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Christianity and Locke: An Investigation of Resistance Theory

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## Abstract

This paper will explore Locke's theory of the right of resistance by examining its relationship to Protestant resistance theories and Scripture. Concepts such as resistance, self-defense, and the use of force will be examined from a biblical worldview in order to ascertain whether the right of resistance is a biblical concept, and if so, whether theology had any influence on Locke's theory. This paper will also examine to what extent Christians are compelled to resist tyrannical authority.

## Introduction and Research Question

There is perhaps no other name more closely associated with the idea of unalienable rights than John Locke, with the only possible exception being Thomas Jefferson, who was himself inspired by Locke's writings. In his magnum opus, *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke outlines the unalienable rights of man, including life, liberty, and property. He explains that these rights are derived from natural law. He also illuminates a fourth right called the right of resistance. Locke believes that people have a right and a duty to resist an unjust law, and if necessary, also have the right to overthrow a ruler who has become a tyrant.

Locke arrives at this conclusion based on his idea of social contract, which states that men are born free, and enter into contractual obligations towards one another which form the basis of society and government.<sup>1</sup> This government exists to protect the rights of men, and if a ruler attempts to subvert or deny these rights then they are no longer a legitimate ruler but have become a tyrant. In Locke's view, by subverting the stated goal of government, the tyrant becomes the true rebel to society, having broken faith with the people.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Locke concludes, the people owe no obligation to tyrants, but rather have a right and duty to resist and if necessary, overthrow them. If mankind's unalienable rights are derived from God, then does scripture also support the idea of the right of resistance, and if so to what extent is the use of force admissible for Christians?

## Methods

In order to answer this question, two things must be investigated. Firstly, the Bible as the inerrant word of God must be examined for instances that either support or deny the existence of a right to resist. Secondly, Christian scholars and the history of church thought should be consulted in order to ascertain what prominent Christian minds determined regarding the right to resist and the proper use of force. It is also important to determine what influence Christian thought had on Locke's theory.

## Literature Review

### *Slaying Leviathan: Limited Government and Resistance in the Christian Tradition*

The first book this paper will examine, is a work entitled *Slaying Leviathan* by author and Professor Glenn Sunshine. The name draws its title from Locke's philosophical opponent Hobbes.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, "John Locke 1632-1704," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 497.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 504.

Sunshine traces the roots of limited government in the Christian tradition throughout history beginning with early Christians in the Roman Empire. He offers examples of Christians who refused to burn incense as offerings to the Caesars and thus faced a martyr's death as examples of early resistance to government authority.<sup>3</sup> The idea of natural law comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his work *Politics*, which states that humans have intrinsic value, and that the role of government is to promote the good and virtue of society.<sup>4</sup> These notions are perfectly in line with biblical teachings.

Sunshine writes that the Christian solidification of natural rights came from the Decretists, a group of Christians who studied church laws. They include that because life is a gift from God, one cannot be deprived of it arbitrarily. This includes the forbiddance of suicide, meaning one must do what is necessary to preserve oneself.<sup>5</sup> This set the foundation for the idea of self-defense. John Calvin, the famous theologian, also pioneered a kind of covenantal theory of government, based on God's promise to Israel in the book of Exodus, which claims that government is based on the consent of the governed.<sup>6</sup> This is extremely similar to Locke's own social contract theory. The biggest difference between social-contract theory and covenant is the absence of God in social contract theory. For covenants, it is imperative that the covenant is made with and or before God, while this obligation is absent from Locke's social contract theory. Sunshine claims that the work, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* also influenced Locke's political thought.<sup>7</sup> This will be discussed later.

Protestant exile Christopher Goodman writes in, *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed by Their Subjects and Wherein They May Lawfully by God's Word Be Disobeyed and Resisted*, that Romans 13 only applies to legitimate kings and not tyrants with warped perceptions of right and wrong.<sup>8</sup> This is evidenced in verses 3-4, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."<sup>9</sup> Clearly Romans 13 is speaking of just rulers, not unjust rulers.

