

PRO REGE.

THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST.

PART ONE - THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST IN HIS HIGHNESS II.

*The subversion of Christ's Kingship.*

I. - By the grace of God.

Power against me. JOH. 19:11.

Must among the powers, which may repress the Kingship of Christ in order to put themselves in its place, ought governmental power also to be counted among those which, according to the Scriptures, can overthrow the Kingship of Christ and replace it with their own? Many, more or less thoughtfully, imagine this to be the case, but completely wrongly. For the Governmental power is not included in the Kingship of Christ. As is obvious, governmental power may turn against His Kingship and indirectly attempt to undermine it, while, conversely, governmental power is called upon to serve the glory of Christ.

But all this does not alter the fact that the distinction between the Kingship of Christ and the Governmental power on earth must be sharply discerned from the outset. This will be explained in more detail in the course of our remarks, but we must guard against misunderstandings already, and at least outline the main line that marks the boundary.

Jesus' statement that "he is given all power in heaven and on earth" has often been understood to mean that the kings and princes of the earth derived their governmental authority from Christ.

This has often been elaborated in the Roman Catholic sense, as if all Sovereignty could be derived from the Christ, and thus the Sovereign of Christ on earth also had to forgive and take away the Crown and the Scepter. This was not to deny that the Government ruled by the grace of God, but that the assignment and transfer of authority was understood in an indirect sense. Government power was indeed a power from God, but it came to the magistrate in the name of the Father through Christ and thus indirectly. The Reformed, on the other hand, have always emphasized that the assignment of authority to the government was of an immediate nature, and that Christ was not to be thought of as an intermediary. Our Reformed theologians have not elaborated on this point. Only in two respects has it come up for discussion. First, in their struggle with the Roman theologians

concerning the authority of the Pope over the princes; and second, in their opposition to the Remonstrants, who, conversely, wanted to attribute to the Government an authority in the church, a *jus in sacra*, and tried to derive this from the power that descended upon it from Christ. Only insofar as this subject was included in the spiritual struggle of the day did they explore it, but they did not fathom it in its depths. This was reserved for our time, now that the contrast between the direct and indirect nature of governmental authority has itself come up for discussion in the struggle against the modern spirit of the age. In so far, however, they drew the line of opposition correctly, that they took up and maintained the plea for the immediate, the immediate character of the State authority, as directly derived from God. The starting point and basis for this was the Apostolic Declaration in Rom. XIII. No apostle has made the power of Christ shine in all its glory with greater emphasis than the man of Tarsus. And yet, where in Rom. XIII it came down to establishing the right relationship between the believer in Christ and the authorities, he did so in terms that completely excluded Christ, and in which at no time and with not one letter was there any mention of the origin of the authority of the authorities other than in God Triune. Christ is not even mentioned in this context, while the name of God is emphasized five times in these short verses: "There is no power but from God. The powers that be are ordained of God". "Who opposes Government power resists the order of God". "The Government is God's servant, for your good". And finally, she "is God's servant, as an avenger to punish the one who does evil". And in the whole of this chapter of Rom. XIII the name of the Lord Jesus Christ only appears again at the very end in the last verse, where there is no longer any mention of governmental authority, but rather of spiritual influence on the life of the people, when it says: "So do ye therefore unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and lead not the flesh into lust.

What Jesus Himself spoke to Pilate confirms this. As John 18:36 shows, Jesus confronted Pilate, not as the Redeemer of sin, nor as the Finisher of prophecy, but as King. The Prophet and High Priest stepped down to face the Emperor's Councillor as King. That Pilate gave occasion for this by his question: "Are you then a King? Jesus answered that question. His answer was decidedly: "I am not only a King, but to this end I was born and came into the world." And not only did Jesus emphasize His Kingship, but He spoke with equal emphasis of His Kingdom. But in such a way that he described the nature of that Kingship and that Kingdom in its own special character. The strength of his Kingship lay in the fact that he had come "to bear witness to the truth", and his Kingdom was different from the

Kingdom of earthly princes in that theirs was the Kingdom of the world, and that they maintained an armed force to defend their Kingdom; whereas Jesus' Kingdom "was not of this world", and that, although he had servants, his servants were not allowed to fight for him with the sword. A characteristic of his Kingship and Kingdom, which he further confirmed by his closing words: "My Kingdom is not of this world'. That of the Kings and Emperors was here, but not his.

But there is more. Jesus had not told Pilate that he was about to become King; that he would only acquire his Kingdom through his resurrection and ascension, and only then be crowned. No, as King he set himself opposite the Emperor's Councillor. As King, anointed by God, he set himself against the Kingdom of the world. And yet, standing before Pilate in the full majesty of his Kingship, he acknowledged that the Emperor of Rome had power over him, power from above, power from God. And such power that Pilate, in the name of the Emperor, could capture him and release him, and could also subject him to the law of Rome's Emperor to the point of death. That Pilate, by condemning Jesus to death, would be sinning, was obvious, but only insofar as he, in his capacity of judge, would pronounce the death sentence on Jesus, not according to the law, but against the law. That is why Jesus added: "But those who delivered me to you are more guilty, committed greater sins. It was a mixed jurisdiction in Jerusalem. On the one hand it was the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin, and on the other hand it was the jurisdiction according to Roman law. And in so far as the Roman judge could not entirely ignore the verdict of the Sanhedrin, a double responsibility rested on the Jewish court that brought Jesus to its seat as the Sanhedrin had ordained him to death. Hence the sin of Pilate, but the even greater sin of the Sanhedrin. But even though the law was mixed up and the law was interfered with by two sins that were different in degree, - this did not prevent Jesus from acknowledging without reservation that Pilate, as the city councilor of the Emperor of Rome, had power over him.

