

A NATION WITHOUT A STATE:
CONSTITUTING THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

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2011

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The message of Christianity has often been presented in a highly individualized and spiritualized form: Jesus came to die for your sins; you must accept him as your personal savior; this will guarantee you eternal life. This may be true but it constitutes only a small part of Jesus' message. Most of Jesus' public proclamation was not about personal forgiveness but "the good news of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35).¹ George Eldon Ladd remarks, "This theme of the coming of the kingdom of God was central to [Jesus'] mission."² Christian theological tradition (especially among Protestants) has often focused the word "gospel" on forensic justification. But for Jesus, it is not the term *justification* which is at the center of the good news, but *kingdom*.

This choice of terms is essentially political. When Jesus said "kingdom" he evoked in the thinking of his hearers the only paradigm for the "state" (in the sense of the apparatus of legal organization) known to them. Indeed, little else was known in that era, anywhere, by anyone. The closest synonym in biblical Greek to "state" would be *basileia* (*basileia* = kingdom).³ In the New Testament, when *basileia* (kingdom) was used, it would have inevitably held political connotations for the original hearers. By announcing the "kingdom of God," Jesus called for a new political entity, but one which would not resemble "the kingdoms of the world." This new nation has not only different laws, but a different constitution (in the abstract sense of that term), in that it is organized in a fundamentally different way.

DEFINING TERMS: POLITICS

Some will be reluctant to identify the teachings of Jesus as political, as the words "political" and "politics" usually evoke the activities of the state⁴ which typically involve the use or threat of force.⁵ For the purposes of this paper, "politics" will be used in a broader, less pejorative sense and will refer to *the entire web of social relationships within a community*,⁶ including not only what is done in and by formally constituted states, but also what is done in and by less formally constituted social groups. It

¹Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture citations in English in this paper are taken from *The English Standard Version* (ESV) (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2001).

²George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 14.

³*Basileia* is used in the Septuagint to translate three related but distinct Hebrew words, **hkwlm**, **hklmm** and **twklm**. Of these, the first refers primarily to the rank of king, the second to the kingdom or dominion and the third to the power or activity of the king. In practice, this distinction was often blurred.

⁴The Oxford English Dictionary defines "politics" as "the science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organization, and administration of a state or part of one, and of the regulation of its relations with other states." *Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), s.v. "politic" This is the primary definition of the plural form of the word; secondary definitions are also offered though it will be acknowledged by most that this is the commonest understanding elicited by the word.

⁵These forceful, even violent, statist connotations of "politics" are mitigated somewhat by our use of the word in non-statist contexts: we speak of institutional politics or church politics or family politics. But even in these latter uses the word "politics" still carries negative connotations associated with compulsion or force.

⁶Cf. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2003), 11 ed., s.v. "politics," definition 5a. "the total complex of relations between people living in society."

will refer not only to the expression of force, but also to the expression of love so far as this is constitutive and characteristic of a given community.

In addition, we must define “nation” and “state.” In common discussion these are often used interchangeably but here it is their distinction which is important. “Nation” will be understood in the sense of the Hebrew *~[; (‘am)* or the Greek *εϋqnoj (ethnos)*, that is, a people group defined genetically or culturally.⁷ “State,” in contrast, will be understood as a group defined legally.⁸ It will be noticed that no Greek and Hebrew synonyms have been offered for the English word “state” other than the words for “kingdom” since in the biblical period there was no such term in either of the biblical languages.⁹

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Although what we call “religion” and what we call “politics” are separable in theory they were unseparated in the thinking of people of the first century. For first-century pagans, the emperor was both a king (for whom one prayed) and a god (to whom one prayed). For first-century Jews, the Sanhedrin was both the ultimate authority on religion and the supreme court of the nation. To speak of politics was to engage in a fundamentally theological discourse. Consequently, words of the gospels evoked in the minds of their first readers concepts that were at once both religious and political.