Regarding Locke's influences, Sunshine writes that Locke drew inspiration for social contract, rather than covenant, as the basis of government from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*.<sup>10</sup> This is perhaps why Locke's work appears divorced from theology. Indeed, Locke rejected the idea of original sin, believing all men were born as blank slates.<sup>11</sup> However, Locke also accepted the idea that people were subject to divine and natural law, and that people have a right to life as a gift from their Creator because God is the source of all human rights.<sup>12</sup> Locke did not hold to the idea of the lesser magistrate, but rather, that individuals have the right to resist unjust rulers.

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn S. Sunshine, *Slaying Leviathan: Limited Government and Resistance in the Christian Tradition* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2020), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 13:3-4 (CSB).

<sup>10</sup> Glenn S. Sunshine, *Slaying Leviathan*, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 146

*John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*

In a chapter entitled, “Resistance and the Second Treatise,” John Marshall explores the philosophical background of Locke, in particular his idea of the right of resistance. Locke wrote his *Two Treatises*, partly as a rebuttal of Sir Robert Filmer’s work, *Patriarcha*, and partly as a pontification on social contract theory. Marshall writes that Locke’s ideas in the *Two Treatises* are built on his earlier thoughts on property and religion. Locke believed that mankind was God’s property and therefore had value. Additionally, it was mankind’s ability to reason that gave him superiority over the dumb beasts.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Locke, unlike many philosophes of the Enlightenment, agreed with Christianity, even writing, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in which he posits that all men have the intellectual abilities necessary to comprehend and achieve salvation.<sup>14</sup> Locke represents one of the few Enlightenment philosophes who saw revelation and reason as being compatible.

Marshall writes that Locke originally believed in non-resistance up until the 1670s before changing his views to support limited conditions for individual resistance.<sup>15</sup> Marshall argues that Locke avoided framing his arguments from religious grounds because of the hypocritical nature of those who pushed for toleration, “Locke did not defend resistance in order to secure toleration in the *Two Treatises* because it would have lost him support for both resistance and toleration, and because he did not believe that those who would resist in order to secure 'toleration' desired or would establish genuine toleration.”<sup>16</sup> Locke’s *Two Treatises* are almost completely silent on resistance originating with religion.<sup>17</sup> While this does not have implications for Locke’s personal beliefs, it does mean that Locke put forth an argument that could be made apart from any Scriptural backing, a construct of largely independent thought. However, this does not mean that the idea of the right of resistance, as Locke defines it, is necessarily incompatible with scripture.

*Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*

Daniel Dreisbach’s chapter, “A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants,” found in his book, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, compares Scripture against the backdrop of the American Revolution, a fitting setting to examine the biblical sentiments of resistance. Dreisbach cites several passages of Scripture that seemingly support the idea of unlimited submission, such as Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17. However, Dreisbach does not hold to the doctrine of unlimited submission as being the correct biblical interpretation, as he importantly cites Acts 5:29 which requires believers to, “Obey God rather than men.”<sup>18</sup> He qualifies this by showing examples from Scripture, of disobedience to civil authorities in order to obey the Lord. Dreisbach cites the Apostle Paul who preached the gospel despite being thrown in prison for doing so. After Paul was

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<sup>13</sup> John Marshall, “Resistance and the Second Treatise,” in *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 206.

<sup>14</sup> John Locke and Ian T Ramsey, *The Reasonableness of Christianity; with A Discourse of Miracles; and Part of a Third Letter Concerning Toleration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).

<sup>15</sup> John Marshall, “Resistance and the Second Treatise,” 220.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 291.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach, “A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants: The Bible, the Right of Resistance, and the American Revolution,” in *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

beaten and released, the first thing he did was preach the gospel in direct opposition to the authorities. He also cites Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who disobeyed the direct orders of the king.<sup>19</sup> Although not mentioned in this work, it is interesting to observe the actions of Moses in the book of Exodus as he implores Pharaoh to release the Israelite slaves according to God's will. This could be interpreted to mean that God does indeed bestow authority on the rulers of the Earth, though he does not intend for them to become tyrants or abuse their authority.

