

because of the shortness of time, diversity in background of the participants, and its own tremendous complexity.

(i) Does the authority of God in government, justice, marriage and family life constitute an area of his Kingdom outside the church?

(ii) Does the Kingdom of God demand that he act independently in the world when the church fails in its responsibility?

(iii) Can God's purpose in his Kingdom transcend his purpose for the church, or is it always an indication of God's larger purpose for his church?

(iv) The confession of the Kingdom demands that no absolute church structure is possible. The local, visible church is that community where the Kingdom of God comes into being.

(v) Triumphalism is when the church loses its consciousness of being a servant (see final section of paper).

The scriptural basis for most of our discussion centered around the John chapter 3 references to seeing and entering the Kingdom; the New Testament references to Psalm 110, Romans 13-15, and Ephesians 4-6; the kingdom parables, Revelation 11:15; and local church references in Acts.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMONG THE KINGDOMS OF EARTH

José Grau

"The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa. 103:19).

God, the only absolute Ruler

We shall leave it to theologians to decide whether human government belongs or does not belong to the so-called "creation orders." One thing is certain, anyhow, the *ruling of God* over his creation and creatures. His Providence uses different instruments for the ruling of the world. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hands is mine indignation. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people . . ." (Isa. 10:5, 12, 14a). Here we see that human powers are recognized by all the authors of Scripture, as being parts of the Almighty God's interventions in his Providence.

We should keep in mind that those powers or rulers are acting as God's delegates. They are relative, never absolute, since it is God who "changeth the times and seasons, removeth kings and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:21, cf. Isa. 40:23,24). Thus, God is not submitted to the order of his creation, nor is he in the realm of nature, in spite of the opinions of certain liberal theologians. But, on the other hand, he is not indifferent to the evolution of civil powers or the order of nature, in spite of the statements of deists of all times. God is sovereign in time, history, and space, i.e., in all his creation (cf. Isa. 40:23,24, 10:1-3).

Ruling powers and sin

As Hans Bürki judiciously remarked, "Earthly powers have to do with the sinful condition of men. One cannot say that the State be sinful in itself, nor that it is a natural or neutral institution. Yet one may affirm that ruling powers are always bound up with the law of God, and this according to the Bible, so that both state and individual have to do in several ways with Divine Law. Even God's law is a grace, a divine mercy. We must never forget that law expresses divine will, and this will is always 'eudekia,' i.e., kindness towards us. Even when it is sentencing, it comes to us as grace, for it kills, so that the Lord may heal us. The authority of God comes to us as a liberating power and not as a threat; for the law is always in favor of man and at his side, as an essential source of true liberty."

In scriptural thinking, *state* and *law* always belong together. And this because powers are ruling by God's delegation, in order to command that which is rightful (Prov. 8:15). And it is God's law that determines what is right and what is not. That is why Hans Bürki, quoting Gal. 3:19,22-24, says that the law was given because of sin and in view of the coming Savior. So, as long as a state is obedient towards the

law by means of its political power, it is more or less submitted to the will of God. In this way it becomes a power because of sin, in the same way as the law of Moses was a kind of "school master" leading us to the coming Christ. A fact remains very clear: ruling powers are utterly unable to give life, even when submitted to a certain extent to the law of God, they can only lead and show the way to the saving power. And this because of sin, for the citizens are sinners and the state is made up of sinners. Thus, ruling powers not only have to do with the reality of sin, but are themselves contaminated by sin. This is an evident fact in all realms — not only in politics. It is the same with churches: neither the state, nor the people (not even God's people!) are free from the influences of sin, though Christians should be the clearest example of deliverance from sin's power, for they were constituted a "holy people" (Exod. 19:5; I Pet. 1:13-16; 2:4-5).

Why should one demand so much from God's people? And what are the consequences of that demand, as far as the relation of God's people to the ruling power is concerned? One should not forget that God's interest for this world was manifested in an extraordinary way in forming, in spite of fall and sin, a people of his own. And it will be in their midst, since they are bound with God by a covenant, that the Lord will establish a kingdom entirely of his own (Exod. 19:6). God establishes his kingdom among men's kingdom.

