine cannot make his position against rebellion any clearer, “For what else did He mean by ‘every soul,’ save every man?” Christ is given power over all flesh. The amount of flesh that Christ does not have power over is equivalent to the amount of men that are free from the prohibition against rebellion. Again, just as no flesh is exempt from Christ’s power, no one is exempt from the divine command against rebellion. Every man is to be subject to God’s ordained rulers, just as Christ has power over all flesh.

²⁸ *Epistle to Romans*, 72.1-74.3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Augustine, *Tractate CV. John XVIII, 1-5, A select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, NPNF 1-07 Volume VII, St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) 396.

When Paul states that all authority is established by God, Augustine takes him on his word.³¹ Even the authority that the devil has is from God. “[A]s I had commenced saying, the devil when he fell from heaven received this region... ‘There is no power but of God.’ Why then do you fear? Let the dragon be in the waters, let the dragon be in the sea: you are to pass through it. He is made so as to be made sport of, he is ordained to inhabit this place, this region is given him.”³² When the devil was tempting Jesus in the desert he, “[S]howed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, ‘To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.’”³³ If there were ever a morally permissible situation in which to remove authority from an evil tyrant it would be in this situation. One might think that Augustine would want to find all the kingdoms that the devil had set up and tear them down. But Augustine does not encourage anyone to remove the authority that God has given the devil, even if one could. Augustine states that the devil is made “to be made sport of.” The point is not to focus on the fact that the devil has power on earth, but it is God that has given it to him. Augustine wants his readers to trust God, and know that He has given power to those who power.

Herbert Deane comments on the importance of Augustine’s understanding of providence and its relationship to God’s ordination of authority and prohibition of rebellion. He writes, “If anyone attempts to rebel against the established ruler, he is not to be aided but rather opposed and, if possible, punished, even if he seems to be a better

³¹ Although it may appear that Augustine does not recognize free will, this issue shall be dealt with at a later point.

³² Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, CIV, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, NPNF1-08 Volume VIII, Expositions on the Book of Psalms, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 37. Shall be cited as *Exposition on the Psalms*, from henceforth.

³³ Luke 4:5,6.

and wiser man than the present king. However, it is God who, by His control over human actions, even over the actions of wicked men, determines the destinies of states and of rulers.”³⁴ Augustine advises his readers to have faith and trust God’s providence because he is the one orchestrating the rise and fall of governments and the ordination of all rulers, even if power comes through a violent war without just cause: “[E]ven the wars which arise from human passion cannot harm the eternal well-being of God, nor even hurt His saints; for in the trial of their patience, and the chastening of their spirit, and in bearing fatherly correction, they are rather benefited than injured. No one can have any power against them but what is given him from above. For there is no power but of God, who either orders or permits.”³⁵ Wars are part of God’s eternal plan, designed to try patience, chasten the spirit and bring fatherly correction, which do not injure but in fact benefit. Even those rulers who are ruled by their human passion and do subsequent evil benefit God’s people rather than harm them. Deane affirms this reading when he writes, “It is God who sends tyrannical and cruel rulers in furtherance of His own designs. He uses the evil actions of wicked rulers, for which they alone are responsible and which hurt only themselves, to punish the transgressions of the sinful and to try the patience and fidelity of the good.”³⁶ Another Augustinian excerpt delineates this same message that God ordains all authority, good and evil. “Likewise, because the power even of those that are hurtful is from God alone, thus it stands written, Wisdom speaking: ‘Through me kings reign and tyrants hold the land through me.’ The apostle also says: ‘For there is

³⁴ Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), 145.

³⁵ Augustine, “Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon,” *Against the Manichaeans*, 22.75; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, NPNF-04 Volume IV, Writings against the Manichees and against the Donatists, Vol. IV. ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974). Shall be referred to as *Against the Manichaeans* or *Against the Donatists* henceforth.

no power but of God.”³⁷ Why would a Christian citizen, who is told by God to be subject to the ruler over him, want to tear down what God is building up for his benefit?

The Roman Empire and all earthly polities are simply pawns in the hands of God as His plan for the world unfolds before our eyes of humanity. In God’s providence, kings rise and fall as it suits Him and His purpose. Augustine explains that God is the one who raises up evil rulers, “These things being so, we do not attribute the power of giving kingdoms and empires to any save to the true God, who gives happiness in the kingdom of heaven to the pious alone, but gives kingly power on earth both to the pious and the impious, as it may please Him, whose good pleasure is always just.”³⁸ God gives power to all rulers including evil ones, and whoever attempts to undermine their authority undermines the authority that God has placed there. Augustine lists various emperors and notes how God gave them all their authority. From evil emperors like Caius to Nero and “finally, to avoid the necessity of going over them all,” good Christian rulers like Constantine all these received authority from God.³⁹ There are no exceptions: God ordains every ruler, even rebels that become rulers.⁴⁰ But this does not make the rebellion right or just. Since God is the one who ordains all authority, He too is the one who ordains evil rulers. Sometimes God brings down an evil government only to replace it with another evil government.

³⁶ Deane, 145.

³⁷ “Concerning the nature of good,” in *Against the Manichaeans*, 1:32.

³⁸ CD 5.21.

³⁹ CD 5.21.

⁴⁰ Augustine’s argument has a circularity problem here; that is, he puts forth a principle that is undermined or compromised in its application. In times of authoritative uncertainty Christians do not have a framework to work from to provide support. At election time, who should one vote for? Augustine, because of the circularity problem, does not answer this. The removal of tyrannies is sometimes dependent on rebels, which benefit Christians, who will not rebel. Christians benefit from the rebellion but will not dirty their hands morally in seeing its realization. If Augustine is trying to put forth a prescriptive rebellion theory, how can he rightly say to rebels about to mount a successful rebellion, do not rebel, since it will be these rebels that God ordains with authority?

The moral reprehensibility of rebellion is that it is an act against God. The rebel says by his action that he does not trust God's plan for human history nor respect His choice of authoritative ordination. Rebellion undermines the work of God. The rise and fall of cities, states and empires is due in part to the political earthly virtues of earthly citizens but ultimately to God's purpose for mankind at that particular point in time in respect to His view of history past, present and future for mankind. The purpose of government is to meet the needs of the people. When God places an evil government in its place then that government will best meet the needs of the people. Humanly perceived needs and the needs that God thinks we have can be two different things. God gives kingdoms to those that deserve it so that the people get what they need, as only God knows. When a people are evil, God places an evil ruler of them. In other times, God causes the just to rule because they provide a good environment for His people to worship. But God knows that even the most pious Christians do not know their hearts and may think themselves good but are not. We do not have, "in ourselves power to live rightly, but can do so only if He Who has given us faith to believe in His help to help us when we believe and pray."⁴¹ Much of the person's disposition must be inclined towards faith and trust in times of hardship. These are not the times for attempting to find a way out of tribulation and persecution from an evil ruler through one's own ingenuity.

2. The Purpose of Evil Rulers

Augustine thinks there is a use and purpose for evil governments and that all should recognize this and not tear down what God has built up. In formulating a

⁴¹ CD 19.4. Augustine is referring to the living in perfect rightness. Although inferior righteousness is something that one can have without God, which Augustine acknowledges elsewhere, and shall be addressed at a later point.

rebellion theory, one sets out a number of conditions that must be in place to make the rebellion morally permissible. One central condition necessary for a morally justified rebellion is that the ruler is a tyrant who performs evil acts. But this condition is irreparably undermined when the existence of evil tyrants has a purpose and use. This is the case for Augustine. Augustine names many different uses and purposes for the existence of evil government and their unjust judgments. Some of these include: testing virtue, showing oneself approved, receiving praise and goodness from the authority, healing the just further, paying for small sins, punishing evil rulers and their evil subjects, conversions for enduring persecution and martyrdom. It is a mystery; God only knows.

One purpose for an evil government is that God can use it to test the virtue of the just so that the good may show themselves approved. "For to the just all the evils imposed on them by unjust rulers are not the punishment of crime, but the test of virtue."⁴² Here Augustine recognizes the value of allowing God to test one's virtue through unjust rulers. God uses evil rulers to allow the good to show themselves approved. "For it is not unrighteous, that the wicked receiving the power of being hurtful, the patience of the good should be proved."⁴³ And in another place, "If he who is over you be a good man, he is your nourisher; if a bad man, he is your tempter. Receive the nourishment in the one case with gladness, and in the temptation show thyself approved."⁴⁴ If in temptation, one is to show oneself approved, how could they then turn around and rebel? God also places evil governments into their place of power to show

⁴² CD 4.3.

⁴³ "Concerning the nature of good," *Against the Manichaeans*, 1:32.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, 12.12. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels, Vol. VI. ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974). Shall be cited henceforth as *Sermon* book and chapter.

that “the patience of the good should be proved.”⁴⁵ Christians should trust God to bring about a change in government in his due time, irrespective of the current circumstances so that their patience can be proved.

Another purpose for evil rulers is that God’s people will receive praise and goodness from the authority. Augustine writes, “‘Do you want not to fear authority? Then do what is good and you will have praise of him’ [Romans 13:3]. This can provoke some people, because they know that Christians have often suffered persecution at the hands of these authorities.”⁴⁶ Augustine continues, “Therefore,” they say, “were these Christians not doing good? For not only did these authorities not praise them, but they punished them and killed them.”⁴⁷ Augustine deals with the claim that Christians must have done wrong if they are punished by the ruler. He counter argues, “One must consider the Apostle’s words, for he does not say “Do what is good and the authority will praise you,” but: “do what is good and you will have praise of him.” Thus whether the authority approves your good deed or persecutes you, “You will have praise of him,” either when you win it by your allegiance to God, or when you earn the crown of martyrdom by persecution. The subsequent passage should be understood in the same way, when Paul says, “For he is God’s servant for your good” (13:4), though it be for his own evil.”⁴⁸ Even when Christians are being persecuted by evil rulers they will have praise of him.

⁴⁵ “Concerning the nature of good,” *Against the Manichaeans*, 1:32.

⁴⁶ *Epistle to the Romans*, 72.1-74.3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 72.1-74.3. Although Augustine speaks only of Christians here, non-Christians are under the same rules. The difference lies in the extent to which Augustine can communicate his rebellion theory based on revelation to non-Christians informed by natural reason, when his position on rebellion offends natural their reason.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 72.1-74.3.

God can use evil governments as a surgeon's tool to heal the just further. "Something useful is tribulation; useful the surgeon's lancet rather than the devil's temptation. He became secure when his enemies were overthrown, pressure was removed, swelling grew out. This example therefore does avail to this end, that we should fear felicity. 'Tribulation,' he says, 'and grief I found, and on the name of the Lord I called.'"⁴⁹ God uses evil rulers and tribulation as a way to mold His people the way He wants.

Evil governments force everyone, including the saints, to pay for their small sins. "[F]or although they be far from the excesses of wicked, immoral, and ungodly men, yet they do not judge themselves so clean removed from all faults as to be too good to suffer for these even temporal ills. For every man, however laudably he lives, yet yields in some points to the lust of the flesh."⁵⁰ Augustine recognizes that even the most righteous living in this world are vulnerable to at least small sins and should pay for them through "temporal ills."

God uses tyrants to punish evil rulers and their evil subjects. Augustine says concerning evil rulers, "[T]he dominion of bad men is hurtful chiefly to themselves who rule, for they destroy their own soul by greater license in wickedness; while those who are put under them in service are not hurt except by their own iniquity."⁵¹ Evil rulers hurt themselves and those involved in iniquity.

Evil people can be converted by the example that the good provide. Augustine writes after addressing the fact that Christians endure persecution. "[W]hen, admiring the

⁴⁹ *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, LI 4. A similar except is found in "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon" *Against the Manichaeans*, 22.75.

⁵⁰ CD 1.9., the same idea is repeated in the same book and chapter later on.

⁵¹ CD 4.3.

endurance of the Martyrs, even the persecutors believed; and they who had plotted to injure our King by the injury of His soldiers, were gained over by Him in addition.”⁵² By the just enduring the persecutions of the government, earthly citizens become citizens of the city of God.

 Patiently enduring an evil government declares the goodness of God to those who would argue that the faithful are only faithful because God bribes them to be so.

Augustine writes, “[T]here is another reason why the good are afflicted with temporal calamities, the reason which Job’s case exemplifies that the human spirit may be proved, and that it may be manifested with what fortitude of pious trust, and with how unmercenary a love, it cleaves to God.”⁵³ Job was able to declare to Satan that he loved God despite the many hardships he endured, and that no bribery was necessary to keep him faithful.

 God causes all things to work together for good, even the existence of evil rulers, for those who live according to His purpose: “For even thus they profit by their wickedness those true catholic members of Christ, since God makes a good use even of the wicked, and all things work together for good to them that love Him.”⁵⁴ God uses even wicked rulers and their acts to work for the good of His purpose for mankind. What may appear to some as a hopeless cause, God can use according to His purpose.

Augustine is informed by revelation compared to the Pagans who are informed by natural reason. If one enters into Augustine’s frame of mind, one would see that rebellion is not an option because evil rulers have meaningful purpose. But absolute subjection does not mean aiding and abetting the criminal acts of an evil ruler.

⁵² *Expositions on the Psalms*, CXIX, 160.

⁵³ CD 1.9.

3. Obey God rather than man

Augustine's absolute prohibition against active resistance or rebellion does not make his followers complicit with the evil tyrants however. If an evil ruler makes an impious edict then the subject should passively disobey the law and suffer whatever punishment, including death, the ruler deals to the pious subject. Deane explains that "This kind of passive disobedience with complete acceptance of the consequences of not obeying the state's commands is the only kind of disobedience that Augustine will sanction, and it is permissible only when the ruler commands his subjects to do something that clearly contravenes God's laws."⁵⁵ Augustine infers this in the following statement, "[W]hen emperors enact bad laws on the side of falsehood as against the truth, those who hold a right faith are approved, and, if they persevere, are crowned."⁵⁶ The crown of martyrdom is not an unreasonable expectation for Augustine.

In the book of Daniel there are two prototypical examples of the pious disobeying evil edicts, and in two instances faced the immanence of receiving this same crown. "[K]ing Nebuchadnezzar, when he was a servant of idols, enacted an impious law that a certain idol should be worshipped; but those who refused to obey his impious command acted piously and faithfully."⁵⁷ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down before the idol and were sentenced to be thrown into a fiery furnace. Miraculously, God saved them from certain death. The other impious edict was made by Darius the Mede when he commanded that all should pray to no one save him for 30 days. Daniel

⁵⁴ CD 18.51.

⁵⁵ Deane, 149.

⁵⁶ *The Correction of the Donatists*, chapter 2, section 8, 636.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

disobeyed the king's edict and followed God's and was consequently thrown into the lion's den, but was saved also.⁵⁸

Augustine's commentary on Romans 13:1, pertaining to disagreement between various authoritative levels, sheds light on how he views appropriate responses to evil edicts.⁵⁹ Augustine recognizes grades or levels of powers each subordinate to higher, the top being God, who is over all, and the bottom being husband or father, who is over his wife and children.

Do we lift up ourselves unto pride, or tell you to be despisers against the powers ordained? Not so. Do you again who are sick on this point, touch also that border of the garment? The Apostle himself says, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. He then who resists the power, resists the ordinance of God.' But what if it enjoin what you ought not to do? In this case by all means disregard the power through fear of Power. Consider these several grades of human powers.⁶⁰

Augustine lists different hierarchies of powers and considers the possibility of conflicting commands. Augustine reasons that one should obey the law of the higher authority. He begins with family and government.⁶¹ If parents command a son to fight against the civil government unlawfully, then the son should disobey the parent and obey the civil government because it has a higher authoritative position. Augustine considers further a magistrate, a Proconsul, an Emperor and then God. If the lower power "enjoin anything, must it not be done?" Augustine answers, "but choose to obey a greater power."⁶² So,

⁵⁸ Daniel 6:1-27.

⁵⁹ John Calvin departs from Augustine's rebellion theory at this point in the well-known section of the *Institutes of a Christian Religion*, 4.20.31. Calvin allows for lower level authorities to rise up against evil tyrants and rulers that make evil edicts in armed rebellion if need be. This departure would lead to the foundation of modern politics. See Ralph C. Hancock's, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989). These ideas will be developed further in Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ *Sermon 12.13.*, 302.

⁶¹ Henry Paolucci, *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, (Chicago: A Gateway Edition, Henry Regnery Company, 1965, second printing) 311 [Sermons, LXII, 8]. It shall be noted that this sermon is a simplified view of family government and how it relates to civil government in light of Augustine's discussion of this matter in CD 19.16.

⁶² *Sermon 12.13.*

then, most importantly, if the highest human government makes a law against God's law, one should obey God's law, and disobey the human law. Augustine says not to despise the lower power, nor provide a check on the power, although it makes an evil law, but obey the higher power and despise neither power.

We shall now move on to the final section in considering Augustine's perspective on rebellion. Augustine surveys history and in doing so comments on many rebellions. Did he ever sympathize or legitimize a morally permissible case for rebellion? Recent scholarship suggests that he did. This possibility shall now be examined.

4. Exceptions to Augustine's Absolute Prohibition Rule?

Traditionally, Augustinian scholars have viewed his rebellion theory as purporting an absolute intolerance and prohibition against rebellion.⁶³ Some more recent Augustine scholars suggest that this position needs to be reconsidered. This new research suggests that Augustine allowed for rebellion in special circumstances based in natural reason.⁶⁴ If Burnell and von Heyking are correct in identifying examples where Augustine morally permits rebellion then Augustine's position on rebellion as put forth in this paper would have to fundamentally reconsidered. Peter Burnell suggests that the commonly held position usually does not take into consideration Augustine's early works. The younger Augustine defended the use of revolution to take out tyrants.⁶⁵ Burnell also suggests that another important factor to take into consideration is the intended audience. He suggests that when Augustine is addressing the Church audience Augustine assumes a steady

⁶³ See Herber A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York and London, 1963), 145 and Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 103.

⁶⁴ Peter Burnell, "The Problem of Service to Unjust Regimes in Augustine's City of God", April 1993: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (2), pages 181-188 and also John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia and London: Missouri University Press, 2001), 114, 121-130; criticize the view that Augustine held an absolute prohibition against rebellion.

government. But in the *City of God*, Augustine treats these matters in a different way to suit a sophisticated and philosophical audience. Augustine provides a more exhaustive coverage of the political issues and he did not take an orderly polity for granted.

Augustine addresses revolution, civil unrest and political instability.⁶⁶ We shall now turn to the cases that new research has put forth.

i. Brutus' Expulsion of the Tarquins

The first case for rebellion that Burnell puts forth is found in the *City of God*.⁶⁷ In this section of the *City of God*, Augustine shows how wars, rebellions and tyrants existed within the Roman Empire before Christianity came into existence. The example of rebellion that Burnell cites concerns Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus and other dissidents expelling king Tarquin and his son for the latter's part in raping Collatinus' wife. Burnell suggests that Augustine disparages the expulsion, but not on the grounds that Brutus and dissidents rebelled successfully against King Tarquin, but rather that Brutus and company did not wait long enough to find out if King Tarquin would be a virtuous and prudent leader in dealing with the action of his son.⁶⁸ Burnell states, "If, for example, one were an outright pacifist, one would be unlikely to suggest that Chamberlain should have waited longer before declaring war, to see what Hitler's plans were after Poland."⁶⁹ Likewise, if Augustine holds that rebellion is never morally permissible he would likewise not suggest that Brutus wait to see how King Tarquin dealt with the rape incident before rebelling, because it would not be a conceivable option.

⁶⁵ Burnell, 182.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 183.

⁶⁷ CD 3.15-16

⁶⁸ Burnell, 184.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 184.

However, does the text support this conclusion? The facts of this particular story can be found in chapters 15 and 16 of Book 3 of the *City of God*. Before looking at the particulars the broader context shall be addressed. In book 3, Augustine addresses the accusation that Christianity brought on the external and physical disaster of Rome. He tries to show throughout Roman history, even though the Romans have been faithful to the gods, disaster and calamity has still come upon them. Augustine recounts how the Roman gods did not protect Troy because of Paris' adultery⁷⁰ and exposes the inconsistency of the gods as they failed to exhibit consistent behavior towards Romulus' mother's adultery⁷¹ and the fratricide of Romulus.⁷² Augustine explains that the gods did not prevent the wicked wars of the Romans against the Albans, as would have been just.⁷³

The context of chapter 15 is about the deaths of the Roman kings and whether or not their deaths were just.⁷⁴ Augustine writes that Rome's best king died of an "unnatural crime" by the hand of his son-in-law but it was the son-in-law who died an old man of natural causes, although he deserved the cruel death. The gods did not serve out justice in this situation. "Servius Tullius was foully murdered by his son-in-law Tarquinius Superbus, who succeeded him on the throne."⁷⁵ Augustine states that the parricide against "Rome's best king" did not prompt the gods to send the Greeks over to topple the new evil ruler, as they had done in Paris' adultery, a far lesser crime. No less than five times does Augustine write that it was due to parricide that Tarquin came into power, and that the gods did nothing to punish him. This is the context that Burnell's quotation must

⁷⁰ CD 3.3,5.

⁷¹ CD 3.5.

⁷² CD 3.6.

⁷³ CD 3.14.

⁷⁴ CD 3.15.

⁷⁵ CD 3.15.

be considered within. King Tarquin “won his way by unnatural crime.” Augustine carries on with his argument:

And when [King Tarquin] was afterwards banished by the Romans, and forbidden the city, it was not for his own but his son’s wickedness in the affair of Lucretia, a crime perpetrated not only without his cognizance, but in his absence. For at that time he was besieging Ardea, and fighting Rome’s battles; and we cannot say what he would have done had he been aware of his son’s crime. Notwithstanding, though his opinion was neither inquired into nor ascertained, the people stripped him of royalty; and when he returned to Rome with his army, it was admitted, but he was excluded, abandoned by his troops, and the gates shut in his face.⁷⁶

Augustine’s point here is that the gods do not enact justice, as were his points in his earlier chapters. The point is not that Brutus and company should have waited to see what type of decision Tarquin would have made, before rebelling, but rather that the gods, if there was ever a time for justice to reign, in whatever the form it may be, including rebellion, should have taken place while Tarquin was doing evil, not because of something else. The gods did not have knowledge of what Tarquin would do, so how then can it be just to expel someone when no evil action is committed? The problem and issue that Augustine has is that the corresponding consequences are misplaced, not the type of punishment the gods use. Tarquin came to his position of power through evil action and while he was doing evil, he succeeded in his wicked wars. However, when King Tarquin was away at war, doing no evil that is mentioned, his son commits an evil act and it is his father, King Tarquin, who receives the punishment. The fact that King Tarquin did not receive his due punishment for the many crimes that he committed, but for a crime that he did not commit he received a punishment, and the gods’ inability to orchestrate the appropriate punishment, is the point Augustine tries to make. Burnell’s

⁷⁶ CD 3.15.

first case for Augustine's allocation for rebellion fails because Augustine does not say what Burnell claims he does.

ii. Overthrowing Spartacus and the Gladiators

There are three parts to this subsection. The first part includes Burnell's second case for Augustine's exception for rebellion. The second part to be addressed includes the necessary conditions that must be established in order for Burnell's position to hold. The third part will determine whether the conditions are supported or not.

a. Burnell's Position on the Spartacus Case

Burnell's second special case for rebellion is taken from Augustine's overview of the historical period of 73-71 B.C. when the gladiators, under Spartacus, revolted. Burnell is not saying anything about the moral permissibility of Spartacus' rebellion, but of the possible moral permissibility of rebellion for the new subjects under Spartacus' rule. Deane contends that, "[I]f a rebellion is successful and the former ruler is killed or routed, the usurper becomes the rightful ruler."⁷⁷ Both Deane and Burnell are in agreement with this point. However, Burnell confronts Deane on his position that the new rebel ruler, "[I]s to be obeyed and honored as his predecessor was."⁷⁸ Burnell claims that Augustine holds, if a rebellion occurs, then the citizens, within the area of the dissension, are allowed to do whatever is in their means, including rebellion, against the rebels that recently took power, if the new rulers do not rule justly. Burnell states that the citizens under the unjust rule, "[A]re justified when they prevent a greater evil, the unjust, lording it over the just."⁷⁹ Burnell concludes that, "This would certainly allow for

⁷⁷ Deane, 145.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Burnell, 185.

fighting and unseating Spartacus.”⁸⁰ And as Augustine writes, Spartacus’ gladiators “indulged in whatever pleasures they wished; they did what their lust suggested.”⁸¹ Burnell states, “Thus Roman rule was better, less incompatible with devotion to God as an end, than the regime of that licentious mob.”⁸² Burnell suggests that there are two principles that are in conflict, which invariably allows for rebellion. The two principles in tension include, “a presumptive duty of obedience to that government”⁸³ and “the duty of trying to ensure that civil power is in the hands of the least unjust persons or groups possible.”⁸⁴ The latter principle must win out at some point in time, reasons Burnell, which may result in rebellion.⁸⁵ Burnell concludes that “The inchoate government of Spartacus is an exception (for Augustine a rare one to the rule of obedience to the powers that be).”⁸⁶ Burnell suggests the situation surrounding Spartacus is an example of Augustine’s allowance of rebellion. We shall now turn to ascertain this.

b. Establishing the Necessary Conditions

Burnell must establish many things in this case to validate his claim that Augustine is providing a warrant for rebellion in this particular circumstance. Now for a quick summary of the points that need to be established: 1 Spartacus and the gladiators rebel successfully from the Roman Imperial and form a new government with authority and subjects. 2 It is these new subjects - which are made up of slaves that escaped from their Roman masters - under Spartacus’ gladiator government, who aid in the overthrowing or the resistance of the gladiator government because they realized the new

⁸⁰ Ibid. 185.

⁸¹ CD 4.4.

