Citizenship and Discipleship: Upholding Ultimate Allegiance to Christ in Modern States

Boubakar Sanou

Modern nation-states construct a sense of belonging through legal frameworks, civic rituals, and nationalist narratives. These practices reveal the state not only as a political institution but also as a symbolic system that often operates with quasi-religious force, shaping identity and loyalty. For Christians, this dynamic creates a persistent tension, since discipleship calls for supreme allegiance to Christ that cannot be subordinated to civic or national claims. Drawing on anthropological theories of the state, biblical and theological analysis, and historical examples, this article examines how believers have navigated the competing demands of citizenship and discipleship. It argues that while Scripture affirms the legitimacy of political authority, it also places clear limits on the state's claims, particularly when they encroach upon obedience to God. The study highlights both the dangers of conflating nationalism with discipleship and the possibilities for cultivating a faithful presence that honors civic responsibility while resisting the sacralization of political power.

Introduction

The state, defined here as a political apparatus of government that rules over a given territory, exercising authority grounded in a legal system and enforced through the capacity to use force in implementing its policies (Giddens et al. 2021, 418; Sider 2012, 28), occupies a paradoxical position within Christian thought and practice. On the one hand, Scripture commands believers to honor and submit to governing authorities as servants of God who maintain order and promote the common good (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Titus 3:1). On the other hand, Christians are reminded that their ultimate allegiance belongs to God alone (Acts 5:29; Matt. 22:21).

As states provide order, security, and a shared sense of belonging through laws, institutions, and civic rituals, they often claim loyalty in return, demanding a form of allegiance that can rival the devotion Christians owe to God alone. This claim to loyalty is what enables nationalism to function with quasi-religious force, shaping identity and meaning in ways that challenge Christian discipleship (Perry and Whitehead 2020). State theorists have long pointed out this tension. Max Weber defined the modern state as the entity that claims "the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" (1978, 54, emphasis in the original), thereby concentrating authority and loyalty. Clifford Geertz had previously pointed out the states' reliance on mores, symbols, rituals, race, and religion to create an identity that seeks to sacralize power and elicit allegiance (1973, 240-241, 260). From this perspective, the modern state operates not merely as a political structure but also as a symbolic system, cultivating identities that often demand primacy over other affiliations.

In post-colonial contexts, these tensions have intensified. Nation-states built on territorial sovereignty and national identity often demand loyalty from citizens of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds by constructing new norms of belonging and exclusion. Because the modern nation-state intervenes in nearly every sphere of personal and social existence, everyone, religious or not, inevitably comes under the reach of its far-reaching authority (Asad 2003, 25, 193, 199). For Christians, this raises pressing questions: How can disciples honor civic responsibilities without compromising their allegiance to God? What

resources do theology and anthropology provide for navigating this ambivalence?

This article explores these questions by placing theological reflection in dialogue with social science theories of the state. Drawing on biblical exegesis of selected texts, historical case studies, and social science analysis, the article highlights how Christians in diverse contexts have navigated the tension between citizenship and discipleship. It argues that Christians must cultivate a posture of faithful presence that affirms civic responsibility while refusing to compromise ultimate allegiance due to Christ. Such faithful presence is not merely reactive but includes active participation in shaping public life toward justice, peace, and the common good. While a substantial body of philosophical, theological, and practitioner-oriented literature has explored Christian engagement with political authority and the modern state (e.g., Wallis 1996; 2006; Wolterstorff 2008; Stearns 2010; Sider 2012; 2015), this study does not attempt a comprehensive review of that literature. Instead, it seeks to complement that scholarship by bringing anthropological theories of the state into dialogue with biblical and theological reflection on citizenship and discipleship.

The Concept of the State in the Social Sciences

Social sciences provide valuable tools for understanding the nature and function of the modern state. Although often taken for granted as a fixed political reality, anthropologists and sociologists argue that the state is in fact a social construct characterized by sovereignty, nationalism, and citizenship rights (civil, political, social, and religious) and sustained through institutions, rituals, and narratives (Giddens et al. 2020, 458-461; 2021, 418-420; Barkey and Parikh 1991, 530-531). Rather than viewing the state as a fixed or monolithic reality, they highlight its cultural, symbolic, and contested dimensions, showing how the concept of state is continually produced, negotiated, and experienced.

To highlight the state's cultural embeddedness and social construction, Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta argue that the state must be understood not merely as a set of institutions but as an idea and a set of practices continually produced and reproduced in everyday life (2006, 1-29). Complementing this cultural analysis, other state theorists observe that sovereignty rests on a state's ability to enforce a monopoly of coercive power over all who live within its territory (Barrow 2008, 102; Giddens et al. 2021, 418). They argue that for a state to exist, it must centralize authority in law, administration, and military force, since sovereignty is undermined wherever competing groups retain independent governing power (Nelson 2006, 7-8; Plessner 2018, 10; Barrow 2008, 102). By monopolizing coercive power, the state not only maintains social order but also legitimizes itself as the ultimate arbiter of authority, justifying demands for loyalty and obedience from citizens, often framed as a patriotic duty (Peter 2023). This dynamic has frequently driven authoritarian governments to perpetrate widespread atrocities, ranging from systemic violations of human rights, political repression, and large-scale acts of violence against their own citizens (Fiorenza 2013, 57; Mabat 2022, xvi-xviii, 40-41).

Social scientists have also shown that the state's power operates as much through symbolism as through coercion. Benedict Anderson's theory of nations as "imagined communities" highlights how shared narratives, symbols, and practices, such as national anthems, flags, and memorial rituals, create affective bonds that cultivate a sense of belonging. At times, these bonds inspire sacrificial devotion, even persuading citizens to die or kill for the state (2016, 6-7; see also Cole 2019, xxiv). Scholars also note that states rely on rituals and symbols to sacralize authority, functioning not only as bureaucratic entities but also as theatres of power where public ceremonies reinforce legitimacy. Political systems are sustained not merely by force or consent but also by the cultural symbols and narratives that establish authority (Geertz 1973, 240-241, 260; Cohen 1969, 221, 224). Likewise, scholars of nationalism have argued that secular rituals such as voting, reciting pledges, or celebrating national holidays operate in ways analogous to religious practices, shaping identity and cultivating loyalty (Verdery 1991, 86-90; Perry and Whitehead 2020). These dynamics raise important questions for Christians, who may find their discipleship tested by practices that blur the line between civic participation and devotion to God.