Quoting Martin Luther, Dreisbach notes that many church scholars believe the Bible does not condone violence when it instructs believers to disobey commands that are contrary to God's law.<sup>20</sup> However, he also quotes John Calvin, who writes that, "earthly princes deprive themselves of all authority when they rise up against God..."<sup>21</sup> Recounting the wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics which climaxed in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Dreisbach shows how many Protestants, began to question the doctrine of unlimited submission.<sup>22</sup> Resistance theorists such as John Knox and John Ponet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries began to assert a doctrine of resistance, which claims Christians have a right and duty to overthrow tyrants.<sup>23</sup>

### *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

Dreisbach also touches on the work, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, which explains that Christians should resist tyrants, though they must seek restitution through a lower magistrate, or a lower civil authority. In this way, Christians would not form or give credence to anarchy and mob rule but would still have a way to redress wrongs.<sup>24</sup> This idea seems to be consistent with both the Scriptural idea of submission to authority and resistance to unjust commands. Dreisbach explains that the American patriots saw the Continental Congress as an authentic lower magistrate, and therefore their resistance was not an act of disobedience to God.<sup>25</sup> Appropriately, John Adams cited *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* as being one of the most influential documents that shaped the American Revolution.<sup>26</sup> Dreisbach writes, "This idea was expressed in the popular motto of the War for American Independence, embraced by both Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson: "Rebellion [or Resistance] to tyrants is obedience to God."<sup>27</sup>

### *Lex, Rex; or, The Law and the Prince*

Dreisbach also cites the work, *Lex Rex*, by Scottish Minister Samuel Rutherford. Rutherford claims that the law is above the king, in direct opposition to the idea of the absolute divine right of kings.<sup>28</sup> In his work, Rutherford also attempts to justify self-defense as a biblical concept. He states that because of God's commandment not to kill, Christians may not commit suicide, and further, that they are perfectly within the law to preserve their own life. Rutherford

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach, "A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants," 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 14.

notes some important caveats to the use of self-defense, which include first addressing the abuse with words and petitions, and if that fails, to flee. If the first two are exhausted then an individual may passively resist an unjust command, and if all else fails, then they may actively resist an unjust command, including the use of force if their life is in danger.<sup>29</sup> To defend this idea, Rutherford cites David's many encounters with Saul, including when David could have killed Saul but chose not to immediately resort to violence.<sup>30</sup>

Dreisbach provides ample evidence to support the biblical idea of resistance to tyrannical authority. He does not rely on John Locke's reasoning behind the idea of resistance, instead focusing on the Protestant tradition. However, it would seem that Locke's idea of the right of resistance, is very similar to the Protestant idea of the right of resistance. An important difference is that Locke believed that the people form the government apart from God, and therefore the power to dissolve the government rests with the people,<sup>31</sup> whereas Protestants believe that authority is bestowed by God, and that if a Tyrant disobeys God's commands and abuses his power, then he should be resisted. This distinction displays the fundamental difference between social contract theory and covenant.

According to Locke, a Tyrant breaks faith with society by placing his own interests above those of the people.<sup>32</sup> Reverend Samuel West concurs with this assessment in his 1776 Massachusetts election sermon, citing natural law: that the goal of government is to promote the general good and to preserve the rights of men. When a ruler subverts these goals, West concludes that they become agents of Satan, and therefore Christians have a duty to oppose them.<sup>33</sup> Both the Protestant tradition and the ideas of John Locke are congruent with an important distinction as to the origin of the right, namely, that the right of resistance is either a duty from God or else it exists purely as a social contract.

#### “The American Revolution, Romans 13, and the Anglo Tradition of Reformed Protestant Resistance Theory”

In a journal article for *American Political Thought*, William T. Reddinger draws a distinction between two different schools of thought regarding a Christian right to resistance: the Lockean view and the Lockean-Reformed view. The Lockean view is self-evident, meaning the acceptance of Locke's ideas of social contract apart from theology. Reddinger claims that the Lockean-Reformed view, which holds that Locke's right of resistance and Protestant resistance theories are compatible, is the weaker of the two views.<sup>34</sup> He writes that there are also two traditions behind resistance, Continental Protestant Resistance Theory, and Anglo-Protestant Resistance Theory. The main difference between these two traditions is whether the right of resistance is given to lower magistrates, as in the Continental view, or if it is also granted to

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach, “A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants,” 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, “John Locke 1632-1704,” 504.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach, “A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants,” 21-22.

<sup>34</sup> William T. Reddinger, “The American Revolution, Romans 13, and the Anglo Tradition of Reformed Protestant Resistance Theory,” *American Political Thought* 5, no. 3 (2016): 361.

individuals as in the Anglo view.<sup>35</sup> The Anglo view is a component of the Lockean-Reformed view, which extends the right of resistance to individuals through natural law.