⁸² Burnell, 185.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 186.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 185-186.

government was unjust. The overthrowing of Spartacus' gladiator government cannot be done solely by the Roman Imperial Army otherwise the conflict is not a rebellion. Also, the overthrowing of the gladiator government cannot be done by the Roman citizens that did not yield to the rule of the gladiator government, because this did not happen historically. The new subjects under the gladiator rule must only rebel if the new government is less just and more capricious than the previous one. 3 Augustine thinks that if the new government is unjust, it is permissible to rebel. 4 Finally, Augustine must approve of the rebellion of the new citizens of the Gladiator government, because they realized that the Gladiator government was more unjust than the Roman government. If these things can be supported, then Burnell is correct in identifying a case, which Augustine would permit for rebellion.

c. Are the necessary conditions fulfilled?

It is safe to assume that Spartacus rebelled against the Roman authorities and took over a geographical area from the Roman Empire and that Augustine understood this as so. Augustine says that the gladiators recruited a "great army" and "most widely and cruelly devastated Italy"⁸⁷ at the expense of the Roman Empire. The historian Cyril E. Robinson states that the slave rebellion began in Southern Italy in 73 BC, but traveled to the Alps to escape slavery, but then decided to return to Southern Italy to plunder some more. Their pillaging ended in 71 BC.⁸⁸

Was it the new gladiator subjects that aided in the overthrowing of the Gladiator government, after seeing that the new government was not just? The answer to this is that the slaves did not rebel against Spartacus' rule but fought with him until death, death

⁸⁷ CD 4.5.

by crucifixion for 6,000 of them. The slaves were actually the ones who made the slave government unjust because it was they who wanted to continue the pillaging. It was not the Roman subjects, after coming under the authority of the Gladiator government, who aided in the toppling of the gladiator government. There is no evidence that Augustine understood there to be any civilian resistance against the ever-transient Gladiator government. Robinson states the condition of the Roman public after Spartacus and the slaves decided to return to Southern Italy, "The Roman public was at last thoroughly scared."⁸⁹ The Roman people turned to the Roman Imperial army to protect them. Furthermore, the following excerpt gives some insight as to who were actually battling Spartacus and company from Augustine's perspective. The Gladiator government caused the Roman majesty to fear and remained "unsubdued by several Roman generals" ... "until at last they were conquered, which was done with the utmost difficulty."⁹⁰ Augustine mentions that the Roman generals were unable to subdue the Gladiator government immediately and states that it was difficult to defeat this slave government. In Zvi Yavetz's ancient compilation of passages dealing with Roman slavery he cites Livy who records that, "Praetor Marcus Crassus ... fought to a finish with Spartacus, who was killed along with 60,000 men."⁹¹ Robinson states that Crassus "[W]as appointed to take the field at the head of six legions."⁹² History records that it was not civilians under the rule of Spartacus that defeated the rebel army but rather a Roman army. The former slaves died loyal to Spartacus. Burnell fails to provide evidence that Augustine

⁸⁸ Cyril E. Robinson, *A History of Rome: from 753 BC to 410 AD* (London, New York, Toronto: Methuen Education Limited, 1986), 165.

⁸⁹ Robinson, 165.

⁹⁰ CD 4.5.

⁹¹ Zvi Yavetz, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 92. Yavetz cites Levy's *Summaries* from Book 97.

⁹² Robinson, 165.

recognized that the civilians under the rule of the Gladiator government resisted the rogue government, nor is there any to be found.

Does Augustine think that if the new government is unjust, it is permissible to rebel against it? Burnell needs to show where Augustine explicitly says, that the citizens under the new rule of Spartacus revolted against him, and that this was a morally permissible act, because they were unjust rulers. Burnell points to CD 4.15 where Augustine says that it is better for a just ruler to govern than an unjust ruler. Burnell goes further and states that Augustine would also allow rebellion in dethroning an unjust ruler. But is this so?

There is an important difference between a ruler with authority overthrowing an unjust ruler who has authority and a subject with no authority overthrowing an unjust ruler. Augustine only states and recognizes the former in CD 4.15, not the latter as Burnell suggests. The chapter includes Augustine's discussion as to whether it is appropriate for "good men to rejoice in extended empire."⁹³ This implies that the "good men" wishing to extend their empire, already have some empire to rule over.⁹⁴ Within the chapter, there is mention of annexations and invasions. However, annexation is to take more land; invasion is to invade someone else's land from one's home base. Rebellion is to start with nothing and take something that belongs to one's superior. Augustine's language used in CD 4.15, suggests that he was only referring to those that have power and authority. Augustine puts this principle more explicitly in a letter to Faustus the Manichaean, where he reaffirms that one must have authority to undertake war. "A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have

⁹³ CD 4.15.

⁹⁴ CD 4.15.

for doing so; for the natural order which seeks the peace of mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable.”⁹⁵ A condition for just war is authority. Without authority, there cannot be a just war, and therefore a just rebellion is an oxymoron. Those that have authority have a set of rules that are different than those who do not have authority.

Finally, did Augustine approve of the slave subjects of the Gladiator government rebelling against the gladiator government, because they realized that the Gladiator government was more unjust than the Roman government? Augustine does not explicitly even praise the Roman army for overthrowing the Gladiator government, let alone praise those people who were under Roman rule, changed to Gladiator government, and then after realizing that the new rule was evil, rebelled. Moreover, there is a tone of admiration for the rogue government’s success against the Empire.⁹⁶

All of the four conditions have to be satisfied so that Burnell’s case stands. However, only condition 1 is satisfied and conditions 2 - 4 are left unsatisfied. Therefore, Burnell’s position for a morally permissible case for rebellion, by using the overthrowing of Spartacus’ gladiator government, fails.

iii. The Cacus Analogy

Burnell’s final case presentation for rebellion concerns the story of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and the semi-man called Cacus.⁹⁷ Burnell claims that Augustine uses the myth of

⁹⁵ “Reply to Faustus the Manichaean,” *Against the Manichaeans*, 22.75.

⁹⁶ CD 4.5.

⁹⁷ Virgil, *The Aeneid* (New York: Vintage Press, translated by Robert Fitzgerald, 1984), 236-242, lines 250-490.

Cacus as an analogy of a political situation where rebellion is justified, to which von Heyking adds.⁹⁸ Their case shall be presented and then analyzed.

a. Burnell and Von Heyking's Cacus analogy as a case for Rebellion

Burnell sees Augustine's description of the Cacus story as a political analogy where Cacus' soul (ruling government) deprives his body (citizenry) of mortal necessities which warrants the body's (citizenry's) rebellion.⁹⁹ He states, "In the course of a disquisition on Cacus, the monster in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Augustine compares that creature's turbulent inward condition with the civil community in stasis."¹⁰⁰ The important thing to note as Burnell states, "is that mortality's original rebellion arouse "out of need": the mortality is an unavoidable and universal fact; the need, its inevitable result in the circumstances."¹⁰¹ Now, to quickly summarize Burnell's position in this Cacus analogy, Augustine allows for rebellion when people have legitimate and mortal needs for self-preservation that are not being met by the government, and are given no other option but to rebel. Put another way, the case for rebellion is, when people who have had their mortal needs deprived of, by the authority in place, have the duty or at least freedom to rebel against the authority to ensure self-preservation when there is no other option available.¹⁰² Von Heyking agrees with Burnell's position and adds his commentary.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Burnell, 186; von Heyking, 122-148 passim.

⁹⁹ Burnell, 186-187.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 186.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 187.

¹⁰² Ibid. 187.

¹⁰³ von Heyking, 128-129.

b. Analysis of Cacus Case

Are these above claims an accurate representation of the text, however? The text dealt with above shall be read within the larger context from which it comes and then an analysis on the implications of the former reading shall be considered.

1. Context of CD 19.12.

To summarize CD 19.12, Augustine attempts to show that, every nature desires peace, even in the most disturbing human, and non-human, situations. Augustine's whole point of the chapter is to persuade the reader to believe that even in the most dubious of human situations, there exists a desire for peace.

Augustine deals with four unlikely human situations where peace is the goal, before turning to the even less unlikely non-human situations. As Augustine attempts to anticipate counter-argumentative questions to his claim, he considers "[H]ow can there be peace in the desire to make war? He answers, "For even they who make war desire nothing but victory - desire, that is to say, to attain to peace with glory. For what else is victory than the conquest of those who resist us? It is therefore with the desire for peace that wars are waged."¹⁰⁴ Augustine is not justifying these wars, but simply suggesting that even in war, there is a desire for peace. What about sedition?¹⁰⁵ Augustine anticipates. "[I]n the case of sedition, when men have separated themselves from the community, they yet do not effect what they wish, unless they maintain some kind of peace with their fellow-conspirators."¹⁰⁶ Again, Augustine does not condone the sedition, but comments on how within insurrectionary separation there must be peace in

¹⁰⁴ CD 19.12.

¹⁰⁵ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879) explain that the word sedition comes from the Latin word *seditio*, which means to go aside or apart hence an insurrectionary separation, and has a different meaning than rebellion.

order to have their goals achieved. He then deals with a den of robbers and makes a similar observation. Next, he deals with an evil “individual” “unrivaled in strength” who prefers to work alone than with a den of robbers. Augustine derives two instances of peace from this situation. The first is that “he maintains some shadow of peace with such persons he is unable to kill.” Secondly, “In his own home, too, he makes it his aim to be at peace with his wife and children, and any other members of his household.”¹⁰⁷ This is not the last time Augustine refers to two instances of peace, with one example, in this chapter. Augustine shows two instances of a desire for peace in the life of a murderer and robber.

Augustine summarizes the accumulated examples by stating, “And thus all men desire to have peace with their own circle, while wishing to impose their will upon those people’s lives. For even those whom they make war against they wish to make their own, and impose on them the laws of their own peace.”¹⁰⁸ Augustine does not condone these practices, but states that, although on the unjust side of peace, they still seek after peace. But Augustine does not stop here. He continues to examine unlikely cases for desiring peace.

Augustine considers the most unlikely case he can imagine, and ponders whether peace is a desire in this extreme case. This is how Augustine puts it: “But let us suppose a man such as poetry and mythology speak of - a man so unsociable and savage as to be called rather a semi-man than a man.” The case is of Cacus. “[H]e himself was so singularly bad-hearted that he was named *Kakos*, which is the Greek word for bad.” Augustine then alludes this situation to the one just mentioned of the solitary robber as to

¹⁰⁶ CD 19.12.

¹⁰⁷ CD 19.12.

how Cacus differentiates, “[Cacus] had no wife to soothe him with endearing talk, no children to play with, no sons to do his bidding.” But Cacus differs in ways that are more significant.

Virgil describes the story of Cacus in book 8 of the *Aeneid*. He writes of Cacus’ home as being “a cave with depths no ray of sun could reach.”¹⁰⁹ He states that Cacus is a “bestial form, half man.”¹¹⁰ Virgil describes Cacus’ house furnishings as, “reek[ing] forever with fresh blood, while nailed up in vile pride on cave doors were men’s pale faces ghastly in decay.”¹¹¹ Cacus is presented as the most unlikely candidate to desire peace.

Augustine sets out to show by two arguments that even Cacus desires peace. “[Y]et in that solitary den, the floor of which, as Virgil says, was always reeking with recent slaughter, there was nothing else than peace sought, a peace in which no one should molest him, or disquiet him with any assault or alarm.”¹¹² Augustine states that Cacus desired to have peace with people and gods, as it is, in the form of being left alone. Hercules, who came from Spain, shot Cacus with arrows to death, after Cacus stole four oxen. Thus, the first instance of peace that Augustine refers to is peace from being bothered by gods and humans.

The second instance of peace that Augustine mentions is “With his own body he desired to be at peace, and he was satisfied only in proportion as he had this peace.”¹¹³ Not unlike the solitary robber, Augustine mentions two instances of peace. How did Cacus maintain this peace? The following quote answers this question and also leads to

¹⁰⁸ CD 19.12.

¹⁰⁹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*. Book 8, line 259.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 8.260.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 8.261-263.

the controversy at hand “For he ruled his members, and they obeyed him; and for the sake of pacifying his mortal nature, which rebelled when it needed anything, and of allaying the sedition of hunger which threatened to banish the soul from the body, he made forays, slew, and devoured, but used the ferocity and savageness he displayed in these actions only for the preservation of his own life’s peace.”¹¹⁴ The part of this quotation that causes controversy shall be taken out to be reread, also, pronouns shall be complimented with their respective reference nouns. “For he [Cacus’ soul] ruled his members [mortal nature], and they [mortal nature] obeyed him [Cacus’ soul]; and for the sake of pacifying his mortal nature... he [Cacus’ soul] made forays, slew, and devoured, but used the ferocity and savageness he displayed in these actions only for the preservation of his own life’s peace.”¹¹⁵ This sentence forms a coherent thought without the controversial rebellion section. Cacus’ soul “forays, slew, and devoured” to “pacify his mortal nature” to ensure peace with body and soul. The answer to the question above is, Cacus maintained peace by pillaging. Augustine says of this endeavor, “So that, had he [Cacus’ soul] been willing to make with other men the same peace which he made with himself [mortal nature (through devouring)] in his own cave, he would neither have been called bad, nor a monster, nor a semi-man.” Cacus’ soul did what was necessary “forays, slew and devoured” to preserve his own life’s peace; this is the aspect of which Augustine compares with the other examples listed previously. It is because Cacus did whatever was in his means to preserve his bodily peace that Augustine sees the commonality for striving for peace. Cacus’ devouring is no different than vicious men

¹¹² CD 19.12.

¹¹³ CD 19.12.

¹¹⁴ CD 19.12.

¹¹⁵ CD 19.12.

who like to war. What is the motivation for evil men going to war? - a desire to promote peace by subjecting those they can. What is the motivation for the semi-man Cacus to devour? - a desire to promote peace by appeasing rebellious threats. Cacus is no different from these war-seeking men with respect to his body. Augustine recognizes Cacus' slaying; not the rebelling of his body, as the aspect of which Cacus could be deemed a normal earthly person. Had Cacus done this (slay, devour) to preserve peace, and had he transferred this energy to dealing with other people in a similar manner, he would not be called bad. But as it is, the peace that Cacus wanted with other people was to be left alone. It is important to restate that the necessity that Augustine recognized was the savageness not the rebellion.

How does the section, "and for the sake of pacifying his mortal nature, which rebelled when it needed anything, and of allying the sedition of hunger, which threatened to banish the soul from the body"¹¹⁶ fit in then? This section is secondary to the main point, which is that all nature desires peace. His mortal nature and hunger allied to threaten to rebel and dissent. Cacus' soul does something to prevent the rebellion. From the pronoun reference, it is the soul that devours, not the rebellious mortal nature. The rebellious nature does not take control governmentally. Augustine condones the soul for ensuring peace, not the rebellious mortal nature for its uprising.

But Augustine does not stop with a semi-man in his position that all nature desires peace. Augustine goes from a semi-man, half beast to the "most savage animals" and how they too desire a type of peace.¹¹⁷ Augustine examined the kite, tigress, and Cacus as creatures having a nature towards peace and explains that the law of man's nature

¹¹⁶ CD 19.12.

¹¹⁷ CD 19.12.

towards peace is that much stronger.¹¹⁸ Cacus' peace is not human and it is inadequate in representing an accurate portrait of a permissible case for human rebellion. Furthermore, the wars that wicked men wage are not just and should not be considered just simply because they bring about an earthly peace, as Augustine further illustrates.

Augustine explains that all the peace that he just described cannot be correctly identified as peace at all when compared to God's peace as illustrated in the following excerpt. Augustine explains that it is the pride of man that considers himself superior to his fellow man which forms the basis of unjust peace. Augustine further states, "He, then, who prefers what is right to what is wrong, and what is well-ordered to what is perverted, sees that the peace of unjust men is not worthy to be called peace in comparison with the peace of the just."¹¹⁹ Augustine does not mention any just man in the entire section while he is dealing with the idea that all nature desires peace, even in the most unlikely examples. All peace that is earthly is not worthy to be called peace compared to just peace. Therefore, how can a just rebellion be derived from a peace that Augustine says is not just, in the first place? Secondly the peace created does not deserve to be called peace at all, in comparison to a just peace. Again, why would Augustine place his most explicit case for rebellion within this context? It is more likely that he did not intend the Cacus section to be read as condoning rebellion.

2. Intended Analogy?

Did Augustine intend to use Cacus as an analogy to illustrate a case for rebellion? All the examples leading up to Cacus were each more unconscionable than the former, culminating with Cacus. It is also noteworthy that rebellion was mentioned twice

¹¹⁸ CD 19.14.

¹¹⁹ CD 19.12.

amongst such groups as evil warmongers, robbers and monsters. A positive reading for rebellion is difficult to establish in a context such as this. If Augustine was trying to illustrate through political analogy a case for something as important as rebellion, it was less than ideal for him to leave the analogy with the statement, that the thing that Cacus had, "in common with many other fancies of poets is mere fiction."¹²⁰ It is true that Augustine uses political references that involve Cacus. However, Augustine did not intend the Cacus section to be a political guide by which to live. Augustine speaks metaphorically of Cacus to illustrate his second desire for peace.

Augustine explains the use of a rebelling body and uses similar political language two chapters later when describing animals as he did with Cacus. "For if bodily peace be wanting, a bar is put to the peace even of the irrational soul, since it cannot obtain the gratification of its appetites. And these two together help out the mutual peace of soul and body."¹²¹ The rebelling appetite helps creatures maintain the peace between soul and body. If the appetite did nothing, then the body truly would separate from the soul. But as it was with Cacus, the hunger only "threatened" to banish the soul from the body. The mortal nature, "rebelled when it need anything." This is an appropriate action to help the soul and body stay at peace. "For as animals, by shunning pain, show that they love bodily peace, and, by pursuing pleasure to gratify their appetites, show that they love peace of soul, so their shrinking from death is a sufficient indication of their intense love of that peace which binds soul and body in close alliance."¹²² Similar political language is used but not to the same extent. The same principle is implemented. It is the "intense love" or the "desire" that causes both animals and Cacus to go and devour in order to

¹²⁰ CD 19.12.

¹²¹ CD 19.12.

bind “soul and body in close alliance.” Cacus desired peace, so he devoured whatever came his way to keep the alliance with soul and body. In Cacus’ example, the soul did not deliberately deprive the body of its needs. Likewise, the animals’ soul does not deliberately try to separate the alliance but sometimes food becomes scarce. The Cacus section is a part of a larger point that Augustine is trying to convey, namely, that all nature desires peace, not an allowance for rebellion.

3. Means justifies the end?

An unintended analogy is not the only reason the Cacus case is not an example of a justified rebellion. Simply because rebellion produces a peace, does that mean that Augustine justifies it? Augustine says that all wars are waged to arrive at peace. But not all wars are justified. So surely the end does not justify the means in this instance.

Augustine is not then explicitly condoning any of the following actions sedition, robbery, bullying or pillaging on the basis that they all strive for peace. Moreover, because each of these actions produce an earthly peace, this does not mean that there is a just sedition, just robbery, just bullying, or just pillaging. Augustine is not condoning rebellion in this Cacus story any more than he is condoning all wars because all wars strive for peace. Augustine is merely trying to establish that human nature, even semi-human nature, strives for peace.

4. On governmental provision

On the account that the government should provide for the citizens’ well-being Augustine says this, “‘And so you must be subject’ (13:5). This helps us understand that it is necessary because of this life that we be subject, and that we should not resist anyone wishing to take away any material thing from us, for he has been given authority over

¹²² CD 19.14.

temporal things.”¹²³ And again, “It was best, therefore, that the soul of man, which was still weakly desiring earthly things, should be accustomed to seek from God alone even these petty temporal boons, and the earthly necessities of this transitory life.”¹²⁴ If God is the one who gives man the necessary material things to live, what does it matter if a state is not providing something it cannot provide? God is the ultimate provider of mortal needs for the people.

c. Model for Rebellion: for the shameless oppressor

Von Heyking puts forth this final consideration for Augustine’s allowance for rebellion. Von Heyking states that submission and martyrdom are general responses to evil political rule for Augustine. However, von Heyking thinks that Augustine allows for rebellion when martyrdom does not change the direction of injustice of the ruler providing that three certain conditions are met.¹²⁵

1. Conditions for rebellion

A categorical framework for conditions shall be built to consider Von Heyking’s presentation of Augustine’s just rebellion. Three conditions for a just rebellion have been extracted from von Heyking’s explanation. Firstly, a just rebellion must have a just cause. The two just causes that von Heyking lists are, when “rulers force the citizens to commit unjust or impious deeds, or when rulers fail to provide for their citizens’ material well-being.”¹²⁶ Von Heyking supports the first just cause using CD 5.17, impious decrees, and for the second cause the Cacus story of CD 19.12, as was addressed above.

¹²³ *Epistle to the Romans* 72.1-74.3. There are two other instances where this theme is presented, CD 10.14.

¹²⁴ CD 10.14.

¹²⁵ von Heyking, 122.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 126.

Secondly, there must be enough people downtrodden to represent the common good and to strike fear into the oppressor. Von Heyking states, “Just rebellion requires ‘fear of [a people’s] own numbers.’”¹²⁷ Von Heyking views the passage out of CD 19.17 as portraying a violent attitude towards unrepentant and shameless rulers: “The heavenly city could not have common laws of religion with the earthly city, and on this point must dissent and become a tiresome burden to those who thought differently, and must undergo their anger and hatred and persecutions, except that at length it repelled the hostile intent of this adversaries with fear of its own numbers.”¹²⁸ The just are to endure martyrdom to the point where their numbers strike fear into the hearts of the evil rulers. Von Heyking thinks that the population factor indicates that there are enough people to provide a real threat and enough numbers to “represent the common good.”¹²⁹ Von Heyking sees the Hebrew situation in Egypt before their exodus as a “paradigmatic case of large numbers of people with divine aid resisting a tyrant (CD 16.43; Exod. 1.7).”¹³⁰ Von Heyking summarizes by stating, “Augustine’s requirement for large numbers indicates that escape from tyranny and then martyrdom are required when small numbers are involved.”¹³¹ But large numbers are necessary when a rebellion is attempted.

The third condition is that there must be, “evidence of the ever-present divine aid” (CD 19.17).¹³² Von Heyking explains what is involved in “ever-present divine aid.”¹³³ It is suffice to say that ‘ever-present divine aid’ is God’s providence. Governments rise and fall and God orchestrates this oscillation of regimes. Being part of a resistance force on

¹²⁷ Ibid. 129.

¹²⁸ CD 19.17.

¹²⁹ von Heyking, 129.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 130.

¹³¹ Ibid. 130.

¹³² Ibid. 129.

¹³³ Ibid. 129-147 passim.

the downswing of the oscillation of a regime would be in synchronized movement with God's orchestration. In order for a just rebellion to occur there should be a just cause that incites many people to tear down a regime that God is bringing down.

A graph shall be constructed below. The 'x' axis represents the level of injustice, while the 'y' axis represents the size of population enduring the injustice of a ruler. The third condition, 'God's providence' forms a direct positive correlation with the level of justice. As von Heyking states, "If we apply the relationship between nature and grace explicated above to "divine aid" and the course of nations, we find that Augustine can speak quite comfortably about divine aid in terms of natural causation."¹³⁴ Furthermore, "[I]nsufficiency of virtue and the corruption caused by vice contribut[es] to [a] empire's disintegration."¹³⁵ As the level of injustice increases, God's providence to move a regime in the downward descent increases. As the level of injustice decreases, God's providence stops a regime from falling. Therefore, ever-present divine aid shall be graphed.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 147.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 147.

Figure 1.1 At What Point to Rebel

4. Gross level of injustice, endured by few people imbuing little fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Martyrdom.	Gross level of injustice, endured by some of the population imbuing little fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Martyrdom.	Gross injustices, endured by much of the population imbuing some fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Permission for rebellion or martyrdom.	Gross level of injustice endured by a majority of the population imbuing much fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: obligation for rebellion.
3. Moderate level of injustice endured by minute number of people imbuing little fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Endure.	Many injustices endured by some of the population imbuing little fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Martyrdom or endure.	Moderate level of injustice endured by much of the population imbuing some fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Leave, martyrdom or rebel.	Moderate level of injustice endured by most the population imbuing much fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Permission for rebellion or leave.
2. Small level of injustice endured by minute number of people imbuing little fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Enjoy.	Small level of injustice by some of the population imbuing little fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Endure government	Small level of injustice endured by much of the population imbuing some fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Leave or endure.	Small level of injustice endured by most the population imbuing much fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Leave
1. Minute level of injustice endured by minute number of people imbuing little fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Enjoy. A	Minute level of injustice Endured by some of the population imbuing little fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Enjoy B	Minute level of injustice endured by much of the population imbuing some fear into rulers. Augustine's answer: Endure C	Minute level of injustice endured by most the population imbuing much fear into the rulers. Augustine's answer: Leave. D

Minute-----Large
 Population enduring government's injustice to imbue fear in rulers

An analysis of the graph will aid in further understanding in making a table for von Heyking's position. The darker the shade of gray, the more morally permissible the situation becomes to rebel. If someone were to rebel in an A.1, situation, Augustine would deem their rebellion completely unjustified. However, if someone were to rebel in a D.4, situation, then Augustine would not only think that this were a morally permissible case for rebellion, but an obligatory one. Situations A-C and 1-3, and all the combinations will not warrant a permissible case for rebellion; although, the C-3 situation comes the closest. The morally permissible situations for rebellion will take place from C-D and 3-4, although C-3 is a close case. There is not clear cut case for C-3 as many options are available for the civilians. Cases C-4, and D-3 would provide situations where rebellion would be morally permissible, but not necessarily a moral obligation, as D-4 would be.

2. Analysis of von Heyking's rebellion model

Turning now to the analysis of von Heyking's position, how does one verify this rebellion model? Von Heyking must show that Augustine states that as a greater number of people are unjustly treated by the government, which strikes fear into the rulers, then the more morally permissible it becomes to rebel. The following questions shall be addressed: Q1 Did Augustine use these conditions as a way to justify rebellion in his writings as von Heyking suggests? Q2 What examples are there in Augustine's writings to support this finding? Q3 Are there any counter-examples? Q4 What reactions to evil rulers does Augustine recommend? Q5 Is the position a justifiable one? These questions shall be answered in the order that they were presented.