Other state theorists highlight that the state is contested and shaped by historical events. In his critique of the Western notion of linear historical progress, Pierre Clastres challenges the assumption that so-called "primitive" societies represent the unfinished or failed stages of human development. He notes that such societies are often conceived as "the rejects of universal history," marginalized as remnants

outside civilization's trajectory. He contends that their non-state organization is not a sign of backwardness but a deliberate social and political choice to resist centralization and coercive authority (1989, 189). Some scholars have likewise critiqued universalizing models of political evolution, with some insisting that political centralization takes culturally specific forms (Skalník 2009, 5-24). Others challenge the assumption that secularism separates religion and politics, arguing instead that modern states actively regulate and reshape religious communities, structuring them into forms of belonging compatible with national identity (Asad 2003, 25-27).

The above insights highlight both the functional necessity and the moral ambiguity of the state. On the one hand, the state performs indispensable functions by maintaining social order, enforcing justice, regulating collective life, and providing structures that facilitate human coexistence. In this sense, political authority can serve as a means of restraining chaos and encouraging the pursuit of the common good. On the other hand, the same concentration of power that enables the state to secure stability also renders it susceptible to corruption, coercion, and self-exaltation. Thus, the state is essential for social flourishing, but it can also challenge the spiritual values of those who live under its authority.

Biblical and Theological Tensions in Relation to the State

The relationship between the Christian community and the state is marked by complex biblical and theological tensions that have shaped Christian political theology across the centuries. Scripture presents a range of perspectives that affirm both the legitimacy of governing authorities and the necessity of maintaining ultimate allegiance to God alone. A close reading of texts such as Daniel 3:8-18; 6:1-28; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1; Acts 5:29; and Matthew 22:21 illustrates this tension, revealing a dynamic interplay between obedience, discernment, and resistance.

The narratives of Daniel 3 (the fiery furnace) and Daniel 6 (the lions' den) are foundational biblical case studies for exploring the continuing tension between obedience to God and submission to civic authorities. Both stories unfold under imperial regimes that claim total loyalty. Babylon and Medo-Persia represent examples of states that attempt to consolidate absolute authority by demanding unqualified loyalty and conformity. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar's golden image functions as a political symbol of unity and submission. It was an act of worship that merged political loyalty with religious devotion. Similarly, in Daniel 6, Darius' decree that all prayers be directed to him for thirty days transforms royal authority into a quasi-divine status (Longman 2024, 671). In both cases, governing authorities attempted to sacralize themselves, demanding religious conformity as proof of civic obedience. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's defiance, "we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold" (Dan. 3:18), is not an anarchic rebellion but a covenantal fidelity. Their allegiance to Yahweh supersedes imperial decrees because worship belongs to God alone. Although they acknowledge God's power to save them, they also recognize the possibility that he may choose not to intervene. No matter the case, deliverance or death, they remain unwavering in their resolve not to yield to the king's idolatrous demands. Likewise, Daniel's deliberate continuation of prayer "three times a day" (Dan. 6:10) represents not defiance for its own sake, but uncompromising devotion to his God. Because his faith serves as the guiding principle of his life, he demonstrates unwavering obedience to God (Longman 2024, 667, 671). Daniel and his companions model a theology of faithful presence within the state. They serve diligently in public office, contributing to the welfare of the empire, but draw a firm line when loyalty to God is compromised. In both narratives, the message is clear: honoring earthly authorities is conditional, not absolute. When human decrees contradict divine law, faithfulness to God must prevail.

Paul's exhortation in Romans 13:1-7 is one of the most cited texts in discussions of church-state relations. Here, governing authorities are described as divinely instituted, "for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1). The state, in Paul's view, serves a divinely ordained function of restraining evil, promoting order, and commending those who do good. As such, he calls on believers to submit to "any person who represents the power of the state" in recognition that "they 'stand under' government in the scheme that God has instituted for ruling the world" (Moo 2024, 1076). This text has often been used to encourage submission to political authority, even under hostile regimes. However, Paul also qualifies his statement by grounding the state's legitimacy in its service of justice. The ruler is called "God's servant for your good"

(v. 4), implying that when the state ceases to serve justice, its authority is distorted. Romans 13 therefore affirms the necessity of government while implicitly setting moral limits on its claims. Douglas Moo observes that "While not always explicit, Paul assumes that one's ultimate submission must be to God and that no human being can ever stand as the ultimate authority for a believer. When governments order us to do something incompatible with our allegiance to God, our highest authority, we must 'obey God rather than human beings (Acts 5:29)'" (2024, 1076).

Similarly, in Titus 3:1, Paul instructs believers to "be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work." This exhortation underscores the legitimacy of civic obedience as a dimension of Christian discipleship. Still, like Romans 13, it assumes that obedience is tied to doing good rather than surrendering to evil, thus providing a framework for discernment. In other words, although the proper attitude toward secular rulers and authorities is one of submission, not every call to submit to human authority requires obedience, especially when such obedience would violate God's higher law (Liefeld 2024, 1214). Therefore, in Romans 13:1-7 and Titus 3:1, Paul's affirmation of political authority must be understood as conditional rather than absolute. His nuanced view of governance affirms the importance of submission to civil authorities while simultaneously making such obedience contingent upon the just and moral exercise of that authority.

The First Epistle of Peter offers a complementary, yet nuanced perspective. Addressed to "exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1), the letter situates believers as resident aliens within the Roman Empire, underscoring the precariousness of Christian identity in a hostile world. The exhortation to "honor everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor" (1 Pet. 2:17) reflects this tension. Christians are instructed to respect political authorities and live honorably within society, yet they are also reminded that reverence belongs to God alone (Sanou 2024, 51-64). In other words, "The Christian is to be obedient to the structures of society and to live within those structures, but such obedience at times may involve a justifiable civil disobedience to something unjust or idolatrous that remains within that governmental structure (cf. Acts 5:29). Christians at such times must speak out against government. But this has to be done in ways that honor God and remain peaceful and nonviolent" (McNight 2024, 1257). This careful balance prevents uncritical submission to the state, situating civic responsibility within a higher loyalty to Christ. Furthermore, Peter reframes suffering under political oppression as participation in Christ's own suffering (1 Pet. 2:21), suggesting that fidelity to God may lead to social marginalization or persecution. Thus, 1 Peter calls Christians to responsible engagement in civic life while affirming that ultimate allegiance to God may bring them into conflict with the state.

This higher loyalty is made explicit in Acts 5:29, where Peter and the apostles affirm that obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to human authorities. Here, the principle is unambiguous: whenever obedience to human rulers conflicts with obedience to God, the latter must prevail. Acts 5:29 serves as a critical counterbalance to Romans 13:1-7 and Titus 3:1, preventing them from being read as legitimizing unconditional submission. Peter's determination to remain steadfast in this instance grants him the credibility to instruct the church later that God must stand at the pinnacle of every hierarchy (Fernando 2024, 999).

Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 22:21 provides another angle on this tension. By stating, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus both affirms the legitimacy of civic duty and establishes clear boundaries to state authority. Caesar may receive taxes, but only God deserves ultimate loyalty and worship. This suggests that allegiance to God must take precedence over allegiance to the state, particularly when the state seeks to claim what belongs to God alone. Believers are called to serve the state in a way that is honoring to God (Wilkins 2024, 786; 2004, 722). Another key point contained in Jesus' statement, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," is this: The coin which bore Caesar's image should be surrendered to him; but because human beings bear God's image, they should surrender themselves to God's authority. In other words, matters of limited and delegated authority may be rendered to human institutions, but the weightier matters of ultimate allegiance, identity, and discipleship belong to God alone (Keener 2014, 102; Sanou 2022, 291). This distinction preserves the rightful place of the state while safeguarding the sovereignty of God over every human claim.

Daniel 3:8-18; 6:1-28; Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Acts 5:29, and Matthew 22:21 articulate a theological tension. Theologically, this tension reflects the "already/not yet" character of Christian

existence. Believers live within earthly political communities and have responsibilities to them. Yet, their ultimate citizenship is in the kingdom of God (Phil. 3:20). This unresolved tension prohibits anarchism by affirming the legitimacy of political order as a gift from God for human flourishing, while also preventing political absolutism by denying that any earthly authority can claim divine prerogatives. The church is thus positioned as both a participant in and a critic of political life, called to seek the common good while resisting demands of the state that compete with allegiance to God. In practice, this means Christians must cultivate discernment, submitting where possible, resisting where necessary, and enduring where inevitable. In this way, the biblical witness equips the church to live faithfully as both citizens and disciples engaged in the world but not captive to it, honoring rulers yet confessing that Christ alone is Lord.

Historical and Contemporary Case Studies

The tension between submitting to human authority and giving ultimate allegiance to God has echoed throughout Christian history. Believers have continually navigated the tension between honoring the state as a God-ordained structure and resisting its claims when they threatened the primacy of discipleship. Examining specific historical and contemporary cases illustrates both the diversity of Christian responses and the enduring challenge of balancing citizenship with ultimate allegiance to Christ.

The early Christians lived under an empire that tolerated religious pluralism but demanded political loyalty, expressed through worship of the emperor. The church's refusal to participate in emperor cult rituals often led to persecution and martyrdom. Tertullian articulated the Christian posture clearly:

> But why dwell longer on the reverence and sacred respect of Christians to the emperor, whom we cannot but look up to as called by our Lord to his office? So that on valid grounds I might say Cæsar is more ours than yours, for our God has appointed him. Therefore, as having this propriety in him, I do more than you for his welfare, not merely because I ask it of Him who can give it, or because I ask it as one who deserves to get it, but also because, in keeping the majesty of Cæsar within due limits, and putting it under the Most High, and making it less than divine, I commend him the more to the favour of Deity, to whom I make him alone inferior. But I place him in subjection to one I regard as more glorious than himself. Never will I call the emperor God, and that either because it is not in me to be guilty of falsehood; or that I dare not turn him into ridicule; or that not even himself will desire to have that high name applied to him. If he is but a man, it is his interest as man to give God His higher place. Let him think it enough to bear the name of emperor. That, too, is a great name of God's giving. To call him God, is to rob him of his title. If he is not a man, emperor he cannot be. (1885, 63)

In this context, the church embodied duality, praying for those in authority in response to scriptural injunction while refusing to grant them divine honors. When Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century and subsequently Christianized the Roman Empire, the church entered into a new relationship with the state. Christendom blurred boundaries between citizenship and discipleship, creating conditions where allegiance to Christ was often conflated with loyalty to the empire or nation. While this provided stability, it also fostered complacency and, at times, complicity with unjust political structures. As a response, Augustine, in his *City of God,* articulated a theological framework for this paradigm. While he affirmed the state's role in maintaining order, he firmly distinguished between the earthly and heavenly cities.

During the Reformation, various traditions developed distinct perspectives on the relationship between the church and the state. The Roman Catholic Church continued to claim supremacy over temporal rulers, a position it had consolidated since the time of Constantine. Popes asserted authority over kings and emperors, maintaining that political power was subject to papal oversight. This fusion of church and state enabled the church to wield immense political and social influence, although it also fostered tension and corruption. Reformers such as Martin Luther rejected papal supremacy (Murza 2021, 90-91). In his 1523 treatise, "Secular Authority: To What Extent Should It Be Obeyed," Martin Luther distinguished between two spheres of God's rule: the spiritual kingdom, in which God governs through the gospel and the church, and the earthly kingdom, in which God governs through law and civil authority. He argued that secular authority is to be obeyed insofar as it preserves order, restrains evil, and safeguards the well-being of its citizens. However, obedience ceases when such authority exceeds its proper limits by

intruding into matters of faith and conscience, which belong to God alone (Vaughn 2018; Murza 2021, 91-93).

Huldrych Zwingli went further, envisioning a close alliance between church and state. For him, civic magistrates were legitimate leaders of the church, charged with defending God's honor and enforcing divine law. Unlike Luther's reliance on princes, Zwingli emphasized republican ideals, granting the wider civic community a direct role in shaping religious life (Murza 2021, 93-94). John Calvin offered a more balanced model of cooperation. He affirmed that church and state were both divine institutions, each with distinct responsibilities, but called to serve the common good together. While Calvin preserved the church's independence in spiritual matters, he also expected the state to defend true religion and safeguard the church.

He was of the opinion that when civil authority comes into conflict with religious obligation, obedience to God must take precedence. Although he allowed for resistance to state authorities, he nonetheless insisted that such resistance be exercised peacefully and through representative bodies, such as the consistories of pastors and elders he organized to oversee theology and moral life within the community and to impose discipline, a principle that later influenced constitutional and democratic traditions (Murza 2021, 94-95). The Anabaptists stood apart from the magisterial Reformers by insisting on a complete separation of church and state. They rejected state control of religion and refused to participate in political practices that compromised their discipleship, including swearing oaths, bearing arms, or holding public office. While they acknowledged that God ordained rulers to maintain order, they insisted that obedience was limited to matters not contrary to faith. The church, in their view, was to be a distinct and faithful community modeled on the New Testament, characterized by nonviolence, mutual care, and, in some cases, shared property. This radical vision often brought them into conflict with both Catholic and Protestant authorities (Joireman 2009, 73-91; Estep 1996, 135-140; Murza 2021, 95-96).