The Kingdom of God

First of all, it is a kingdom of *soteriological origin*. God forms his Old Testament people with Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The New Testament Church is the congregation of saved sinners.

The nature of this kingdom is *eschatological*. The words of Exod. 19:6 are for the future, when the law will be given from Sinai. Yet, from Sinai, the kingdom becomes a reality and, in the same time, a *hope*. It will be the hope of the prophets, who are the mouthpiece of the coming kingdom.

It is a *present and hidden* kingdom at the same time, which fact can already be verified in the Old Testament books. Israel is called to be a holy people of "priests." It is a kingship associated with God's great deeds for his people. Yet this kingship remains brittle and sinful, even apostate. In other words, it is only a shadow of what it ought to be, a "type" of future realities. For there is a future for Jehovah's people, a future in which God himself will be King, Savior, and Lord of his people. From the time of David, the Old Testament people have been living in a present kingdom, but they were mostly expecting a new kingdom with a new king, the Son of David. This expectation was not concerning a kingdom like those of Israel or Judah, but an entirely new and eschatological one.

This kingdom came with Jesus Christ. John the Baptist already announced that it was near at hand (Matt. 3:2). Jesus himself says, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near at hand" (Matt. 4:17). The person of Jesus is the kingdom among men (Matt. 11:2,6,9,10, 12:28; Luke 11:20). The "good tiding" of the Savior is the "*Gospel of the kingdom*," which was made present in him and through him. Thus, in Jesus Christ, the future became present.

Jesus is really "*autobasileia*" but, at the same time, *revelation and mystery*, for the kingdom is hidden. It comes as a seed, a mustard seed, as leaven, as a hidden treasury, as a hidden pearl of great price. But it is also "like a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind." One should not forget that the Cross is one of the aspects of that kingdom and that it forms the central subject of its preaching.

The kingdom experiences the paradox of its present weakness and of its eschatological greatness; of its revelation and mystery. Paradoxically, too, the king comes under the form of a slave before taking the whole possession of his kingdom (Matt. 28:18) and before the day in which all kingdoms of this world will belong to God and Christ.

Thus, the kingdom came in the past, is coming in the present and will be coming in the future. As O. Cullmann puts it, "We are living the time of the 'already' and of the 'not yet.'" In any case, the kingdom is the only *real absolute*. Therefore, the believer is invited to ask, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

The people of God are living in the *theocentric* expectation. Their attitude towards the ruling powers can only be understood in the light of that expectation. It is the expectation of the prophets, apostles, and Christian martyrs.

The authors of the Bible and ruling powers

As Martin Buber writes, the Old Testament is theopolitical in its conception of ruling powers. If Israel was a religious and national community, it is not the same as the Church. However, after taking hermeneutic precautions one must not forget that the Christian — as well as the Israelite — is under a theocentric expectation though he is not submitted to a theocratic power. Besides, the Christian belongs to the *earthly dwelling*, as well as to the *civitas Dei*. Christians are being tried in the same way as the Israelites of old, by different forms of ruling powers — some of them entirely idolatrous — who would replace the absolute of God's kingdom by the "absolutes" of this world's kingdoms.

Let us consider a few examples of such trials or temptations.

a. *Samuel* — The situation of Israel at the time of Samuel offers a good illustration of the fact that no form of human government can be idolized. The important fact is the people's attitude towards God's government, as well as the attitude of ruling powers towards divine will. No government system is perfect, compared with the perspective of the sovereign will of the Lord, as revealed in his Word.

For Samuel, the fundamental question was not to know which form of government was the best — the neo-federalism of the judges or the monarchy — but the disposition of the people's heart (governors and governed) towards God's will, whatever the government system. And such a principle is as valid today as it was yesterday.

