

IV. - No spiritualization.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government is upon His shoulder: and His name is called Wonderful, Counselor, Strong God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. ISA. 9:5.

Only in the triune God the origin, supremacy and sovereignty. He, who created and maintains everything, can claim His honor, and has complete control and right of decision over everything that exists. He does with all creatures as He pleases, and no creature, however highly placed, can assert any right which would limit or diminish God's supremacy and right of decision. For this very reason, however, that same God is free to exercise His high authority in such a way, and to let it work, as it pleases Him. It is conceivable that He might have pleased to exercise His divine authority always and everywhere directly, but it is also conceivable that He might have pleased to exercise His high authority indirectly, through one spirit over another, in the realm of spirits, so that the angel or the human being invested with authority might serve as His instrument. God has chosen the latter. He rules the child through its father and mother, the student through his master, the weaker spirits through the geniuses, the tribes through their chiefs, and the nations through their princes.

In the meantime, sin has become the cause that this administration by human instruments has suffered from all kinds of defects. Abuse of authority degenerating into despotism on the one hand, and resistance and disobedience on the other, driven to rebellion, disturb the natural working of this instrumental authority established by God, and cause what should work organically and naturally to degenerate into a relationship of restraint and violence. The instrumental authority is increasingly detaching itself from the bonds of life; it is being put together mechanically and is working more through the strong arm than through spiritual factors. This can already be seen in lower-ranking families, but it is particularly evident in the rule over larger and broader circles, especially in the rule of the princes over the peoples of the earth. Often these Princes and their Houses do not even belong to the people themselves, but came in from outside. Without police power and an army, no dynasty could hold its own over the centuries. And what was even more frightening was the fact that people were pitted against people, nation against nation, and king against king. It ended in a split and fragmentation, which of itself brought about the fear of war, and with it the violence of the strong arm still more to the fore. And no matter what attempts were made to put an end to this division and fragmentation by uniting the many peoples under one emperor,

this never led to anything more than the rule of one people over the other peoples and to the artificial unity of part of the world, crowned by the sword. In contrast to this, the ideal of the original creation remained intact in the human heart, thanks to Revelation. To recognize and honor without any reservation God's supreme power over all our human family as a unity, and over all circles of families, families, genera and tribes in that unity. The Lord is our King, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our Judge. This authority, insofar as it included the right of decision and the administration of providence, was exercised directly by God Triune, but insofar as it had to regulate and govern our human life externally, instrumentally by human persons, whom God had vested with this authority. And they did not exercise this authority by means of a direct and far-reaching appointment, but by the place they occupy in their circle by virtue of life itself. The father, as the founder of the family and the giver of his children; where he was absent, the mother; and where she was absent also, the elder of the brethren over the young. And according to this example, the instrumental authority of God had to be established over the whole of our generation. There had to be a King, who would be the head of the entire human race, but who by virtue of his nature could also be the organic head of the human race. A second Adam, who in an elevated sense would be what the first Adam actually was. And it is from reaching for this ideal that the Messiah ideal also arose in Israel. It did not arise out of the thoughts and ponderings of the Israelite people, who as a people had never been able to raise themselves above their own private jealousy, and who even in Jesus' youth spoke of reestablishing the Kingship in Israel.

Israel's more powerful spirits, and was fulfilled in Christ, as King of the Kingdom of God. In Christ's Kingdom, all national distinctions of Greek, Jew, or barbarian fall away, and only the unity of the reborn humanity remains. In His Kingdom, in this dispensation, there is no longer any outward show of power, but high authority rests exclusively on spiritual foundations. And in Christ's Kingdom, too, there is no longer any question of artificial assembly, but of the formation of a Body, i.e., of a natural, organically constituted whole, of which He Himself, by virtue of His nature, is the all-controlling Head.

The Christ is also the Redeemer, the Reconciler of our sins, our Savior and Redeemer, but all this is only the means to reach the great goal, and that great goal is and remains the foundation of the Kingdom of Heaven, of a Kingdom in which he is the King. His royal honor and dignity is thus not an appendix that comes with his Redeeming Work, but rather the ultimate goal to which it all leads, is directed,

and leads. The one Kingship encompassing all of mankind, which, but for sin, would have arisen naturally in Paradise, but which was disrupted and cut off with the loss of Paradise, returns in Christ along the way of the Redemption and the renewal of life of our generation, thanks to the rebirth. From the very beginning of his appearance, that Kingship is in the foreground, even before the rich treasure of the Redemption Work is unfolded. John the Baptist acts as Jesus' herald and announcer, and his first cry sounds: "repent, for the Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, is at hand. And when Jesus later begins his preaching, he too proclaims first and foremost his Kingship, and like John the Baptist, testifies: "repent, for the Kingdom has come near." And arriving at the end of his career on earth, he pronounces it to the governor of Rome's Emperor unequivocally and solemnly: "You say that I am a King. To this end I have come into the world". Yes, even more so: "To this end I was born." Jesus' entire mission is thus summed up in this one, all-encompassing idea of Kingship. The world lacked its real King. There were Kings of the nations, and even an Emperor in Rome, but in all of them the real idea of the high Kingship had not been realized. And the fulfillment of this high idea He brought. Not as an afterthought, but as the main thing, for in this lay the high purpose of His whole mission. It was for this purpose that He was born, and it was for this purpose that He came into the world. The true, the essential Kingdom, the Kingdom, not as the sinful world had contrived it, but the Kingdom as it had been ordered by God, and was to represent God's high authority. Hence it is alternately called the Kingdom of Christ, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. That Kingdom came to be established by Jesus. That Kingdom would be set in motion by His action. That Kingdom would be brought to its completion through Him. And of that Kingdom John testified that it had come near in Jesus, yea, Jesus Himself testified that He had been sent by the Father, born of Israel, and had come into the world to be King in that Kingdom.