Reddinger points out that, a reason to suspect that the Anglo tradition may be less internally consistent is that it is difficult to reconcile Locke's statement that "reason is our only star and compass" with the idea that the "infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself."<sup>36</sup> This is indeed difficult to reconcile, though reason and revelation are not mutually exclusive. However, Christians must have an individual right of resistance if they are to be obedient to God's Word, since they themselves are subject to God's law, unable to rely on a lower magistrate to intermeditate between themselves and God. If not, how were biblical figures such as Daniel, David, and Paul justified in their resistance to authority? They did not have lower magistrates interceding on their behalf. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego acted as individuals, mandated by God, when they resisted king Nebuchadnezzar. It would seem that though reliance on reason alone goes against the teachings of Scripture, reason, when subject to Scripture, is not a bad thing. Indeed, theology was once considered the queen of the sciences. Additionally, Reddinger fails to note that Locke, an Englishman, came from the Anglo-tradition. It would make sense that Locke drew his own ideas from prominent protestant ideas of resistance that formed the Anglo view.

"Resistance and Romans 13 in Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*"

This article by Ryan McAnnally-Linz, published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, also explores Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, but most significantly, the passages pertaining to Romans 13. Against traditional interpretations of the text, Rutherford uses Romans 13 to support his position of the legitimacy of violent resistance to tyrannous authorities under limited circumstances.<sup>37</sup> It is because of Rutherford's distinction between the office, as it was intended to be used, and not how a man may abuse the office, that he is able to clarify what he believes Paul's meaning was in Romans.

Clearly Christians suffered under the persecution of Emperor Nero, but Rutherford believes that Paul called for recognition of the office, not the man himself.<sup>38</sup> Rutherford writes that while the office of the king is of God, that the choosing of the king is from the people.<sup>39</sup> A good example that can be examined in Scripture is the anointment of Saul. 1 Samuel 8:19 says that the people demanded a king, and in 1 Samuel 9:17, it says, "When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, 'This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.'"<sup>40</sup> It is unclear whether the people chose Saul by demanding a king, or whether God anointed Saul. Rutherford insists that Saul was only crowned king after the endorsement of the Hebrew elders at Mizpah in 1 Sam 10:9–25. Likewise, David recognized Saul as God's anointed, and did not take the throne until he was crowned by the people of Judah at Hebron.<sup>41</sup> Rutherford believes that the people, as a community, hold the power of government. Similarly, Locke writes in his *Two Treatises*:

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<sup>35</sup> William T. Reddinger, "The American Revolution," 362.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 387.

<sup>37</sup> Ryan McAnnally-Linz, "Resistance and Romans 13 in Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no. 2 (May 2013): 142.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Samuel 9:17 (CSB).

<sup>41</sup> Ryan McAnnally-Linz, "Resistance and Romans 13," 145.

The Majority may retain the legislative power, and then the government is a democracy; or may entrust it to some few men, and then the government is an oligarchy; or may put the power into the hands of one man, under one set of terms or another, and then it is one form of monarchy or another. But in every case, only majority consent can found the government; all forms of government (remembering that absolute monarchy is not a form of government), from “perfect democracy” to “hereditary monarchy” are equally founded on majority consent.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly these two scholars agree on this point, however Rutherford holds to a providential position, and believes that God ultimately appoints a king through the election of the people. He believes that power does not come directly to a king from God, but that, “the Lord and the people giveth a crown by one and the same action.”<sup>43</sup> He is not describing an absolute power, however, as both the king and the people have a civil obligation towards one another, as well as an obligation to God. Rutherford writes that the goal of government is to promote the good of society, and that in order to meet his obligations as ruler, the monarch must strive towards this goal. He defines the good of society under a ruler as “that the people may lead a godly and peaceable life under him.”<sup>44</sup>

This is an excellent example of the Lockean-Reformed view of the right of resistance, since Rutherford’s reasoning is very similar to Locke’s own interpretation of the role of government: to preserve the rights of men. When a tyrant breaks his obligation towards the people and the good of society, he becomes the true rebel and an illegitimate authority. According to both Rutherford and Locke, an authority which no longer pursues the goal of government but instead pursues selfish ends ceases to be an authority.<sup>45</sup>