Q1. Considering the Conditions

To recapitulate the conditions: a rebellion is just when A) there is just cause, which includes i) rulers enforcing evil laws on its citizens and ii) rulers depriving the citizens of their mortal necessities. B) There must be a sufficient number of the oppressed to represent the common good to strike fear into oppressor. C) The rebels must have ever-present divine aid. Augustine's intention for these conditions is important because the argument is weaker when the intent of the author cannot be shown.

A) The two just causes shall be dealt with firstly. There is no explicit mention in CD 5.17, for a just cause for rebellion. Augustine writes, "As for this mortal life ... what does it matter under whose rule a man lives ... provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?" This statement means that this mortal life does not matter (which also deals with mortal necessities when the government is just), but it does matter when the government tries to force someone to do evil because the actions of this mortal life will then affect the eternal life. However Augustine does not prescribe an appropriate reaction to impious and wicked acts, let alone suggest that these are examples of just causes for rebellion. As for the Cacus story, CD 19.12, it was already dealt with. Therefore, the two just causes were not intended to be conditions for the allowance of rebellion, in any sort of explicit or implicit way.

B) The second condition for rebellion is that there are a sufficient number of oppressed to represent common good to strike fear into the oppressor. Did Augustine intend to use numbers and fear as a condition to allow for rebellion? In the following excerpt, Augustine provides his insight into this question.

So it was not because the Savior was unable to protect His disciples that He told them, "When you are persecuted in one city, flee to another. And He Himself set the example. For though He had the power of laying down His own life, and did not lay it down till He chose to do so, still when an infant He fled to Egypt, carried by His parents; and when He went up to the feast, He went not openly, but secretly, though at other times He spoke

openly to the Jews, who in spite of their rage and hostility could not lay hands on Him, because His hour was not come, -not the hour when He would be obliged to die, but the hour when He would consider it seasonable to be put to death.¹³⁶

The timing for martyrdom or flight seems to be the indicator for these two options, not numbers or fear as von Heyking suggests.

C) Ever present divine aid is the third condition for rebellion. If God is causing a regime to make its way to its demise then von Heyking holds that just individuals may help in giving it a helping hand through rebellion, providing the other two conditions are in place. "If a society ignores the other virtues for a long enough time, and ignores the injustices and other problems that this ignorance creates, then the regime disintegrates because the conditions for rebellion are created."¹³⁷ I agree with von Heyking in his reading of Augustine where he states that the virtue of a nation is its sustenance. The more virtue a state has the longer it will be sustained, although this is not a guarantee.

When an empire moves further into vice, God will cause the empire to fall, according to his general providence. But the disagreement lies in what to do when the empire is on a downward spiral. Augustine sees use in evil governments, although they are temporary. Von Heyking is reluctant to view Augustine just letting an evil government kill all sorts of people and allow for the government to fizzle out as is part of Augustine's thought. An evil government can only last so long then God causes it to fall. Does He need the help of humans? How does he use humans? But at what point can the new authority take its place from the evil one? Is it when the old evil authority reaches a certain point of depravity? Or is it something else. Augustine's commentary on the story of Saul and David sheds light on this, which will be presented shortly.

¹³⁶ "Reply to Faustus," *Against the Manichaeans*, 22.36.

¹³⁷ von Heyking, 148.

Q2. Paradigmatic cases for rebellion

The two examples that von Heyking puts forth are CD 19.17, and the story of Cacus CD 19.12, which has already been addressed above, for positive examples for Augustine's permissibility for rebellion. We shall now turn to the first example. Von Heyking reads Augustine's CD 19.17 as a political dissension. "Contrary to advocating passivism to tyranny, Augustine leaves grounds for resistance against unjust rulers who force impious and unjust acts."¹³⁸ Both cities want earthly peace, CD 19.17. Von Heyking's criticisms of the martyrdom case is, "In the passage under consideration here, martyrs do not actively rebel, but their martyrdom can make it exceedingly difficult for a tyrant to govern a country. But is this merely to beg the question? Is Augustine using martyrdom merely to provoke the tyrant to create more martyrs? ... Augustine does not appear to consider these questions, but his argument for martyrdom seems to create the conditions in which rebellion constitutes a threat to political rule."¹³⁹ The thing that von Heyking is reluctant to accept is that Augustine sees the evil government continuing to kill people without anything being done about it and thus being complicit towards the evil performed by the government. Let us look at the text. In book 19 chapter 17 of the *City of God*, Augustine deals with what produces peace and the conflict between the earthly and heavenly city. Augustine begins by explaining that both earthly and heavenly cities need their mortal needs met and there is peace between the two cities because of this. But this is where the commonality ends. Augustine says the difference between the earthly city and heavenly city is that they have different laws of religion. The earthly city

¹³⁸ Ibid. 127.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 128.

thinks that for each part and department there is to be *latreia* for each god. The heavenly city has one God for all things. Augustine continues:

The heavenly city has been compelled in this matter to dissent, and to become obnoxious to those who think differently, and to stand the brunt of their anger and hatred and persecutions, except in so far as the minds of their enemies have been alarmed by the multitude of the Christians and quelled by the manifest protection of God accorded to them. This heavenly city, then, while sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that how ever various these are, they tend to one and the same end of earthly peace.¹⁴⁰

Another question that needs to be answered is, 'who quelled the enemies of God's citizens?' If Augustine were supporting rebellion, now would be a good time to insert that citizens of this city of God should subject the enemies, but it is not these citizens but God who does this, as it is written, "[Q]uelled by the manifest protection of God."

Augustine speaks of a spiritual dissension and this is not a Christian trying to overthrow with the sword, but not obeying the religiously impious law. But does this offend natural reason? It probably does, but does not negate the fact that Augustine still holds that regimes rise and fall due to God's hand.

Q3. Counter Model Example

A good counter example¹⁴¹ against rebellion is found in Augustine's commentary on the incident that involves Saul and David found in the biblical books of I & II Samuel.

¹⁴⁰ CD 19.17.

¹⁴¹ Another example that meets all of the conditions for a justified rebellion is the incident that involves Moses and the Hebrews and the Egyptian Pharaoh. Moses and the people had a just cause to rebel because the three conditions were met. Firstly the "Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile'" (Exodus 1:22). The second condition for rebellion is that there are a sufficient number of oppressed to represent common good to strike fear into oppressor which is appeased, as it is written: "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us'" (Exodus 1:8,9). The third condition is that there must be ever-divine present aid. God's ever-present-divine aid is with the Moses and the Hebrews. While Moses was in hiding in Midian the king of Egypt died. "The people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant" (Exodus 2:23-24). But when God told Moses to free the Hebrews from slavery he did not come to raise up a rebellion. He asked permission from the king

Augustine says of Saul's rule, "[T]he kingdom of Saul himself, who certainly was reprobated and rejected."¹⁴² Augustine sees Saul's rule as unjust. David has a just cause to rebel. Augustine explains that Saul was evil and was rejected by God and that God ordained another ruler, David. God's ever-present-divine aid is with David. Saul learned of this and sought after David to kill him. With all the conditions appeased, according to the rebellion model above, David would have been justified in rebelling, but David ran away. Augustine states that David had "suffered for persecutor Saul." David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he was "most gentle," "mild," "patient," "beneficent" and did not hurt Saul.¹⁴³ David had an excellent opportunity to kill and rebel against Saul. Even though David was just and Saul an unjust king, David waited until God brought Saul down and brought himself up. Augustine states further, "When holy David was suffering Saul his enemy, when he was being vexed by his persecutions, ... he slew not husband after committing adultery with wife."¹⁴⁴ Augustine notes that David incurred hardship, and this was before the Bathsheba incident, where he committed adultery and killed the adulteress' husband. But this tribulation caused David to become "so much the more intimate with God."¹⁴⁵ Augustine sees purpose in tribulation, persecution and sufferings. It is a "surgeon's lancet" that causes people to call "on the name of the Lord."¹⁴⁶ According to the rebellion model above, David should have rebelled, but he did not because Saul was God's anointed.

Q4. Appropriate reactions to evil regimes

of Egypt for the people to be released. Moses and the Hebrews do not leave Egypt until they are given permission from the king.

¹⁴² CD 17.6.

¹⁴³ *Expositions on the Psalms*, LVII.3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* LI.4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Enduring persecutions, like having temporal goods taken away, threatened with words, physical beatings, and jailing from an evil government is the most common reaction to an evil ruler. Augustine entitles the chapter CD 1:10, "That the saints lose nothing in losing temporal goods."¹⁴⁷ Throughout the chapter, Augustine explains how saints do not lose anything of import and that they should endure such losses. "The kings of the earth therefore have persecuted the Christians without a cause. They too had their threatening words: I banish, I proscribe, I slay, I torture with claws, I burn with fires, I expose to beasts, I tear the limbs piecemeal. But heed what he has subjoined: 'And my heart has stood in awe of Thy word.' My heart has stood in awe of these words, 'Fear not them that kill the body,' etc. I have scorned man who persecute me, and have overcome the devil that would seduce me."¹⁴⁸ From this quotation, it is obvious that Augustine believes that patient endurance is an appropriate reaction to evil governments.

Another appropriate reaction to evil rulers is martyrdom. This is actually the furthest extension of enduring persecution. It is enduring it to death. Augustine says, "As our martyrs, when that religion was charged on them as a crime, by which they knew they were made safe and most glorious through eternity, did not choose, by denying it, to escape temporal punishments, but rather confessing, embracing, and proclaiming it, by enduring all things for it with fidelity and fortitude, and by dying for it with pious calmness, put to shame the law by which that religion was prohibited, and caused its revocation."¹⁴⁹ Martyrdom is a pious way dying, and Augustine sees merit in this type of death.

¹⁴⁷ CD 1.10.

¹⁴⁸ *Expositions on the Psalms* CXIX, 59.

¹⁴⁹ CD 8.19.

The final appropriate reaction to evil governments is flight. There are many instances where the flight option is chosen. The Hebrews fled from Egypt to Canaan, Elijah fled from Jezebel, and Jesus fled with his parents to Egypt. Jesus told his disciple to flee from one city when persecuted and to another, and Paul escaped a city by being let out of a window. But some of these people eventually faced and endured an evil ruler to death. Augustine writes of Christ's prompting and example:

So it was not because the Savior was unable to protect His disciples that He told them, 'When you are persecuted in one city, flee to another.' And He Himself set the example. For though He had the power of laying down His own life, and did not lay it down till He chose to do so, still when an infant He fled to Egypt, carried by His parents; and when He went up to the feast, He went not openly, but secretly, though at other times He spoke openly to the Jews, who in spite of their rage and hostility could not lay hands on Him, because His hour was not come, -not the hour when He would be obliged to die, but the hour when He would consider it seasonable to be put to death.¹⁵⁰

Flight is another appropriate reaction to evil rulers.

Q5. Justifiable Model?

Is the model for rebellion derived from von Heyking's position textually supported? The answer to this question, in short, is no, and on three accounts. Firstly, Augustine did not use the conditions for rebellion. There is no just cause that makes rebellion legitimate. Numbers and fear imbued into leaders are not the indicators for either martyrdom or fleeing. God is the one who raises up kingdoms and tears them down and he does not use his people to do this through rebellion. An integral condition was not included in the model above. A fourth condition should have been accounted for. The fourth condition should read, all the purposes and uses that evil tyrants serve, listed above, are exhausted before the possibility of rebellion can be considered. The model for rebellion is very narrow as it is, and it has not even taking into account, even

¹⁵⁰ "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon" found in *Against the Manichaeans*, 22.36.

partially, the purpose and use of evil rulers. Secondly, the two examples that are listed that support von Heyking's finding do not stand up. Thirdly, there is a counter-example that contradicts the model put forth. From these findings, the model put forth for rebellion is not a justifiable one. The major problem with the rebellion model presented above is that it fails to account for the view that tyrants have a purpose and use in God's shaping of humanity.

Concluding the section on special providence and rebellion, it shall be noted that Augustine holds that rebellion is never morally permissible, on three counts. Firstly, God personally raises each single ruler to his place of office for a particular reason. If one opposes a ruler the rebel is in fact opposing God, and what he is trying to achieve through ordaining that particular ruler. Secondly, God has ordained evil rulers for a purpose. Thirdly, Augustine never suggests that there are morally permissible cases for rebellion, or can any cases be found where Augustine endorses a rebellion. But in speaking with non-Christians Augustine wants to put forth a position that condemns rebellion in all cases but cannot do so on the basis of special providence and revelation. Augustine argues against rebellion on the basis of natural reason and general providence.

B. General Providence, reason, inferior righteousness and politics

Although Augustine's theory of rebellion is driven by his understanding of special providence, revelation and the divine command, and is unintelligible to non-Christians, his political philosophy on the whole is intelligible to non-Christians because it is inspired by general providence, natural reason and serves a human good that anyone can identify regardless of one's religious beliefs. It shall be noted that Augustine's position on rebellion, based on special providence and revelation, is paradoxical to his position on

political philosophy as a whole, based on general providence and natural reason. General providence is God's rule of the universe as a whole through his laws. The natural and physical laws are examples of God's general providence. These laws are the means by which God governs creation, except when God personally intervenes. Augustine would also liken the way kingdoms are established with the physical laws of creation as being part of God's general providence. God set up the laws, like gravity, and humans can observe and study in a scientific way the way gravity effects things. This is true of the way Augustine views politics on a whole, as informed by general providence. One can observe the political life in a scientific way using natural reason and come to the same conclusions of politics as a Christian informed by the Scriptures. Augustine states, "God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence."¹⁵¹ There are certain rules and laws that politics follow according to the laws that God set out in his general providence. Politics follow a predictable pattern, just as the natural laws found in nature do. If one is able to figure out the laws that God has put forth for politics and carries them out then the political regime can produce political goods.

Justice and virtue are two laws of politics that constitute an "inferior righteousness" that non-Christians can carry out, which contribute to governments producing political goods. Von Heyking argues that "Political virtue does not require perfect virtue, derived from seeing God directly, but rather on 'inferior righteousness' which stops one from sinning."¹⁵² Augustine states that "[A]s an inferior righteousness may be said to be competent in this life, whereby the just man lives by faith although

¹⁵¹ CD 5.11. In CD 5.1., Augustine writes, "The cause, then, of the greatness of the Roman Empire is neither fortuitous nor fatal. ... In a word, human kingdoms are established by divine providence."

absent from the Lord, and, therefore, walking by faith and not yet by sight it may be without absurdity said, no doubt, in respect of it, that it is free from sin; for it ought not to be attributed to it as fault, that it is not as yet sufficient for so great a love to God as is due to the final, complete, and perfect condition thereof.”¹⁵³ The “inferior righteousness” is not “final, complete” or “perfect” but it is “free from sin” and one does not have to be a Christian to attain this. The way people can know this “inferior righteousness” is by observing the “spirit of a just man,”¹⁵⁴ although here Augustine makes the same circularity mistake, as did Aristotle.

There are many examples of inferior righteousness, like justice and virtue for instance. In each there is a true and perfect form, not unlike Plato’s theory, and there is an inferior form of justice and virtue, as Augustine refers to. Von Heyking identifies Augustine’s acknowledgment of the natural good politics serve, including justice.¹⁵⁵ There are two types of justice that can be derived from Augustine’s writings. Firstly, there is true justice, which does not exist in any earthly kingdom, only in “that republic whose founder and ruler is Christ.”¹⁵⁶ Secondly there is an earthly justice that mimics true justice, that rulers have the freedom to administer as they will. In Augustine’s discussion of justice in empires and bands of robberies he begins by writing, “And justice removed, what are kingdoms except great robberies?”¹⁵⁷ But the existence of a kingdom is not all or nothing for Augustine. In Augustine’s discussion of true justice, he acknowledges a republic that has degrees of justice.¹⁵⁸ Although no earthly kingdom has

¹⁵² von Heyking, 111.

¹⁵³ “On the Spirit and the Letter,” in *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, 36.65.

¹⁵⁴ CD 11.29.

¹⁵⁵ von Heyking, 19, 39, 40-42, 44-46, 70, 72, 75, 156.

¹⁵⁶ CD 2.21.

¹⁵⁷ CD 4.4.

¹⁵⁸ CD 2.21.

true justice, all earthly kingdoms have a measure of justice varying from kingdom to kingdom.

Virtue is another important concept in understanding the principles by which God ordains rulers by His general providence. In the same way as with true justice, there is no true virtue independent of God.¹⁵⁹ People can replicate the likeness of true virtue, but because virtue is independent of God, it is actually a vice in comparison to the true virtue.¹⁶⁰ However, when a truly virtuous ruler comes into power, with the talent for ruling, human affairs are greatly benefited. “But there could be nothing more fortunate for human affairs than that, by the mercy of God, they who are endowed with true piety of life, if they have the skill for ruling people, should also have the power.”¹⁶¹ This clearly indicates that good rulers and politics can benefit humanity. Within this, it is by “the mercy of God” that good rulers come into power. But it is not that the people always deserve a good ruler, contradicting the above address on justice, but being consistent with the mystery of God. Furthermore, the case for this happening is unlikely as Von Heyking states, “The coincidence of true piety, the science of ruling, and political power brings about the happiest of affairs, although the difficulties surrounding political glory indicate that this coincidence is unlikely to occur.”¹⁶²

Augustine attributes the Roman Imperial longevity to their earthly virtue.

Augustine quotes Cato stating that the republic became great by its “industry at home, just government without, a mind free in deliberation, addicted neither to crime nor to

¹⁵⁹ CD 19.25.

¹⁶⁰ CD 19.25.

¹⁶¹ CD 5.19.

¹⁶² von Heyking, 168.

lust.”¹⁶³ These certain virtues are necessary for the sustenance of a government, providing God’s hidden agenda is in alignment. Augustine writes: “Wherefore, though I have, according to my ability, shown for what reason God, who alone is true and just, helped forward the Romans, who were good according to a certain standard of an earthly state, to the acquirement of the glory of so great an empire, there may be, nevertheless, a more hidden cause, known better to God than to us, depending on the diversity of the merits of the human race.”¹⁶⁴ Augustine concedes that the Romans were good to a certain standard, and that this proved to be a valuable human merit that may have aided in the longevity of the Roman Empire. With regard to political success and virtue, the interrelationship between God’s “hidden cause” and the “merits of the human race” have an element of “mystery and incompleteness combined with an inner divine order,”¹⁶⁵ as von Heyking puts it.

Von Heyking argues that Augustine views Roman virtue as foreshadowing perfect virtue.¹⁶⁶ Of the *City of God*, von Heyking writes, “Cato is cited in book 5 as the Roman whose virtue was nearer to the idea of true virtue, and of whom Sallust observes, ‘The less he sought glory, the more it followed him.’”¹⁶⁷ Also in book 5, Augustine cites various Roman heroes who were virtuous in ways that Christians should aspire to.¹⁶⁸

Augustine explains that the entire population was not like this in order to produce a great empire, but only a few were like this to make the whole state great. Augustine explains that the rulers did wrong, and that there were internal dissensions. Augustine states that it was only when the Tarquins were banished that a government skilled in

¹⁶³ CD 5.12.

¹⁶⁴ CD 5.19.

¹⁶⁵ von Heyking, 168.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

ruling was put into place. Then soon after the new government reverted back to the old habits of the former kings. "But the great things which were then achieved were accomplished through the administration of a few men, who were good in their own way."¹⁶⁹ Augustine agrees with Cato as, "it seemed evident to him that the pre-eminent virtue of a few citizens had achieved the whole, and that that explained how poverty overcame wealth, and small numbers great multitudes."¹⁷⁰ Only a few good men are necessary to sustain the whole state.

The general providence of God and political order can be scientifically inquired into, and made intelligible to those outside Christianity. Augustine's discussion of justice and virtue provide a medium by which his interlocutors can enter. Augustine can identify virtuous Romans, like Cato, Cicero, or Regulus, and ascribe to them an earthly virtue that produces good through politics.

II. Augustine's Communicability with his respective audience

It will be stated from the outset that Augustine's rebellion theory is unintelligible to non-Christians, but not to the Manichaeans, Pelagians or the Donatists, three Christian heretical groups. Augustine's broader political philosophy is intelligible to non-Christian groups like the Neo-Platonists, Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics and Roman Pagans. Civic virtue and general authority under the bearing of general providence informed by natural reason provide the avenue for Augustine to communicate to these non-Christian groups. In this section, the following questions shall be answered; how did Augustine communicate his Christian understanding of government to his audience? And to what

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.* 166.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ CD 5.12.

extent was Augustine successful in articulating his political philosophy, despite his heavy reliance on Romans 13, to a non-Christian audience or to heretical Christian sects? To what extent Augustine's political philosophy intelligible to those outside the Christian tradition? Augustine addressed many different philosophical and religious groups as mentioned. It is beyond the scope of this project to address all the different groups. The following audiences will be addressed: the Donatists and the Roman Pagans, because each group represents Augustine's political theory informed by revelation and reason.

A. Donatists

The argument that Augustine makes to the Donatist sect focuses on special providence informed by revelation of the divine command from Romans 13:1. Augustine argues that the Donatists should not rebel because God ordains all authority, and if they resist the authority they are in fact resisting God Himself. The Donatists were a heretical group that emerged out of the early 300's due to persecution inflicted by the Emperor Diocletian. They believe in the authority of Scriptures. Some Donatists were prone to violence and Augustine saw the Donatists as possible threats to the government. The Donatist branch called the Circumcellions thought that assassinations were permissible actions when they were ordained by God. Augustine had good reason to be weary of the Donatists as some made an assassination attempt on him.¹⁷¹

On three fronts Augustine attacks the Donatist position advocating rebellion. The first is through historical proofs attempting to show the impiety of the Donatist Church. Augustine tries to expose the guilt of their founders. He uses the negative judgment of the "pope, council, and emperor" to disarm the group. Augustine speaks of

¹⁷⁰ CD 5.12.

the hypocritical behavior of the Donatists and of the violence of the Circumcellions.¹⁷²

The second group of arguments is based around the writings of the Donatists and exposing their inconsistencies. Augustine addresses the Donatist, Petilianus, who claims the Christian Catholic government persecuted and killed Donatists.¹⁷³ Augustine retorts that that is a hypocritical claim. He continues that Donatists did the very same thing to the Maximianists (a Donatist sect). Augustine knows that they would be unable to deny their hypocrisy. The Donatists attempted to stomp out the heretical group called the Maximianists, yet the Donatists complained that the Catholics were persecuting them. The third front Augustine employs is from Scripture, which both groups hold as authoritative. He writes, "Joseph, who, after the tribulation of a prison, in which his chastity was tried as gold is tried in the fire, being raised by Pharaoh to great honors."¹⁷⁴

Augustine tries to persuade the Donatists that the Scriptural pattern for godly government coming into power is through patient endurance and not rebellion. This reiterates Paul's statements from Romans 13, trusting in God for his deliverance when evil rulers are in power. Augustine is able to read to the Donatist Romans 13 because they believe in the Scriptures as God's word but what about the Roman Pagans?

B. Roman Pagans

Augustine is not able to persuade the Pagan Romans of his position of absolute intolerance towards rebellion because this position is based on special providence, divine command and revelation. But Augustine is able to put forth a political theory intelligible to a Pagan audience that would stop rebellion to the point that it does not offend natural

¹⁷¹ Brown, 330.

¹⁷² Ibid. 229.

¹⁷³ *Against the Donatists*, 20.44.

reason. Augustine saw the potential for a Pagan uprising fueled by the belief that Christianity and Christian rulers caused the fall of Rome. Augustine aimed to answer these accusations in his work the *City of God*, to justify Christianity and perhaps too, to dissuade any Pagans from revolting against the Christian Emperors. There had been a riot initiated and run by the Pagans at Calama. Augustine was aware of this rebellion and the potential threat the Pagans posed to rebel again.¹⁷⁵ Augustine knew that he must petition them by using their own authoritative writings and examples that would appeal to them. Augustine would have to come to a middle ground so that the two groups could enter into dialogue with one another.

Augustine did this through the discussion of politics. Politics can fulfill the longings of humans and move them towards a type of perfection. Augustine recognizes that non-Christians can have true wisdom and knowledge as it is revealed through nature. Augustine viewed Plato as someone who came to an understanding of wisdom,¹⁷⁶ and if Plato could, then so could other non-Christians like the Roman Pagans. Von Heyking's discussion of Platonists coming to wisdom further illuminates how non-Christians can understand Augustine's political theory. He explains that the "[I]ntellect can know God through understanding creation. Augustine argued that Platonic wisdom recognizes that being is the object of intellection and that the good is the object of love of the will. This means that the love of God and of neighbor depends on wisdom and ordinate loving. The existence of members of the city of God outside the sacramental order shows the extent to which Augustine considered this type of virtue 'natural.' Virtue, as ordinate loving,

¹⁷⁴ "Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist," *Against the Donatists*, 2.204.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, 242, 287-288, 408.

may be practiced outside the sacerdotal order. This has important political implications because it provides a neutral ground, a midway point as it were, between the ends of politics and the ends of the Church where the footprints of God can be tracked.¹⁷⁷ Being able to communicate with the same language enables Augustine to provide input and meaningful criticism to the Pagans, and this feedback can be accepted because it is done through a medium that the Pagans can relate and identify. This enables Augustine, a devout Christian, to provide meaningful input into the current discussion over the cause of the fall of Rome. He was able to put forth a political theory that could be understood and discussed with those outside his Christian circle.

The common ground increases as both Christians and non-Christians alike benefit from the virtuous' involvement of politics. Augustine recognizes the various virtuous Romans involved in politics. This common ground does not require the Pagans to have perfect virtue, but rather a political virtue and is based on an "inferior righteousness."¹⁷⁸ "Political virtue does not require perfect virtue, derived from seeing God directly, but rather on "inferior righteousness," by which one's ordinate love prevents one from sinning."¹⁷⁹ Von Heyking explains that, "Augustine acknowledges the rightfulness of venerating virtuous human beings, but he distinguishes this from true sacrifice. His willingness to accept a politics that involves the *cultus* or glorification of virtuous human beings is further seen in his criticism of the Romans, who rightly glory in Regulus, their hero, but refuse to glory the city of God."¹⁸⁰ Virtue levels the playing field for Christians

¹⁷⁶ CD 8.12. See also Augustine's discussion in CD 9.16 where he discusses Apuleius having knowledge of God and how God visits wise men without being contaminated by men for further insight into non-Christians having true wisdom.

