

FOREWORD TO RJ RUSHDOONY'S BOOK, *SOVEREIGNTY*

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Why is Psalm 110 so important? Because it is the Psalm most quoted in the New Testament. Its frequency of citation underscores its import: it is a powerful text.

What is the most quoted Scripture in the works of R. J. Rushdoony? Runners-up include Genesis 1:26-28 (the so-called dominion mandate), Matthew 28:18-20 (the Great Commission), and Proverbs 8:36 ("all they that hate me love death"), but there can be no question as to the most crucial text in Rushdoony's works: it is Genesis 3:5.

Genesis 3:5. There is no more pivotal text in a fallen world: it explains why, how, and in what direction our world fell. The entirety of redemptive history involves God's dragging man out of the pit created by the seductive promise embodied in Genesis 3:5. But Christendom has not only failed to learn the lessons of Genesis 3:5, it has too often co-opted the tempter's program laid out by the serpent of Eden. It is crucial to understand this one indisputable fact: *the program put across by the serpent involved sovereignty*.

"Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Since the Hebrew *Elohim* appears here, there is authority for translating the serpent's promise thus: "Ye shall be as God." Equality with nothing less than God Himself is being extended to Eve. Unlike Christ (Phil. 2:6), Eve and Adam did attempt to gain equality with God by means of robbery and preemptive seizure.

On theological grounds, the serpent's promise can be put in compellingly equivalent terms: *ye shall be sovereign!* Satan was extending to man the promise of sovereignty, of man's lordship over himself. Lordship and sovereignty are virtually synonymous: the attributes of one are the attributes of the other. To be sovereign is to be subordinate to no one: all is subject to the sovereign, but the sovereign is beholden only to himself. Sovereignty entails possessing the authority to define, to determine the definition of all things. Rushdoony hence extends the rest of the serpent's promise in light of the promised attributes of sovereignty: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing [*or determining for yourselves*] what is good and evil." The explanatory phrase added in brackets captures the sense in which sovereignty *defines* all moral dimensions; it is an addendum consistently incorporated by Rushdoony to clue his readers in on the core issues driving modern man's mad groping after sovereignty. A true sovereign doesn't merely *know* what is good and evil: a sovereign can and will *define* it. A sovereign is the *source* of law; he is *not subject to it*.

The penchant, the inner drive, for seizing sovereignty from a transcendent God and relocating it to this world takes two fundamental forms: individuals appropriating sovereignty and the state's claim to sovereignty. Rushdoony herein contrasts these two warring factions in trenchant terms:

What we have are two anarchistic would-be sovereigns, modern man, and the modern state. Two sovereigns, however, cannot coexist with any peace. As a result, both are extending their powers and their self-will. The modern state grows daily more powerful, and modern man grows daily more lawless. For "sovereign" man, the way of expressing his claim of sovereignty is to defy the law and will of the state. Both man and the state seek to displace God as *the center*. The means of attaining this role as the center of being is *power*. Hence the voracious hunger of the state for ever-increasing controls over every area of life and thought, (p. 122)

This emphasis on power is a destructive one for man, since a quest for power displaces a quest for moral order, particularly within the context of freedom and its responsibilities.

According to Lapham, "Americans tend to prefer the uses of power to the uses of freedom." The emphasis on private power versus public power leads to a man-centered society, and a society in conflict. This conflict of interests is thus harmful to both the private and public sectors. Moreover, the public versus private concern is not a moral one: it is a quest for power, not for moral order. As a result, in politics, law, education, and other spheres morality is no longer a social consideration; morality at best has become a private concern. (pp. 80-81)

Rushdoony implicates Friedrich Nietzsche and the death of God school in this hunt for power and explains the shift in the modern state's bearing vis-à-vis the state's purpose and mission.