According to certain modern critical schools, one might find two kinds of texts in I Sam. 8 and 9. The anti-monarchic version would be chapter 8 and also chapter 10:17-24, and chapter 12. The one in

favor of the monarchy would be I Sam. 9:1-10,16:11. To ask which is the better system would mean having a mentality very different from the scriptural one. The passages which appear to be "against" monarchy are less against a system than against the motives that make the people want a king. If Samuel appears to be sometimes against monarchy and sometimes in favor of it, there is actually no contradiction. Samuel prayed for God's guidance (I Sam. 8:6), and God revealed to him that he would give Israel a king (I Sam. 9:16). What he was fearing was a *monarchy according to the human pattern*, independent of the will of God. The real problem came from the words the people were using, "Make us a king to judge us *like all the nations*" (15:5,8); "We also may be *like all the nations*" (v. 20). The people were not asking for a king like the one promised in the Torah, but for a ruling power which would be an imitation of heathen powers. And it is that which Samuel could not accept.

True, God used the people's desire in order to choose a king, but according to the prophecy of Deut. 17:14-20. In Israel, the king will be submitted to the law of God as any other citizen, and he will have to respect the life, honor, and possessions of his subjects. He will have to read every day a copy of that law "so that he may learn to fear the Lord, his God" (v. 19). We are very far from the heathen divinization of emperors.

Samuel hastens to show them the kind of monarchy found among other nations (15:8,11); cruelty, lack of righteousness, which the Hebrews well knew. How then can this desire to have a king like that of other nations be explained? History shows us a certain "attraction of the abyss," as was the case at the coming out of Egypt and is the case in many a sector of the twentieth-century Christianity.

One fact is important; Samuel introduces a *principle of critic*. And said principle will manifest itself in all future relations of God's people with ruling powers. Theocracy will assume different expressions: God will no longer be the immediate king he was at the time of the judges. Yet his law and his covenant *remain valid for the king as well as for the people*. The king of Israel will not be prophet and priest (I Sam. 13:8-14,15; I Kings 13:1-10). In spite of theocracy, civil and religious functions have their own particular and distinct form of sovereignty and all of them are placed under the sovereignty of the Lord.

There is no contradiction whatever in the texts of I Sam. If the people want to be prosperous, they will have to do the will of the God of the covenant, whatever the ruling system. The God who gave the judges can also give the kings needed by Israel (Jdg. 2:16, Deut. 17:14, 15; I Sam. 16:1-13). *God's sovereignty* always remains in the foreground. The text informing us of the election of David also tells us about the rejected king. It is still God who "rejects and establishes kings." This divine almightiness made the believers of Israel take an attitude of *obedience* and also of *critic* towards ruling powers.

b. *Wisdom* — Obedience and critic are thus to be found with all the authors of the Bible, for they are convinced that ruling powers come from God and that they themselves might become untrue to their calling. "Keep the king's commandment, and in regard of the

oath of God," (Eccl. 8:1-8; cf., Prov. 24:21). The aim of this obedience is "not to stand in an evil thing" (Eccl. 8:3,5, Rom. 13:3). Yet the king may lose his intelligence and no longer be able to listen to others' advice (Eccl. 4:13). Then the people look for another to reign instead of the foolish one.

The example found in Eccl. 4 is rich in teachings. It should be understood in its context, which denounces selfishness and solitude (Eccl. 4:9-16).

Despotism has one of its sources in selfishness and the separating of the ruling power from the people. The foolish king refuses everybody's advice and governs arbitrarily. On the other hand, the young candidate who knows and lives among the people, becomes the interpreter of the latter's will, thus the king becomes afraid of his popularity among the oppressed (Eccl. 3:16,4:1). A change in the ruling — we do not know how it happened — put the imprisoned young man on the throne. This young man was poor, but wise (Eccl. 4:13), for he knew how to draw advantage from listening and discoursing. This passage is praising cooperation in social life, where there is selfishness and the isolation of foolish ruling powers. In this case, the critic of the author is not alluding to structures, but to persons. Wisdom is more important than age; and men are more determining as systems. The lesson is emphasized again at the end of the passage where we find a fundamental scepticism towards the human condition, which is a characteristic of every biblical criticism of men and institutions. In the beginning there is great enthusiasm for the new king; it is the novelty, but let us read verse 16 of chapter 4, "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The mystery of frustration and iniquity, which is inherent in all human activity, will manifest itself in the king's experience with his people. Popularity is not lasting; the people are unconscious. Civic virtues, such as friendship, cooperation, etc., are not usually kept intact by man. That is why there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3:1), a time for popularity, for certain ideologies, and also a time for weariness of that which yesterday was new. "Vox populi, vox Dei" is not a scriptural principle!