Our modern reluctance to recognize the political nature of the kingdom of God arises less from our misunderstanding of this kingdom and more from our statist definition of politics. If, however, we understand “politics,” as defined above, to refer to *the entire web of social relationships within a community* this reluctance may be reduced. In the light of this definition, Jesus’ message is political. Indeed, Jesus’ ethical call to love others is fundamentally political since it constitutes a way of relating to people in society and of organizing society. In fact, Jesus’ career, as described in the synoptic gospels, has many political characteristics. Not only does Jesus announce a kingdom, but the gospels describe him as a king.¹⁰

From the beginning, indeed, from before the beginning, Jesus is a political figure. In Luke’s Gospel it is announced before Jesus’ birth that he is associated with the God who puts down powers from their thrones and exalts the abased (Luke 1:52). At the inception of his public activity he is tempted with the attractions of statist politics.¹¹ Jesus instructed his disciples in the organizational principles of the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:25-28), and delegated political authority to his disciples (Matthew 19:28).¹² A fair-minded reading of the gospels will lead us to the conclusion that “. . . Jesus is,

⁷It should be noted that the terms “nation” and “nationalism” have modern definitions in political science which are not always related to their origins in the Latin word *natio* (“nation,” “race” or “people”). Political scientists may speak of nations which are defined in terms of territory, ideology, religion, or civic identity, as well as (or rather than) common ancestry, even though the latter is inherent in the etymology of the word. The present paper utilizes the word “nation” in the genetic and ethnic sense and allows for an expansion of this definition in the light of the New Testament concept of “new birth.”

⁸For example, Kurds, Turks and Arabs are national groups, Iraq, Syria and Turkey are states. There may be cases in which national and statist groups overlap or even coincide to a significant degree, though the examples offered here illustrate the difference between the concepts.

⁹In classical secular use, *politeia (politeia)* comes closest, in some of its occurrences to the concept of “state.” In the New Testament, however, this word is used to mean “citizenship.”

¹⁰Cf. Matthew 21:1-5; Luke 19:37-38; Mark 15:1-2 and parallels. The gospels also use other politically loaded terms, such as “messiah” and “son of God” to identify him.

¹¹Jesus’ second and third temptations are both political and the political advantages of the first temptation are obvious, if it were to be generalized to the provision of bread for many, instead of one. In fact, John’s gospel indicates that when Jesus actually did provide bread for the many, the reaction of the crowd was political (John 6:14-15).

¹²Luke places this announcement in the context of the Last Supper (Luke 22:28-30).

according to the biblical witness, a model for radical political action."¹³ Even hostile consideration of Jesus' message and actions will lead to the same conclusion. Both popular and administrative responses make it clear that Jesus' message and movement were perceived as political. Jesus not only said that the existing political system was not operating in recognition of the authority of God; he also tried to get people to start acting as though God, and not the emperor, the ethnarchs, or the Sanhedrin, were truly to be obeyed. The "gospel of the kingdom" is a call for a new social order, thus a new political entity, in which the patterns of all the political entities of the then-known world would be replaced by a new way. This is a fundamentally political undertaking though the principles of this community are radically at variance with those of any conventional state.

SPIRITUALIZATION VERSUS POLITICAL REALISM

Unfortunately, there has been a long-standing tendency to interpret Jesus' teachings in an other-worldly or "spiritual" way.¹⁴ This is true not only in popular understanding but in scholarship as well. The spiritualizing tendency in New Testament scholarship can be seen, for example, in Ladd's comment:

The Kingdom of God is here; but instead of destroying human sovereignty, it has attacked the sovereignty of Satan. The Kingdom of God is here; but instead of making changes in the external, political order of things, it is making changes in the spiritual order and in the lives of men and women.¹⁵

The truth is otherwise: Jesus was not apolitical, nor was his message one which was purely spiritual and otherworldly. Jesus' teachings are, as they were intended to be, profoundly practical in the life of the present world, and profoundly relevant in their challenge to this world and its institutions.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

What, then, is the nature of the kingdom which Jesus announces? Our question is not merely about the character of the citizens of this kingdom, an enquiry which could easily devolve into an individualistic concern with private spirituality, but with the character of the kingdom itself, as a whole. It is possible to reflect on the kingdom either from the paradigm of a *state* or a *nation*.

From the perspective of a state, we notice immediately that the kingdom of God is radically different from the states known to Jesus' hearers. The Roman empire presented both a way of living and an explanation for the form of society as it is. Jesus taught his disciples to live in a way which was in distinct contrast to the way of the empire, and he offered them a vision of society, and a rationale for that vision, strikingly at variance with the vision espoused by the agents and beneficiaries of the empire.

Wes Howard-Brook understands Scripture to be presenting and contrasting two approaches to life which he calls "the religion of creation" (characterized by hospitality, love, egalitarian kinship, gift, collaboration, justice and the reign of God alone) and "the religion of empire"¹⁶ (characterized by suspicion, violence, destruction of enemies, hierarchical patronage, debt, competition, scarcity, and the

¹³John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 12.

¹⁴In *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 27, Scot McKnight cites an unidentified pastor saying that, "For most American Christians, the gospel is about getting my sins forgiven so I can go to heaven when I die."