The emergence of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century highlighted the tension between the state and the church. In Nazi Germany, many church leaders accommodated Hitler's demands, aligning nationalism with Christian identity. However, the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church resisted, affirming in the 1934 Barmen Declaration that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear, and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death" (Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2007, 249). Figures like Dietrich Bonhoeffer embodied costly discipleship, resisting even unto death the state's call to ultimate allegiance (Bonhoeffer 1997, 381-383).

Under apartheid, the South African state imposed racial segregation, often defended by theological rationalizations. However, many churches resisted, articulating a prophetic critique of unjust structures. The 1985 Kairos Document declared apartheid a heresy and called Christians to resist state injustice in the name of the gospel. The document articulated a critique of both "State Theology" which serves to legitimize and reinforce the oppressive status quo and "Church Theology" which maintains a posture of passive observation. In contrast, it advanced the notion of "Prophetic Theology" which calls the church to solidarity with the oppressed, active engagement in prophetic witness, and, when warranted, the exercise of civil disobedience as a means of resisting the tyranny of the apartheid regime (Kairos Theologians 1986, 3-27). For the Kairos Theologians, discipleship involves rejecting the state's demand for loyalty when it conflicts with allegiance to God.

In Latin America, Gustavo Gutiérrez developed a theological vision in the late 1960s and early 1970s, shaped by widespread poverty and the rise of military authoritarianism across the region. He denounced not only these repressive regimes, which persecuted minority religious groups such as Protestants, indigenous movements, and emerging evangelical communities while promoting Catholicism as a marker of national identity (Medilien and Steigenga 2025, 1, 3-4; Mabat 2022, xvi-xviii, 40-41), but also elements within the Roman Catholic Church that lent them support. He explicitly critiqued ecclesial complicity in oppressive social orders, arguing that Christian faith cannot legitimize structures that oppress or exclude (Gutiérrez 1990, 9-25; 2023, 125-126). However, unlike some contemporary theologians associated with radical political praxis, Gutiérrez did not issue a theological mandate to overthrow regimes and rejected the use of violence as a means of achieving justice. His perspective centers on prophetic critique, ecclesial solidarity with the poor, and structural transformation grounded in the gospel (Gutiérrez 2023, 125). He maintained that authentic Christian discipleship demands solidarity with the poor and active, but non-violent, resistance to unjust state structures, framing

such engagement as participation in God's liberating mission. By affirming that "to preach the universal love of the Father is inevitably to go against all injustice, privilege, oppression, or narrow nationalism" (2023, 220), Gutiérrez is arguing that because the gospel possesses inherent political dimensions, silence or complicity stands in direct contradiction to its message (2023, 204-210, 225-226). As such, he advocates an understanding of the salvation offered by Christ as integral, encompassing political liberation, the ongoing liberation of humanity within history, and ultimate liberation from sin that restores communion with God (2023, 159-160, 169).

In contemporary contexts, nationalism frequently exerts a significant influence on Christian identity. The blending of religious conviction with political loyalty has sparked debates about whether allegiance to the nation compromises fidelity to Christ. In some contexts, dominant cultural or religious nationalisms place pressure on Christian communities. In others, governments regulate religious practice to ensure conformity with state priorities. Elsewhere, historic ties between church and nation shape identity in ways that blur the line between discipleship and citizenship (see Perry and Whitehead 2020; Cavanaugh 2011; Gorski 2019). Across these diverse settings, Christians face the ongoing challenge of resisting civic claims to ultimate authority while engaging responsibly in public life (see Volf 2011; Yoder 2007). In post-colonial societies, nation-states constructed around territorial sovereignty often encompass diverse communities in terms of religion, ethnicity, and culture. The project of nation-building typically requires forging a unified civic identity, yet this effort frequently masks underlying fractures and hierarchies of power. Talal Asad argues that modern secular states do not merely separate religion from politics; they actively regulate religious life by disciplining it into privatized, depoliticized forms that appear compatible with the state's definition of citizenship and national belonging (2003, 25-27). Through laws, education systems, and public discourse, religion is redefined as a matter of personal conscience rather than a communal, public, or political reality.

For Christians, this dynamic creates both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, religious freedom in many pluralistic contexts enables the church to make a positive contribution to the common good through education, healthcare, and social services. On the other hand, the reduction of faith to private belief risks silencing Christianity's prophetic and communal dimensions, especially its critiques of injustice and its alternative vision of social life under the reign of God. The challenge, therefore, is to navigate public witness in ways that affirm civic responsibility while avoiding the merger of discipleship and citizenship. Faithful presence requires Christians to inhabit their societies with integrity, indiscriminately serving neighbors, promoting justice, and seeking peace, without surrendering the transcendent claims of the gospel to the immanent demands of the state.

Navigating Citizenship and Discipleship Today

Reflections on Church-State Relations

The relationship between the state and the church is marked by constant tension, which Otniel Muza summarizes as follows:

> The history of the Church and countries with a majority Christian population is dotted about with good or bad opinions on the role of the Church in relation to the government or the State. Sometimes the Church is accused of interfering with the government or local authorities over issues that should be only under the State jurisdiction. Some Christians would consider it a normality because they see God as a supreme King over the whole world, and therefore his will stated in the Bible should be made law and prevail in every country. On the other hand, secular people oppose such ideas and try to exclude any ties of the Church in politics, economics, and social life. (2021, 89)

As such, the relationship between the church and the state is a prominent feature in modern political and theological discourse (Cole 2019, xxv). Far from being a fixed principle, the concept has proven to be historically contingent, philosophically contested, and complex in practice. Scholars have approached this issue from cultural, theological, and socio-political perspectives, each contributing insights that shape contemporary understandings of how Christians engage the public sphere.

Carol Greenhouse argues that the American notion of church–state separation differs from the French concept of *laïcité* because it functions as a cultural framework that shapes political legitimacy. In her analysis, she highlights that American political culture perceives local religious and moral communities as both the source of federal sovereignty

and the foundation of its moral authority. This dual role allows moral communities to exist outside the state while still influencing it through democratic participation. Greenhouse suggests this relationship explains why American public life remains "church-minded" despite constitutional separation, reflecting ongoing tensions between moral legitimacy and democratic governance (2006, 493-504). Similarly, William Clohesy argues that while the separation of church and state is a fundamental principle of the United States Constitution, grounded in reason rather than divine authority, this separation can be overstated. For him, this separation should not be interpreted to mean that there are, or should be, no connections, mutual interests, or collaborative efforts between government and religion (2009, 50). This separation protects both spheres: it prevents government from imposing or privileging any religion (p. 53) and prevents religious groups from gaining political "dominion" over others (pp. 49-50). He envisions a democracy in which secular government preserves liberty and equality, while religious citizens contribute morally grounded opinions within a shared civic framework (pp. 62-63). Both Greenhouse and Clohesy remind Christians that church-state separation is not a rigid formula, but a dynamic arrangement in which believers engage in public life morally and responsibly, while resisting any fusion of religious authority with state power.