Let us add to all this the relativity of our existence and all its plans (Eccl. 8:6-8). Placed in a "political" context (cf. vv. 2-5) verse 8 teaches us that there are more fundamental questions than those of governmental structures, and more important struggles than those concerning ruling powers and the condition of citizens. Therefore, we should be attentive to God's will and his providence.

c. *The prophets* — The texts we have just been considering convey an aspect of biblical criticism towards ruling powers, which aspect is also present with the prophets who criticized the people as well as the governments.

This is found, among others, in Ezekiel, viz., in chapter 34, which was called one of the most political prophecies of Ezekiel. It is a denunciation of the policy of the country's civil leaders. At that time,

the situation was the result of a perverted monarchy which had been lasting for five centuries. Such authorities were incapable of feeding the sheep, i.e., the people. However, Ezekiel is not ringleader or agitator denouncing only the government's faults, he also strongly criticizes the people's sins. He was aware that monarchy was not the only one guilty of the national failure. He knew that "men of the people" had tyrannized other men of the people. Therefore, the Lord will be obliged to judge "between cattle and cattle, between rams and goats, between fat cattle and lean cattle" (Ezek. 34:17-21). Avarice and tyranny were as common among the masses as among the rulers. Ezekiel, as well as Amos, Micah, and other prophets, denounces small towns and villages, etc., who had helped to destroy the country as much as apostate and unworthy kings.

Let us make matters even clearer: What is the prophet's goal? It is the kingdom of God, the Messianic hope, according to the concepts of kingdom and covenant. It is the norm for the judging of the present and the expectation of an eschatological future. This is the subject of verses 23-31. The passage unfolds the blessings of God's covenant with Israel (v. 24,25,31). God's answer to the problems arising from ruling powers is the announcement of the Messianic kingdom. Therefore, the prophet's message is not at all secular or laic but theocentric and even christological.

Amos denounces the sins committed by other nations with the complicity of the Jews (*Amos* 1:1-2;15) and then also those of Israel, which are worse since Israel had heard the Word of God. He denounces, (i) their forgetting the Word of God (*Amos* 2:6-8), (ii) their neglecting God's love towards man (*Amos* 2:9-12), and (iii) their forgetting God's judgment concerning all injustice (*Amos* 2:13-16). Later on, he denounces the dangers of false prosperity, which today would be called the society of consummation, creating illusions of security and power (*Amos* 6:1-14). It is a world based on materialism and injustice. All those denunciations are given by *Amos* in God's name, not in the name of an ideology or system.

We have not sufficient space to consider the other prophets. Let us take only *Micah*. We have in *Micah* a man condemning the social injustice of his time, as well as the political unrighteousness of ruling powers (*Mic.* 2:1-13). But his message is also messianic (*Mic.* 4:1-13) and even evangelical (*Mic.* 5:1-15, cf., *Isa.* 36:19-36). Here again we find the ever present perspective of the kingdom. The prophets had a message concerning eternity (*Mic.* 6:1-16); they were mouthpieces of God's grace (*Mic.* 7:5-20), totally engaged with God and his Word (*Mic.* 1:1-2).

Biblical prophecies and secularization

It has been recently suggested that the result of the biblical message concerning ruling powers is the "desacralizing" of the state, since the latter is considered as absolute and totally sacred. "There exists a real continuity between the prophetic resistance to the sacred pretensions of kings, the Christian resistance against the divinity of emperors, and secular spirit, traditions and official ideology trampling

rights and personal dignity," says Lesslie Newbigin, who rightly emphasizes the fact that such prophetic and Christian protestation is linked with the conception of absolute divine authority held by prophets and martyrs. Some of the modern analysts seem to have forgotten that conception of divine authority, and consequently the true origin and nature of scriptural protestation, which is always made in the name of the sovereign God, against any idolatry and sin of men and ruling powers.

Prophets and martyrs never denounce a king in favor of another king, or a system in favor of another system, but always in God's name, because of the sins committed against God. For them, faithfulness towards God is the only guarantee of human rights. They never take any ideology as their pattern. On the contrary, their pattern is the divinely revealed conception of the kingdom of God.