This did not prevent Jesus from acknowledging without reservation that Pilate, as the Emperor of Rome, had power over him, and that this power over him was given to the Emperor of Rome by God. Of course, Pilate remained responsible for his verdict, and he had to know whether his verdict was lawful or unlawful. But if in actuality he saw in Jesus a pretender to nullify the Emperor's authority in Palestine, then his was the power to break this resistance to the imperial authority. Jesus expresses two things here. On the one hand, that he himself is King, and on

the other hand, that he, also as King of the Kingdom of God, is subject to a power of government, which it did not receive of itself, but from God, also over him.

This can lead to no other conclusion than that there are two kinds of Kingship; that both emanate directly from God Triune, and that these two run parallel to one another. On the one hand, there is the Kingship of the world, which emanates directly from God, and establishes governmental power on earth. On the other hand, there is the Kingship of Christ, which is not from here, not from the world, and which rules on another terrain, but which emanates directly from God on this terrain. The governmental power is ordained by God, and next to it we read that to Jesus as King of the Kingdom of God "all power in heaven and on earth is given." Both of these kingships will one day come to an end. The earthly kingship with the destruction of the world, because it is of the world and belongs to the sphere of the world; but also, the spiritual kingship, when after the judgment "the Son Himself will give the kingdom over to the Father, that God may be all and in all. So, there are two kinds of derived Sovereignty here. The original Sovereignty, the primordial Supremacy, rests in God Triune, and in Him alone, because He is the Creator of heaven and earth. But from this original sovereignty resting in God alone, two kinds of sovereignty are derived. First, the sovereignty of the government, which is God's servant, rules by His grace, and as His servant even has the right over life and death for its subjects. And secondly, the Sovereignty of Christ in His Kingdom, so that in His Kingdom all souls are subject to Him by God's will; not only those who acknowledge Him as King, but also those who deny Him, or have never even heard of His Kingship. Jesus, as a citizen of Palestine, as a citizen of Israel, was subject to Pilate and the Emperor of Rome, and they could and could judge him according to worldly law; but also, Pilate and the Emperor of Rome were subject to Jesus as King of the Kingdom of God, and, when his day will come, Jesus will judge them. But the governmental power itself, and as such, does not belong to the Kingdom of Christ. It stands independently beside it. Hence the independence of the State from the Church, but also the independence of the Church from the State. State and Church are two spheres, both ordained of God, but in such a way that the one sphere, that of the world, is and remains subject to the State for the organisation of the State, and on the other hand, the other sphere, the spiritual sphere, is and remains subject to Christ for all human coexistence.

A reflection on this could be derived from Jesus' Kingship over Zion. In the days when Psalm 2 was sung, Zion represented a people's power, a national sphere, the chosen people of Israel. The battle in this Psalm is between Israel and the peoples

of the Gentiles. The surrounding peoples want to destroy Israel, and in the face of this mass of peoples, Israel, as the people of God, must remain intact nationally. And now the Psalm tells us that God has anointed his Messiah "over Zion, the mountain of his holiness", and that the nations will not be able to do anything against Zion. Rather, it is said to them: "Kiss the Son, lest He anger you and you perish in the way if His anger should be kindled even a little". If we understand Zion to be the type of every nation and people that will give God their due, as has happened all too often, this would lead to the conclusion that Jesus is anointed king over every nation individually, and that what applied to Israel under the Old Covenant would apply to every kingdom or to every republic. And from that would then be deduced that the Christ, therefore, would still be honored as the sole governing power over the Netherlands, England, and whatever other countries there are. It hardly needs saying, however, that this view completely misunderstands the significance of Israel, of Zion, of the Messiah, and of the order established by God in the land of the patriarchs. Israel is an imaginary appearance. In an imaginary sense it was and remained "God's people", even in the days when idols were being sacrificed in every street of Jerusalem. But this imaginary people would not be replaced by the real people until Messiah had come, and the true Israel, not of the circumcision of the flesh, but of the circumcision of the heart, would be gathered from all the people. The apostles therefore clearly expressed that the real, actual Zion is the Zion above, the Jerusalem in the heavens; that the people of Messiah are those purchased by His blood, and that not the children of Abraham, but those born of the spirit are the Israel of God.