Other scholars examine the separation question through a theological lens, exploring the responsibility of Christians in democratic societies. Gutiérrez calls the church to become an "*institution of social criticism*" (2023, 208, emphasis in the original), arguing that

> To assert that there is a direct, immediate relationship between faith and political action encourages one to seek from faith norms and criteria for particular political options. . . . On the other hand, to assert that faith and political action have nothing to say to each other is simply that they move on juxtaposed and unrelated planes. If one accepts this assertion, either he will have to engage in verbal gymnastics to show—without succeeding—how faith should express itself in a commitment to a more just society; or the result is that faith comes to coexist, in a most opportunistic manner, with any political option. (225-226)

In a related vein, Samuel Calhoun argues that constitutional law does not require Christians to refrain from bringing their faith-based convictions into public debates (2018, 565-598). Instead, he suggests that the more pressing question is whether Christian doctrine itself requires limits on political engagement, thereby shifting the focus from legal boundaries to theological ethics. Daniel Haines takes this further by arguing that strict separation is impractical in modern democracies, since religious convictions inevitably shape political discourse. For him, the real task is not to insist on an impossible neutrality but to cultivate a model of balanced engagement that respects pluralism while affirming the legitimacy of faith in the public sphere (2024, 1-14). These contributions underscore the theological complexity of the church-state separation principle and highlight the dual citizenship Christians must navigate between their earthly responsibilities and their allegiance to the heavenly kingdom.

Beyond questions of law and theology, scholars have also investigated the socio-political effects of church-state relations. John Huber and Piero Stanig posit that the degree of separation has measurable consequences for redistribution and welfare policy. In contexts where church and state are closely aligned, religious institutions often serve as conduits for social services; conversely, greater separation places the responsibility for welfare more directly in the hands of the state (2011, 828-836). Robert Weclew (1960, 1-26) also argues that although the principle of church-state separation is essential for protecting religious liberty, complete or absolute separation is not feasible. Surveying constitutional history and legal cases, he shows that the relationship between church and state in the United States has always been permeable, with cooperation occurring in areas such as health benefits, education, public funding, and social welfare. He emphasizes that separation must be interpreted flexibly because the state inevitably engages religion in its efforts to promote public welfare, uphold individual rights such as access to education and health, and, in some ways, accommodate the spiritual needs of citizens. Thus, rather than full separation, he advocates a model in which the state maintains neutrality regarding religion while permitting interaction when justified by public or individual benefit (19).

Viewed through a socio-political lens, these developments illustrate how the state's regulatory power intersects with religious identity and public witness. In *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary*

Political Theology, the perspectives of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2012, 286-302) and Karl Barth (2012, 303-315) on the relationship between church and state are presented consecutively, perhaps because of their shared opposition to the totalitarian claims of the state and their resolute insistence on the lordship of Christ. At a foundational level, they agree far more than they differ. Both affirm that God is sovereign over church and state; that the state possesses a legitimate but limited mandate to secure justice, order, and peace; that the church owes its highest allegiance to Christ and must therefore remain independent of political control; and that whenever the state exceeds its proper bounds, the church is obligated to respond with prophetic critique. To grasp their subtle difference in emphasis, it is essential to recognize that the divergence lies not in theology but in context and application. Writing in the early 1930s as the Nazi regime was consolidating power, Barth emphasized the independence of the church from state interference and firmly rejected any form of theology that might allow nationalism to co-opt Christian faith. His concern was theological clarity: Christ alone is Lord, not the Führer. Bonhoeffer, writing later under the full weight of Nazi tyranny, stressed the church's prophetic responsibility in times of crisis. For him, it was not enough to assert independence; the church was called to act, even at high personal and institutional cost, to defend the oppressed and confront injustice. Their perspectives converge on a common conviction: the church must engage public life responsibly without ever compromising its allegiance to Christ. Barth draws the theological boundaries that safeguard the church's freedom. Bonhoeffer underscores the urgency of active witness when those boundaries are violated. Both point beyond the state to God's kingdom of justice and peace. In other words, while the church must use its prophetic voice to denounce unjust societal structures, it is also called to proclaim what is not yet but will be.

The above perspectives suggest that the separation of church and state functions less as a settled principle and more as a continual process of negotiation and adaptation. From cultural reinterpretations (Greenhouse; Clohesy), to theological and ethical responsibilities (Calhoun; Haines), to socio-political consequences (Huber and Stanig; Weclew), the concept emerges as multidimensional and contextually influenced. For Christian theology and mission, these insights are particularly relevant. They caution against simplistic readings of separation, invite careful theological reflection on civic engagement, and highlight the social stakes of church-state arrangements. The literature thus provides a framework that connects identity, theology, law, and justice, offering resources for reimagining Christian public witness in a pluralistic world.

Implications for Citizenship and Discipleship

The tension between the duty to honor governing authorities and the necessity of giving ultimate allegiance only to God still constitutes a defining challenge for Christians in the twenty-first century. Issues related to globalization, migration, pluralism, and the resurgence of nationalisms intensify the tension, making discernment essential for believers. If believers are to live faithfully as both citizens and disciples, they must navigate these realities with theological clarity and practical wisdom. They must acknowledge that their allegiance to Christ should not be confused with a nationalistic or ethnically defined form of Christianity. Instead, their citizenship must be perceived as an arena for bearing biblically faithful and contextually relevant witness to God and His never-changing Word.