¹⁷⁷ von Heyking, 207-208.

¹⁷⁸ "On the Spirit and the Letter," in *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, 36.65.

¹⁷⁹ von Heyking, 111.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 179.

and Pagans. Christians often charge Pagans with being virtuous to serve their self-interest. On the other hand, Pagans despise having to appeal to the Christian God for their virtue. However, natural virtue, as Von Heyking explains, removes the Christians' condescending looks upon the Pagans for practicing virtue based on self-interest. Also, Pagans do not have to look to the Christian God to practice moral virtue.¹⁸¹

Through politics, even Pagans can perform a type of worship or service to their fellow man and by extension to God. Augustine writes, "There are indeed many kinds of worship that have been appropriated from the service of God to be conferred upon men for their honor, an abuse that may come either from carrying humility too far or from the pestilential practice of flattery. Yet those who received such tribute were still considered only men. They are spoken of as men worthy of worship and reverence, or even, if we chose to bestow still more honor, by adoration."¹⁸² Von Heyking explains that Augustine's use of God in its various uses and forms in Latin and Greek further support the claim that Augustine held that non-Christians could be involved in a form of service to man, and by extension God, that is virtuous within politics.¹⁸³

Augustine's broader political philosophy as it relates to rebellion, as far as it is intelligible to the Pagans, rests in the position that the purpose of politics is to bring subjects to a kind of perfection, an inferior perfection that mimics the true perfection of the city of God.¹⁸⁴ Von Heyking explains that "Augustine's paradigm both elevates and moderates politics. It acknowledges that politics is a substantive good, but it stresses that

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 174.

¹⁸² CD 10.4.

¹⁸³ von Heyking, 177.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 216.

only the sacraments of hope for eternal happiness.”¹⁸⁵ When politics serves a good for humanity, and everyone, including those outside Christianity, are a part of politics, the prohibition against rebellion is a plea for the upholding of the good that politics serves.

But this argument cannot support Augustine’s claim that rebellion is never morally permissible, because governments do not always produce a service for humanity. Augustine has more difficulty arguing against rebellion since the evil government is no longer performing its duty as articulated by his intelligible political theory to the Pagans. This is where Augustine’s intelligibility is hindered. The area of unintelligibility is Augustine’s argument for the purpose and use for evil rulers. This is a harder claim to communicate to his interlocutors. Augustine can argue that the Romans have a model by which to live by with Regulus. Regulus did not patiently endure the death penalty of the Carthaginians because God told him to do so, in accordance to Augustine’s divine command rebellion theory, but rather because of natural virtue and an inferior righteousness, namely an inordinate love. The nobility of Regulus is recognizable by Augustine and the Pagans. “[A]mong their own famous men they have a very noble example of the voluntary endurance of captivity in obedience to a religious scruple. Marcus Attilius Regulus, a Roman general, was a prisoner in the hands of the Carthaginians.”¹⁸⁶ Regulus defeated the Carthaginians, but they in turn rebelled successfully and captured him. Augustine points out that, “[I]f they say that M. Regulus, even while a prisoner and enduring these bodily torments, might yet enjoy the blessedness of a virtuous soul, then let them recognize that true virtue by which a city

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 220.

¹⁸⁶ CD 1.15.

also may be blessed.”¹⁸⁷ Regulus has a virtuous soul even though he was captured and tortured, so likewise, Rome can have a virtuous soul even though it was captured.

Augustine is not concerned to discuss the type of virtue Regulus held but, “that by his very noble example they are forced to own that the gods are to be worshipped not for the sake of bodily comforts or external advantages; for he preferred to lose all such things rather than offend the gods by whom he had sworn.”¹⁸⁸ Augustine states that Regulus is more virtuous than Cato because he was unable to conquer and he “disdained to submit himself” to the enemy. Augustine praises Regulus for patiently enduring subjection to his enemy and explains that this showed a love for his fellow Romans. “Patient under the domination of the Carthaginians, and constant in his love of the Romans, he neither deprived the one of his conquered body, nor the other of his unconquered spirit.”¹⁸⁹

Regulus appeased the Carthaginians and the gods by yielding his body, and also appeased his fellow Romans with his “unconquered spirit.”

Conclusion

Two rebellion theories can be derived from Augustine’s writings. One theory is the “perfect” position on rebellion derived from the revelation of the divine command, which puts forth an absolute prohibition against rebellion. From Romans 13:1,2, Augustine has formulated a position towards rebellion that includes an absolute prohibition against it, but allows for passive disobedience when rulers make impious edicts. However, politics, even under an evil ruler, can move subjects towards a type of perfection. The second theory he puts forth is based on his broader understanding of

¹⁸⁷ CD 1.15.

¹⁸⁸ CD 1.15.

¹⁸⁹ CD 1.24.

political philosophy based on natural reason. He is unable to establish from this position an absolute prohibition against rebellion however. Rebellion is morally impermissible insofar as the ruling authorities are performing their duty to a reasonable level.

Augustine is able to communicate to some extent the importance of being subject to even evil rulers at times. Augustine's rebellion theory, dependent on general providence, is to a large extent intelligible to a non-Christian audience. Augustine's position that sees politics as having the potential of fulfilling the desires of human beings is an aspect of his political philosophy that is appealing to a larger audience. When Augustine makes the position that rulers and others that hold authority produce a good for humanity, he can make the argument that rebellion should not occur because it will undermine the good that politics is working.

According to Augustine, reason is limited in providing people with the knowledge essential to perfect living, although not to an inferior perfect living, to use a paradox. The limit of reason compared to revelation is prominent in the Scriptures as it is written in Galatians 1:12, "For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Augustine's comments on Matthew 16:16, "Wherefore as those eyes, that is, the holy Apostles, to whom not flesh and blood, but the Father which is in Heaven had revealed Him, so that Peter said, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God.'"¹⁹⁰ When it comes to possible morally permissible cases for rebellion, revelation trumps reason for Augustine. But Augustine is able to make his general political philosophy, as it pertains to his position on rebellion, intelligible to non-Christians to large extent. Whereas Augustine's general political philosophy is intelligible to non-Christians because it is based on natural reason, and his rebellion

theory is unintelligible to non-Christians because it is based on revelation, the reformational thinker John Calvin is the inverse, whose rebellion theory and political philosophy shall be addressed next.

¹⁹⁰ *Commentary on the Psalms* 88.6.

Chapter 2

The Rebellion Theory of John Calvin of Sixteenth Century Geneva, Switzerland

In this chapter, John Calvin's rebellion theory and the way he communicated his ideas about rebellion to his audience will be addressed. What is Calvin's position on rebellion briefly? Calvin rejects all forms of rebellion because rebellion is opposition against God, except when lower level governmental officials are mandated by the constitution of their country to curb evil rulers. In his constitutional theory of resistance, rebellious passions are channeled into legal and morally permissible activities within the governmental institution to preserve the integrity of the political offices while removing evil rulers, but it is a form of rebellion nonetheless. In a sense, Calvin is an inverted Augustine, meaning that Calvin's general political philosophy is unintelligible to non-Christians whereas Augustine's is. However, Calvin's constitutional rebellion theory is intelligible to non-Christians whereas Augustine's particular providential rebellion theory based on revelation is not. Calvin's political philosophy, and the principles of rebellion flowing from this philosophy, are for the most part only intelligible to Christians, but his constitutional theory of resistance has been adopted, implemented and expanded by people of all beliefs, including every liberal democratic state in the world.¹⁹¹ This chapter shall be divided into two main sections including, I Calvin's consideration for the moral

¹⁹¹ Ralph C. Hancock's argument in his book, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 1, 72-73.

permissibility of rebellion and II his ability to communicate his political ideas to his respective audience, in an attempt to both present and explicate his rebellion theory and its communicability.

John Calvin is one of the most influential thinkers during one of the most philosophically turbulent times in history. Calvin was born in the sixteenth century. He is a major contributor to the dialogue of rebellion theory. Calvin's consideration of political philosophy had a direct impact on the administration and governance of his home polity Geneva. He was in correspondence with many rulers and had much influence in political matters during his time. Calvin wrote many significant works that provide insight into his thinking and the reformational period he lived in. Calvin's *Institutes of a Christian Religion*¹⁹² is his most regarded work and is considered "The ablest treatise that the reformation produced, its power was recognized by friend and foe alike."¹⁹³

Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan state that Calvin's thinking is "essentially premodern."¹⁹⁴ One reason for this is that, "John Calvin may largely take the credit for conceiving and implementing a reintegration of political order and spiritual community."¹⁹⁵ Many democratic liberals cringe at the thought of Calvin's Geneva and would not like to imagine what a contemporary replication would look like. Many think that Calvin's thought is irrelevant and unimportant as it is narrow and dogmatic. Other

¹⁹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (The Library of Christian Classics Volume XXI, Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edited by John T. McNeill, and translated by F. L. Battles, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967). From henceforth *Institutes of the Christian Religion* shall be footnoted as ICR and referred to in the text as the *Institutes*.

¹⁹³ Franklin Charles Palm, *Calvinism and Religious Wars*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1971), 10.

¹⁹⁴ Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus To Grotius, A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, (100-1625)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company 1999, 549.

¹⁹⁵ O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 662.

reasons why some disregard Calvin is that, as Franklin Charles Palm states, "Calvin was virtually a dictator."¹⁹⁶ However, Calvin's ideas were essential to the political philosophic dialogues during the 17th Century. His ideas were further developed and put into action by those, like John Locke of the Glorious Revolution, and founding fathers, like John Adams, of the American Revolution. Recent scholarship has shown that some parts of Calvin's thought have helped to lay the foundation for modern politics.¹⁹⁷

I. A Consideration for the Moral Permissibility for Rebellion

Calvin deals with rebellion questions many times in his various writings. Calvin's most noted writing for his address of rebellion is contained in the *Institutes*. But other writings such as his many letters, Scriptural commentaries, sermons and other treatises provide insight into his thinking about rebellion. Again, Calvin provides a position that characteristically prohibits rebellion absolutely, but allows for institutionalized governmental accountability or a constitutional theory of resistance, which channels and allows for the controlled cathartic release of rebellious passions within institutional constraint. These two positions will be presented accordingly.

A. Calvin's Absolute Prohibition of Rebellion

In this section, four issues shall be addressed. The first issue is Calvin's primary reason one should not rebel against the government. The second issue concerns evil tyrants and the appropriate behavior towards tyrants. The third issue deals with

¹⁹⁶ Palm, 20.

¹⁹⁷ See Hancock, 72-73; also, Quentin Skinner's, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume Two: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 189-349 passim; see also, Harro Hopfl's, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 49.

governments making laws contrary to God's. Finally, the fourth issue looks at why evil tyrants are not long for the world, according to God's providence.

1. Rebelling against God's Ordained Authority is Rebelling against God

Calvin states in the *Institutes* that the fact that all authority is ordained by God is the reason that subjects should obey and remain in positional subordination. After quoting many passages of Scripture in *Institutes* 4.20.23, which explain that God has placed all authority in its place and that people should be subject, Calvin states, "Let no man here deceive himself, since we cannot resist the magistrate without resisting God. For, although an unarmed magistrate may seem to be despised with impunity, yet God is armed, and will signally avenge this contempt."¹⁹⁸ An attack against an authority is an attack against God and He treats this attack as an attack against Himself and will protect the authority He put into place.

Calvin puts this same principle forth in another way. He writes, "Let us doubt not that on whomsoever the kingdom has been conferred, him we are bound to serve. Whenever God raises anyone to royal honor, He declares it to be His pleasure that he should reign."¹⁹⁹ Calvin's position on why rulers come to power and why subjects should not rebel is that, God alone exalts and abases. If one rebels against the authority, which God put into place, he is actually rebelling against God. This is where the absolute prohibition against rebellion is evident.

The primary passage of Scripture for Calvin's position is taken from Paul's epistle to the Romans, 13:1-2. Calvin's *Commentary on the Romans* 13:1,2 elucidates his position against rebellion to his Christian audience:

¹⁹⁸ ICR 4.20.23.

And by mentioning every soul, He removes every exception, lest any one should claim an immunity from the common duty of obedience. For there is no power, etc. The reason why we ought to be subject to magistrates is, because they are constituted by God's ordination. For since it pleases God thus to govern the world, he who attempts to invert the order of God, and thus to resist God himself, despises His power; since to despise the providence of Him who is the founder of civil power, is to carry on war with Him.²⁰⁰

By stating that no one is exempt to this law of obedience to magistrates, this statement ends any claim for God's approval of rebellion. The reasoning against rebellion is that since God constitutes all authority, and rebellion undermines authority, then rebellion undermines God's constitution of government. Rebellion undermines God's manifested work on the earth. Calvin says that it pleases God to govern the earth. But humans take it upon themselves to invert this order and retract from God what belongs to Him.

Rebellion is taking up arms against God.

Calvin's *Commentary on Psalms* further explains that rebelling against God's chosen authorities is virtually rebelling against God. Calvin comments on the rebellion of Korah against Moses and Aaron²⁰¹ in his commentary on Psalms 106:16-22. Korah and company, "under the influence of diabolical pride," rise up "against God" when they confront Moses and Aaron:

[I]t was the will of God to rule the people by means of Moses and Aaron, not to submit to their rule was virtually to set themselves obstinately to resist the authority of God Himself. ... [T]he very time when God was treating the children of Israel with the utmost kindness and care, [Korah and company] yet were discontented with their lot, and rebelled against Him. Could such madness serve any other purpose than to show, that, casting off all farther dependence upon the providence of God for their support, they aspire to rise above the very heavens? In this sense Aaron is called the saint of Jehovah, in order that we might know that both he and Moses were equally identified with God; for under the person of the one, the designation is applied to both, and in this way the prophet shows that they had been Divinely invested with that authority which they were exercising. In renouncing their authority, therefore, and, to the utmost of their power, dishonoring these saints, Dathan and Abiram were rebelling not against men, but against

¹⁹⁹ ICR 4.20.28.

²⁰⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries On The Epistle Of Paul The Apostle To The Romans*, (Owen, John, ed. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1855), Chapter 13.

²⁰¹ This rebellion can be found in Numbers 16.

God. The earth opened. The heinousness of their sin may be seen in the magnitude of the punishment by which it was visited.²⁰²

Rebellion is not an action to be taken lightly, according to Calvin. All the rebels, and their families, just described, were swallowed by the earth and killed. Again, the reason that one should not rebel against authority is that God is the ultimate ruler, who delegates and bestows authority to all those who hold authority. When Korah and some of the other Levitical families stood against Moses and Aaron, it is true that they stood against two men who did not deserve great honor or respect in themselves.²⁰³ But because God chose Moses and Aaron to be authority holders, they deserve the same amount of respect they would give God because Moses and Aaron held something only of God can give, that is, authority. Authority is uniquely of God. Without God, there is no authority. Therefore, withstanding Moses and Aaron, independent of God and authority, is non-consequential, but since God ordained these two vessels with authority, the opposition to Moses and Aaron is opposition against God.

Calvin encounters a practical situation and recommends the same advice he gives in the theoretical. Calvin writes a letter to the Duke of Somerset of England in October of 1548 to explain that the subversives in the Duke's midst deserve to be punished. He writes that the rebels, "deserved to be repressed by the sword which is committed to you, since they not only attack the king, but strive with God, who has placed him upon a royal throne, and has committed to you the protection as well of his person as of his majesty."²⁰⁴ Calvin expresses to the protector of the king, that the attack his king is

²⁰² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms: John Calvin* (Translation by James Anderson, Grand Rapids Mi.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Volume 4, 1845), 106:16-22; this shall be referred to as *Commentary on Psalms*, henceforth.

²⁰³ Numbers 16.

²⁰⁴ "Letter to the Protector of Somerset", October 22nd 1548, Letter CCXXIX, *Selected Works of John Calvin Tracts and Letters* (Edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, Vol. 5., Letters, Part 2: 1545-

experiencing is not only an attack against the king, but against God. Knowing this, Calvin recommends that the rebels be put to death with the sword. Calvin's position is easily understandable if the rulers are good, but what about evil rulers?

2. Subjection to Evil Tyrants

What if an unjust ruler is terrorizing the countryside? Would it be permissible to remove the evil ruler and replace him with a just one? This issue shall be answered using four tyrannical examples that Calvin addresses and these will be presented in chronological order. The first example is the rebellion against the tyrannical King Chedorlaomer taken out of the story of Genesis 14. The second example is the assailing of David by King Saul taken out of the story of I Samuel 18-31. The third example is Nebuchadnezzar, which is taken from the book of Daniel.²⁰⁵ The fourth example is the French Monarch Francis I. We shall now turn to these examples.

Calvin looks at an obscure king of the ancient world in explaining his position for subjection to tyrants. Calvin's commentary on Genesis explains his position against rebellion even when evil rulers have authority:

Now, though Chedorlaomer had rendered so many people tributary to him by tyranny rather than by lawful authority, and on that account his ambition is to be condemned; yet his subjects are justly punished for having rashly rebelled. For although liberty is by no means to be despised, yet the subjection which is once imposed upon us cannot, without implied rebellion against God, be shaken off; because 'every power is ordained by God,' notwithstanding, in its commencement, it may have flowed from the lust of dominion.²⁰⁶

1553, Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 187. Calvin's letters shall be referred to by the name of the recipient, date, letter number, page number henceforth.

²⁰⁵ Although these are three Old Testament examples, Calvin also extracts the same principle from the New Testament. One such example is found in his commentary on Acts 23 when Paul is struck for speaking evil against a ruler. Calvin asks the question, "But here riseth a question, whether we ought not to obey a ruler, though he exercise tyranny?" He answers, "For though the exploiting [administration] of earthly or civil rule be confused or perverse, yet the Lord will have men to continue still in subjection" (*Commentary on Acts*, 23: 1-5).

²⁰⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis: By John Calvin* (John King, ed. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1847), Genesis 14; Shall be referred to as *Commentary on Genesis* henceforth.

Chedorlaomer was a tyrant when he conquered and while he ruled and Calvin condemns him for this. But when a rebellion, spurred on by the tyranny, was squelched, Calvin explains that the rebels deserved the punishment for their rashness. Calvin does not advocate a domineering government, but cherishes liberty. Once a ruler is able to subject a person by whatever means possible, the person cannot throw off the authority over him without an implied rebellion against God. Calvin recognizes that Chedorlaomer's power flowed from his lust of dominion, but even this cannot circumvent the prohibition against rebellion.

Calvin's commentary on the story of David and Saul provides another example of Calvin's position of subjection to evil tyrants. King Saul sought to kill newly ordained King David, but David would not fight back because God had ordained King Saul with authority. Calvin writes: "Thus David, when already king elect by the ordination of God, and anointed with his holy oil, though causelessly and unjustly assailed by Saul, holds the life of one who was seeking his life to be sacred, because the Lord had invested him with royal honor. 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.'"²⁰⁷ Calvin comments on a rare event when a good subject, who has legitimate claim to the throne, is pursued by a tyrannical ruler and flees and does not fight back. David patiently endures the persecution from Saul until God's appointed time when David could realize the throne upon Saul's death. David did not want to hurt God's anointed for no other reason than Saul was ordained by God, even though Saul was evil and rejected by God.

²⁰⁷ ICR 4.20.28.

Good rulers and evil tyrants should receive submission from their citizens, as Calvin's commentary on Nebuchadnezzar explains this. Subjection to evil rulers should be done for no other reason than that both a tyrannical ruler and a good ruler have authority given to them from God. Calvin explains that it is God who places tyrants in their place to receive obedience.

We see how great obedience the Lord was pleased to demand for this dire and ferocious tyrant, for no other reason than just that [Nebuchadnezzar] held the kingdom. In other words, the divine decree had placed him on the throne of the kingdom, and admitted him to regal majesty, which could not be lawfully violated. If we constantly keep before our eyes and minds the fact, that even the most iniquitous kings are appointed by the same decree which establishes all regal authority, we will never entertain the seditious thought, that a king is to be treated according to his deserts.²⁰⁸

Calvin concedes that Nebuchadnezzar was a tyrant. The reason for subjection, however, is not for good governance, but because God placed Nebuchadnezzar on the throne.

Calvin emphasizes if people keep this in mind, rebellion will not be conceived as an option.

Calvin encounters a real life tyrant and suggests the same reactions. During the height of the reformation, King Francis I never encouraged or became soft towards the Protestant movement. Palm reports that Francis I was "interested solely in the sensual and artistic sides of the Renaissance, not in the Christian."²⁰⁹ Francis I expelled many evangelicals, including Calvin, and had others killed. What is Calvin's reaction to this misuse of power? Calvin writes the *Institutes* to persuade Francis I, King of France in 1536 that the Christianity that he espouses is not a rebellious sect.²¹⁰ In the *Institutes*, Calvin dedicates an entire book to address his perspective on civil government.²¹¹ Calvin

²⁰⁸ ICR 4.20.27.

²⁰⁹ Palm, 6-7.

²¹⁰ Preface to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bainton, 134-135.

²¹¹ ICR, 4.20.1-32.

writes a dedication to Francis I to explain the intent of his work and denounce the false accusations made against the Protestants' Gospel. Calvin reassures the French Monarch:

I have resolved to present to you a confession that you may learn what is that doctrine against which the furious so rage who disturb thy kingdom with fire and sword. Daily this teaching is traduced before the most noble king as designed to wrest scepters from kings, overthrow judicial procedures, subvert all order and government, disturb the tranquillity of the people, abrogate laws, dissipate possessions and introduce sheer chaos. Wherefore, most invincible King, not without reason do I request that you assume full cognizance of this cause.²¹²

Calvin wishes to have the French monarch know that Protestant Christianity is not to be feared by kings and rulers as they are not rebels. Many of Calvin's opponents attempt to strike fear into the hearts of the rulers by claiming that the Protestant's Gospel is heretical and breeds rebellion. Calvin attempts to show the king that this is not the case. "King, listen not to the groundless delations by which our adversaries seek to alarm you, charging that our new Gospel, as they call it, has no other intent but to seek opportunity for sedition and impunity for vice. We who are thus accused of meditating the subversion of kingdoms have never uttered a factious word."²¹³ Calvin reassures the king that his group is not to be feared politically and this is confirmed by a copy of the *Institutes* sent. But even if the Francis I does not heed or believe what Calvin writes, Calvin replies:

If on the contrary, your ears are lent to the malevolent and no defense is permitted to the accused, if we then continue to be persecuted, with connivance on your part, by imprisonment, scourges, tortures, confiscations and flames, then like sheep for the slaughter, reduced to extremities we will in patience possess our souls and wait the mighty hand of the Lord who will undoubtedly come in due time to deliver the poor from their affliction and to castigate those who swagger in their security.²¹⁴

²¹² Preface to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bainton, 134-135.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Even if the king decides to punish the followers of the new Gospel, Calvin says that they shall endure his persecution consistent with a position of absolute intolerance towards rebellion even with tyrants.

Calvin attempts to close all the doors for people contemplating justification for rebellion based on the claim that the ruler is evil. Calvin considers an oft-used argument for rebellion, "But rulers, you will say, owe mutual duties to those under them. This I have already confessed. But if from this you conclude that obedience is to be returned to none but just governors, you reason absurdly."²¹⁵ If rulers do not fulfill their mutual obligation, this does not give citizens freedom to rebel. Subjects will be beyond their jurisdictional boundary if they try to hold the king accountable for his actions. William R. Stevenson Jr. writes, "A ruler is then primarily a 'minister of God,' and his true accountability is to God alone."²¹⁶ The king is accountable to no one, save God, because it is God who made the king, king, not the people.

3. Obey God Rather than Man

Total subjection does not mean total obedience however. Calvin expects subjects to obey all decrees of the government except those that are contrary to God's law. When a government makes a law against the law of God, then subjects are to 'obey God rather than man.'²¹⁷ In this section, two excerpts from Calvin's writings shall be addressed. Calvin's commentary on Acts, from where the verse is taken from, will be considered, followed by Calvin's treatment of the evil decree by Darius recorded in Daniel.

²¹⁵ ICR 4.20.29.

²¹⁶ William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace – The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22.

²¹⁷ Acts 5:29.

Calvin's commentary on Acts provides guidelines on appropriate actions to take when rulers make laws contrary to God's. Calvin writes:

If a magistrate does his duty as he ought, a man shall in vain say that he is contrary to God, seeing that he dissents in nothing; yea, rather the contrary rule is then in force. We must obey God's ministers and officers if we will obey Him. But so soon as rulers do lead us away from the obedience of God, because they strive against God with sacrilegious boldness, their pride must be abated, that God may be above all in authority. Then all smokes of honor vanish away. For God does not vouchsafe to bestow honorable titles upon men, to the end they may darken his glory.²¹⁸

People are to obey the laws insofar as they do not break the commandments of God. But when rulers do make evil decrees that "lead us away from the obedience of God" then God will revoke their authority and make them mere men as he writes later in the same commentary, "If a king, or ruler, or magistrate, do become so lofty that he diminishes the honor and authority of God, he is but a man."²¹⁹

Calvin deals with the issue of rulers making evil decrees in the *Institutes* 4.20.32, in dealing with Darius' impious command. Calvin cautions his readers to be alert for laws that are made by the king that are against God's laws.²²⁰ The commands of the rulers must be compared to the laws of God. If a decree is found to be contradictory to God's law then subjects should disobey the decree. Calvin states, "If [rulers] command anything against Him let us not pay the least regard to it, nor be moved by all the dignity which they possess as magistrates."²²¹ Even though earthly authorities deserve reverence and respect if they make a law against God's, the subjects should not obey the evil law. Hancock states that God has given rulers authority but this does not mean that they should receive unlimited obedience. A private citizen has the responsibility to God to

²¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles: John Calvin*, (Henry Beveridge, Volume 1. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1850), Acts 5:29; Shall be referred to henceforth as *Commentary on Acts*.

²¹⁹ *Commentary on Acts* 5:29.

