

When darkness long has veil'd my mind,
And smiling day once more appears;
Then, my Redeemer, then I find
The folly of my doubts and fears.

I chide my unbelieving heart;
And blush that I should ever be
Thus prone to act so base a part,
Or harbour one hard thought of thee!

O! let me then at length be taught
(What I am still so slow to learn;)
That God is love, and changes not,
Nor knows the shadow of a turn.

Sweet truth, and easy to repeat!
But when my faith is sharply try'd,
I find myself a learner yet,
Unskillful, weak, and apt to slide.

But, O my Lord, one look from thee
Subdues the disobedient will;
Drives doubt and discontent away,
And thy rebellious worm is still.

Thou art as ready to forgive
As I am ready to repine;
Thou, therefore, all the praise receive;
Be shame, and self-abhorrence, mine.

TΩ XΠΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Doctrine of Interposition

Kevin T. Bauder

Interposition is an old word. It is not much used in theological conversation these days, but it was at one time. It is directly related to the duty of magistrates (governing authorities, whether lawmakers, administrators, or judges) to uphold just laws.

The doctrine of interposition assumes that magistrates are accountable to a higher moral authority. The laws that they enact can be judged as either just or unjust. The most unjust laws are those that require people to do what is wrong or that forbid people from doing what is morally obligatory. These laws are not only unjust, but immoral. Magistrates must never enact immoral laws.

But they often do. When they do, Christians and other moral people must keep doing what is right and refuse to do what is wrong. In other words, moral people are bound in conscience to disobey immoral laws. The problem is that, when they do, they expose themselves to the penalties prescribed by the unjust magistrates. Unless something is interposed between moral people and the unjust magistrate, moral people will suffer the penalty of the immoral law.

The doctrine of interposition states that lesser magistrates have a duty to interpose themselves between higher magistrates and moral people who break immoral laws. This interposition may be as simple as refusing to enforce the penalty of the law. It may be as extreme as removing the greater magistrate from office. In other words, lesser magistrates have a duty to protect citizens from unjust laws imposed by greater magistrates.

This principle also applies to other sorts of unjust laws. Not every unjust law forbids doing good or demands doing evil. Laws can be unjust in other ways. For example, the sphere of governmental authority is circumscribed by moral law. Magistrates are limited in the things that they can rightfully make laws about. When they exceed their legitimate authority and legislate outside their assigned sphere, then their laws are unjust and even tyrannical. Under these circumstances, lesser magistrates may interpose themselves between citizens and higher magistrates who have exceeded their rightful



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
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900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

authority. If the higher magistrate insists upon enforcing a tyrannical law, then lesser magistrates may rightfully remove the tyrant from office.

This doctrine of interposition has been essential to Protestant thinking ever since the Reformation. It has resulted in practical applications with real-world consequences. For example, lesser magistrates removed and eventually executed Charles I, King of England. Lesser magistrates invited William of Orange to depose James II during the Glorious Revolution. Eventually, lesser magistrates (the Second Continental Congress) led thirteen American colonies to declare independence from George III. These were all legitimate applications of the doctrine of interposition.

But every doctrine contains the possibility of its own corruption. The doctrine of interposition is no exception. It can be corrupted when immoral lesser magistrates resist the rightful requirements of a greater magistrate. Their resistance may arise from a variety of motivations.

One motivation is that they have become committed to immorality and are trying to circumvent just and virtuous laws. Another motivation is that they are cynically trying to recruit or enlarge a following, perhaps by enfranchising individuals who would not otherwise be permitted to participate in the civil process. Another motivation is that they are simply corrupt and are attempting to use the government's taxing power to enrich themselves or their friends. The worst motivation is that they envision the overthrow of an entire civil order built upon a moral reality that they find oppressive.

When the lesser magistrates have become corrupted, moral citizens are likely to suffer. When this situation occurs—when the righteous are suffering under the decisions of immoral lesser magistrates—they may rightly appeal to higher magistrates to intervene. When lesser magistrates are inflicting injustice upon the populace, then higher magistrates must do the interposing. Higher magistrates must protect citizens by thwarting and even prosecuting unjust lesser magistrates.

The foregoing is the theory. But what about the practice? Here are some specific instances.

- Only unjust magistrates grant sanctuary to citizens of other countries who have invaded their nation and are trespassing upon its territory.
- Only unjust magistrates oversee the plundering of citizens' tax dollars to reward citizens of other countries who have invaded their nation and are trespassing upon the nation's territory.
- Only unjust magistrates force girls to accept boys into their private spaces (such as restrooms and locker rooms) when those boys nonsensically claim to be girls.

- Only unjust magistrates force girls to compete against boys in girls-only athletic competition when those boys nonsensically claim to be girls.
- Only unjust magistrates refuse to prosecute people who have committed crimes.
- Only unjust magistrates fail to inflict just penalties upon people who have been lawfully convicted of genuine crimes.
- Only unjust magistrates permit the killing of unborn babies up to the moment of birth, regardless of how viable they may be.
- Only unjust magistrates encourage protesters to interfere with peace officers in the prosecution of their rightful responsibilities.
- Only unjust magistrates personally resist and denounce peace officers in the prosecution of their rightful responsibilities.
- Only unjust magistrates look the other way while millions and even billions of dollars of tax money are siphoned away fraudulently, some of it being sent to the nation's enemies.
- Only unjust magistrates neglect the responsibility of ensuring the identity, eligibility, and legality of every person who attempts to vote in civil elections.
- Only unjust magistrates fail to restrain protesters from blocking public infrastructure, damaging public buildings, and vandalizing or looting private property.
- Only unjust magistrates threaten to remove children from parents who oppose (impossible) gender transition.

Where such things occur, it is high time for the greater magistrate to protect citizens who simply wish to live peaceably. It is time for the greater magistrate to interpose rightful authority over those lower magistrates. It is time for the greater magistrate to dispatch authorities to investigate, enforce, restrain, and if necessary, remove, prosecute, and imprison unjust lesser magistrates.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