*Defending the Declaration: How the Bible and Christianity Influenced the Writing of the Declaration of Independence*

In his book, *Defending the Declaration*, author and lawyer Gary Amos argues that despite the popular depiction of a deistic Locke who based his conclusions on reason alone, Locke did in fact derive many of his conclusions from Scripture. Amos points out that Locke explicitly stated both nature and Scripture are declarations of God’s eternal law, and his *Second Treatise* is abundantly filled, sometimes with whole pages, that reference Scripture.<sup>46</sup> Amos takes this revelation a step further, by claiming that Locke was not only reliant on Scripture in addition to reason, but also that he was not a deist. He cites an essay by Locke which reads, “The holy scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide of my belief; and I shall always hearken to it, as containing infallible truth relating to things of the highest concernment.”<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Locke

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<sup>42</sup> John Locke and Peter Laslett, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), (§)132.

<sup>43</sup> Ryan McAnnally-Linz, “Resistance and Romans 13,” 146.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152.

<sup>46</sup> Gary T. Amos, *Defending the Declaration: How the Bible and Christianity Influenced the Writing of the Declaration of Independence* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers Inc., 1990), 54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



writes that without believing in the saving grace of Jesus as the Messiah all men will be counted as sinners and transgressors.<sup>48</sup>

When Locke writes of the law of nature, Amos argues that he does not mean it as most Enlightenment philosophes do, with a deistic philosophical origin. Locke explains that the “law of nature” is God’s general revelation of law in creation, which he also writes supernaturally on men’s hearts.<sup>49</sup> He repeatedly links both God and natural law together with the phrase “the law of God and nature.”<sup>50</sup> Additionally, theologian Samuel Rutherford repeatedly used the phrase “law of nature” in the same sense that Locke used the term.<sup>51</sup> This would seem to suggest in some sense that Locke’s ideas were based in Scripture, though social contract still differs from the idea of covenant, as previously mentioned.

Regarding the right to resistance, Amos cites the biblical account of king Joash. In this account, the people of Israel deposed Queen Ahaziah because of her illegitimate claim to the throne of Israel, instead crowning young Joash king.<sup>52</sup> This account describes a covenant rather than a social contract. However, both social-contract and covenant hold in common the belief of a right to resistance if a material breach of the respective conditions of the contract or covenant occurs. Amos writes that,

...if through acts of tyranny the highest ruler in a country forfeits his right to rule, lower officers who still have a right to rule can declare a change in government. Those who have a right to rule must be representing the law and “the people,” because the people can resist tyrants only through lawful representatives. Lower rulers must act to defend the covenant or compact of government.<sup>53</sup>

This is clearly an acceptance of the doctrine of the lower magistrate, though Amos also writes that, “... ‘the people’ cannot become a destroying mob, acting apart from the direction of lawful representatives. If they do, they lose their right to resist.”<sup>54</sup> From this it is clear that Amos disagrees with an individual right of resistance, precluding the use of force.

### The Use of Force

In order to fully understand whether Locke’s idea of the right of resistance is fully compatible with Scripture, it is important to determine what constitutes resistance, and to what extent a Christian can resist. As already mentioned, Samuel Rutherford believed in limited situations where resistance was justifiable. “Rutherford is clear that excessive taxation is not sufficiently tyrannous to merit a violent response. In fact, in matters concerning property, and even physical beatings which do not result in maiming or death, Rutherford precludes ‘any act of offending’ in response.”<sup>55</sup> His reasoning is that in instances that do not involve life-or-death

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<sup>48</sup> Amos, *Defending the Declaration*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> Ryan McAnnally-Linz, “Resistance and Romans 13,” 153.

scenarios, a Christian has limited dominion, meaning Christians are called not to respond with violence. The difference comes when a person's life is directly threatened, since a Christian is not at liberty to dispose of their own life.<sup>56</sup>

Locke argued that a primary driver of human motivation was a sense of self-preservation.<sup>57</sup> It could be argued however, that Christ laid down his life for mankind. 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."<sup>58</sup> With this in mind, it would appear that the use of force must be used with extreme discretion and should only be implemented if the situation is unavoidable.