²²⁰ ICR 4.20.32.

identify in the political realm laws that are evil. "Thus God's ordination does not finally remove the political responsibility of each individual."²²²

The story of king Darius and Daniel exemplify the model of disobedience to an evil law. Daniel disobeyed Darius' laws that no one is allowed to petition any God or man other than the king Darius for 30 days. Daniel is caught for praying to God thus breaking the impious law, but that did not count as sin. Calvin comments: "On this ground Daniel denies that he had sinned in any respect against the king when he refused to obey his impious decree, because the king had exceeded his limits, and not only been injurious to men, but, by raising his horn against God, had virtually abrogated his own power."²²³ Daniel prayed to God, disobeying the "impious decree" and was subsequently thrown into the lion's den. When Darius made the evil command he contended with God, which led to the near abrogation of his power. But, in the end, as he saw the wrongfulness of his decree and released Daniel the next day. Calvin comments on the same story in his *Commentary on Daniel*:

Daniel ... defends himself with justice, since he had not committed any crime against the king; for he was compelled to obey the command of God, and he neglected what the king had ordered in opposition to it. For earthly princes lay aside all their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy [*conspuere in ipsorum capita*, lit., 'to spit on their heads'] than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights, and, as it were, to seize upon his throne and draw him down from heaven.²²⁴

Again, Daniel did not commit any crime against the ruler who made the impious command. When rulers make decrees contrary to God's they "lay aside all their power" and God brings them low.

²²¹ ICR 4.20.32.

²²² Hancock, 73.

²²³ ICR 4.20.32.

²²⁴ CR XLI. 25, *Commentary on Daniel*, 6:22.

Editors John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles argue in a footnote of the *Institutes* 4.20.31, that Calvin endorses popular rebellion in this section.²²⁵ They write, “In general, Calvin carefully guards against any endorsement of popular revolutionary action, but in some instances his language is less guarded.”²²⁶ McNeill and Battles point out that when Calvin addresses Darius’ dealing with Daniel he lets down his guard in his commentary on Daniel 6:22. However, Calvin does not suggest that people rise up against the ruler who makes impious decrees. Calvin commends Daniel for subjecting himself to the unjust punishment of King Darius. “Daniel might, as I have said, have complained of the king's cruelty and perfidy. He does not do this, but is silent concerning this injury, because his deliverance would sufficiently magnify the glory of God.”²²⁷ Calvin expects subjects to endure unjust punishment to “magnify the glory of God” rather than engage in popular revolution as McNeill and Battles suggest. Calvin does not explicitly or implicitly suggest that an armed rebellion is suitable for rulers who make impious decrees. It is not that Calvin was unguarded with his language. Calvin recognizes that when a ruler opposes God, God will cause the ruler to fall in a short time. As the ruler has set aside his power by making a law against God’s, it is only a matter of God’s timing that the ruler will fall from his position. Calvin does not deal with how God debases the rulers in his dealing with Daniel, but he does so elsewhere in dealing with the providence of God, as was touched on at an earlier point.

²²⁵ *ICR*, 4.20.31n54.

²²⁶ *ICR*, 4.20.31n54.

²²⁷ *Commentary on Daniel* 6:21-22.

4. Evil Tyrants Are Not Long for the World According to Providence of God

Calvin's understanding of God's sovereignty, also called as divine providence, is essential to his position on rebellion. Roland H. Bainton explains that Calvin's theology centers on the sovereignty of God.²²⁸ Bainton writes, "Calvin was overwhelmed by the sense of the majesty of God who sits above the circle of the earth, before whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, who exalts and abases, who is the Lord of time, the director of history, the end and aim of man's endeavor and aspiration."²²⁹ Palm suggests a similar reading, "The supremacy of God constituted Calvin's fundamental belief."²³⁰ Hancock states that Calvin's understanding is unlike deists in that his understanding is "Far from limiting God's providence to the original act of Creation, Calvin understands the creation itself as a manifestation of providence."²³¹ As providence is the cornerstone of Calvin's perspective on the universe, politics and rebellion, further attention shall be allotted to it. Firstly, Calvin's general understanding of providence shall be presented. Secondly, the way Calvin viewed the providence of God in its relationship to government shall be presented. Thirdly, the reason tyrants are not long for the world according to God's providence will be presented.

Calvin presents his attitude towards the commonly held view of divine providence. He states, "At the outset, then, let my readers grasp that providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events."²³² This common view, according to Calvin, is held by 'sophists,' 'philosophers,' 'stoics,' 'profane men' and the 'carnal'

²²⁸ Roland H Bainton, *The Age of the Reformation* (London: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1956), 48.

²²⁹ Bainton, 48.

²³⁰ Palm, 11.

²³¹ Hancock, 36.

minded. Calvin thinks that these aforementioned depreciate what God actually does because they, “make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished His work.”²³³ Calvin argues that the accurate view of God is seeing the “presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception.”²³⁴ Calvin believes that God deserves reverence according to what He has done and continues to do. Calvin writes, “[T]ruly God claims, and would have us grant Him, omnipotence – not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity.”²³⁵ Calvin continues, “[H]e so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation.”²³⁶ Calvin does not view providence as God getting the earth ball spinning, according to unseen laws, then taking a step back, and periodically intervening into human history when He thinks it timely. God’s intervention pertains as much to the grandiose ‘celestial frame’ as to the insignificant ‘sparrow’.²³⁷

Calvin states that God is the one who ordains authority and casts down rulers according to His providence and sovereign will. Calvin writes in the *Institutes*:

I would have the reader carefully to attend to that Divine Providence which, not without cause, is so often set before us in Scripture, and that special act of distributing kingdoms, and setting up as kings whomsoever he pleases. In Daniel it is said, ‘He changes the times and the seasons: he remove kings, and sets up kings’ (Dan. 2:21, 37). Again, ‘That the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will’ (Dan. 4:17, 25).²³⁸

Calvin states that God personally elevates and debases rulers. He does this in the same breath as saying God changes the times and the seasons. Calvin makes God’s providence

²³² ICR 1.16.4.

²³³ ICR 1.16.1.

²³⁴ ICR 1.16.1.

²³⁵ ICR 1.16.3.

²³⁶ ICR 1.16.3.

²³⁷ ICR 1.16.1.

the only possibility for the ordination of authority, although God uses a variety of means. Calvin attempts to put an end to curiosity and any other consideration on many occasions. Rulers do not come to power by their own prowess, but by God alone. Calvin explains this in his *Commentary on Romans* 13:1: "And it seems indeed to me, that the Apostle intended by this word to take away the frivolous curiosity of men, who are wont often to inquire by what right they who rule have obtained their authority; but it ought to be enough for us, that they do rule; for they have not ascended by their own power into this high station, but have been placed there by the Lord's hand."²³⁹ Calvin tries to end speculation as to how rulers come into their position of power. Calvin concedes that it is against human tendency to attribute this type of control to God. "[S]carcely one in a hundred feels in his mind the dominion of God over the earth."²⁴⁰ It is easier to believe that a ruler came into power by accident or for some other reason rather than God ordaining the ruler, "We feel great difficulty in believing kings placed upon their thrones by a divine power, and afterwards deposed again, since we naturally fancy that they acquire their power by their own talents, or by hereditary right, or by fortuitous accident."²⁴¹ What Calvin means by this is that the various means by which rulers come to power, albeit through their talents, hereditary right or accident are insufficient explanations of their empowerment, apart from God. These means and explanations are insufficient because they omit the fact that God dictates all events and circumstances, including the empowerment of rulers. Talent, hereditary right, fortuitous accident, valor, counsel, and powerful troops are means by which God elevates and debases rulers in His

²³⁸ ICR 4.20.26.

²³⁹ *Commentary On Romans* John Calvin, Romans 13:1; This idea is repeated in *Commentary on I Peter* 2:13-16.

²⁴⁰ *Commentary on Daniel* 4:17.

providence. These means are necessary but they are insufficient in themselves in achieving power. God is, ultimately, as the controller of the universe, the one who ordains all authority. There is no other option to God setting rulers in their place, in this sense. The idea that God is the one who is solely responsible for the ordination of authority according to his divine providence is an idea that is repeated many times in Calvin's writings, and it is sufficed to list three of them here.

Having covered Calvin's understanding of providence, for the purposes here, and its relation to ordination of authority, relationship of God's providence and how evil tyrants are not long for the world will be considered. There are three types of rulers God opposes. They are, firstly the proud who believe they achieved their position of power by their own merit and detract glory from God. Secondly, rulers that make laws contrary to God's (which includes rulers attempting to prevent their subjects from following God). And thirdly, rulers that abuse the widows and orphans and other "lowly common folk."²⁴²

Calvin deals with the pride of King Herod and his subsequent death in his commentary on Acts 12:19-25 in showing how God tears down the proud rulers.²⁴³ The story goes as follows, King Herod gives an oration and "The people [sic] cry out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."²⁴⁴ Calvin explains that Herod is "condemned of sacrilege" because he "took to himself the honor due to God." Calvin explains that "[T]his sacrilege is a common fault in all proud men,

²⁴¹ *Commentary on Daniel* 2:21. This theme repeated *Commentary on Daniel* 4:17.

²⁴² ICR 4.20.31.

²⁴³ *Commentary upon the Acts*, 12:19-25.

²⁴⁴ Acts 12:22-23.

because, by taking to themselves more than they ought, they darken the glory of God.”²⁴⁵

Calvin thinks that when people do not attribute authority to God they take away glory from God. Calvin writes in his commentary of Daniel: “[M]en cannot ascribe even the slightest merit to themselves without detracting from God’s praise; hence angels continually seek from God the casting down of all the proud, and that He will not permit Himself to be defrauded of His proper rights, but maintain in all its integrity His own sovereign powers.”²⁴⁶ Again, if God is the one that ordains authority, and humans attempt to take credit or ascribe this privilege to something other than God, then God will abase those who deprive Him of this due recognition. The story of Nebuchadnezzar illustrates the fact that God tears down proud rulers. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and wanted the wise men of the nation to come and provide him insight into its meaning. Daniel interprets the dream for the king. Calvin offers his insight into Daniel’s interpretation in his commentary on Daniel: “[Nebuchadnezzar] has all angels opposed you; for by one consent and with one mouth they accuse you before God, for as far as possible you obscurest his glory; and God, assenting to their prayers, has determined to cast you away, and to render you an object of contempt and reproach before the whole world; and this decree has been signed by all the angels, as if it were common between Him and them.”²⁴⁷ Nebuchadnezzar obscures God’s glory and the angels rail against the king to God. God then decides to cast the king down as a spectacle to the world, but did so in his due time, when all that He wanted to accomplish through Nebuchadnezzar was

²⁴⁵ *Commentary on Acts*, 12:22-23.

²⁴⁶ *Commentary on Daniel* 4:17. Calvin writes a similar sentiment later in his *Commentary on Daniel* 6:21-22.

²⁴⁷ *Commentary on Daniel* 4:17

achieved, just as Calvin describes, “[T]hey were directed by God’s hand whither he pleased, and executed his work unwittingly.”²⁴⁸

Although the issue of a ruler forming laws contradicting God’s law was covered more thoroughly above, it shall be revisited briefly to extract the way God makes evil rulers low in his providence. Calvin deals with the issue of what to do when a king makes an unrighteous decree in *Institutes* 4.20.32. He also deals with God’s reaction to the ruler who made the evil law, which is the focus of concern here. Calvin states that Darius “exceeded his limits ... and in lifting his horn against God, had himself abrogated his power” by making an evil edict.²⁴⁹ God brings down those that oppose him by making laws contrary to His by His providence. One of the roles of government is to see to it that the people are free to follow God in all obedience. When a government fails to do this, God, through whatever means He chooses, replaces the government.

The third type of ruler that God opposes is the one who abuses the weak people of society. Calvin warns King Francis I in the dedication to the *Institutes*, that the “Lord will undoubtedly come in due time to deliver the poor from their affliction.”²⁵⁰ God dethrones the tyrannical and those that afflict the poor in his divine providence.

Why does God put tyrants to rule over people? Calvin provides two reasons. Firstly, Calvin answers, “[T]hose who domineer unjustly and tyrannically are raised up by [God] to punish the people for their iniquity.”²⁵¹ Calvin writes in another place, “[T]hey who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised up by Him to punish the

²⁴⁸ ICR 4.20.30.

²⁴⁹ ICR 4.20.32.

²⁵⁰ Preface to Calvin’s *Institutes*.

²⁵¹ ICR 4.20.24.

wickedness of the people.”²⁵² Secondly, God raises up evil rulers to “exercise the patience of His servant[s] by calamity.”²⁵³

Calvin’s primary response for tyrannical rulers is prayer and patient suffering.²⁵⁴

Quentin Skinner identifies Calvin’s allowance for subjects to pray for help when an evil king is on the throne.²⁵⁵ When the timing is left to God, the option of rebelling against an evil ruler is cut off. Calvin writes:

Let us then also call this thought to mind, that it is not for us to remedy such evils; that only this remains, to implore the Lord’s help, in whose hand are the hearts of kings, and the changing of kingdoms. God will deal with tyrants in the way He sees fit. ‘He is God who will stand in the assembly of the gods, and will judge in the midst of the gods’ [Psalm 82:1]. Before His face all kings shall fall and be crushed, and all the judges of the earth, that have not kissed His anointed, and all those who have written unjust laws to oppress the poor in judgment and to do violence to the cause of the lowly, to prey upon widows and rob the fatherless.²⁵⁶

Calvin recommends that “We owe this attitude of reverence and therefore of piety toward all our rulers in the highest degree, whatever they may be like”²⁵⁷ and that “every man should keep in mind that one duty which is his own.”²⁵⁸ In sum, Calvin states succinctly his recommended response for evil rulers, “For, if the correction of unbridled despotism is the Lord’s to avenge, let us not at once think that it is entrusted to us, to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer.”²⁵⁹

If Calvin had left his political theory here, he would have a consistent position on government and rebellion. George H. Sabine writes that Calvin’s political view is “on

²⁵² ICR 4.20.25.

²⁵³ ICR 2.4.2.

²⁵⁴ ICR 4.20.29.

²⁵⁵ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume 2: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge, London, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 192.

²⁵⁶ ICR 4.20.29.

²⁵⁷ ICR 4.20.29.

²⁵⁸ ICR 4.20.29.

²⁵⁹ ICR 4.20.31.

the whole [a] consistent assertion of the duty of passive obedience.”²⁶⁰ Similarly, Ralph Hancock writes, “Magistrates govern, people obey: this fundamental separation between public and private callings pervades Calvin’s political teaching. It is the basis of Calvin’s very severe doctrine of nonresistance to established authorities.”²⁶¹ However, when Calvin deals with different types of governments, he provides an exception to the general rule of no rebellion. This exception shall be addressed in the following section.

B. Calvin’s exception to the rule: Constitutional Theory of Resistance

This exception has been called constitutional theory of resistance, and the impact of this theory is far reaching.²⁶² This exception, to Calvin’s otherwise rigid treatment of rebellion, forwards the philosophic dialogue into modernity by counteracting rebellious passions and channeling them into patriotic private duties. A carefully crafted constitution transfers authority from a person, like a King, to a rule of law or rule of constitution. When a tyrant arises within this type of constitution, one can remove the tyrannical ruler without undermining the rule of law. Constitutional rule counteracts evil ambitions thereby preserving peace and security. Calvin explains that God chooses to give authority to some and not others and provides those He chooses with the attributes necessary for ruling. Calvin writes, “For God, in providing for the human race, often endows with a heroic nature those destined to command. ... Private individuals are not to be judged in the same way. But because, however excellent anyone has been, his own ambition always pushes him on—a blemish with which all virtues are so sullied that before

²⁶⁰ George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory, 3rd Edition* (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 366.

²⁶¹ Hancock, 71.

²⁶² Skinner uses the term “constitutional theory of resistance” to describe Calvin’s permissibility of resistance, 215-218.

God they lose all favor—...”²⁶³ Calvin recognizes only a few are marked for authority, but that many desire to gain the mark. Desiring authority when God has not endowed it cultivates rebellious passions. Calvin seeks to provide a catharsis for this ambition for rulership into a type of patriotic expression within the parameters of a constitution. Calvin acknowledges that rebels are able to fulfill, in an often non-violent way, their insubordinate inclinations within this type of government. A constitutional government with institutionalized checks may be preferable to a monarchy where few rebellious appetites are satisfied, but peace and chaos exist at extremes. A constitutional theory of resistance provides a more moderated political environment.

We shall now turn to the Calvin’s allowance for a constitutional theory of resistance. There are a number of writings where Calvin permits a constitutional theory of resistance.²⁶⁴ There are two passages from the *Institutes*, 4.20.8, and 4.20.31, most importantly the latter. Calvin’s letter to Admiral Coligny provides another instance where Calvin endorses constitutional checks. Another writing, Calvin’s commentary on Samuel, provides insight into his perspective on a constitutional justification for rebellion.

1. ICR 4.20.8 – Weighing the Types of Governments

Calvin’s consideration of advantages and disadvantages of various types of governments provides insight into his constitutional theory of resistance. Calvin spends little time considering the best type of government. The comments he does make on the subject are brief but very insightful to his position on institutionalized accountability. He

²⁶³ ICR 2.3.4.

²⁶⁴ Rebellion and resistance against authority are terms meaning the same thing, and will be used interchangeably.

states, "Monarchy is prone to tyranny. In an aristocracy, again, the tendency is not less to the faction of a few, while in popular ascendancy there is the strongest tendency to sedition."²⁶⁵ Calvin explains the weaknesses of each of the different types of governments. The problem with monarchies is that the kings become tyrannical. The problem with aristocracies is that those in leadership tend to faction; that is, small authoritative groups are pitted against other small authoritative groups vying for power. Democracy is prone to sedition. Calvin's preferred form of government is a blend of aristocracy and democracy. "I will not deny that aristocracy, or a system compounded of aristocracy and democracy, far excels all others."²⁶⁶ He prefers this form of government because they have institutionalized checks within them, to curb evil rulers. A monarchical or absolutist government without a set of institutionalized checks has no allowance for popular resistance or accountability, as Calvin only allows for resistance against authority that is institutionalized. Calvin continues, "Therefore, men's fault or failing causes it to be safer and more bearable for a number to exercise government, so that they may help one another, teach and admonish one another; and, if one asserts himself unfairly, there may be a number of censors and masters to restrain his willfulness."²⁶⁷ Because of man's evil human inclination, Calvin prefers to have checks on government to "restrain" the "willfulness" of a ruler that "asserts himself unfairly." Calvin claims that point can be proved from history and Scriptural precedence, with the exception of King David and Christ. But whatever the form, Calvin exhorts his readers to be subject to it. "For if it has seemed good to Him to set kings over kingdom, senates or municipal officers over free cities, it is our duty to show ourselves compliant and

²⁶⁵ ICR 4.20.8.

²⁶⁶ ICR 4.20.8.

obedient to whomever He sets over the place where we live.”²⁶⁸ Calvin casually disregards everything he has said about the various types of government, which have deeply seeded significance in the way subjects are to respond to evil rulers, and says to be subject to whatever government is in place, reverting to the primary position he puts forth.

2. ICR 4.20.31 – Institutionalized Checks

This passage from the *Institutes* is the most poignant in Calvin’s constitutional theory of resistance. Hancock comments, “This single intentionally emphatic and dynamic paragraph, found in all editions of the *Institutes*, links Calvin with the more radical Calvinist political writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”²⁶⁹ In this passage, Calvin answers the question, what should one do when a type of government has institutionalized a set of checks into the system of government? Calvin’s discussion begins as any other of his many discussions on God’s sovereignty, power of ordination, and the consequential prohibition of rebellion, as can be gathered from the following excerpt:

Let princes hear and be afraid; but let us at the same time guard most carefully against spurning or violating the venerable and majestic authority of rulers, an authority which God has sanctioned by the surest edicts, although those invested with it should be most unworthy of it, and, as far as in them lies, pollute it by their iniquity. Although the Lord takes vengeance on unbridled domination, let us not therefore suppose that that vengeance is committed to us, to whom no command has been given but to obey and suffer.²⁷⁰

Up to this point, Calvin has recapitulated the same ideas he has put forth in his other writings concerning absolute subjection to governing authorities. But he leaves a

²⁶⁷ ICR 4.20.8.

²⁶⁸ ICR 4.20.8.

²⁶⁹ Hancock, 163-164.

²⁷⁰ ICR 4.20.31.

loophole, as T. H. L. Parker puts it,²⁷¹ in the following passage. Calvin writes: “I speak only of private men. For when popular magistrates have been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings (as the Ephori, who were opposed to kings among the Spartans, or Tribunes of the people to consuls among the Romans, or Demarchs to the senate among the Athenians; and perhaps there is something similar to this in the power exercised in each kingdom by the three orders, when they hold their primary diets)...” The condition Calvin places on people concerning the obedience and subjection to authority only applies to ‘private men’. ‘Popular magistrates’ are exempt from this rule, and have the duty to ‘check’ and ‘curb’ the ‘tyranny of kings.’ Calvin endorses popular magistrates to “check the undue license of kings.” The purpose of the popular magistrates is to hold the ruler accountable to the obligation he owes to his subjects, by resisting if need be. Calvin allows for the place for institutionalized checks, because it is God that has ordained all authority, even authority that is designed to check other authority. Calvin goes further, and says that it is not only an option to curb a tyrant but a duty. “So far am I, from forbidding these officially to check the undue license of kings, that if they connive at kings when they tyrannize and insult over the humbler of the people, I affirm that their dissimulation is not free from nefarious perfidy, because they fraudulently betray the liberty of the people, while knowing that, by the ordinance of God, they are its appointed guardians.”²⁷² If a popular magistrate fails to fulfill his God ordained duty by checking the connivance of the tyrant, then he will “betray the liberty of the people.” It would appear to follow, that the means that “popular magistrates” have is defined by the

²⁷¹ T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 147-148.

²⁷² ICR 4.20.31.

constitution. An armed resistance would be permissible insofar God has ordained it through the constitution.

3. Homilies of I Samuel – Role of Inferior Magistrates

Quentin Skinner states that the radical Calvinists looked to Calvin's limited constitutionalist position for governmental accountability as the gateway to popular revolutions. Skinner observes that, "Calvin began to modify his doctrine of passive obedience at the end of the 1550s, and started to move towards an acceptance of the constitutional theory of resistance."²⁷³ Skinner further explains that in Calvin's Homilies of the first Book of Samuel, 29th sermon, he deals with the question of lawful resistance against a tyrant.²⁷⁴ Calvin states that inferior magistrates "are able to constrain the prince in his office and even coerce him,"²⁷⁵ and even kill him. Skinner observes that Calvin contradicts his usual rhetoric in stating that the ruler has duties to fulfill. Although it is not up to the private subject to see that the tyrant receives justice, God has not left them without means.

4. Letter to Admiral Coligny – Calvin's Practical Application

Calvin's theoretical position is tested as real life situations are presented to him. Calvin's letter to Admiral Coligny provides an example where there is a tyrant present (French monarch Charles IX, 1561) and a style of government that allows for checks. Calvin answers the many "what ifs" from a fearful Calvinist in France. Calvin advises in accordance with his theory of constitutional resistance. He provides an instance where he permits violent resistance in curbing a tyrant. "I admitted, it is true, that if the princes of

²⁷³ Skinner, 214.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

the blood demanded to be maintained in their rights for common good, and if the Parliament joined them in their quarrel, that it would then be lawful for all good subjects to lend them armed assistance. The man afterwards asked me; if one of the princes of the blood, though not the first in rank, had decided upon taking such a step, we were not then warranted to support him. I again gave him an answer in the negative with regard to this supposition.”²⁷⁶ Calvin would allow for this violent curbing, providing certain conditions must be in place. Firstly, the government type must have institutional checks within it. Secondly, a higher-ranking officer must be leading the charge against the tyrant. It is not permissible for a low ranking prince to curb a ruler with violent means. Thirdly, the action must be for the common good, although other justifications could be used also, but Calvin does not go into them here. He would likely also include rulers making impious edicts, oppressing the “lowly people,” preventing the faithful from following God, and undermining the political purpose.²⁷⁷ When these conditions are appeased then violent curbing is permissible.

However, after hearing of the Protestant rebellious plot of Amboise²⁷⁸, Calvin does not provide support for the rebellion even though it meets the criteria for a justified constitutional rebellion. Parker explains that in 1559 the Evangelicals thought they had experienced persecution long enough and began to consider the option of armed revolt. Parker states that, “The ranks of the Evangelicals now contained a large number of nobles, unused to suffering wrongs as patiently as the middle classes who had hitherto

²⁷⁵ Calvin, *Homilies on the First Book of Samuel* in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Baum et al., vol. 29, 552.

²⁷⁶ “To the Admiral De Coligny”, April 16th 1561, DLXXXVIII., 175-176.

²⁷⁷ These justifications shall be elaborated on at a latter place.

²⁷⁸ Calvin, being a prominent Protestant, was privy to many Protestant rebellious plots. Godefroy du Barry is another such Protestant rebel who approached Calvin for support. His situation also fit the criteria for Calvin’s constitutional theory of resistance, but Calvin did not support him. See Calvin’s letter “To Bullinger” May 11th 1560 – DLXI, 104-106.

predominated.”²⁷⁹ As Protestants came into increasingly higher positions of power, the opportunity for the implementation of Calvin’s theory of constitutional rebellion became available. Calvin was moved to address this issue and others like it.

Amboise inquired of Calvin’s constitutional theory of resistance and Calvin admitted that there is a place of it when the conditions are right. However, Calvin tried to steer the man away from such thoughts. He writes, “In a word I adopted so decided a tone in condemning all his proposals that I was convinced he had completely abandoned them. And this is the reason why I did not breathe a syllable on the subject, because it would only have been breeding disturbances to no purpose.”²⁸⁰ Even though the rebellion would be justified in this particular circumstance, because a high-ranking prince was in support of curbing the tyrannical French king, Calvin still advised the Protestants to not rebel. In a letter to Bullinger, Calvin writes of how he was distraught with the knowledge of the oppression of the French Protestants. He writes, “But what wrings my heart is that brethren united to us in the faith should be oppressed by a barbarous tyranny, nor yet find any succor to alleviate their distress.”²⁸¹ However, even with this, Calvin does not provide his endorsement for the Protestants to rebel, even when it is morally permissible.