A biblical resource for navigating the tension between citizenship and discipleship can be found in the First Epistle of Peter. Addressed to "exiles of the Dispersion" scattered across Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1), the letter situates Christian identity within the experience of social marginalization. Peter exhorts believers to stand firm in the "true grace of God" (1 Pet. 5:12), even when faithfulness leads to social scorn, humiliation, or persecution. This counsel provides a vital paradigm for Christians today who find themselves viewed with suspicion or pushed to the margins in plural societies. Like Peter's audience, contemporary Christians are called to remain steadfast in loyalty to God while inhabiting political communities that may not share their ultimate commitments. Central to Peter's exhortation is the identity of Christians as "aliens and exiles" (1 Pet. 2:11). This description underscores that believers participate in civic life yet do so as those whose ultimate belonging lies elsewhere. For Christians negotiating citizenship in modern contexts, 1 Peter insists that their baptismal identity relativizes national belonging, orienting their loyalty to Christ above all other claims. At the same time, 1 Peter does not advocate withdrawal from civic responsibility. The letter instructs believers to "honor everyone, love the

family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor" (1 Pet. 2:17). This formulation holds civic respect and ultimate allegiance in careful tension: Christians are to respect rulers, but fear (a posture of ultimate devotion) is reserved for God alone. First Peter's exhortation mirrors Romans 13's call to civic obedience while underscoring the need to resist idolatrous authority. Its message is clear: Christians may participate as responsible citizens, but they must resist any demand that elevates civic loyalty above discipleship. Finally, Peter reframes suffering not as defeat but as participation in Christ's own path: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example" (1 Pet. 2:21). Endurance under social scorn becomes a form of public witness, demonstrating that Christians live by a different set of loyalties. In contexts where nationalism, secularism, or state regulation pressures Christians to assimilate, 1 Peter equips believers to embrace steadfast faith as their most powerful testimony (Sanou 2024, 52-55). The epistle thus complements the witness of Romans 13, offering a vision of faithful presence marked by respect, discernment, and perseverance in the face of marginalization.

In pluralistic societies, Christians often find themselves navigating multiple identities: ethnic, national, and religious. However, baptismal identity transcends all others (Gal. 3:28), anchoring believers in a community defined not by nationality but by the body of Christ. This theological grounding empowers Christians to engage pluralistic societies without reducing discipleship to citizenship. Lamin Sanneh highlights the "translatability" of Christianity as evidence of its supranational character. For him, "the circumstances that gave birth to the church as a divine office rather than a political institution, enabling the church to flourish in spite of every attempt by the state to suppress it," also point to the fact that the gospel can take root in diverse cultures without being captive to any one political order (2003, 9, 130).

Several implications for Christian discipleship can be drawn from reflecting on the biblical and theological tensions regarding the state, along with insights from social scientists into the nature of the modern state:

First, discipleship requires discernment about ultimate loyalty. The state is not merely a neutral backdrop but a powerful actor that shapes identity, commands loyalty, and at times competes with the claims of Christ. While it is indispensable for maintaining order, mediating conflict, and securing public goods, in some contexts, its authority often verges on the totalizing, demanding allegiances that rival divine sovereignty. Christians must therefore carefully discern the difference between civic obedience and obedience to God. A faithful perspective must navigate this duality by affirming the state as part of God's provision for social order (Rom. 13:1-7), while resisting its pretensions to ultimacy (Acts 5:29). In *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God,* Skye Jethani (2011) suggests that at its core, Christian discipleship is about being *with* Jesus. He presents four ways most people relate to God: Life *under* God, Life *over* God, Life *from* God, and Life *for* God (23-116). He notes that these four ways are each motivated by fear and a desire for control, and therefore distort the true intention of Christian discipleship. Life *under* God sees blessing and protection as rewards for obedience, reducing faith to a cause-and-effect moral bargain with divine rules. Life *over* God replaces trust in God with reliance on proven principles, management, or technique, treating God as unnecessary once we have mastered the right systems. Life *from* God treats God as a supplier of blessings or consumer benefits, seeking his gifts but not his presence. Life *for* God appears noble, emphasizing mission, service, and significance, but it still uses God to secure meaning, often leading to burnout, pride, or spiritual emptiness. By contrast, Jethani argues in favor of a fifth posture: Life *with* God. He points out that the Bible's story begins and ends with God dwelling *with* his people, revealing that the ultimate goal of Christian discipleship is not control, usefulness, or even impact, but communion with God himself. He insists that only "Life *with* God" satisfies the deepest longings of the soul because God becomes the treasure, not a means to something else. John Mark Comer adds that *being with* Jesus should lead to *becoming like* him and *doing as* he did (2024, 32-155). Such an apprenticeship to Jesus recenters one's identity around Christ rather than the cultural forces that seek to define them.

Second, discipleship must resist the sacralization of the state. States often employ symbols, rituals, and narratives such as flags, anthems, and pledges to cultivate a sense of belonging and devotion. Because cultural rituals function as formative practices with liturgical power, they shape citizens' loves and identities often more deeply than is consciously recognized. Repeated through imitation and embodied practice, they cultivate second-nature orientations that guide desire and action almost

instinctively. When national rituals operate as secular liturgies, they can therefore rival the worship owed to God (Smith 2016, 19-22, 37-39). Faithful discipleship requires believers to critically exegete the rituals in which they are immersed to discern whether they reflect the character of Christ and to cultivate intentional, biblically faithful counter-formative practices that foster a deep hunger for God and break the power of rival liturgies. Such practices include: 1) regular engagement with Scripture to allow its truth to reshape distorted images of God; 2) the practice of spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, fasting, repentance, worship) to retrain the heart's automatic responses to sin and cultivate attentiveness to the intuitions of the Spirit; 3) active participation in a supportive and accountable community, where believers are encouraged, corrected, and sustained in their walk with Christ; 4) intentional openness to the Spirit's ongoing transformative work in one's life; 5) perseverance in the journey of discipleship**,** recognizing that Christlikeness unfolds gradually over time rather than instantaneously; 6) learning to remain open to God amid pain, trials, and suffering**,** trusting that God is present and at work even in seasons of struggle; and 7) the practice of altruistic service, marked by the relinquishment of self-centered ambition and the cultivation of attentiveness to the wellbeing of others (Comer 2024, 101-114; Foster 2018; Dybdahl 2015).

Third, discipleship is lived in contested spaces. Since the state is not a fixed reality but one that is socially and historically constructed, the practice of discipleship will inevitably take different forms across contexts. Christians are called to follow Christ faithfully within various cultural currents, even in environments where the state regulates, reshapes, or openly opposes religious life. Such circumstances demand contextual wisdom and missional flexibility, rather than blind conformity to civic expectations. In this, Jesus remains the prototype in "making space for the gospel," "preaching the gospel," and "demonstrating the gospel" (Comer 2024, 124-155).