The death of God belief went hand in hand with belief in man as his own god and law. The assault on Christendom was an assertion of man's will to power, his will to be his own god (Gen. 3:5). The political consequences of this movement were enormous. Justice as the reason for the state's existence gave way quietly to the will to power. (p. 330)

As has been well said, the state is the coercive sector of society. The element of coercion that operates in tandem with state-claimed power is something that the state tends to monopolize, denying it to institutions other than itself. In fact, the state will label something as coercive and condemn it on that ground by pure fiat definition in terms of public policy.

State power is coercion, always coercion. To equate the state with Reason is to equate Reason with coercion. Reason then *requires* coercion because it is Reason, and to oppose its coercion is irrational. We can justifiably argue on Biblical grounds that the church should not indulge in physical coercion; the attitude of the humanists is that the church must not coerce because it is neither Reason nor its faith reasonable. This non-coercive requirement imposed increasingly on the church by the civil revolution extends to such things as Christian education; Christian schools and home schools are viewed as coercing the mind of the child. Parents are also seen as coercive if they impose a Christian training and discipline on their children. Only the state's coercion is rational; all Christian forms are irrational and even evil. (p. 285)

We see here how the sovereign, in this instance the modern power-state, indulges its propensity to function as the definer and determiner of all meaning within society.

In Western culture, the amassing of power, of relocating it from the transcendent plane of God's throne in heaven to incarnate it in visible form on earth (in institutional form), was originally undercut by the coming of Christ. The church, however, fell prey to the siren song of power and sought to create visible power centers on earth (the church shifted power from a transcendent source to an immanent manifestation). What befell the church on account of this tragic misstep was that the state quickly learned the lesson the church was teaching by example: power should be immanentized, should be reflected in institutional form on the earth rather than centered in a transcendent invisible throne in heaven.

Human power centers have claimed sovereignty, and have denied the authority of the church. As Stalin said cynically, "How many legions has the Pope?" Once the premise of Greco-Roman statism, the necessity for an immanent and visible sovereignty, was accepted, it was the state which gained by it, not the church. (p. 459)

A sovereign power is a power that can *necessitate* those subject to that power. Just as

sovereignty was transferred from God to man, from heaven to earth, by implementing the seizure of sovereignty advocated by the serpent in Genesis 3:5, so too was the *necessitating power* transferred to the created domain by the same strategy. This particular usurpation was aided and abetted by Arminian theology, which contended against the sovereign God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to liberate man from the necessitating consequences of the divine decree.

Marxism's theoretical foundation has been the shift of the governing or sovereign power, the necessitating or predestining force, from God to the state. In varying forms and degrees, all over the world, *the state is now the necessitating force or power. By claiming sovereignty, the modern state declares itself to be the necessitating power over man.* As such, it is increasingly denying freedom to the economic sphere, to the family, to the school, and to the church. It cannot claim sovereignty without necessitating all things.

It is not an accident that the rise of Arminianism coincided with the rise of the modern state. Arminius warred against the doctrine of the necessitating God. Man's freedom required, he held, deliverance from such a God. To abolish necessity from theology is not to abolish necessity but to transfer it to another realm, and the state was progressively freed from God's necessitating power to become Hegel's god walking on earth, a this-worldly necessitating power. (pp. 463-464)

The statist implications of the Arminian depreciation of God's sovereignty is examined in length in another important volume co-authored by R. J. Rushdoony entitled *The Great Christian Revolution*, which goes into considerable theological and historical detail concerning the slide into statism that non-Calvinistic theologies invariably undergo. As mentioned earlier, the church set a dangerous precedent by appropriating visible sovereignty unto itself, as the state soon grasped the implications of that strategy. Sovereignty being usurped, even in part, by the church tended to trigger a domino effect that led to power states that coexisted quite peaceably with Arminianism.

