

Church and State



This is one way the Church and Christians might respond to the State. Pretend you hold this position and think how you would argue with others who disagree with you.

Accept the benefits and the comforts of co-operating with the state with gratitude:

Rather than worry too much about the world's injustices, we can simply be thankful that, whether by birth or hard work, we can enjoy a comfortable existence. We are part of the system, and it is not in our interests to battle against it. That must be the way God intended it to be! The problem is we are on the side of the status quo however unjust it is. (A classic Christendom position)



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Use our position to help others, but being cautious about getting ourselves into trouble:

Our power is limited, but it is important to show some concern for the well-being of others. We will give to charities and volunteer our time at the soup kitchen, but not take part in any campaigning. The problem is we are not really changing anything, merely offering a little first aid. (The attitude of some charitable giving.)



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Seek radical change or revolution:

The basic inequalities are so much part of the fabric of society that the whole system needs to be exposed and rebuilt, and we must not be afraid to be part of direct confrontation. The problem is that revolution might fail, and the last state will end up being worse than the first. On the other hand, is it right to allow evil to go unchallenged? (The Diggers took this view in occupying land)



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Take non-violent direct action:

When some Christians have felt there are no democratic methods left, they have turned to non-violent direct action as a way of standing up against the power of the state. This can be a high profile witness and full of integrity, but can be lonely and personally costly, and ultimately fail to change structures. This is a response usually taken by individual Christians rather than Churches. (Trident Ploughshares took this position)

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Walk away and create an alternative model of how life should be lived:

In Christian history, there have been those who have opted out, creating communities that are radically different, and having as little as possible to do with the rest of the world. The problem is that all possible influence on society is lost and the abuse of power goes unchallenged. (The Amish communities have taken this approach)



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Stay in co-operation with the state, conscious of the compromises needed, and try to voice effective opposition:

The aim is to try to make the existing structures more just, and this includes a willingness to speak out against the prevailing powers when necessary. The problem is that a spirit of compromise may too easily prevail. When should you walk away? Is it possible to retain a first loyalty to God that will result in a willingness to finally break with the state when this is demanded? (Jubilee 2000 is an example of such engagement)