Fourth, discipleship involves prophetic critique of injustice. Social science reminds us that states have often used consolidated power to commit atrocities, suppress dissent, and violate human rights. Because participation in Christ necessarily leads to participation in God's restorative mission and prophetic confrontation of injustice (Gorman 2015, 18, 104, 139; Steuernagel 2008, 62-76; Haddad 2008, 77-83), genuine apprenticeship to Jesus includes learning to embody kingdom righteousness publicly and contributing to systems that value human life made in God's image. Since biblical principles are relevant not only to the life of the church but also to secular societies, Christian discipleship cannot be reduced to personal piety or private morality. Rightly understood, holiness is integral to both the church's missional identity and the personal sanctification of individual members (Wright 2010, 30). Christopher Wright observes that

> Holiness in Leviticus 19 involves: respect within the family and community (vv. 3a, 32); exclusive loyalty to YHWH as God; proper treatment of sacrifices (vv. 4, 5–8); economic generosity in agriculture (vv. 9–10); observing the commandments regarding social relationships (vv. 11–12); economic justice in employment rights (v. 13); social compassion to the disabled (v. 14); judicial integrity in the legal system (vv. 12, 15); neighbourly attitudes and behaviour; loving one's neighbour as oneself (vv. 16–18); preserving the symbolic tokens of religious distinctiveness (v. 19); sexual integrity (vv. 20–22, 29); rejection of practices connected with idolatrous or occult religion (vv. 26–31); no ill-treatment of ethnic minorities, but rather racial equality before the law and practical love for the alien as for oneself (vv. 33–34); commercial honesty in all trading transactions (vv. 35–36). (2010, 125)

Because Scripture draws no dichotomy between believers' private and public lives, between the sacred and the secular, between who they are at work and who they are in corporate worship, between what they profess and what they practice (Wright 2010, 236), discipleship, therefore, necessarily calls for engagement with social and political structures that perpetuate injustice. To ignore unjust social and political structures is to render discipleship not only incomplete but socially irrelevant (Sider 2012, 77-99; 2015, 219-223; Stearns 2010, 2, 22-23, 36-39, 298-299).

Fifth, discipleship requires a re-examination of citizenship. Because the state constructs and reconstructs citizenship rights (civil, political, social, or religious), Christians must carefully evaluate how these rights align with or conflict against their higher calling as citizens of God's kingdom. Being with Jesus, becoming like him, and doing as he did involves reordering one's identity so that loyalty to him supersedes every other civic or cultural identity. In this way, faithful discipleship redefines belonging, placing Christians within God's family first and foremost.

Sixth, discipleship commits believers to vigilance against co-opted faith. Smith's account of cultural formation warns that Christians can be unconsciously shaped by political liturgies that redirect their loves toward national ideals rather than God's kingdom. Since states often regulate and reshape religious communities in ways that make them conform to national identity, Christians must remain vigilant against the danger of partisan co-optation of faith, where discipleship is domesticated to serve political or national agendas rather than being oriented toward God's mission. Like Sider and Stearns, Jim Wallis contends that authentic Christian faith is inherently public and political, calling believers to engage the political sphere prophetically. He argues that

> Since politics is ultimately about ordering our communal life together, it is far too important an aspect of human life to be considered outside of God's care and attention. God has a "political perspective," one might say, rooted in God's identity as Creator and expressed in the Bible. However, God's politics always challenges our politics. We too easily pursue ideological agendas that serve our own interest. God's politics is never ideological, but always intends to benefit human well-being. In particular, God reminds us of our obligations to the persons we often neglect—the poor, the vulnerable, and those otherwise on the margins. (2006b, 1)

As such, Willis cautions that Christians' political engagement must resist being co-opted by partisan politics, insisting instead that Christian political witness be rooted in the values of God's kingdom rather than in ideological alignment (2006a, xiv–xvii; 72-84; 151, 157; 2006b, 1-12). In line with Wallis' emphasis on the prophetic posture of Christian engagement, Nicholas Wolterstorff provides a complementary normative framework by clarifying the moral criteria by which such engagement is to be evaluated. His account of justice centers on the protection of inherent rights grounded in the worth of persons, a worth rooted in their creation in the image of God. He argues that political authority is morally legitimate only insofar as it respects and protects these rights, particularly those of the vulnerable, and becomes unjust when it violates them through law, policy, or neglect. Such a vision reinforces the claim that Christian obedience to the state is necessarily conditional and discerning rather than absolute. Discipleship, therefore, involves more than patient endurance or selective resistance. It calls Christians to participate constructively in public life by advocating for justice, holding institutions accountable, and resisting social and political arrangements that wrong persons by denying their God-given dignity. In this sense, faithful presence includes active engagement aimed at shaping political structures toward justice for all (Wolterstorff 2008, x-xii; 81-82, 94-96; 109-131, 342-361).

The above implications also extend to Christians who serve within the state's structures as public officials, civil servants, or in positions of governmental authority (Wolterstorff 2008, 80-81). Discipleship commits such believers to exercising authority with moral integrity, resisting unjust policies from within, and shaping institutions toward justice and the common good (Sider 2015, 25, 221, 226-227; Murza 2021, 95). Their dual location intensifies rather than resolves the tension between citizenship and discipleship, requiring heightened discernment, humility, and accountability.

Conclusion

A biblically and theologically informed perspective on the church's engagement with society carries significant implications for how believers understand both citizenship and discipleship. While Christians live as citizens of earthly states, the Bible affirms that their ultimate allegiance belongs to Christ and his kingdom. This reorders civic loyalty, making obedience to God the highest priority and setting clear limits on the claims of political authority. Government has a legitimate and God-given role in maintaining order, promoting justice, and restraining evil, but it must not intrude into matters of faith and conscience. When it does, the church cannot remain silent. Instead, it is called to prophetic witness by speaking truth to power, defending the vulnerable, and resisting the idolatrous tendencies of nationalism and unchecked political authority. Discipleship, therefore, cannot be reduced to private devotion but must be lived out in public faithfulness, even when this demands costly obedience. Following Christ may at times mean confronting injustice, bearing suffering, or sacrificing comfort and security for the sake of truth. The church, as a community distinct from the state, embodies alternative values that point beyond earthly power structures to the justice, peace, and reconciliation of God's kingdom. In this way, citizenship and discipleship converge: Christians engage public life responsibly, honoring legitimate authority, yet always

remembering that their highest loyalty is to Christ and their truest citizenship is in the kingdom of God. The task before the church, then, is to navigate the tension between civic responsibility and discipleship with wisdom and courage. This tension will not disappear, but it provides an opportunity for faithful witness. By participating constructively where possible, submitting where appropriate, resisting where necessary, and enduring where inevitable, Christians expose the limits of earthly power and bear testimony to a higher kingdom where justice, peace, and reconciliation are not the achievement of any state but the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. 2016. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London, UK: Verso.

Augustine. *The City of God*. 1984. Translated by Henry Bettenson. London, UK: Penguin.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Barkey, Karen, and Sunita Parikh. 1991. "Comparative Perspectives on the State." *Annual Review of Sociology* 17: 523-549.