¹⁵George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 55.

¹⁶Wes Howard-Brook, *Come Out, My People! God's Call out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010). See especially pp. 3-10.

reign of human kings).¹⁷ Within this paradigm, he asserts that “. . . Jesus spoke and acted boldly on behalf of the God of Israel proclaimed in the texts of the ‘religion of creation’ and against those who would claim YHWH’s authority for the religion of empire.”¹⁸ Thus Jesus’ teachings deny the understanding of society which prioritizes the power of the state and propose a fundamentally contrary understanding of society, effectively dismissing “state” as an appropriate paradigm for his kingdom. If Jesus calls us to leave behind the actions and appearances of the *state*, we must then understand his kingdom from the paradigm of a *nation*. But even though we speak of the kingdom of God as a *nation* rather than a *state*, we cannot ignore its politics. How do the gospels define this new nation?

In the first place, Jesus internationalizes the people of God.¹⁹ Jesus also associates “the kingdom of heaven” with repentance (Matthew 4:17-25), a change of thinking, and presumably also of acting. The kingdom of God is tied to the realization of God’s will (Matthew 7:21-23). Thus the community of Jesus’ followers is defined, not by structures of power, as would be the case with a state, or even genetically or ethnically, as would be the case for many nations, but culturally: it is their common ways of behaving that identify not only the individual citizens, but also the nation as a whole.

This is illustrated in a story common to the synoptic gospels which includes Jesus’ saying about the greatest of the commandments. Jesus’ interlocutor’s answer to his teaching and Jesus’ approbation of that answer indicate the nature of the kingdom:

And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark 12:32-34)

The acknowledgment that there is one God, and that our duty is to love him and to love our neighbors places one “not far from the kingdom of God.” This principle implies a community of love: whatever is done in the kingdom of God is done out of love for God and others.

The final comment of the scribe contrasts the ideas of monotheism and love for neighbor, on the one hand, and the practices of sacrificial or ritual worship, on the other. It may be overstatement to regard this as the priority of political activity over religious, but this declaration, which Jesus approves, certainly places social action above ritual action. How we relate to others in society is more important to Jesus than how we worship. And, after all, we have defined politics as “*the entire web of social relationships within a community.*” Beyond this, it is even more striking that the politics of the kingdom require that the same principles should govern not only the relations among people, but those between people and God: all relationships are to be characterized by love and justice.

The justice of the kingdom defies expectations. In the kingdom of God, people receive not merely what they have earned, but undeserved goodness (Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus teaches that “the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king . . .” who forgives debts of unimaginable magnitude but who insists that forgiveness is so fundamental to his kingdom that there is no place within it for one who does not live by this principle (Matthew 18:21-35). The kingdom of God thus functions on the basis of forgiveness. It is common to interpret such teachings in a purely spiritual and theological way. But they must be seen in contrast to the political policies of the Roman empire. In fact, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount constitute a reversal of imperial policy. Commenting on Matthew 5:21-26,

¹⁷Howard-Brook, *Come Out, My People*, 6, 397.

¹⁸Howard-Brook, *Come Out, My People*, 9.

¹⁹A Roman centurion becomes the model of faith for the followers of Jesus (Luke 7:2-9); many will come from far places to enjoy the feast in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:10-12). The widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will all have a place—even a prominent political role—in the kingdom. These people, genetic and ethnic outsiders to the Jewish nation, are insiders in the kingdom of God.

Howard-Brook remarks,

The way of empire has always been to justify the escalation of the cycle of violence, as seen so tragically in the aftermath of 9/11. The Romans made an art of the kind of “scorched earth” policy that “taught a lesson” to people who would dare to resist imperial authority. Jesus reverses this completely.²⁰

This reversal of the ways of the Roman empire and, indeed, of all states, is not limited to military matters but also includes mundane activities such as the forgiveness of debts (Matthew 18:23-35), the rejection of retribution (Matthew 5:39-41), and the rejection of oaths (Matthew 5:33-37), not to mention the counsel against the accumulation of earthly wealth (Luke 12:16-21).