There are thus two kinds of dispensation. The symbolic dispensation, in which only shadows and images were seen, and which lasted until the Messiah came. Then there was the actual dispensation, when the shadows and images disappeared and the spiritual kingdom made its entrance. Hence the completely exceptional situation of earthly government in Israel, with which the governmental authority among no other nation can be compared. In Israel the theocracy. The immediate government of God. The Lord is our King, the Lord Himself is our legislator, the Lord Himself is our judge. And from there also in Israel the indispensability of the permanent miracle, as a direct revelation of the theocratic power that governed Israel. In contrast, among the other peoples there was no theocracy, but a derived and upright sovereignty, the legislation emanating from the princes themselves, and the administration of justice initiated and sealed by the government. Not those other nations, therefore; only Israel could be a type and symbol of the Kingdom of

Christ; Israel alone could be a type and symbol of the people of the Lord. And only in Israel's nation-state could the state of the spiritual Kingdom be foreshadowed. It is therefore impossible to draw a direct conclusion from what existed in Israel to the life of the nations and peoples. This is not to say that the theocratic law of Israel does not have much in it that applies to all nations, but the difference must be made clear, lest either the theocratic and symbolic character of Israel be nullified, or that what cannot apply to us be transferred to our national life, so that there is neither a theocratic nor a symbolic nation here.

Still from another point of view this must be seen.

Art. 36 of our Confession rightly says, that the institution of governmental power on earth serves to restrain sin. We believe and confess that our good God, because of the depravity of the human race, has ordained kings, princes and governments, desiring that the world should be governed by laws and police, that the unruliness of mankind should be restrained, and that all things should be done with good order among men. You need only imagine the state the world would be in if sin had not wrought its destruction, and you will be convinced that there would then have been no place for government action. In the absence of all sin, all legislation would have been entirely superfluous, since everyone would have written the law in his or her heart and would never have meant or done anything other than God's will. There would be no point in a court of law where no transgression existed and no dispute could arise. Without sin there would be no curse, and therefore no sickness or desolation caused by the elements of nature, and therefore all the measures that the government must now take to ensure our health and safety would be out of the question. War among nations would be unthinkable where all would live together in peace. Division and splitting among the peoples would never have occurred. No fleet or army would be equipped. From what is called the private initiative, which nowadays is still so much hampered in its functioning by unfair competition, full and sufficient power would have emanated to organize all necessary business data for life. The domestic society, continued in the family, would have automatically brought with it the patriarchal regulation of society. And if, therefore, one examines all our departments of general government in succession, one can come to no other conclusion than that, in a state without sin, they would be perfectly superfluous. The earthly endowment of government power thus refers to an unspiritual situation in which the consequences of sin for public life must be overcome, and the spread of evil must be checked, and that by force.

For force is the very nature of this earthly dispensation. It goes against sin with the strong arm, if necessary, with the sword.

But what does all this have in common with the kingship of Christ, with the spiritual kingdom, with the kingdom of heaven? That this should not be understood as if the Kingdom of Christ were to evaporate into vague ideas and spiritual feelings will prove otherwise later on. But the fundamental difference between the worldly power that exercises compulsion by the sword and the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of Christ, which has no servants who fight for it with the sword, which is not of this world, nor does it come with an outward appearance, but is within you, must not be lost sight of for a moment. To be sure, this Kingdom of Christ also goes against sin, but it does not attack sin from the outside in the wildly growing shoots of transgression, but in the core and root. It does not prune the tree, but heals the cancer of the root. And also, it does not go down before sin is conquered, but shines forth in fuller splendor just then.

Both Kingdoms thus diverge completely in origin, nature, instrument, and purpose. They are each in their own field and in their own sphere of power of completely different predispositions. They are not of the same kind, but each represents a different species. How, then, can governmental authority be derived from the Kingship of Jesus?

It is true that the spirit that goes against what is holy also tries to undermine the earthly institution of government power, to tear it away from God and to turn it against Him. The cry that to speak of a "king by the grace of God" is a relic of worn-out and obsolete concepts is loud. The conviction that it is man himself who, in his own wise order, sets up a state and appoints governments over him, is gaining ground. There is a growing awareness that the people lay down the law and that the will of the people is the highest expression of will on earth. The law is what the people stamp as law. There can no longer be any question of an eternally valid principle of law. To want to avenge a violation of the right, as Rom. 13 intends, is called committing a new injustice, since the criminal is not the guilty party but the victim of someone else's guilt. In short, "Let us break their bonds" is the tone in which the desire for emancipation among all people begins its song. And of course, this disruption of all ties also turns against the Holy One, and ends up by attacking the kingship of Christ threefold. But it never follows that this action of popular sovereignty is fundamentally opposed to Christ. It is not directly directed against the Christ, but against the Supreme Sovereignty of God, and only

in its effect and consequences against the Kingship of the Christ. In the context of our study, therefore, the frenzy of popular sovereignty must not be seen as one of the fundamental forms in which the spirit of the age acts to substitute its own kingship for the Kingship of Christ. From this form of evil comes not the denial of the Kingship of Christ, but the direct denial of God, atheism. Popular sovereignty does not say in its heart: I will replace the Christ, but quite differently: I will set my heart as God's heart. I will make myself God. A people who acknowledge "Our king rules over us by the grace of God' is therefore by no means a Christian nation, and a people who cry out "Get rid of the king by the grace of God' do not thereby throw off their Christian garment, but become godless.