God cannot be "robbed" of sovereignty at one point without soon being denied sovereignty at all points. When the church claimed sovereignty, it thereby made it a fact of the human scene, one which others could seize from it. It was not an accident of history that, while civil government often established various forms of Arminianism, they rarely and then only briefly established Calvinism. They saw it as a threat to their freedom. If sovereignty is a this-worldly fact, then who is better to exercise it than the state? With the rise of Arminianism, we have also the rise of statism, of state sovereignty. (p. 74)

Much confusion over apparently synonymous terms has arisen in discussion over the matter of power, authority, dominion, and domination. The term *dominion* in particular is subject to gross misinterpretation, usually with the intent to depict Christians who take the Bible seriously as individuals prone to exercise tyranny (a remarkable accusation, given the dimensions of the modern state's overreaching of its citizens' supposed liberties). Rushdoony wisely provides clarifications concerning the ideas of dominion, domination, and theocracy.

The locus of dominion is *not* at the presumed power centers as understood by secularists and humanists, but the opposite: the individual Christian and the family were the proper recipients of the mandate to take dominion. Rushdoony dispenses with the popular caricatures in three short sentences.

Moreover, dominion is not given to the state nor to the church but to man and to families.

The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man.

It is contrary to God's law for church and state to seek to dominate society. (p. 31)

Further clarifying the difference between dominion and domination, Rushdoony *focuses on the* aspect of lawful versus unlawful moral conduct and the contrast between limited derivative authority versus tyrannical seizure of illegitimate sovereign control.

God's law-word gives man the way to dominion, and dominion is not domination. Domination is the exercise of lawless power over others. Dominion is the exercise of godly power in our God-given sphere. The rejection of God's sovereignty leads to domination; the affirmation of God's sovereignty and His law is the foundation of dominion. It is also the means to power under God.... A humanistic power can only be truly overthrown by God's power, and men cannot escape domination and tyranny apart from a return to the triune God and their total calling and dominion mandate under Him. (p. 165)

It may strike humanists as ironic that the very means to secure freedom from state domination and tyranny is godly dominion. This alone restores sovereignty to the only domain rightfully authorized to exercise it with justice and equity: the throne room of God Himself.

A consistent, full-orbed Christianity that takes the crown rights of Christ the King seriously poses a threat to the self-proclaimed sovereign power state, and this threat is clearly understood by the state. It has accumulated power it has no intention of voluntarily relinquishing: it would take a power greater than itself to pry its fingers off of its claims to ultimacy.

Christians, by affirming the sovereignty of the triune God and the universal Kingship of Jesus Christ, thereby deny the modern doctrine of sovereignty and the people. The fact that most Christians are unaware of the conflict does not alter the fact that the humanists recognize that Christ's lordship spells death to the modern state, because it undercuts its premise. (p. 107)

The state seeks a church that it can use, that is subordinate *to* its own authority, and that acknowledges the state's sovereignty and dutifully goes through its ritual motions without disturbing the power structures the state has painstakingly amassed over time. Rubber-stamp religion is acceptable to the power state; a faith in a sovereign God that is actually taken seriously presents the state with a problem.

[Quoting Owen Chadwick:] "Government likes religion to bless its acts, crown its dictators, sanction its laws, define its wars as just, be decorous masters of national ceremonies. And since on grounds of religion religious men may criticize acts or laws or wars or modes of waging war, government prefers quietness and contemplation to excess of zeal." (p. 311)

Rushdoony was no stranger to this conflict between church and state. As an expert court witness during trials against Christian schools and homeschooling parents, he observed the official government-sanctioned vilification of Biblical faith firsthand. The roots of that enmity reside in the issue of sovereignty: those who believe they possess it bristle at any challenge to their power.

It is the Christian who is increasingly viewed as the enemy of the state as he stands in terms of the crown rights of Christ the King. He thereby challenges the sovereign claims of the state in the name of the King of kings, and the Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Increasingly, in the eyes of the sovereign state, this is the unforgivable sin. (p. 362)

The conflict rides on the Christian's appeal to a transcendent law and authority that judges the entire created domain, that stands over all humanity as an irrevocable standard against

which there can be no ultimate appeal. The state sees itself as the highest court of appeal; the Christian necessarily denies this usurpation by the state.