The inconsistency between accumulated wealth and the kingdom of God is indicated several places in Jesus’ teachings. The beatitudes state that this kingdom belongs to “the poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3) and “those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matt 5:10).²¹ Their poverty and persecution are evidence that the kingdoms of the world belong to someone else who, in fact, despises the poor and the persecuted. It is because of this hatred against them by the representatives of the worldly kingdoms that they are poor and persecuted. It is particularly noted that the ones persecuted are suffering because of “righteousness” (= dikaiosunh), that is uprightness, justice and equity.²²

In addition to turning away from economic superiority over others (and the consequent economic domination of others), Jesus also repudiates domination of others through the system of the state in favor of self-sacrificing service to others. His most famous teaching on this issue is found in Matthew 20:25-28:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke’s version of this teaching highlights the cognitive dissonance which the political sayings of Jesus must have created in the minds of his hearers: on the one hand, Jesus asserts that the Father has assigned him a kingdom and that he is assigning a kingdom to his followers (Luke 22:29). In this kingdom, the disciples will dine at the king’s table and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). This sounds very much like the kingdoms of the world. On the other hand, Jesus tells his followers not to exercise lordship over others (Luke 22:25) and to serve, rather than to recline at table, just as Jesus was present among them to serve. The kingdom is promised, but it will not be like the kingdoms which Jesus’ followers know. The role of the politically prominent is not one of control.

Thus, the new kingdom which Jesus announces, the community of Jesus’ followers, this *nation* which is not a *state*, leaves behind not only the violence inherent in Rome and every worldly state, but also the hierarchical structure and top-down authoritarianism of the kingdoms of the world.

The gospel [of Matthew] shapes the community’s governance. There is no recognized leadership, teaching office (23:8-12) or hierarchical control (20:20-28). The community (at least ideally) is to be an egalitarian community in which all imitate Jesus in serving one another

²⁰Howard-Brook, *Come Out, My People*, 414.

²¹Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Plain ascribes the kingdom to the “poor” (without further qualification) and there is considerable discussion over the meaning of Matthew’s qualifier “in spirit.” Regardless of how this is interpreted, it is still obvious that the poor and the persecuted are not those who possess the kingdoms of the world.

²²The association of the poor and persecuted with the possession of the kingdom parallels other expressions in the Synoptics which point to the inverted nature of the kingdom of God from the perspective of the worldly kingdoms. It is precisely those who are least esteemed and even despised in the kingdoms of the world who are of most account in the heavenly kingdom. References to the meek and the peacemakers in the Beatitudes also highlight those who are generally little esteemed in the world. Our society gives galas for celebrities and parades for victorious generals (being, in this respect, little different from the first-century Romans) but tends to ignore the meek.

(20:25-28). The community makes decisions about appropriate behaviors and practices (18:18). It has its own disciplinary structure (18:15-17). Yet the audience is to continue to interact with and participate in its larger society and religious traditions (e.g., 5:43-48).²³

Jesus' teachings about the kingdom may be set in a broader frame. The ethics of the kingdom are not an arbitrary code, a mere list of requirements which one must obey. They share a commonality. This may be characterized in more than one way: we have already indicated that these principles constitute a reversal of statist politics. Viewed from another perspective, they are a prioritization of relationships over accumulation, of people over things, of service over domination and of love over power. *More simply, these ethics valorize community above control.* They imply that what matters in God's kingdom are not the ways in which members of society are compelled to operate, but the ways in which they voluntarily choose to relate to each other.

It is for this reason that, when Jesus is asked when the kingdom of God would come, he answers, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus dismisses the question of *when* the kingdom will come and preempts the question of *where* it will come. It does not come with observable signs—as a worldly kingdom would—but it is among the hearers. It consists of relationships between them and Jesus and between them and each other. Thus, the kingdom of God is not located in history, nor even less, in geography: it is located in community, in the relationships among its citizens.

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

We must think not only of the kingdom of God as a whole, but also of its citizens. Jesus' own message was both an announcement of the kingdom of God and an appeal to enter that kingdom. But who actually entered? Jesus' parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32) indicates the response: the socially despised and objectively sinful enter the kingdom ahead of those who are more respectable but who do not actually do the will of the father.

The same concept is expressed in the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14). As with the parable of the two sons the emphasis is on the fact that those who seem, by the standards of the world (even of the religious world) to be the most likely to enter the kingdom turn out, in fact, to be those who reject the kingdom, and are subsequently to be destroyed. In contrast, those who seemed unlikely ("all whom they found, both bad and good") are admitted. Luke's version of this parable is even more explicit regarding those who enter the feast: they include "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" (Luke 14:21) as well as homeless wanderers, those in "the highways and hedges" (Luke 14:23)²⁴

The poor, the undeserving and the improbable enter the kingdom. Elsewhere, Jesus adds that the kingdom is the particular possession of children and those like them: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Luke 18:16-17) It may be asked,

²³Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 9-10.