Now all this has been weakened, and its real meaning taken away, by spiritualizing it. In this way Jesus' Kingdom was allowed to sink into his prophetic glory. Jesus has also testified, has also revealed the nature of the spiritual life to us. And following on from that, it was presented as if the Kingdom He had come to establish consisted exclusively in the power of truth, which would gradually defeat the power of lies, and in the power of a holier sense, which would gradually defeat the power of sin. In other words, the words kingdom, kingship and king were not used in a real sense, but only in a figurative sense. Just as we say that truth rules over lies, and virtue over vice, so Jesus also ruled, because he took a higher

spiritual position than all the other godly servants. That may not have been a Kingdom, but it was called that by way of metaphor. And He may not have been a King, but He was given that honorific title in a figurative sense. This, however, is in complete contradiction to all that Scripture presents to us prophetically in the Old Testament and historically in the New, and it is by imperceptibly yielding to this spiritualization that the glory of Jesus' Kingship has faded so much in our circles as well. We will come back to this in more detail.

But this spiritual, transcendental view found its strength above all in what is stated in Scripture itself about this Kingdom and about Jesus' Kingship, in order to combat the national and material view that had taken hold among the Jews. The Jews, especially in Jesus' day, had claimed the great prophecy of the King, on whose "shoulder the rule would rest, and whose name would be Wonderful, Counselor, Strong God, Father of eternity," entirely for themselves as a Jewish nation. Of course, the Messiah would come, but to be King of the Jews, Israel's national King, who would make Israel triumph over the Gentiles. They could not, therefore, imagine the Messiah's kingship except on an elven throne, as Solomon once shone in the palace in Jerusalem, and all Israel would seize the sword to rule over the surrounding peoples under the banner of this King. This narrow-minded, national, and thoroughly false conception of the Messianic Kingship was so deeply ingrained in Israel in Jesus' day that even Jesus' own disciples kept asking until the very end, until after his resurrection, and even on the Mount of Olives just before his ascension: Lord, when will you re-establish the Kingdom in Israel? Motherly tenderness had even led the mother of two of the apostles to ask what high position her children would occupy in that newly established Israelite Kingdom. In the given circumstances it was inevitable that Jesus, in the face of this earthly and worldly conception of his Kingdom, should persistently point out the spiritual character of his Kingship. And it is now by these repeated and strong statements of Jesus that one allowed oneself to be tempted, in the end, to esterify His Kingship completely, and to destroy it, in fact, by a conception of the name King, which was meant only metaphorically.

However, they lacked any right to do so. The mere statement of Jesus: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth," completely destroys this conception. What Jesus fought against, and in the given circumstances had to be punished, was two things: 1°. any idea that Israel, and not the world, was the object of God's work of grace, and 2°. as if His kingship would be a kingship similar to the kingship that existed among the nations, resting on external force. Israel was chosen as a people

from among the nations, to be the bearer of divine revelation, to foreshadow and prepare that which was to come, and to see the Messiah born from them. Through this election it was not called to rule, but to serve. God was God over all the world and for all mankind. He did not love Israel, but the world, so much that He gave it His only begotten Son, so that everyone, Jew, Greek or barbarian, who believed in Him would have eternal life. It would have been unthinkable and impossible that the Almighty God, whose is the whole earth, the whole world, and the whole human race, would have set His eyes only on the small, insignificant people of the Jews in His work of mercy. His work of mercy could not have meant anything else than the whole world, and extended to all mankind. And Israel's honor was not that it stood in God's place in the world, but that it was called to minister salvation to the whole world in shadow and in preparation. That it would therefore retain a place of honor among the other nations in the end of things, only applied to the real Israel that was converted to Jesus, and could only find its revelation when the previous nations had first been called to salvation. The Jews' mistake was that they did not want to serve to spread salvation in the world, but wanted to rule over all other peoples, and wanted to bless only those from the rest of humanity who allowed themselves to be incorporated into Israel by the sign of circumcision. Instead of being an instrument for the glory of their Messiah, they wanted the Messiah to use his honor to increase the glory of their people.