Barrow, Clyde. 2008. "State, The." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* 2nd Edition by William A. Darity Jr. Pp. 102-105. Detroit, MI: Gale.

Barth, Karl. 2012. "Church and State." In *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, and Craig Hovey. Pp. 303-315. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 1997. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: Touchstone.

_____ 2012. "State and Church." In *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, and Craig Hovey. Pp. 286-302. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Calhoun, Samuel W. 2018. "If Separation of Church and State Doesn't Demand Separating Religion from Politics, Does Christian Doctrine Require It?" *Washington & Lee Law Review Online* 74(2): 565-598.

Cavanaugh, William T. 2011. *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Clastres, Pierre. 1989. *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*. Translated by Robert Hurley and Abe Stein. New York: Zone Books.

Clohesy, William W. 2009. "The Separation of Church and State: Truth, Opinion, and Democracy." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 23(1): 49-66.

Cohen, Abner. 1969. "Political Anthropology: The Analysis of the Symbolism of Power Relations." *Man* 4(2) (June): 215-235.

Cole, Jonathan. 2019. *Christian Political Theology in an Age of Discontent: Mediating Scripture, Doctrine, and Political Reality*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Comer, John Mark. 2024. *Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become Like Him, Do as He Did*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook.

Dybdahl, Jon L. 2015. *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul.* Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications.

Estep, William. 1996. *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Fernando, Ajith. 2024. "Acts." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 989-1046. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler. 2013. "Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges." In *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Direction,* edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner, and Michael Welker. Pp. 37-59. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

Foster, Richard J. 2018. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth.* San Francisco, CA: HarperOne.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony, Mitchell Duneier, Richard P. Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

_____. 2021. *Essentials of Sociology.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Gorman, Michael J. 2015. *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Gorski, Philip S. 2019. *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Greenhouse, Carol J. 2006. "Separation of Church and State in the United States: Lost in Translation." *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 13(2): 493-504.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 2023. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation.* 50th Anniversary Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

_____. 1990. "Church of the Poor." In *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church since Medellín*, ed. Edward L. Cleary. Pp. 9-25. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Haddad, Bev. 2008. "To Seek to Transform Unjust Structures of Society (ii)." In *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission.* Edited by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross. Pp. 77-83. New York: Orbis Books.

Haines, Daniel. 2024. "Christian Citizens in a Democratic State: Is a True Church-State Separation Possible?" *Religions* 15(262): 1-14. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030262.

Huber, John D., and Piero Stanig. 2011. "Church-State Separation and Redistribution." *Journal of Public Economics* 95: 828-836.

Hunter, James Davison. 2010. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Jethani, Skye. 2011. *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Joireman, Sandra F. 2009. "Anabaptism and the State: An Uneasy Coexistence." In *Church, State, and Citizen: Christian Approaches to Political Engagement*, edited by Sandra Fullerton. Pp. 73-91. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Kairos Theologians. 1986. *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa.* Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Publishers.

Keener, Craig S. 2014. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Liefeld, Walter L. 2024. "Titus." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 1212-1216. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Longman, Tremper III. 2024. "Daniel." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 665-678. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Luther, Martin. 1962. *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523). In Luther's Works, Vol. 45. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Mabat, Yael. 2022. *Sacrifice and Regeneration: Seventh-day Adventism and Religious Transformation in the Andes.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

McKnight, Scot. 2014. "1 Peter." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 1253-1262. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Medilien, Ishama, and Timothy John Steigenga. 2025. "Understanding the Catholic Church's Behavior Under the Dictatorships of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil: Rethinking the Religious Economy Explanation." *Religions* 16(7): 1-19. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070929.

Moo, Douglas J. 2024. "Romans." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 1047-1084. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Murza, Otniel. 2021. "A Comparison of the Church-State Relationship as seen by Catholics, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the Anabaptists during the Reformation." *Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies* (December): 89-98.

Nelson, Brian R. 2006. *The Making of the Modern State: A Theoretical Evolution.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Peter, Fabienne. 2023. "Political Legitimacy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy/.

Perry, Samuel L., and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Plessner, Helmuth. 2018. *Political Anthropology.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). 2007. *The Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).* Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly.

Sanneh, Lamin. 2003. *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Sanou, Boubakar. 2022. "Shepherds After God's Heart: A Biblical Perspective on the Use of Power and Authority in Leadership." In *Theology, Philosophy, Hermeneutics, and Mission,* edited by Daniel K. Bediako and Martha O. D. Duah. Pp. 281-292. Accra, Ghana: Advent Press.

_____. 2024. "Embodying God's Mission in an Unfriendly World: The Identity and Missionary Mandate of the Church in 1 Peter." In *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of 1 Peter,* edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither. Pp. 51-64. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.

Sharma, Aradhana and Akhil Gupta, eds. 2006. *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Sider, Ronald J. 2012. *Just Politics: A Guide for Christian Engagement.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

_____. 2015. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*. Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson.

Skalník, Peter. 2009. "Early State Concept in Anthropological Theory." *Social Evolution & History* 8(1) (March): 5-24. https://www.sociostudies.org/journal/files/seh/2009_1/early_state_concept.pdf.

Smith, James K. A. 2016. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

Stearns, Richard. 2010. *The Hole in Our Gospel: The Answer That Changed My Life and Might Just Change the World.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Steuernagel, Valdir Raul. 2008. "To Seek to Transform Unjust Structures of Society (i)." In *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*. Edited by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross. Pp. 62-76. New York: Orbis Books.

Tertullian. 1885. "Apology." In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, edited by Allan Menzies. Pp. 22-82. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Vaughn, Nick. 2018. "Martin Luther on Secular Authority: The Powers of Princes versus the Obligations of Subjects." Hanover College History Department. https://history.hanover.edu/hhr/18/HHR2018-vaughn.pdf.

Verdery, Katherine. 1991. *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Volf, Miroslav. 2011. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

Wallis, Jim. 2006a. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. HarperCollins.

_____. 2006b. *Living God's Politics: A Guide to Putting Your Faith Into Action*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Weclew, Robert G. 1960. "Church and State: How Much Separation?" *DePaul Law Review* 10(1): 1-26.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 2008. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wilkins, Michael J. 2004. *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

_____. 2024. "Matthew." In *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible,* One-Volume Edition by Nancy L. Erickson and Christopher A. Beetham. Pp. 730-813. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Wright, Christopher J. H. 2010. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Yoder, John Howard. 2007. *The Christian Witness to the State*. Waterloo, Canada: Herald Press.

Boubakar Sanou is Associate Professor of Mission and Intercultural Leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University.

Author email: sanou@andrews.edu