Similarly, in a letter to Peter Martyr, concerning the same instance, after many vehement arguments against an action against the French government, Calvin recognizes that the Protestants have followed through in fulfilling his constitutional theory of resistance. Calvin writes, “They attempted to show that they had not taken up arms

²⁷⁹ Parker, 147. Parker is alluding to Calvin’s letter ‘To the Church of Paris’ – CCCCLXXV, September 16th 1557, 359.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 177.

²⁸¹ “To Bullinger” – DLXI, May 11th 1560, 104.

rashly, by saying that a promise had been made them by one of the princes, who by the ancient usage of the kingdom and its written laws claims as his right ... the highest rank in supreme council.”²⁸² Calvin was not fully satisfied with even this. He hoped that there would be no bloodshed because if there was the rivers of France would run red with blood. The necessary conditions were in place for a rebellion, but Calvin would not give his support for it even then.

5. Calvin’s position on Rebellion and its Political Implications

The question of rebellion is small in comparison to field of political theory. However, from looking at the question of rebellion, one can begin to see answers to more politically significant questions like what is the basis of authority, or broader yet, what purpose does government or politics serve. Two questions shall be addressed in this section, keeping these larger matters in mind. The first is, why not rebel? The second question is, why rebel?

Why not rebel? The first and most important reason that one should not rebel, for Calvin, is that rebellion works against what God is doing. Calvin believes that it was God’s idea to create government and it did not come about from human perversity, but by “divine providence and holy ordinance.”²⁸³ Calvin believes that God is the one who ordains authority; rebellion, which undermines authority, undermines God and His purpose for mankind.

Secondly, rebellion betrays mankind. Calvin writes, “[S]ince God keeps the world in order by the ministry of magistrates, all they who despise their authority are

²⁸² “To Peter Martyr” – DLXII, May 11th 1560, 107.

²⁸³ ICR, 4.20.4.

enemies to mankind.”²⁸⁴ Those that rebel “betray the freedom of the people.”²⁸⁵ Without government, disorder and chaos rule. Mankind is worse off without government.

The third reason is from a self-interested perspective, which is the basest reason in Calvin’s esteem. Rebellion is rarely successful, and the punishment for rebellion is death. Calvin uses this reasoning to persuade prospective rebels away from dissension.²⁸⁶

Fourthly, rebellion undermines the political purpose, which is to maintain peace and security and instill virtue, among other things. Governments punish evil doers and execute the wrath of God.²⁸⁷ All subjects have an invested interest in remaining subject. Calvin states succinctly his belief as to the purpose of civil government: “Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity.”²⁸⁸ Rebellion, at the very least, undermines these purposes temporarily. Calvin lists seven purposes of government in this passage.

The first political purpose is to protect the ‘outward worship of God’. Civil government is to ensure that religious folk are free to worship God in an open display.²⁸⁹ This message would be most appealing to Christians, as this particular address is to the Anabaptists. Calvin writes in another place, that ‘divine worship’ is the beginning of the ‘office of the magistrates’.²⁹⁰ Calvin states that government is not only for the benefit for

²⁸⁴ *Commentary on 1 Peter* 2:13-16.

²⁸⁵ ICR 4.20.31.

²⁸⁶ “To Bullinger” May 11th 1560 – DLXI, 104-106.

²⁸⁷ ICR 4.20.4.

²⁸⁸ ICR 4.20.2.

²⁸⁹ Calvin defines his basic understanding of worship in ICR 4.10.29.

²⁹⁰ ICR 4.20.9.

man but also for God. Calvin observes that worldly philosophers allow their religion to take precedence in their government and reasons that Christian rulers should do the same thing.²⁹¹

The second purpose of civil government is to defend 'sound doctrine'. Calvin allows governments to eliminate heresy. The Servetus incident epitomizes Calvin's position on the issue of sound doctrine and government's obligation to put an end to heresy.²⁹² Calvin states, "Let no man be disturbed that I now commit to civil government the duty of rightly establishing religion."²⁹³ The Scriptures define this religion.²⁹⁴ Calvin holds that rulers have the right to make laws against what they deem as heresies. Francis I expelled Calvin from France because of his theological doctrines. Calvin disagrees with Francis' decision, but thinks Francis is within the governmental parameters set forth by God, for making the decision.

The third is to protect the 'position of the church'. The church is responsible for teaching the ignorant what righteousness is.²⁹⁵ If the position of the church is destroyed there will be no teachers to teach righteousness. Calvin acknowledges that humans need outward help and aid in coming to faith in the gospel. "[I]n order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, [God] deposited this treasure in the church."²⁹⁶ It is from the church that 'sound doctrine' is produced.

The fourth purpose that civil government has is "to adjust our life to the society of men". Calvin holds even non-Christians rulers can preserve human society in

²⁹¹ ICR 4.20.9.

²⁹² Calvin defends Trinitarian doctrine against heretics like Servetus in ICR 1.13.21-29.

²⁹³ ICR 4.20.3.

²⁹⁴ ICR 1.10.1-3.

²⁹⁵ ICR 4.1.1.

²⁹⁶ ICR 4.1.1.

“righteousness, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, and prudence” although they do so poorly.²⁹⁷

The fifth purpose for government is to shape social behavior towards private ‘civil righteousness’.²⁹⁸ Many contemporary liberals cringe at Calvin’s Geneva in this respect. The largest obstacle for liberals is overcoming the moral laws that infringe on private liberties. However, Calvin saw these laws as a means to instill virtue. But the difference in laws comparatively is only a matter of degree. It is true: there were laws against homosexuality, fornication, other sexually immoral behaviors, witchcraft, idolatry blasphemy and heresy in the city of Geneva during Calvin’s time. However, there are laws in Canada that are as intrusive into the lives of Canadian citizens as in Geneva. For instance, there are many laws that invade on one’s private life, like laws against hate literature, incest, bestiality, polygamy, and child pornography.

The sixth purpose for government, for Calvin, is to “reconcile us with one another.” This is a vague purpose and can be understood in many different ways. One possible example would be a government imposing strict laws against divorce. This would force a husband and wife to be reconciled with one another as divorce is not an option. Other examples could be easily contrived, but it is suffice to leave it at this.

The seventh purpose is to promote peace within the society. Government, with the power of the sword, is able to imbue fear into evil men from acting in an unjust manner.²⁹⁹ Calvin writes, “[F]orced righteousness is necessary for the public community of men, for whose tranquillity the Lord herein provided when he took care that

²⁹⁷ ICR 3.14.3.

²⁹⁸ This purpose is examined at greater length in ICR 4.20.10.

²⁹⁹ ICR 2.7.10.

everything be not tumultuously confounded.”³⁰⁰ With the sword, the government is able to curb the fighting between citizens and promote peace, although this is an inferior peace for Calvin.

Why rebel? All the answers to this question are a flip version of the question above. In relation to the first and most important reason why not rebel, being that, rebellion undermines God, a justified rebellion would be performing one’s God ordained duty, according to Calvin’s constitutional theory of resistance. The second reason one should rebel is that popular magistrates must preserve the “liberty of the people”³⁰¹ and to “protect the common good.”³⁰² The third reason a popular magistrate and his subjects should rebel is to carry out vengeance of a tyrannical ruler. The fourth reason is to preserve the purpose of government and politics and all the various purposes government serves.³⁰³ One could rebel if there was a constitutional place for rebellion, and there existed justifiable reasons that required the rebellion. In a paradoxical sense, Calvin largely opposes these reasons as justifications to rebel.

These are reasons Calvin mentions to his readers as to why people should or should not rebel. But how did Calvin communicate these reasons to his respective audiences? Again, Calvin is, in a sense, an inverted Augustine when it comes to answering this question. His broad political philosophy is unintelligible to non-Christians but his constitutional theory of resistance is intelligible to non-Christians.

³⁰⁰ ICR 2.7.10.

³⁰¹ ICR 4.20.31.

³⁰² “To the Admiral De Coligny”, April 16th 1561, DLXXXVIII., 175-176.

³⁰³ ICR 4.20.2.

II. Communicability of Christian ideals to respective audience

The second part of this chapter shall address Calvin's communicability of his respective rebellion positions to his various audience groups. Calvin wrote to a variety of people, the majority of whom are Christian, although not all subscribed to the same brand of Christianity as Calvin did. Two audience groups that Calvin addressed shall be considered: the Libertines and the Anabaptists. In addition, Atheists, a hypothetical third audience group, shall be considered. Calvin communicated to these people in various ways, and had two different messages of rebellion to give. To what extent was Calvin able to communicate his two positions of rebellion to these respective audiences?

A. Libertines - political opposition to Calvin, a.k.a. profane people

Calvin had a difficult start in Geneva. He was kicked out of the city, as Ross William Collins recounts, due in large part to the Libertines.³⁰⁴ Calvin makes mention of the various colorful characters who made up the Libertines. Two families caused Calvin the most grief, the Farves and the Perrinists. The various family members were involved in illegal dancing, gaming, lewd behavior, debauchery, fornication, adultery, incest and

³⁰⁴ Ross William Collins, *Calvin: And the Libertines of Geneva* (Toronto, Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1968), 153. Referring to the opposition group as the Libertines creates some confusion because there was a real religious group that called themselves Libertines, as Benjamin Wirt Farley discusses in his book, *John Calvin Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Brand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), 184-185. Calvin actually addresses the theology of this religious group. The Libertines of Geneva are not to be mistaken with the sectarian group that Calvin addressed. Calvin calls his opposition group Libertines, not because they are part of this group, but because their behavior resembled that of the sect. Palm states (18-22) that once "Discovering that some of them were undesirables, Calvin cleverly called all of them Libertines, just as many orthodox bourgeois citizens today characterize their personal or political enemies as bolshevists, or anarchists." Farley explains that the relationship between the spiritual Libertines that followed the theology and those that Calvin called Libertines of Geneva probably had little affiliation. The Libertines of Geneva posed more of a political problem to Calvin rather than a theological one (185). Any reference to the Libertines, in this chapter, is to the political opposition group against Calvin in Geneva. Scholars that have written on the subject other than Farley that hold this view include, Williston Walker in writing the *John Calvin: The Organiser of Reformed Protestantism* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 295; John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of*

many other crimes. Collins recounts that “One of the ministers retorted that Favre was not a sheep of the flock of Jesus Christ but a dog and an excommunicate of the Church. According to Bonivard, ‘Favre went everywhere gnashing his teeth saying ‘I am a dog’.’”³⁰⁵ These two families had little regard for the Scriptures and perceived Calvin as a dogmatic zealot. If Calvin tried to curb their behavior by proclaiming Scripture to them, his proclamation would not be well received. Calvin would have to make appeals to something other than Scripture.

The Lord Captain Ami³⁰⁶ Perrin, a Libertine, engaged in unlawful dancing and gaming. Henry Beveridge, Jules Bonnet, and David Constable, describe Perrin as someone, “who wished to live according to [his] own inclination, without suffering to be restrained by the words of the preachers.”³⁰⁷ This letter provides insight into how Calvin tried to communicate to Perrin that he should be in subjection to the laws of the civil magistrates. Calvin writes, “I am especially desirous to impress upon you the necessity of earnestly seeking to acquire the primary virtue of obedience to God, and respect for the common order and polity of the Church.”³⁰⁸ Calvin appeals to Perrin and tries to bring him to the virtue of obedience to God and respect for common order and the polity. If the government is overthrown so will the common order of Geneva be overthrown. Calvin not only persuades subjects towards obedience but also against rebellion.

Calvin uses the principles from the Scriptures, but changes the religious language into a language that the Libertines would appreciate. Calvin would take the principle

Calvinism (New York: Oxford, 1970), 169, and George H. Williams in writing *The Radical Reformation*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 604ff.

³⁰⁵ Collins, 154.

³⁰⁶ Ami Perrin’s first name is spelt by translators with an ‘i’ or ‘y’. The ‘i’ will be the spelling used in this chapter for consistency.

³⁰⁷ “To Ami Perrin” 1546, CLXIV, 56nl.

³⁰⁸ “To Ami Perrin” 1546, CLXIV, 57.

behind Romans 13:1 and try to communicate the principle in a manner intelligible to the Libertines. One analogy Calvin uses relates to family government. Calvin writes: "For husbands are also bound to their wives, and parents to their children, by mutual responsibilities. Suppose parents and husbands depart from their duty. ... Shall either children be less obedient to their parents or wives to their husbands? They are still subject even to those who are wicked and undutiful."³⁰⁹ Calvin appeals to the common order of family. Even if parents neglect their duty to their children, they are still their parents and continue in authority. Similarly, if a government, without instituted checks, does not perform its duty to the people, it is still the government. But with all the effort Calvin exerted, he was not able to change the minds of the Libertines. Calvin writes to his friend Farel concerning an insurrection that was brewing, "I was aware that our enemies were making secret preparations for an insurrection, for four months past; the fire was to be kindled at the next election, in the month of November, when it is customary to appoint the chief magistrate."³¹⁰ Alister E. McGrath states that Geneva was a safe haven for Protestants and many flocked to the city. Most of the Protestants were supporters of Calvin. This caused a shift in the power structure.³¹¹ The Libertines saw that their support was diminishing and were preparing for the event in which they lost power.

Calvin could not quote Romans 13:1, and diffuse the situation, for these people had little regard for the Scriptures. In 1555, the Libertines, which had held power for many years, lost their grip and became furious. Parker records that Perrin and the

³⁰⁹ ICR 4.20.29.

³¹⁰ "To Farel" October 26th 1552, CCCII, 370-371.

³¹¹ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwood, 1990), 121-122.

Libertines attempted to seize power. Their attempt was unsuccessful however. Many of the leaders of the rebellion fled the city. All the rebels were sentenced to death. Those rebels that remained in Geneva, realized the consequence of this sentence.³¹² During the final nine years of Calvin's life, the city of Geneva ran rather smoothly. Calvin in this instance was unable to communicate his message to the Libertines to successfully diffuse their rebellious propensities. "Do not rebel because rebellion is against God" did not prove to be a sufficient argument for the Libertines. In this sense, Calvin's rebellion theory is unintelligible to his audience.

B. Anabaptists

Another group Calvin addresses is the Anabaptists. Calvin relies heavily on Scripture in making his argument. But he also appeals to the good and order politics produces. In the *Institutes* Calvin considers the ideas of the Anabaptists.³¹³ Skinner observes that until the closing years of Calvin's life, he held to the "Pauline doctrine of absolute non-resistance."³¹⁴ Skinner notices that the "radical social experiments" of the Anabaptists, as documented in the *Scleitheim Confession of Faith*, coincided with Calvin's publication of chapter on Civil Government in the *Institutes*.³¹⁵ Skinner suggests that Calvin spoke of the Anabaptists in ICR 4.20.1, when he wrote, "[I]nsane and barbarous men furiously strive to overturn this divine established order."³¹⁶ Skinner suggests that much of the chapter deals with the assumptions of the Anabaptists

³¹² Parker, 126.

³¹³ In Farley's commentary on Calvin's work entitled, *Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, he references 4.20.3-7 as Calvin's treatment of the Anabaptist theology of the state and the sword, 72n78, 76. Also see James M. Stayer's book entitled, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado, 1972) and also H. J. Hillerbrand's work, "The Anabaptists View of the State," 83-110.

³¹⁴ Skinner, 193.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

including, “their denial of magistracy, their pacifism and their rejection of due processes of law.”³¹⁷ Calvin begins by explaining to the Anabaptists that government did not come forth from human perversity but from God.³¹⁸ Calvin writes, “Yet this distinction does not lead us to consider the whole nature of government a thing polluted, which has nothing to do with Christian men. That is what, indeed, certain fanatics who delight in unbridled license shout and boast.”³¹⁹ To the Anabaptists, government does little good, and they do not want anything to do with civil government. Calvin explains that the civil government is useful to protect the worship of God, defend sound doctrine and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to curb unrighteous behavior, to reconcile one to another, and promote general peace and tranquility and when the Anabaptists teach against this, they undermine the purpose of government, which God has placed for the reasons mentioned.³²⁰

Calvin was prompted to confront the theological ‘errors’ of the Anabaptists by some concerned Protestants.³²¹ Calvin writes the *Brief Instruction*³²² to provide Protestants with ammunition to combat the Anabaptist theological precepts. In Calvin’s sixth article in refuting the Anabaptist doctrines, he writes ‘On the Magistrate.’ The Anabaptists, whom Calvin deals with, hold that although God ordains authority, it should have nothing to do with a Christian because politics is outside the perfection of Christ. Calvin summarizes the Anabaptist position, “For [the Anabaptists] say that whoever sits on the seat of justice is unworthy to be called a Christian, because the office of the sword

³¹⁶ ICR 4.20.1.

³¹⁷ Skinner, 193.

³¹⁸ ICR 4.20.4,5.

³¹⁹ ICR 4.20.2.

³²⁰ ICR 4.20.2.

³²¹ Preface to *Brief Instruction*, 36-37

has no place at all in Christianity.”³²³ Calvin goes on to list many proofs as to why this is not so, including, the lives of godly kings and prophets who held positions of governmental power, and the words of John the Baptist to the Roman soldier³²⁴ to name a few.³²⁵

Calvin considered these ideas rebellious, unchristian and undermining to the political purpose. Through undermining godly authority, the Anabaptists become enemies to God and to mankind. Calvin writes:

Thus, we see with respect to this matter how false and perverse the Anabaptists' allegations are, by which they condemn the vocation of magistrates, which God has so highly approved. We even see how the devil speaks through their mouths in order to lead princes astray and to hinder them from doing their duty. ... As for the end to which they lay claim, I only have two words to say: that in it they reveal themselves to be the enemies of God and of the human race. For they make war against God in wanting to revile what He has exalted. And we could not imagine a better way of trying to ruin the world and ushering in brigandage everywhere than in seeking to abolish the civil government or the power of the sword, which indeed is thrown down if it is not lawful for a Christian man to exercise it.³²⁶

Calvin thinks that the Anabaptist lowly perception of government is diametrically opposed to God who esteems and approves rulers. The Anabaptists attempted to persuade princes and other rulers away from their positions. In attempting to undermine the doctrine of authority, Calvin uses the same language as he uses when he treats violent rebels who, through their insubordination, attempt to take authority by force. Calvin provides his readers a point by point attack on the Anabaptist doctrine, so that the evangelicals might be equipped to persuade successfully the true nature of government and God's ordination of it.

³²² *Brief Instruction: Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Edited by Farley, Benjamin Wirt, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982).

³²³ "On the Magistrate," Article V, *Brief Instruction*, 80.

³²⁴ John the Baptist exhorts the soldiers to, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14b).

³²⁵ "On the Magistrate," Article V, *Brief Instruction*, 77-79.

³²⁶ *Ibid.* 91.

C. Atheists

Although Calvin does not deal with atheists in his writings, how might he communicate a position on rebellion that would be intelligible for them? An atheist could accept virtually nothing from Calvin's primary position on rebellion, that is, do not rebel because rebellion is against God. He would likely appeal to the good that politics serves, as he did with the Anabaptists. In one place Calvin acknowledges that even the 'world' thinks rebellion is a poor idea, revealing that it is not only Christians, in his mind, who perceive the government as doing good. In his words, "[E]ven from the standpoint of the world rebellion is ill-concerted, presumptuous, and could have no successful issue."³²⁷ Calvin is able to produce an intelligible rebellion theory for the world. Calvin's position on rebellion, where he allows for institutionalized rebellion, has become the foundation for modern politics, which is characterized by human secularization, can be accepted. Focusing on the Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance provides sovereignty to the people.³²⁸ Hancock writes: "[I]f the people, the wholly 'private' class, are entitled to elect magistrates; if there are 'magistrates of the people' such as ephors, tribunes, demarchs, and the French Estates General; then the people themselves make politics their business, at least in periodic elections. And if God has made politics the people's business in this way – if God has given the people the authority to defend themselves by electing magistrates to represent them – then who can say that he has not given them whatever authority is necessary for their own defense?"³²⁹ Calvin's identification of private citizens' duty to be involved in politics is a key foundational stone in the foundation of modern politics. Calvin, in many ways, is the start of politics

³²⁷ "On the Magistrate," Article V, *Brief Instruction*, 176.

³²⁸ Hancock, 72.

as we in a secularized society, have come to understand them. As nearly all institutions in the Western world have some sort of checks and balances, albeit through elections or institutional checks, Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance is fully applicable. Therefore, Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance is intelligible for non-Christians to a large extent.

Conclusion

Calvin's rebellion theory has shaped the face of modern politics in a critical way. Calvin's fundamental position on rebellion is that, "The reason why we ought to be subject to magistrates is, because they are constituted by God's ordination."³³⁰ The exception is when God constitutes an authority system where rebellion is legal, then rebellion is morally permissible. Democracies, or governments with institutionalize checks, channel the spirit or passion of rebellion. Calvin does not flesh out many important issues with his constitutional theory of resistance. Many after Calvin would further his constitutional theory of resistance and would fill in the gaps and answer some of his unanswered questions.

What is the impact of Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance on later generations? Through the constitutional theory of resistance Calvin was able to channel rebellious passions into a non-rebellious activities. He replaces the personal rule with the rule of law. In the future constitutional theory of resistance, as it channels rebellious passions into an institution, would manifest itself in the way of elections or other institutionalized checks. John Locke read Calvin according to his resistance theory. It is

³²⁹ Ibid. 72-73.

³³⁰ *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles: John Calvin*, (Translated and edited by John Owen,

from this tradition that modern politics sprang forth. The American fathers, like John Adams, were deeply impacted by the thought that started with Calvin. William J. Jackman states that "He that will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin, knows but little of the origin of American liberty."³³¹ Jean Bethke Elshtein writes in *Crisis Magazine* that the "Political theorist George Armstrong Kelly, in a brilliant and much ignored book, *Politics and Religious Consciousness in America* ... argued that it was impossible to understand American history and life without coming to grips with the 'fragmenting' offshoots of Calvinist orthodoxy that quite literally peopled and defined the American Republic."³³² Harro Hopfl states of Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance, that "This exception, pregnant with momentous possibilities for later Calvinism, was all that Calvin would allow"³³³ in the way of political rebellion. The constitutional theory of resistance paved the way for later Calvinists to bring together a more comprehensive theory of resistance, which would invariably lead to a further private involvement into public affairs.

Christian Classics Ethereal Library Grand Rapids, Mi.); I Peter 2:13-16; shall be referred to henceforth as *Commentary on I Peter*.

³³¹ William J. Jackman, *History of the American Nation*, Volume 2 (Chicago Ill: Western Press Association, 1920), 394.

³³² Jean Bethke Elshtein, "Protestant Communalism" (New York: *Crisis Magazine*, October 1995), 41. See also George A. Kelly's, *Politics and Religious Consciousness in America* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984).

³³³ Hopfl, 49.

Chapter 3

The Rebellion Theory of John Adams of Eighteenth Century United States of America

John Adams is a political thinker worth considering. Adams, the 18th Century advocate for the American Revolution and the first Vice-President and second President of the United States of America, had personal experience with rebellion and deals with the rebellion issue at length in his writings. Adams expounds on and builds upon the Calvinist tradition of constitutional rebellion theory, constructing a social contract theory. Adams is able to make his rebellion theory coherent to an non-Christian audience where Augustine fell short. He is able to profess an intelligible political theory to nonchristians where Calvin fell short. Adams provides a more modern perspective of what a Christian political philosophy is, where Calvin and Augustine appear more distant. In this chapter, part of Adams's political philosophy shall be addressed, and will be divided into two sections including, I his perspective on rebellion, and II the intelligibility of his ideas to those within and outside the Christian tradition.³³⁴ In the first section, Adams's A definition of rebellion, B his interpretation of Romans 13, and C his social contract theory together shall present his perspective and treatment of resistance against government. In

³³⁴ The bulk of my research on John Adams comes from *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 10 volumes, edited by Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1850-56), which shall henceforth be referred to as *The Works of John Adams* and relevant volume. H. Butterfield's *Diary and Autobiography of*

the second section, his ability and the way he presented his Christian perspective on political matters to his respective audience shall be presented.

Adams and his time in history and geographical location were chosen for consideration for many reasons. The Enlightenment, in contrast to the dawn of the medieval age, and the reformational age, brings to an increasing awareness the applicability of Christianity in the area of political thought that is relevant to any time and geographical location. The Christian gospel was not preached to those in North America until 500 years ago. Today the United States of America is considered the most Christian nation of the world. America is also considered the most powerful nation-state in the world. It is important to know the founding political ideals of this nation. The founding fathers attempted to build a nation on Christian principles, while preserving the freedom of conscience for all believers. Adams's philosophical contribution had a direct impact on the establishment, administration and governance of the United States of America. Adams brings together both classical and Christian puritanical ideas together to formulate a political philosophy that Jurgen Gebhardt calls Americanism.³³⁵ According to some, Adams has been the most underrated and under appreciated founding father. In more recent times, he is receiving the recognition that many claim he deserves. He is now being considered the foremost American political philosopher of his time. Joseph J. Ellis writes, "Adams remains the most misconstrued and unappreciated 'great man' in American history."³³⁶ C. Bradley Thompson states that, "Adams was America's finest

John Adams, 4 volumes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), is another source work henceforth cited as *Diary and Autobiography* and appropriate volume.

³³⁵ Jurgen Gebhardt, *Americanism: Revolutionary Order and Societal Self-Interpretation in the American Republic* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 97.

³³⁶ Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: the Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 12. See also the following authors that make this claim or one of a similar tone, Gilbert Chinard, *Honest John Adams* (Boston: Little Brown and Company), xi; Harold Laski, *John*

eighteenth-century student of the political sciences. No one, not even Thomas Jefferson or James Madison, read as much or thought as long and hard about questions of human nature, natural right, political organization, and constitutional construction.”³³⁷ Social contract and consent, like the one Adams puts forth, are at the heart of all liberal democratic thinking. For these reasons Adams and eighteenth century America were chosen for consideration.