The realities of this world are only provisional and anticipating the manifestation of the kingdom, though in an imperfect and limited way. Yet this is not an excuse for remaining motionless, but an inspiration to work in favor of the world's renewal, for the Christian should never be satisfied with the present state of things.

The provisional character of all temporary achievement is a warning against the temptation to deprecate any system or ruling power. Thus that which is provisional always leads, according to the prophetic line, to a constant critic of authorities and at the same time, to obeying the constituted authorities. It is a critical submission of the critic in a certain obedience.

The New Testament and the ruling powers

All we have said hitherto is found again in the New Testament. There is no contradiction between *Romans* 13 and *Revelation* 13. We find there the same critical obedience or the same respectful criticism as in the Old Testament. Thus, the unity of the Bible on that subject is fundamental.

Ruling powers may prevent evil if the laws are rightful and if the men in authority have a certain understanding of their calling. But they can also multiply evil by the sin which is present in every man and every institution. Therefore, *Romans* 13 speaks of the God-given authority and of the respect due to it. It is not, as certain theologians noticed, just plain obedience (this word obedience itself does not appear in the text), but a serious and responsible obeying on the part of the citizens.

On the other hand, *Revelation* 13, as well as *Acts* 4:19 and 5:29 and other passages, show us the possibility of divinization of ruling powers, in which case obedience toward the state is disobedience towards God. Civil disobedience should always be a responsible act and should not degenerate into anarchy or personal vengeance. Christians should manifest in the same way as the prophets of Israel, that it is founded on solid biblical reasons. There are several examples of such disobedience or active criticism among believers in the Bible including: Moses' mother, Daniel, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist.

The Christian should not forget the theocentric perspective of

the kingdom, as well as the covenant to which he belongs and in which he finds the only "absolute program." Any engagement, for or against constituted authorities, which would forget to be entirely loyal to the Gospel or (which is even worse) would betray evangelical doctrine in some way or other, would no longer correspond to a prophetic or Christian attitude.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICAL UTOPIANISM AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION REPORT

Chairman: M. Wiggins

Secretary: B. Demarest

The group accepted the paper's view of the Kingdom of God as both part of salvation to be entered into now and as an eschatological hope. In the meantime, the kingdoms of this world, no matter how ideal, can never be given absolute allegiance. In relation to them the Christian exists in a tension: owing obedience, yet necessarily judging the kingdoms by the divine law and at times ready to refuse obedience when "Caesar" demands what is "God's," or when it is necessary to say, "We ought to obey God rather than man." The Christian who, as a citizen, partakes in the power process must take such positive action as lies open to him to set right the situation. The discussion was pinpointed in relation to South Africa, from which some members came. There was a strong feeling that the preaching of the Gospel in that country is greatly hindered by the unjust system maintained by a government, most of the members of which claim to be Christian. The group would like to see a united stand made by all evangelical Christians against the system so that the Gospel may be recognized as "good news to the poor," etc.

A danger at the other end of the spectrum is to be seen in newly independent nations where Christians, as part of the nation and naturally sharing its aspirations and joy, may too long give the uncritical consent to all that is done by the new government which can only be given to the Kingdom of God.

A Christian feeling bound to resist the state should check his conviction with the believers and should have the backing of the fellowship.

There was considerable discussion concerning the affluent society and the Christian's relation to this. For although material blessing is cited in the Old Testament as a token of God's blessing, and a life freed from the bonds of sin becomes more efficient in business and so brings prosperity, yet the dangers and temptations of riches are fully spelled out in the New Testament. While riches themselves are not condemned as sinful, the warnings are so pointed that Christians need to be sensitive not only to their own acquisitive instincts but politically critical of government policies designed to produce evergrowing affluence for their own state, especially when this is at the expense of sub-standard living for trading partners.

The revolution produced by God when a man comes into his kingdom is the revolution of the heart, more radical and essentially different from the revolutions produced in the political world. In a discussion on the use of force, it was doubted by many that this could be justified; others spoke of force as being right in overthrowing an unjust system