²⁴One wonders how literally this is to be understood, especially in the light of Luke's versions of some of Jesus' teachings, including the beatitudes (cf. Luke 6:20). Even more emphatically than Matthew, Luke indicates that the kingdom is the possession of the poor. The connection of material poverty with the kingdom of God, and the incompatibility of wealth and the kingdom are underlined by several other synoptic logia. The prohibition against laying up treasure on earth (Matthew 6:19-20) and the teaching on the impossibility of serving God and money (Matthew 6:24) support this point, as do the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-21) and, most emphatically, the story of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-27 and parallels). This pericope, found in all synoptic gospels is well-known. It is notable that all three synoptics precede and follow the story of the rich young ruler with the same pericopes, those of Jesus blessing the children (Luke 18:15-17 and parallels as well as Matthew 18:1-4) and of the rewards of discipleship (Luke 18:28-30 and parallels).

why is the kingdom particularly appropriate for children and those who receive it as children?²⁵ There are various theories on what child-like characteristics may correspond to the kingdom. Trust has commonly been suggested, though this is not stated in the text. But if we think in political terms, children are not (typically) the dominators of society, nor is their participation typically part of an exchange economy. Neither the poor nor the children are the perpetrators of domination, power and control. If anything, they tend to be victims of domination, not perpetrators. And it is the poor and the children who are most likely to be attracted to a community such as that described by Jesus in his discussion of the rewards of discipleship: a community which offers “a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands” (Mark 10:30).

WHO GETS IN?

So who actually enters the kingdom of God? Following his parable of the tenants in the vineyard, Jesus tells the temple leaders who have been challenging him, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. (Matthew 21:43) Should this be understood to imply that those who “produce fruit” have earned the right to enter heaven?

Our strong (and appropriate) theological objection to anything hinting of salvation by works discourages us from saying that those who “produce fruit” have *earned* a place in the kingdom. Yet, from the beginning of the gospels we are faced with a call to produce fruit.²⁶ The kingdom, the realm in which God’s will is performed, excludes, by definition, those who do not perform God’s will, or, to restate the matter, those who do not do God’s will remove themselves from the circle of those who do.

This brings us to the large issue of inclusion and exclusion. It is quite clear from the teachings of Jesus that neither ritual (such as sacrificial worship) nor belief systems nor organizational affiliation nor private behaviors (including devotional practices) mark those who enter the kingdom of God. As Jesus indicates in his parables of judgment, such as that of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46), it is treatment of others, especially personal treatment of the disadvantaged and marginalized, which makes the distinction between citizens of the kingdom and outsiders. This does not mean that our belief systems, organizations, rituals, and private practices are utterly unimportant. They are often both indicators of, and influences on, the fundamental relational orientation of the person. Neither can we overlook what popular evangelism has called the “personal relationship with Jesus,” for the true nature of our relationship with Christ is invariably parallel with the nature of our relationship with others. But even here we must remember that the relationship which is valorized is not a privatized devotional connection but a generalized mode of social existence which directs *the entire web of our social relationships* within the divine/human community. And that is, of course, where we entered the issue of the political ideal of the people of God in the synoptic gospels. In the gospels, the people of God are constituted as a kingdom. This kingdom is, however, not defined in terms of a *state*, but rather in terms of a *nation*. And even so, the nation is not defined genetically or ethnically but culturally, and the culture of the kingdom is precisely that of personal relationships. These personal relationships are characterized by community, rather than control, and extend not only to the head of the kingdom, but also to every other member of the kingdom.

Our world offers representatives of both the right and left sides of politics who assert that the state is the appropriate means of social organization. On the one hand, we encounter the theologians who call for the establishment (or reestablishment) of a “Christian nation,” by which they actually

²⁵In a similar way we may ask why, according to Luke 6:20, does the kingdom belong to the poor? Why is it particularly appropriate for them? Why is it appropriate for the social outcasts (Luke 14:21-23)?

²⁶John the Baptist demands this of his hearers (Matthew 3:8-10). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit (Matthew 7:16-20), states twice that “you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16,20) and concludes, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

mean "a Christian state," as though the experience of Christendom since Constantine had not already demonstrated both the impossibility and the impiety of such an entity. On the other hand, we meet radicals who tell us that the state can provide us with solutions to all social problems, as though Eastern European experiments in central planning had taught us nothing. Even the libertarians who call for "smaller government," i.e., a reduced state, cling most vigorously to precisely those aspects of the state which exercise domination and violence the most and are thus least like the kingdom of God, the nation without a state taught and sought by Jesus. When described, this kingdom challenges every state in the world—present, past, or future. When enacted, it undermines every state which it encounters.