I. Adams’s Consideration of the Moral Permissibility of Rebellion

Adams’s answers to the questions surrounding opposition to government come out of his understanding of the social contract (or compact theory). If a ruler fails to uphold his end of the contract, the people are justified in opposing the ruler, violently if need be. But before going into further depth with Adams’s social contract theory, his direct statements on rebellion shall be treated, as he has a unique definition of rebellion. Following the treatment of Adams’s definition of rebellion his reinterpretation on Romans 13, focusing on verse 4, shall be addressed. His social contract theory shall be considered following.

A. Adams’s definition of rebellion

The word “rebellion” is tainted in the mind of Adams. Adams gets caught up in the language used in the discussion of rebellion, and actually puts forth an absolute prohibition against rebellion, but it is due solely to his narrow definition. Most understand the word rebellion to mean resistance against authority, albeit with justifiable

Adams and the Prophets of Progress (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 46; and C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (University of Kansas: 1998), xiii.

³³⁷ Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*, xiii.

or unjustifiable cause, albeit against a good or evil ruler. Most do not understand rebellion to mean, only, resistance against good authority with unjustifiable cause. Rebellion is understood to mean simply, opposition against authority. However, Adams does not work with this common understanding of rebellion. Adams divides resisting or opposing authority into two definitions. One definition of overthrowing authority is overthrowing good authorities, without justifiable cause, in which case Adams calls this rebellion. The second type of overthrowing authority is overthrowing evil rulers that do not serve public good, and this, Adams holds, is not rebellion, but the subjects upholding their mutual obligation to the social contract. Adams wants to use the word rebellion for an evil populace, or group of bandits, who overthrow a good ruler without justifiable cause. If this is rebellion, it is easy to see how Adams is able to put forth an absolute prohibition against rebellion. According to Adams, justified resistance against an evil ruler does not deserve the term rebellion.

Adams makes his definition of rebellion clear in a couple of different passages. Adams agrees with the statement made by Massachusettensis,³³⁸ who opposes the Colonist liberation movement, “It is a universal truth, that he that would excite a rebellion, is at heart as great a tyrant as ever wielded the iron rod of oppression.”³³⁹ Adams is able to agree with this statement because of his definition of the word rebellion. Adams continues, “Be it so. We are not exciting a rebellion. Opposition, nay, open, avowed resistance by arms, against usurpation and lawless violence, is not rebellion by the law of God or the land. Resistance to lawful authority makes rebellion.”³⁴⁰ When a

³³⁸ In the 1760's Adams enters into a dialogue with a man, likely Daniel Leonard, using the pseudonym Massachusettensis. Adams responds using the pseudonym Novanglus.

³³⁹ “Novanglus, No. 5.” *The Works of John Adams*, Vol., IV, 57.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

ruler has failed to uphold the social contract he entered into, he loses his authority, as the contract becomes dissolved. Resistance against an evil ruler becomes resistance against “usurpation and lawless violence.” Adams does not consider the resistance to the former authority holder to be rebellion because the former ruler no longer has authority, and authority is a necessary prerequisite for rebellion. So, if there is any resistance against a “lawless usurper,” the resistance is not rebellion because the resistance is not against an authority holder but a “lawless usurper.” Since rebellion is resistance against authority, Adams states that the colonists are not resisting against authority and are therefore not committing the act of rebellion. In another place, Adams recounts a conversation he overheard involving some colonists, at a pub, as they spoke of the injustice of British confiscation of private property of the colonists. One colonist suggests that they rebel before the colonists lose all their private property. Adams comments on this man’s usage of the word rebel. He writes, “I was disgusted with his word rebel, because I was determined never to rebel, as much as I was to resist rebellion against the fundamental privileges of the Constitution, whenever British generals or governors should begin it.”³⁴¹ Again, for Adams, rebellion is not simply resistance towards authority. Rebellion is resistance against a lawful authority, which Adams prohibits absolutely. By Adams redefining rebellion he avoids submitting to an evil ruler, because an evil ruler by definition is no ruler at all, and can be removed without the word rebellion needing to be used. Adams is able to come to this definition through his reinterpretation of Romans 13.

³⁴¹ JA to Benjamin Rush, 21 May 1807, *The Works of John Adams*, IX, 597-598.

B. Adams's Reinterpretation of Romans 13: Human and Divine Theory

Adams's treatment of Romans 13 provides insight into how he views Calvinist political philosophy, Calvin's Puritanical descendants (Adams's contemporaries), as well as Adams's view of political philosophy and resistance to authority. The passage Romans 13:1-5 (ESV) revisited goes as follows:

[1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. [3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Adams identifies two readings from this passage. One he refers to as "divine theory" and the other "human theory."

The divine theory, held by Calvinist puritanical colonists, takes the more literal reading of Romans 13:1, which is, paraphrased, God ordains all authority and for this reason, one should be subject and not resist authority because resistance is in fact against God. Adams explains "In the divine theory, ... it is not only treason, but impiety and blasphemy, to resist any government whatever."³⁴² Adams rejects the divine theory as a complete reading of Romans 13. Adams objects to the divine theory because, "If the sovereignty of a nation is a divine right, there is an end of all the rights of mankind at once; and resistance to the sovereignty, wherever placed, is rebellion against God."³⁴³ The divine theory ends the rights of mankind. Humans have no role in the determination or the ordination of authority and therefore do not have the duty or obligation to hold the

³⁴² *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, The Works of John Adams, Vol., VI, 145-146.*

ruler accountable for his actions. The divine theory an incomplete reading of Romans 13 according to Adams.

In opposition to the divine theory is the human theory, held by Enlightened thinkers, based on the idea that God established human consent, which establishes authority. Adams favors the human theory.³⁴⁴ Adams writes that “[I]n human theory, every government ... is created by the people, continued by the sovereign will, and represents their majesty, their august body.”³⁴⁵ Adams states that humans give rulers their authority. When rebels, as Adams defines them, overthrow good rulers, they are overthrowing the majesty of the people and God’s ordained rulers. He writes, “Resistance, therefore, to [good government] ... is as really treason against the majesty of the people; ... [it is] the right of the people to confide their authority and majesty to [the government].”³⁴⁶

But it is not that God is omitted from the authority ordaining process. A social contract is constructed with the reason and conscience of man³⁴⁷ and with God. Adams holds a middle ground position between the divine theory and the human theory. The way that Adams reads Romans 13 can be taken from his reading and quotation of Locke’s contemporary, Algernon Sidney, which focuses on Romans 13:4:

³⁴³ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, The Works of John Adams*, Vol., VI, 145-146.

³⁴⁴ Adams goes through in a methodical way answering Marchamont Nedham’s position on government in his writings in the 17th Century. Adams puts forth his ideal government where the people check the authority. One “[A]ttempt to form a balance against the royal authority has been celebrated as one of the most sublime and sentimental institutions of liberty. If it had been an institution of the of the body of the people, it would have been the most manly and noble assertion of the rights and natural and moral equality of mankind to be found in history, and would have merited immortal praise.” *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, The Works of John Adams*, Vol., VI, 136.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 146

³⁴⁶ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, Works, The Works of John Adams* VI, 145-146.

³⁴⁷ Conscience plays a critical role in the establishing of government in Romans 13:5, and in Adams rebellion theory. Revisiting 13:5 “Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but

It may seem strange to some that I mention seditions, tumults, and wars, upon just occasions; but I can find no reason to retract the terms. God, intending that men should live justly with one another, does certainly intend that he or they, who do no wrong, should suffer none; and the law that forbids injustices were of no use if no penalty might be inflicted on those that will not obey it. ... But the magistrate who is to protect the people from injury, may, and is often known not to have done it; he renders his office sometimes useless by neglecting to do justice, sometimes mischievous by overthrowing it. ... The magistrate, therefore, is comprehended under both, and subject to both.³⁴⁸

Adams holds that God only intended humans to be in subjection to good rulers and this is why God gave humans the responsibility of holding their rulers accountable to the social contract. If subjects fail to hold evil governments accountable, by opposing the lawless usurper violently if need be, they will not fulfill the moral obligation put to them by God.

In Adams's Proclamation of March 6, 1799, he calls for a nation wide-fast and prayer as he fears that "the people of the United States are still held in jeopardy by the hostile designs and insidious acts of a foreign nation."³⁴⁹ Adams prays that God, "would turn us from unreasonable discontent, from disunion, faction, sedition, and insurrection; that He would preserve our country from the desolating sword; ... that He would bless all magistrates, from the highest to the lowest, give them the true spirit of their station, make them a terror to evil doers and a praise to them that do well."³⁵⁰ Here Adams appeals to God for his aid, but Adams does not do so on the basis that God ordain the rulers, but that God help rulers be good rulers so as to fulfill their social contract to their respective subjects.

Jonathan Mayhew provides further insight into Adams's interpretation of Romans

13. Adams makes a bold endorsement, "I subscribe without a doubt to the opinion [sic]

also for the sake of conscience" establishes the role of conscience. See Adams discussion in *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, The Works of John Adams*, VI, 114-115.

³⁴⁸ "Novanglus, No. 6." *The Works of John Adams* IV, 80-81. Adams quotes Algernon Sidney's *Discourses upon Government*, c. 2, 24.

³⁴⁹ "Proclamation for a National Fast, 6 March 1799," *The Works of John Adams*, IX, 172-174.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of Mayhew.”³⁵¹ Adams writes that “Doctor Jonathan Mayhew” is a “gentleman, who had great influence in the commencement of the Revolution.”³⁵² His sermon of 1750 “On the subject of passive obedience and non-resistance ... was read by everybody.”³⁵³

Thompson states, “If Adams did not exactly take his “faith on Trust” from Mayhew, his diary makes clear that he was drawing conclusions remarkably similar to those of the Boston preacher.”³⁵⁴ Adams, at age fourteen, read Mayhew’s sermon entitled *Discourse*

Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers (1750),

“till the substance of it was incorporated into my Nature and indelibly engraved on my Memory.”³⁵⁵ Adams writes, “Mayhew seemed to be raised up to revive all their

animosities against tyranny, in church and state, and at the same time to destroy their

bigotry, fanaticism, and inconsistency.”³⁵⁶ Mayhew lays out in his sermon the

consequences of breaching contract and God’s intention for government.

[I]n such cases, a regard to the public welfare, ought to make us withhold from our rulers, that obedience and subjection which it would otherwise, be our duty to render to them. If it be our duty, for example, to obey our king, merely for this reason, that he rules for the public welfare, which is the only argument the apostle makes us of it follows, by a parity of reason, that when he turns tyrant, and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy, instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him, and to resist; and that according to the tenor of the apostle’s argument in this passage. ... It is true the apostle puts no case of such a tyrannical prince; but by his grounding his argument for submission wholly upon the good civil society; it is plain he implicitly authorizes, and even requires us to make resistance, whenever this shall be necessary to the public safety and happiness.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ JA to Dr. J. Morse, 5 December, 1815. *The Works of John Adams*, X, 191.

³⁵² JA to H. Niles, 13 February, 1818. *The Works of John Adams*, X, 287.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 287-288.

³⁵⁴ Thompson, 9.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ JA to H. Niles, 13 February, 1818. *The Works of John Adams*, X, 288.

³⁵⁷ Jonathan Mayhew, 1750, Boston, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers* (*American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.*, Ed. Michael Warner, Library of America, 1999).

Mayhew focuses on Romans 13, and explains that Paul was only dealing with good rulers and not tyrants. Mayhew argues that subjection is only due to rulers fulfilling their duty to do good to their subjects. Subjection is not due to rulers that do not deserve it. Adams holds a similar reading, which will be established in the sections to come. Romans 13:4 also influences the way that Adams formulates his social contract theory, which shall be addressed next.

C. Adams's Social Contract Theory and Opposition to authority

Adams's social contract theory is key to understanding his position on opposition to authority. In this section four issues shall be dealt with, including his view on human nature, his social contract theory and his view on opposition to government, his guidelines for resistance, and the way he views justified and unjustified cases for resistance. But firstly, some background on the social contract theory and the ways in which Adams's theory differs from other classical and modern social contract theories shall be addressed.

The social contract theory is an explanation about the genesis and perpetuation of government. This theory purports that people come together and consent to establish a contract, which establishes rulers and subjects where there are mutual duties and obligations owed. If both groups uphold the duties and responsibilities, then there ought to be peace, order, and security within society. Rulers are to act as protectors, defenders, managers, and stewards on behalf of their subjects. Subjects are to obey and subject themselves to the rule of law, and ensure that the rulers are performing their duties. Both groups are under laws as set up by contract. Thompson explains that Adams differs in his understanding from the classical thinkers like Plato and modern political thinkers like

Hobbes and Locke in how it is that humans enter into social contract. It is not reason alone that brings humans into social contract for Adams. It is rather the “anarchist alternative” which compels the conscience of man to enter into the social contract. Hobbes and Locke hold that it is through reason alone that humans come together and agree to enter into social contract, but Adams rejects this and suggests that it is through God and human reason and conscience that prompt humans to decide against the “anarchist alternative.”³⁵⁸ Adams states that, “The moral government of God, and his vice-regent, Conscience, ought to be sufficient to restrain men to obedience, to justice, and benevolence, at all times and in all places; we must therefore descend from the dignity of our nature, when we think of civil government at all.”³⁵⁹ Adams continues, “The law of nature would be sufficient for the government of men, if they would consult their reason, and obey their consciences.”³⁶⁰ Furthermore the very nature of humans prompts humans to act in obedience to one’s conscience according to Adams.

i. Human Nature

Adams’s view of human nature is influenced by Romans 13:4. “It is,” writes Thompson, “the universal human propensity, the *spectemur agendo*, that Adams took as the primary datum of human nature and social cohesiveness. Generically, the meaning of the *spectemur agendo* is most easily understood by its literal translation: ‘let us be seen in action.’ To observe, and to be observed, is the strongest natural inclination of humankind.”³⁶¹ Humans long for recognition and praise. Thompson contends that for Adams, this is a basic passion in humans. Adams’s own vanity was applied to humanity

³⁵⁸ Thompson, 152.

³⁵⁹ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, The Works of John Adams*, VI, 114-115.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 115

³⁶¹ Thompson, 154.

as a whole. Thompson continues, “Friends, relatives, and one’s closest “circle of acquaintances” provide the social sphere, the audience, and ultimately the gauge to which one looks for praise or censure.”³⁶² The *spectemur agendo* leads to Romans 13:3-4, which is for Adams, the fundamental propensity for humans, being, desire for praise and fear of censure. Thompson remarks on the magnitude of this passion, “The fear of neglect and contempt, in particular, is a real and deciding passion in mankind; it is almost as powerful as the fear of death.... Men live and die for the recognition and acceptance of their fellows.”³⁶³ In Adams’s words, “The desire of the esteem of others is a real want of nature as hunger; and the neglect and contempt of the world as severe a pain as the gout or stone. It sooner and oftener produces despair, and a detestation of existence.”³⁶⁴ Thompson states, “The voice of nature has balanced in man’s natural constitution a desire for praise with a fear of censure.”³⁶⁵ Gilbert Chinard states for Adams, “Human nature cannot be reformed, but it can be corrected, and above it must be held in check.”³⁶⁶ Government is best able to check human nature by offering the reward of praise and the scourge of censure.

ii. Adams’s Social Contract Theory, Power of the People and Resistance

Although Adams maintains an absolute prohibition against rebellion, as he defines it—that is, resistance against a good ruler—he allows for resistance and violent opposition against an usurping lawless tyrant. How does Adams support his position for the moral permissibility of resistance against evil authority? Adams justifies resistance against an evil authority with an argument that comes directly out of his social contract

³⁶² Thompson, 154.

³⁶³ Ibid. 155.

³⁶⁴ *Discourses on Davil; The Works of John Adams*, 6:234.

³⁶⁵ Thompson, 154.

theory. People come together by God, conscience and reason, and establish a government that will be for the good of the people. When the ruler fails to uphold his end of the contract, the contract becomes void and the subjects are justified, and in some cases obligated, to resist and oppose a ruler, violently if need be, in order to remove the ruler. According to the social contract theory, rulers are merely servants of the people. In Adams's words, "[K]ings are but the minister of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people, for their good, and they have a right to resume it, and place it in other hands, or keep it themselves, whenever it is made use of to oppress them."³⁶⁷ If rulers fail to govern for the good of the people or become oppressive towards the people, the people have the contractual right in removing the tyrannical ruler and replacing him with another. Since the people grant their rulers authority, the people can equally take the authority away, if the rulers do not do what they have been contracted to do.

Thompson states that, "The doctrine of popular sovereignty was Adams's first principle of political architecture."³⁶⁸ Adams writes in many different places in the *Defense* that the "original and fountain of all just power and government is in the people."³⁶⁹ Elsewhere in the *Defense* Adams writes that the "body of the people ... is the fountain and original of all power and authority, executive and judicial, as well as legislative."³⁷⁰ But Thompson interprets this to mean, "the people only temporarily cede their political sovereignty. In other words, the people are always the "fountain and original of all power" and they always retain the right to take it back, but they can and

³⁶⁶ Gilbert Chinard, *Honest John Adams* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1964), viii.

³⁶⁷ "Novanglus, No. 1." *The Works of John Adams*, Vol., IV, 14-15.

³⁶⁸ Thompson, 207.

³⁶⁹ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, The Works of John Adams*, VI, 116-118.

should lend that sovereignty to a constituted government on certain terms.”³⁷¹ Thompson explains that Adams holds that, “[P]olitical power should derive from the people, but it should also be separated from the people. In this way, the people are ultimately sovereign (they retain the right to construct whatever form of government they think best and to throw off that government when it becomes despotic), but they may transfer or loan some of their power to the government.”³⁷²

When the loan of sovereignty to the constituted government fails then “the people ultimately have the right to invoke the revolution-principle.”³⁷³ Adams writes concerning “the right of a nation to kill a tyrant, in cases of necessity can no more be doubted, than that to hang a robber, or kill a flea.”³⁷⁴ Adams supports Sidney’s position for the justification of resistance as exemplified by his quotation of Sidney’s work, “If the laws of God and men are therefore of no effect when the magistracy is left at liberty to break them, and if the lusts of those who are too strong for the tribunals of justice, cannot be otherwise restrained than by sedition, tumults, and war; those seditions, tumults, and wars, are justified by the laws of God and man.”³⁷⁵ In other words, if rulers break the laws of God and man, and the regular checks are not keeping rulers in line, then opposition is justified by the laws of God and man.

The social contract is not unlike a person hiring someone to do a job, and when the employee fails to perform the job as prescribed a new worker is sought out and the old one fired. Adams uses an analogy of a parishioner failing to uphold his contract and

³⁷⁰ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, The Works of John Adams*, VI, 118.

³⁷¹ Thompson, 208.

³⁷² *Ibid.* 207.

³⁷³ *Ibid.* 208.

³⁷⁴ *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the USA, The Works of John Adams* VI, 130.

³⁷⁵ “Novanglus, No. 6.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 81.

likens this to government and citizens. The relationship between the subjects and the ruler is not unlike an employer and employee. In Adams work, *Novanglus* he writes:

“Suppose a great man of a parish should for seven years together, receive six hundred pounds sterling a year, for discharging the duties of an important office, but, during the whole time, should never do one act or take one step about it. Would not this be great injustice to the public? And ought not the parson of that parish to cry aloud and spare not, and show such a bold transgressor his sin; show that justice was due to the public as well as to an individual; and that cheating the public of four thousand and two hundred pounds sterling is at least as great a sin as taking a chicken from a private hen-roost, or perhaps a watch from a fob?”³⁷⁶ Adams does not see negligent rulers any differently than negligent parishioners or thieves. When a parishioner or employee fails to perform a job satisfactorily he is fired and replaced. When a ruler fails to fulfill his duty to his people he should be fired and replaced in the same way. Adams states, “Rulers are no more than attorneys, agents, and trustees for the people; and if the cause, the interest and trust, is insidiously betrayed or wantonly trifled away, the people have a right to revoke the authority that they themselves have deputed and to constitute abler and better agents, attorneys, and trustees.”³⁷⁷ Adams understands government in the same way as Locke, in terms of a social contract between the rulers and subjects.

iii. Guidelines and Conditions for Resistance

But what the limits and guidelines to resisting and removing rulers according to Adams? Are subjects free to remove the government every time the government deviates slightly from the contract stipulations? In an electoral system, the first course of action is

³⁷⁶ “Novanglus, No. 4.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 56.

³⁷⁷ *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, *The Works of John Adams*, III, 456-7.

to vote out the tyrant. But if this does not ameliorate the problem, violent opposition is an option. Adams lays out various requirements and provisions that need to be in place before the people are justified in resistance. In the presentation of these limitations and guidelines, a general overview shall be presented first, followed by a more detailed account of the general points first mentioned. Firstly, subjects must be tolerant of many mismanagements, poor legislation, and general ill treatment. Secondly, opposition to evil authority should be used only in situations of necessity. Thirdly, a large proportion of the law-abiding subjects must be in support of the resistance. Fourthly, subjects can make pre-emptive strikes against a tyrannical ruler if it is obvious that the ruler intends to deprive the subjects of their rights, liberties or life. Fifthly, good rulers need not fear a just resistance.

Adams expects subjects to tolerate a great deal of mistakes by the ruling part as he makes this evident in his support of Locke. Adams endorses the statement that Locke makes, "The people generally ill treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavy upon them. [*Sic*] Such revolutions happen not upon every little mismanagement in public affairs. Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty will be borne by the people without mutiny and murmur."³⁷⁸ The ruling authority should not have to worry about rebellion when they make small mistakes, or even large mistakes, or poor laws as subjects should endure with the inadequacy human nature. One criticism that was made against the colonist revolutionary cause, in the context of the social

³⁷⁸ "Novanglus, No. 6." *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 83-84. Adams quotes Locke's, *Second Treatise on Government*, 18.209. Adams quotes two different sections of John Locke's, *The Second Treatise on Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Edited by Peter Laslett, 2nd Edition, 1967) as one paragraph, including, 19.224.8 and 19.225.1-5.

contract theory, is that subjects could revolt over trivial deviations of the contract.

Adams puts this criticism forth, as articulated by Massachusettensis, “‘In the political compact, the smallest defect in the prince, [results in a] revolution.’ [Adams retorts], By no means; but a manifest design in the prince, to annul the contract on his part, will annul it on the part of the people. A settled plan to deprive the people of all the benefits, blessings, and ends of the contract, to subvert the fundamentals of the constitution, to deprive them of all share in making and executing laws, will justify a revolution.”³⁷⁹

Adams argues that just resistance movements will not be a result of minor infractions of the social contract. Similarly, subjects are not deported or executed for minor infractions of the social contract, because of disobedience against the law, which is against the ruler. In order for a justified opposition to take place, there needs to be a plan by the ruler to, “deprive the people of all the benefits, blessings, and ends of the contract, to subvert the fundamentals of the constitution, to deprive them of all share in making and executing laws.”³⁸⁰ This action would warrant an opposition, although not much short of this would be justifiable however. The people need to be willing to tolerate many mistreatments and injustices by the government before resistance becomes a justifiable option.

Necessity is understood from two different perspectives. Firstly, necessity is a proviso that must be in place for the permissibility for resistance. Adams holds that subjects must have the common understanding that resistance is to be used in situations of necessity. Adams writes, concerning necessity and resistance: “All men will agree that such steps ought not to be taken but in cases of absolute necessity, and that such necessity must be very clear. But most people in America now think the destruction of the Boston

³⁷⁹ “Novanglus, No. 1.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 16.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

tea was absolutely necessary, and therefore right and just.”³⁸¹ If there is a situation of necessity then resistance is a morally permissible action according to Adams. Secondly, Adams defines tyranny as, “Every act of authority of one man over another, for which there is not an absolute necessity, is tyrannical.”³⁸² Rulers must use their authority only when it is necessary.

Not just anyone can overthrow a ruler. Adams supports Pufendorf’s statements on the subject: “When we speak of a tyrant that may lawfully be dethroned by the people, we do not mean by the word people, the vile populace or rabble of the country, nor the cabal of a small number of factious persons, but the greater and more judicious part of the subjects, of all ranks. Besides, the tyranny must be so notorious, and evidently clear, as to leave nobody any room to doubt of it.”³⁸³ A resistance is not sufficiently justified if only a small group of bandits scheme together to bring down a government. There must be a sufficiently large proportion of the population, and this part of the population must be the “judicious part.” The tyrant and his violation of the social contract must be obvious to all.

Subjects do not need to wait until the ruler has finished building the prisons for the population before attempting to remove the ruler. Adams writes, “We may see what Mr. Sidney says upon this subject in his *Discourse Concerning Government*: - ‘Neither are subjects bound to stay till the prince has entirely finished the chains which he is preparing or them, and put it out of their power to oppose. It is sufficient that all the advances which he makes are manifestly tending to their oppression, that he is marching

³⁸¹ “Novanglus, No. 6.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 90.

³⁸² *Diary, The Works of John Adams*, III, 400.

³⁸³ “Novanglus, No. 6.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 82.

boldly on to the ruin of the State.”³⁸⁴ The subjects are permitted to make a pre-emptive strike against a tyrant.

Adams summarily states that revolutions, when implemented, need to be done with careful consideration and thought. America’s revolution might:

[T]each mankind that revolutions are not trifles; that they ought never to undertaken rashly; nor without deliberate consideration and sober reflection; nor without a solid, immutable, eternal foundation of justice and humanity; nor without a people possessed of intelligence, fortitude, and integrity sufficient to carry them with steadiness, patience, and perseverance, through all the vicissitudes of fortune, the fiery trials and melancholy disasters they may have to encounter.³⁸⁵

Adams advises subjects to take resistance seriously because a successful resistance is difficult to achieve. Resistance should not go on without careful consideration, and done in the interest of humanity and justice, and performed with perseverance by intelligent with integrity. It could be disastrous to have a resistance led by unintelligent, immoral quitters.

The easiest way for an authority to stay in power is by upholding the contract.