When considering whether the use of force is justifiable for a Christian, an important aspect to consider is the right of self-defense. Locke considered the foundation of government to be the protection of rights, namely, life, liberty, and property. Rutherford dismisses the idea of force to defend property, however, both Locke, Rutherford, and Aquinas come to similar conclusions regarding the use of force to defend life. Locke writes that, "When a king has dethroned himself, and put himself in a state of war with his people, what shall hinder them from prosecuting him who is no king, as they would any other man, who has put himself into a state of war with them?"<sup>59</sup> Locke places a strong emphasis on the natural desire for self-preservation, a desire which he qualifies with theological backing. He writes, "the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker.... Made to last during his, not one another's pleasure."<sup>60</sup>

Rutherford tends to favor the doctrine of the lower magistrate, however in extreme instances of corruption he also advocates for an individual right of resistance.<sup>61</sup> He views this right through the lens of defending oneself against an unjust ruler. To fortify what has already been stated, Rutherford does not advocate for an immediate resort to violence, he instead insists that supplication should be the first step to redress. Interestingly, because an entire nation cannot flee from an unjust ruler, Rutherford says that if supplication fails, then the nation is justified in passing over flight in favor of violent resistance.<sup>62</sup> He does not however, outline the criteria for when a monarch has become a tyrant and when a tyrant should be resisted.

A third, but crucial Christian philosopher who wrote on the idea of self-defense is Saint Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas writes that for a Christian to exercise self-defense, they must not be intent on killing as a matter of the heart, though it is admissible as a natural consequence of defense. Force is to be applied only to stop the threat from continuing.<sup>63</sup> Aquinas writes, "Legitimate defense can be not only a right but also a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (§)168.

<sup>58</sup> 1 John 3:16 (CSB).

<sup>59</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (§)239.

<sup>60</sup> G. R. Morgan, "Locke and the Right of Self-Defense," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 2 (1982).

<sup>61</sup> Ryan McAnnally-Linz, "Resistance and Romans 13," 153-154.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory M Reichberg, "*Self-Defense*," *In Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).173.

cause harm.”<sup>64</sup> This theory justifies a Christian use of force by balancing the commands of the Bible to love one’s neighbor as oneself, as well as to defend the innocent.

### Findings and Conclusion

Are Christians to abide by the idea of unlimited submission? It would not seem so. Scripture seems to support the notion that Christians, as individuals, have a duty to resist unjust authority when it conflicts with God’s commands. Christian tradition has been split into two camps regarding the issue of violent resistance, that of the doctrine of the lower magistrate, and that of the individual right of resistance. Perhaps the best solution lies somewhere in the middle. Glenn Sunshine writes, “Goodman’s treatise argued that although it would be best if resistance to tyranny were led by the lesser magistrates, if lower officials failed to take that responsibility, the common people could rise against the tyrant.”<sup>65</sup> The latter option can only be implemented in an extreme scenario where no lower magistrates exist as a remnant of just authority. This situation seems highly improbable, though not impossible.

Christian individuals also have a right to self-defense, though that right should only be executed with extreme caution and prudence. It would seem that despite Locke’s right of resistance being grounded in social contract rather than covenant, the biblical principle still seems to support his theory to a degree. Christians should first appeal to a lower magistrate to redress a tyrannical authority. In the absence of any just authority, scholars differ as to whether Christians can use force in order to throw off tyranny. Their difference of opinion may depend on their beliefs regarding whether governments are formed as social contracts or as covenants. In either case, Locke was clearly influenced by the Protestant resistance theories and Anglo traditions of his time.

Because reason and revelation are not mutually exclusive, it remains true that Christians as individuals can exercise resistance to unjust commands where lesser magistrates have failed, though they should do so with caution, and only after prayer and supplication. Christ rebuked Peter in the garden of Gethsemane for his actions, “Then Jesus told him, ‘Put your sword back in its place. All those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.’”<sup>66</sup> It is clear that while Christians indeed have the right to resist and defend themselves against tyrannical government, they should not seek out violence nor should they use it as a first resort. Christians are not called to live by the sword. They must be primarily focused on furthering the kingdom of God and should be ready to die for their faith if necessary. After all, death is not the end for those who are in Christ.

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<sup>64</sup> Reichberg, “*Self-Defense*,” 173.

<sup>65</sup> Glenn S. Sunshine, *Slaying Leviathan*, 116.

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 26:52 (CSB).

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