This has been Israel's downfall. The fact that the Jews wanted to rule rather than serve was their national sin, and when they finally raised their fierce cry of: Crucify Him, Crucify Him! before Gabbatha, they did nothing else than to impose the logical consequence of this deepest national sin on Jesus. Jesus himself had made it as clear as possible: I, your King, have not come to be served, but to serve. It was precisely this statement that attacked Israel's heart sin. Had Israel been called to rule and not to serve, Israel's King would have been called to rule and not to serve. But even vice versa, since Israel's King stated that he had come not to rule, but to serve, this applied even more to that King's people, who then, like him, had to complete his service under God's order, and could think of no rule over the other nations. What filled the heart of the Jew in Jesus' day was robbery of the sacred. An attempt to claim God's holiness, which had been entrusted to Israel in order to bless the world and make it serve God's glory, for himself as a nation, to exalt himself upon it, to aspire to his own glory through it, and thus to prepare himself to gain dominion over all the peoples of the earth. The Jew had to be great; the Jewish nation had to be great; and all God's orders had to serve, not to carry out

God's will for the whole world, but to raise the Jewish people to the highest honor. Jesus' struggle with this Jewish spirit, which in his days had mastered the hearts of all Israel, was thus a struggle for the Holiness of God, for the high government of the Lord, for the glory of the work of grace, for the salvation of the whole world, and for the establishment of that spiritual Kingdom, which would not be confined within the narrow boundaries of Palestine, but would encompass in holy unity all our human race, insofar as it held fast to its God, among those who were still on earth, those who had already entered into salvation, and those who were yet to be born. His was not a kingdom like those of the nations. On the contrary, in his kingdom all the divisions of the peoples fell away. The division of Babel's tower building was undone in His Kingship. He would not be King over one of the nations, nor over several nations, nor over the people of Israel. His Kingship was meant for undivided mankind, for our entire human race.

And now the second contradiction: Jesus is not King of the Jews, but King over His own people from all nations, and thus extending His Kingdom throughout the world - that was the contradiction with the Jews. But with this came a second opposition, now not to the Jews, but to the other nations, to the earthly Kingdom, to the Kings "as the nations had them." Jesus expressed this contrast in two statements. The first when he said, "My Kingdom does not come with outward appearance. It is within you"; and the second when he testified to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. Otherwise My servants would have fought for Me". The characteristic feature of royal power, as it had developed among the various peoples, was precisely that the Sovereign on his throne and under his crown had to shine in ostentation, had to announce himself everywhere in external forms, had to be represented externally in banners and shields, and had to make the impression, by this "external face," i.e., by this ostentation, of rising high above the ordinary life of human children. In the earthly kingdom this could not and could not be otherwise. We are therefore not arguing for excessive opulence, nor for the sheer magnificence in which the Kingdom under Louis XIV, and the Empire first in Rome and later under Napoleon, sought their strength; but it is simply necessary that in our earthly situation the person who wears the crown should not live like an ordinary citizen, but in the opulence of the palace should reflect the highness and honour of the Empire. Crown and throne must make an impression, and according to our earthly relations they must do so also by what is in front of the eyes and what fascinates the eye. In rank the Sovereign stands above the highest rank among his subjects, and it is therefore a requirement that his household go above and

beyond the highest level of life. But this necessity is rooted in the nature and character of our earthly society and state. Since Jesus' Kingdom does not derive its stamp from earthly society, but from a higher essence of life, Jesus' disciples had to be deeply convinced of the truth that in Jesus' Kingship there could be no such ostentation, and that they had to be able to recognize the highness of Jesus' Kingship, even if all ostentation fell away. Here an entirely different standard of splendor applied, not to the eye, but to the soul, and it was to that greatness and honor that the young people had to reach.

And it was no different with the other characteristic of earthly kingship: the display of power and violence in arms. In our present situation no kingdom, at least not in a state of greater size, is conceivable without such external power. In our situation every ruling power continually encounters resistance from malice or danger from outside, and to break this resistance and maintain order and safety an armed power is indispensable. Had Jesus accepted the kingship over the one people of the Jews, over the Israelite nation, Jesus would also have had to arm his own people to fight against the power of the Roman Emperor. He says it himself: "If such a kingdom had been mine, my servants would have fought for me (with the sword). But precisely because Jesus' kingship was not of this earthly-sinly but of a spiritual-sanctified order, there could be no question of such a system of coercion or violence for Jesus. Had it come to a struggle for power, it would by no means have been a struggle of a new earthly power against the existing earthly power, but a struggle of twelve legions of angels against the legions under the Roman eagle, and we shall see later that such a struggle is by no means excluded in the end. But not so Jesus' Kingdom would appear in its beginning. Jesus' Kingship was not mechanical, but worked from spirit to spirit. Jesus did not enter the battlefield for a flawed earthly Kingdom that would violently encompass all of humanity. He set the ideal and true against the flawed and artificial Kingship of this earth. Hence his saying to Pilate that he was born to be King, in order to give witness to the true.

But precisely because we uphold the universal and ideal character of Jesus' Kingship and make it stand out sharply, we must protest more vehemently against any attempt, on the basis of half-belief or unbelief, to destroy the reality of Jesus' Kingship on the basis of the spiritual character of Jesus' Kingdom, by distilling it into a certain controlling influence which one recognizes as having emanated from Jesus in the religious and ethical fields.