Adams endorses this statement through his comments on Locke’s observation: “Now, a prince may easily avoid making himself so universally suspect and odious to his subjects; for, as Mr. Locke says in his *Treatise of Civil Government*, c. 18, 209 – ‘It is as impossible for a governor, if he really means the good of the people, and the preservation of them and the laws together, not to make them see and feel it, as it is for the father of a family not to let his children see he loves and takes care of them.’”³⁸⁶ Adams holds that good rulers need not concern themselves with subversive subjects because subjects look up to the good rulers as children look up to their loving fathers.

³⁸⁴ “Novanglus, No. 6.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 82.

³⁸⁵ JA to H. Niles, 13 February 1818, *The Works of John Adams*, X, 283-284.

³⁸⁶ “Novanglus, No. 6.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 82.

iv. Justified and Unjustified Historical Cases for Resistance

Adams's view of various historical cases of governmental opposition further elucidates his position on resistance against authority. There are five historical oppositions to government that shall be addressed in brief. The first resistance is the Glorious Revolution of 1688 or otherwise known as the Great Rebellion in England. The second resistance is the American Revolution. The John Fries Rebellion, Pennsylvania Insurrection, and Shay's Rebellion shall also be addressed.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 proves to be a model for the later American Revolution. Adams endorses both oppositions. Nearly 90 years before the Declaration of Independence of 1776, the English went through a political equivalent. The Roman Catholic English King James II was considered to be setting up a dynasty of Catholic kings, with the birth of his son. The Protestants encouraged James' son-in-law, William of Orange, to take the throne. William came with an army in 1688, and marched successfully to London promising liberty to Protestants and the English people. The Monarchy, as the English had known for so many hundreds of years, came to an end when the Parliament denounced James II and offered William and his wife to be joint sovereigns, thus placing significant checks and limitations on the once despotic monarchical position. Adams states that the monarchy had violated the contract with the people as specified in the British Constitution. This gave the people the right and duty to replace the ruler with someone who would do the task according to specification. "The vitality of the instrument of Independence itself was derived from the specification of actual wrongs and grievances, in violation of subsisting relations between a particular community and its government, in violation, in a word, of the British Constitution. There

was no more of modern democracy in the American war of independence, than in the great Rebellion, or the deposition of James the second.”³⁸⁷ The English Protestants and William were justified when they deposed King James because the monarchy incurred “wrongs and grievances” ... “in violation” ... “of the British Constitution.” Adams looks to the Glorious Revolution as an archetype of what the Colonists were to go through with the American Revolution.

The second historical case is the American Revolution. Adams puts forth two arguments for the Colonist opposition to British authority. However, his two purported justifications cannot coexist. One argument purports that America has never entered into contract with the British, and are, therefore, not under British rule. The second argument claims that the British rule is negligent and has breached the social contract.

The first argument, which is that the colonists never entered into contract with the British, shall be considered further. Adams takes exception to being a British colony. He argues:

The terms “British Empire” are not the language of the common law, but the language of newspapers and political pamphlets; that the dominions of the king of Great Britain have no power coextensive with them. I would ask, by what law the parliament has authority over America? By the law of God, in the Old and New Testament, it has none; by the law of nature and nations, it has none; by the common law of England, it has none, for the common law, and authority of parliament founded on it, never extended beyond the four seas; by statute law it has one, for no statute was made before the settlement of the colonies for this purpose; and the declaratory act, made in 1766, was made without our consent, by a parliament which had no authority beyond the four seas. What religious, moral, or political obligations then are we under to submit to parliament as a supreme legislative? None at all.³⁸⁸

The British do not have within their constitution or common law or charter allocation made for colonial rule and therefore have no jurisdiction over America by their own rule

³⁸⁷ George, Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*; Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury, Vol. I, New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 4.

³⁸⁸ “Novanglus, No. 3.” *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 37-38.

of law. Therefore, the Americans do not owe subjection to the British. Adams repeats the same argument in a later writing. By attempting to rule the colonists, the British went beyond the scope of its jurisdiction and realm of English law, making their laws over the colonists illegal.³⁸⁹ Thompson states, "In a very subtle move, Adams trimmed the colonists' allegiance to the king from one grounded on Coke's quasi-medieval teaching in Calvin's Case to one squarely within the radical social contract tradition of Locke's Second Treatise."³⁹⁰ Because the British do not have a provision in any governmental recognized document the British case for authority over the colonies falls through. America is a discovered country and was built upon the labor of the Colonists.³⁹¹

In the second argument for opposition against British rule, Adams claims that there has been a contractual breach.³⁹² Gibbs writes, "The war of 1775 was commenced with definite objects, its apology was founded upon the terms of an existing compact. A broken Covenant was its cause and its vindication."³⁹³ The American subjects opposed the British to reinstate a government that would keep covenant. The Americans became released from subjection to the British because the British failed up uphold their end of the contact.

Adam's likens mother Great Britain to Lady Macbeth on more than one occasion in exposing the tyranny of the British. Adams uses the metaphor, "[W]hen you resemble her [Great Britain] to Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare (I cannot think of it without horror), who 'Had given suck and knew How tender't was to love the babe that milked her, but

³⁸⁹ "Novanglus, No. 12." *The Works of John Adams*, IV, 175.

³⁹⁰ Thompson, 78-79.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* 78.

³⁹² This argument undermines the aforementioned position. There can be the position that there was never a contract formed as justification for opposition and resistance coexisting with the position that there was a contract but the ruler failed to uphold it as another justification for opposition against the British.

³⁹³ Gibbs, 4.

yet, who could Even while't was smiling inn her face, Have plucked her nipple from the boneless gums, And dashed the brains out."³⁹⁴ Adams perceives that the British have done this to the Colonists in the same way. Adams believes that he and his countrymen live under yoke of a confederacy of "feudal and canon law," very much like the yoke of the 17th Century English lived under, as he makes evident in his writing, *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*. Adams saw a place for another Glorious Revolution. Adams asks, "Are we not brethren and fellow subjects with those in Britain, only under a somewhat different method of legislation and a totally different method of taxation?"³⁹⁵ The colonists were treated as children with different rules and a different taxation. Adams took great exception to this fact and reasoned that this infraction is enough for a breach of contract and removal of British rule:

'That Britain is the mother and we the children, that a filial duty and submission is due from us to her,' and that 'we ought to doubt our own judgment and presume that she is right, even when she seems to us to shake the foundations of government'; ... But let me entreat you, sir, to pause. Do you consider yourself as a missionary of loyalty or of rebellion? Are you not representing your king, his ministry, and parliament as tyrants – imperious, unrelenting tyrants – by such reasoning as this? ... Do you not represent them as forgetting that the Prince of Orange was created King William by the people on that their rights might be eternal and inviolable?³⁹⁶

The British expect subjection from the Colonists, but the colonists contest that they are not treated like the British subjects and should not have to submit as a result. The British government is undermining all the essential laws of their own British government by imposing a different standard onto a people that have not consented to the different arrangement, thus undcrmining the very principles that were established in the Glorious Revolution.

³⁹⁴ *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, The Works of John Adams*, III, 461.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

Adams does not see himself or the other colonists as adolescent rebels discontent with the curfew time. Adams is deeply concerned with the slippery slope of that the British are on. The British are ruling outside their Constitution, which provides the Colonists with an uncertain contract. Adams writes, "These are not the vapors of a melancholy mind, ... nor a spirit of opposition to government, but the emanations of a heart that burns for its country's welfare. No one of any feeling, born and educated in this once happy country, can consider the numerous distresses, the gross indignities, the barbarous ignorance, the haughty usurpations, that we have reason to fear are mediating for ourselves, our children and so forth."³⁹⁷ Adams does not see the colonists opposing authority because there exists authority to resist. He is concerned with the welfare of his country because of the onslaught of injustices the colonists are enduring. Adams wants a constitution and contract that he and his fellow Colonists can see in writing and agree to.

The war of Independence was preceded by the revolution "in the minds and hearts" of the colonists. In a letter to H. Niles, Adams comments on the American Revolution and the transition the colonies incurred from being faithful to the British rule, to against:

The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations. While the king, and all in authority under him, were believed to govern in justice and mercy, according to the laws and constitution derived to them from the God of nature and transmitted to them by their ancestors, they thought themselves bound to pray for the king and queen and all the royal family, and all in authority under them, as ministers ordained of God for their good.³⁹⁸

The colonists were under the presumption that the king was ruling justly for the good of the colonists. The Colonists did not have a significant problem with British rule until the laws revealed that there were two types of citizens, the British and colonists. Adams

³⁹⁷ Ibid. 464.

continues: “[B]ut when they saw those powers renouncing all the principles of authority, and bent upon the destruction of all the securities of their lives, liberties, and properties, they thought it their duty to pray for the continental congress and all the thirteen State congresses.”³⁹⁹ The Colonists viewed this shift as an end to their rights and securities and began to look to their local leaders as prospective rulers to enter into contract with. For the colonists, the ensuing destruction of “lives, liberties, and properties” provoked them to “their duties and obligations” to remove the tyrannical usurper. Adams views Great Britain as a monarchy taking away the essential rights and liberties of the Colonists. He states, “[W]e can no longer forbear complaining that many of the measure of the late ministry and some of the late acts of Parliament have a tendency, in our apprehension, to divest us of our most essential rights and liberties.”⁴⁰⁰ Adams expresses his intolerance of continuation of poor government. Adams saw that there were two levels of subjects: British and the lower class Colonists. These aforementioned infractions provided Adams and the colonists ample evidence and justification for declaring breach of contract and for the violent removal of British occupation in the colonies.

Adams argues that the colonists are best suited to maintain essential rights and liberties of the colonists.

[T]he people, in their successive single assemblies, are the best keepers of their own liberties, [that] is, - ‘Because it is ever the people’s care to see that authority be so constituted, that it shall be rather a burden than benefit to those that undertake it; and be qualified with such slender advantages of profit or pleasure, that men shall reap little by the enjoyment. The happy consequence whereof is this, that none but honest, generous, and public spirits will then desire to be in authority, and that only for the common good.’⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ JA to Letter to H. Niles, Quincy, 13, February 1818. *The Works of John Adams*, X, 282.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ *Instructions of the Town of Braintree to their Representative, The Works of John Adams*, III, 465.

⁴⁰¹ *Defense of the Constitutions, The Works of John Adams*, VI, 12.

The Colonists entered into a new social contract with fellow Colonists. The American forefathers wrote the Constitution so the Americans could see the terms of the contract and give their consent to the terms of the contract for the common good, as God desires all government to be.

However, many of the Colonists did not believe that the new contract developed after the American Revolution was for the common good. Many rebellions occurred after the birth of America. Adams states that after the establishment of the United States of America there was profound peace. But after ten years of peace and good government the country “broke out in seditions.”⁴⁰² Daniel Shay led Shay’s rebellion from 1786-1787 over farming related matters. The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 is perhaps the most serious civil confrontation since the Revolution to the American Civil War. The John Fries Rebellion of 1798 drove Adams to do something about the reoccurring rebellions. Adams often used legal language to support and justify his position to stomp out the rebellion. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams expresses the many rebellions that occurred after the establishment of America, “You never felt the terrorism of Shays’s rebellion in Massachusetts. I believe you never felt the terrorism of Mr. Gallatin’s insurrection in Pennsylvania. You certainly never realized the terrorism of Fries’s most outrageous riot and rescue, as I call it, - treason, rebellion, as the world and great judges and two juries pronounced it.”⁴⁰³ Adams lists many more ‘terrorism’s’ that he endured after coming into government. In Adam’s proclamation of March 12, 1799, concerning the John Fries Rebellion, he writes that the areas surrounding Pennsylvania have acted in a subversive manner against the just authority of the United States. Adams demanded that the

⁴⁰² *Defense of the Constitutions, The Works of John Adams*, V, 15.

⁴⁰³ JA to Thomas Jefferson, 1813, June 30, *The Works of John Adams*, IX, 47.

insurgents to retire and if they failed to do so, Adams would call in the military to squelch the resistance group. Chinard states that, "Massachusetts herself, in Shays' Rebellion, had given the example, and a spirit of revolt far different from the revolutionary spirit was abroad in the land. At home, as well as in Europe, the great American experiment was in danger of being considered a failure; even in France, the wisdom of some provisions of the state constitutions had been questioned."⁴⁰⁴ At this thought, Adams grew desperate over the seditious atmosphere. This leaves the historian little wonder as to why he made the Sedition Act of 1798, which prohibited anyone from producing any malicious message in any medium against the United States government, and prohibited any involvement in riotous acts or rebellious movements. Chinard explains that the Sedition Bill was a type of martial law that provided fines and imprisonment for anyone who spoke against an office holder of the US government.⁴⁰⁵ Adams made many efforts to ensure that his subjects understood that he was the legal authority that was working for their good. In an ironic twist, twenty-two years after the Declaration of Independence the Sedition Act was narrowly passed.

Adams was not, obviously, able to convince everyone that the new social contract with the United States government was for the common good. But it is likely that he was able to convince many more that his political theory and position on authority was, as many were acting in accordance with Adams's thinking, even if misapplied. But, to what degree were people able to sign on the Adams's theoretical political position? Was his message applicable only to Christians? These questions shall be considered further.

⁴⁰⁴ Chinard, 203.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 275.

II. Communicability to Respective Audience

Adams puts forth an appealing theory of politics and authority to his diverse audience. Adams is able to put forth an intelligible rebellion theory to both Christians and non-Christians alike. He does this by appealing to the Christians with his address of Romans 13, and the active involvement of God and conscience in his social contract. He appeals to non-Christians by emphasizing the power and consent of the people.

If Adams had difficulty reaching any particular audience group it would have been his fellow Puritan Christians. Adams has a greater challenge in communicating to Christians than did Augustine and John Calvin. Thompson states, "Adams dismissed several of the foundational premises of Calvinism: he denied original sin and the total depravity of mankind; he denounced unconditional election; he rejected limited atonement."⁴⁰⁶ Some Christians might be reluctant to sign on to Adams's theory of resistance and authority as well.

But Adams was a devout Christian. Gebhardt notes that, "He never ceased to insist that "I am a Christian," and he was certain that "Christian religion, as I understand it, is the brightness of the glory and the express portrait of the character of the eternal self-existent, independent, benevolent, all-powerful and all-merciful Creator, preserver, and father of the universe; the first good, first perfect, first fair."⁴⁰⁷ Adams says, "My opinion of the duties of religion and morality comprehends a very extensive connection with society at large, and the great interest of the public. Does not natural morality, and much more Christian benevolence, make it our indispensable duty to lay ourselves out, to serve our fellow creatures to the utmost of our power in promoting and supporting those

⁴⁰⁶ Thompson, 10.

great political systems and general regulations upon which the happiness of multitudes depends.”⁴⁰⁸ Thompson explains, for Adams, that the “proper business of mankind” is answered in three parts. “We should use the little time available to worship God, to love our fellow men, and to practice self-discipline by cultivating the ‘Habits’ appropriate to each.”⁴⁰⁹ Thompson explains, for Adams, “The true design of Christianity was not to make men ‘good Riddle Solvers or good mystery mongers,’ as he thought Calvinists had become, but to make “good men, good magistrates and good Subjects, good Husbands and good Wives, good Parents and good Children, good masters and good servants.”⁴¹⁰ It is clear from that Adams is a devout Christian who takes Christian ideas seriously. He even understood the situation the colonies found themselves in with the British tyranny connected to his understanding of his faith and God.

Adams understood that British tyranny was due to sin. Gebhardt states that “Clerical and secular writers agreed: British tyranny is God’s punishment for general sinfulness.”⁴¹¹ But Adams believed that the colonists’ situation could be redeemed, “[I]f they would but mend their ways and humbly acknowledge their God, good might come out of all this suffering.”⁴¹² Despite living under tyrannical rule there was an opportunity to get out of the bounds that bind them and live in freedom. Adams endorses the idea that “Calamities are the caustics and cathartics of the body politic.” Continuing calamities, “arouse the soul. They restore original virtues. They reduce a constitution back to its first principles.”⁴¹³ Gebhardt explains that, “Resistance to British tyranny is to

⁴⁰⁷ Gebhardt, 81-82.

⁴⁰⁸ John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 29, 1775, *Adams Family Correspondence*, I, 316.

⁴⁰⁹ Thompson, 17.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* 21-22. Thompson takes this from, *Diary and Autobiography*, 8, 31.

⁴¹¹ Gebhardt, 105.

⁴¹² G. S. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: 1969), 117.

⁴¹³ *Essays*, “Governor Winthrop to Governor Bradford,” *The Works of John Adams*, III, 485.

that extent revolt against a deficient mode of existence, restoration of the constitution, spiritual regeneration of individual existence, 'work of the Lord.'"⁴¹⁴ Adams explains that, "The furnace of affliction produces refinement in states as well as in individuals. And the new governments we are assuming ... will require a purification from our vices and an augmentation of our virtues or they will be no blessings."⁴¹⁵ Gebhardt recounts that because of this perspective, Rush could write Adams in 1777, "That he hoped the war with England would last long enough to purge all monarchic impurities, to clean the American soul, and to lead back to "the same temperance in pleasure, the same modesty in dress, the same justice in business, and the same veneration for the name of the Deity which distinguished our ancestors."⁴¹⁶ But this is not the only appealing aspect for Christians of Adams's political theory.

The social contract that Adams articulated was different than Locke's in the way the people enter into a social contract. Adams's social contract had a broader appeal to his puritan interlocutors. Both conscience and God, rather than simply reason, are involved with humans making the decision to enter into contract to set up a government. Locke states that reason is what brings people to make a social contract, whereas Adams says that it takes man's reason, conscience and God to bring people together to form a social contract. Neither God nor a God given conscience is necessary for John Locke's social contract.

But this is the same social contract that makes Adams's political theory and theory of resistance intelligible to non-Christians. Adams's social contract was not so steeped in Christian dogma that only Christians could appreciate its message. Thompson

⁴¹⁴ Gebhardt, 106.

⁴¹⁵ JA to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776, in AP, *Adams Family Correspondence*, II, 28.

explains that, "Adams did respect Christianity: not for its creeds, councils, priests, prophets, enthusiasts, miracles, or dogmas, but for its moral and political value. It should support the moral principles and civic responsibilities associated with a Lockean regime founded on the law of nature and nations."⁴¹⁷ Consent is based on something other than religion. A non-Christian can be a citizen of the type of government and country that Adams sets up. Although there might be disagreement by what means and what motivation people enter social contract, both Christians and the French revolutionaries can sign on to the contract.

The revelation and rationality debate is important to the communicability of ideas and Adams shows his familiarity with the discussion, as he states: "[T]he question before mankind is, - how shall I state it? It is, whether authority is from nature and reason, or from miraculous revelation; from the revelation from God. ... These profound and important questions have been agitated and discussed, before that vast democratical congregation, mankind, for more than five hundred years. ... Alas, poor human nature! You are responsible to your Maker and to yourself for an impartial verdict and judgment."⁴¹⁸ The rationality and reason question, Adams does not bother to answer, but impresses upon the reader that whatever the case, everyone will have to give an account to God. To say the very least it comes from either one or the other. The knowledge of authority is known by all, as to whether it comes from revelation or reason, Adams does not venture a guess. But implicitly Adams suggests that authority is made known either through reason or through revelation. Thompson states, "By "looking to Hystory," by observing the "Wealth and Commerce, Warrs and Politicks" of different nations over

⁴¹⁶ Gebhardt, 106. Gebhardt cites Benjamin Rush to JA, August 8 1777, in B. Rush, Letters, I, 152.

⁴¹⁷ Thompson, 23.

long periods of time, and by examining “the Characters of their principal Leading men, of their Grandeur and Power, of their Virtues and Vices,” Adams thought moral philosophers could determine how and why nations rise and fall.”⁴¹⁹ Adams certainly thought that authority could be made known by studying history and by using reason.

Adams’s views on the French Revolution provide further insight into how Adams communicates an intelligible political theory to non-Christians. The French were able to read Locke’s social contract theory in an atheistic and secular way. Beside the motivation for people to enter into social contract there is little difference in the social contract theories of Adams and Locke. Ten years after the French Revolution, Adams becomes solidified in his belief that the French Revolution was very different than the one in America, and that the French misused the guidelines for resistance. In a letter to Dr. Price, he confesses that he does not know what “to make of a republic of thirty million atheists.”⁴²⁰ The French attest that Locke’s social contract, which is little different than Adams’s, was an important contribution to the principles of the Revolution. 30 million atheists, according to Adams, were able to sign on to the social contract theory. From the discussion on the French and American reading of Locke, above, one can see that both atheists and devout Christians, who may despise one another and their ideals, can still subscribe to the same social contract theory. In the same way, anyone can read Adam’s social contract in the same two ways. Adam’s Christian social contract is readable by Christians and non-Christians alike.

⁴¹⁸ JA to F. A. Vanderkemp, July 13, 1815, *The Works of John Adams*, X, 170-171.

⁴¹⁹ Thompson, 15.

⁴²⁰ JA to Richard Price, New York, 19 April 1790, *The Works of John Adams*, IX, 564.

Conclusion

Adams is an important figure in the Christian political and philosophical tradition. He shaped American political thinking in a profound way. Thompson states, "Adams both symbolized and played an important role in defining the nature and parameters of a larger moral revolution that was taking place in the minds and hearts of the American people."⁴²¹ The ideal government for Adams was one that governed "in justice and mercy, according to the laws and constitution derived to them from the God of nature and transmitted to them by their ancestors."⁴²² These are the governments that God ordains for the common good.⁴²³ But when this ideal is corrupted, Thompson explains, the next available recourse is the people's right, if institutionalized, "to call a new constitutional convention."⁴²⁴ If this does not work then "the right to revolt," as Thompson explains, is an available option as it, "is inherent in Adams's doctrine of consent and sovereignty."⁴²⁵ Opposition to government is the ultimate legitimate consequence for tyrannical governments that do not uphold their end of the contract. Adams's position on these issues makes him a potential resource for non-Christian and Christian alike. Augustine and Calvin exclude more people from their discussion. Adams was best able to formulate his theory of politics and rebellion so that it is intelligible to both those within the Christian faith and those outside.

⁴²¹ Thompson, 23.

⁴²² JA to H. Niles, Quincy, 13, February 1818. *The Works of John Adams*, X, 282.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ Thompson, 208.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

Epilogue

The ideas of Christians are worth considering by those outside the Christian tradition. All three thinkers provide a Christian rebellion theory living in different time periods. All three thinkers had something to say to people of their day. Some of the political ideas that they presented then remain with us today. One should be able to see that the ideas that Christians have about politics can be employed and made intelligible through natural reason to any audience at any time, transcending time and geographical location. Christians today can provide substantive input into the political philosophic dialogue. Christian political thinkers can communicate intelligible political ideas to non-Christians, although the extent of the communicability varies from thinker to thinker and from concept to concept.

The differences in political theory can be attributed in part to the political weather, which influenced the way each thinker approached the rebellion issue. Augustine was living during the fall of the Rome when Christianity was gaining dominance. Augustine is the sole thinker of the three who does not permit rebellion in any circumstance. Calvin lived during a time of turmoil for Protestant Christians. Protestant Christians endured much hardship and persecution at the hand of the political authorities. Calvin, through his constitutional theory of rebellion, allows for the opposition of government in certain circumstances. Adams also lived in a period of turmoil in eighteenth century America. He too, in part, due to his political weather, put forth a position for opposition to government. However, none of the aforementioned thinkers would attribute their political ideas entirely to the political weather and would take strong exception to any claim suggesting so. The idea that kingdoms rise and fall,

due in part to the ability of the government to implement an inferior form of virtue and justice in their ruling, can be attributed to Augustine. Calvin's constitutional theory of resistance in channeling rebellious passions into a form of patriotism is a foundational pillar of modern politics. Adams integrates a moral duty, influenced by conscience, for the citizens' involvement in politics.

Focusing on rebellion has been helpful in addressing larger questions like, what is the purpose of politics, limit of power or the basis of authority? Each of the three thinkers answers these questions somewhat differently, but for the most part they agree. Augustine, Calvin, and Adams agree that the purpose of politics is to maintain peace, security and instill virtue. They all agree that rebellion undermines this purpose at least temporarily. They all acknowledge that governments that perform this political purpose well are, in most cases, in for a long life. They all recognize that governments that fail to fulfill the purpose of politics can, in most cases, expect a short life span. The limit of power is determined, in part, by the degree to which the political purpose is fulfilled.

Augustine, Calvin, and Adams were able, in varying degrees, to articulate their rebellion theories, informed by Romans 13, to those outside the Christian faith. However, reason and revelation and the mixture of the two, can produce different understandings. Augustine's political theory is intelligible to non-Christians, but his rebellion theory based in revelation is not. Augustine is unable to communicate his "perfect" theory of rebellion to Christians because it is based on revelation. But through reason he communicates a rebellion theory that comes close to his ideal theory. Reason attempts to bring one close to the ideal theory, but it is revelation that fully discloses it. According to Augustine, reason is limited in providing people with the knowledge essential to perfect

living, although not to a close to perfect living. When it comes to possible morally permissible cases for rebellion, revelation trumps reason for Augustine. Calvin is an inverted Augustine. His political philosophy is a divinely commanded one, and is unintelligible to non-Christians. But his constitutional theory of resistance is intelligible to non-Christians. Adams focuses exclusively on Calvin's institutionalized rebellion and leaves everything else that is Calvin behind and actually subscribes to a brand of deism. By doing this, he is able to make both his political philosophy and his rebellion intelligible to non-Christians. Augustine and Calvin excluded more people from their discussion. Adams was able to formulate his theory of politics and rebellion so that it is intelligible to both those within the Christian faith and outside to the largest degree amongst the three. Revelation, for Adams, is not a limitation for deriving a complete rebellion theory.

Liberal democratic societies in the West are prone to underappreciate the Christian influence of its ideology. Often there is an encouragement for distancing rather than a respect for the propinquity and progeny that Christian thought has in the arena of political ideas. Granting that there are some areas in Christian political thought that are dissuading to those outside its tradition. This should not be sufficient reason to abandon and reject all input and ideas that come from Christians.

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