



# Let's Read *The Institutes* of the Christian Religion, Class 17

**Book 4:** The External Means Or Aids By Which God Invites Us Into The Society Of Christ And Holds Us Therein.

## Chapter 20



- I. General discourse on the necessity, dignity, and use of Civil Government, in opposition to the frantic proceedings of the Anabaptists, sec. 1-3.

(Most of this chapter written for the 1536 edition – Anabaptists in Munster (1534-35), Machiavelli's The Prince (1532)

Also refer to Calvin's Commentaries on Daniel and Romans.

- II. A special exposition of the three leading parts of which Civil Government consists, sec. 4-32.

## A Two-Fold Government

- Civil (Political - a positive blessing from God)  
directing persons with regard to the social responsibility and leading to civil justice and outward morality.
- Spiritual (Ecclesiastical)  
dealing with the conscience and leading to eternal life.

These two kingdoms are separate and distinct in jurisdiction and authority.

## Two Kingdom Doctrine

### **Lutheranism**

- God rules over the worldly kingdom by way of laws and the heavenly kingdom by way of gospel and grace.
- The church is content to allow the state to control the administration of the church (Erastianism).

### **Reformed**

- God rules over both kingdoms by way of law and providence.
- The church must operate in cooperation with but independent of the state in matters of both law and grace.

## Civil Government

- Civil Government is necessary
  - The fact of sin in the world requires it.
  - Civil govt. is a provision of God's goodness (rather than seeing it as a polluted thing to be rejected.)
  - Civil govt. is for the preservation and blessing of humanity (otherwise given to anarchy, destruction, and evil).
  
- A Civil Magistrate (a civilian government or individual officer) is a calling from God
  - He is God's vice-regent, vicar, deputy.
  - Implication: He is a man under divine authority.

## The Civil Magistrate

- He is to enforce/encourage obedience to the commands of the 2<sup>nd</sup> table of the Moral Law
- He is to promote the true, Protestant religion (the 1<sup>st</sup> table of the Moral Law)
  - Preventing opposition from forming against the church - defending piety so that "a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians."
  - protecting the outward function of the Church  
(as opposed to micromanaging its inner workings, such as discipline.)
- Heresy, therefore, is an ecclesiastical and a civil crime.
  - Because the state has only one religion, heresy is tantamount to treason before the Magistrate.
  - But this is not a theocracy (union of the two); it is a distinction with cooperation.
- Right to wage war
  - War must be governed by extreme necessity rather than by angry passion or mere hatred.
  - War must be exercised without implacable severity.

## The Civil Magistrate

- Calvin does not strictly advocate one form of civil government over another, yet:
  - he proposes that “a system compounded of (meritocratic) aristocracy and democracy (among the citizenry)” would be best (pure democracy = anarchy).
  - A plurality of leaders (safety in numbers) is better than a Monarch (with a hereditary ruling class) to provide checks and balances (due to men’s faults/failings).

*“No kind of government is more happy than one where freedom is regulated with becoming moderation and is properly established on a durable basis.”*

## The Civil Magistrate

- The Magistrate must be careful not to
  - dishonor and disregard proper use of civil authority  
(Avoid cruelest gentleness)
  - Exercise too much power unlawfully.  
(Avoid excessive severity)
- The Magistrate has the right
  - to make its own laws.
    - Such laws must be in conformity to the rule of justice, mercy and love.
    - Such laws need not recreate the political system of Moses.
  - to levy taxes upon its people but not out of tyrannical extortion.
  - to allow for rightly exercised lawsuits (following the Golden Rule).

## A Two-Fold Government

- Civil (Political - a positive blessing from God)
  - directing persons with regard to the social responsibility and leading to civil justice and outward morality.
  - “The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate ... ”*
- Spiritual (Ecclesiastical)
  - dealing with the conscience and leading to eternal life.
  - “Nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church”*
- These two kingdoms are separate and distinct in jurisdiction and authority.

## State/Church Relation - Cooperation

- The church is to comply, obey, reverence, and esteem the Magistrate ...
  - This teaches us patience and to consider our own sin.
  - Unjust rulers are raised up by God because of our sin and to move us to implore to God for help.
- ... “As far as is possible”.
  - Calvin never prescribes a program for revolution (as John Knox was prone to do).
  - It is the responsibility and right of lesser magistrates to provide protection of the people against the misuses of the king by attempting to influence or change the government if necessary.
- Sum of our duty: We must obey God rather than men.
  - Our goal is not selfish, independent.
  - Our goal is piety.