The modern state, whether openly or implicitly, hates the church and resents its every effort to be Christian. This should not be surprising. When the church proclaims the whole word of God, it introduces a canon or rule in the public arena which judges every sphere of life and thought. The premise of the state is that it is the source of all law and judgment; its basic faith is that the state is judge over all and to be judged by none. A moral order and law apart from the state which judges the state is rightly seen as an attack on state sovereignty. (p. 356)

The reality *is* that state sovereignty, the successful result of what Rushdoony terms the *civil revolution* whereby sovereignty is transferred from God to the secular state, does *not* disestablish theocracy, but rather creates a theocracy built around a new god, the power state. The melding of atheism and theocracy is a very ugly development of the modern era:

Brian Tierney illustrates that,

Humans find it consoling to imagine that the order imposed by their rulers reflects a divine ordering of the universe; most of the time, as Bernard Shaw observed, "The art of government is the organization of idolatry." (The great advance of the twentieth century has been our discovery that it is possible to combine all the advantages of theocracy with all the convenience of atheism.)

This is, of course, a particularly telling statement: we do have now a theocracy without God, an idolatry of the will of man, and atheism. (p. 253)

George Bernard Shaw's equating of government with idolatry is surprisingly insightful. The sadder surprise is how many Christians are completely engulfed in this same state-centered idolatry.

Such idolatry even makes its way into theology textbooks, some from the pens of conservative Christian scholars. We see a clear example of this in the defense of natural law promoted in works such as the recently published *Systematic Theology* by Dr. Norman Geisler. Volumes such as these contrast Biblical law with "good law" or "fair law." The idea of natural law has a dubious pedigree, as Rushdoony shows herein.

Natural law theories arose in part to provide the state with a non-theological basis for law. Because Christ established the church, it was held, the Bible could provide its supernaturally decreed law for a supernaturally ordered institution. The state, being grounded in Nature, had to have a natural basis for its law, hence natural law. In time, the state ceased to look outside itself for natural law. (pp. 284-285)

The inherent hazard of this approach is well attested historically, but this has not prevented Christians from being led right back into the ditch generation after generation. The depreciation of God's law recoils back on theology itself, and natural law and other man-made surrogate legal structures erected by the supposedly sovereign state are simply used to dethrone God.

Men have sought to relocate meaning, justice, and law on a level below God, because this gives them a convenient starting point. Instead of being judged by God and His transcendental but revealed law and justice, men have, when law and justice are located outside of God, an instrument whereby they can judge God. Churchmen regularly appeal to their humanistic ideas of law, justice, and love to tell us what God cannot be, whatever the Bible may say. (p. 194)

The slide into tyranny that inevitably follows is inexorable.

If the state is the *source* of law, then it is the source of punishment for all

transgressions, and no dissent is permissible. As a result, systematically humanistic societies become totalitarian and tyrannical. They move from punishing offenses to punishing dissent. (p. 132)

The ramifications of the move to non-transcendent law, to humanistic law as determined by the sovereign power state, spill over into the conflict between individual sovereignty (the trend toward anarchy) and state sovereignty (the trend toward tyranny). Natural law ultimately cannot avoid a conflict of interests within society because of the contrary flows of power when all connection to human responsibility before God is severed.

Both the individual and the state demand the recognition of their sovereign rights. Each class in the state seeks its "sovereign rights" at the expense of all others. Without God's law, self-will becomes the ruling premise in every sphere. Society shifts its emphasis from moral duties to civil "rights." All classes seek advantage, not justice, although their advantages are promoted as justice. (p. 291)

Such ill-conceived appeals to natural law, as are often found on the lips of theologians anxious to avoid the implications of God's law, lead to a muffling of the church's prophetic voice. Once Christians repose the source of law in the natural realm, and not in God's written law-word, all appeal to an authority higher than the state has been forfeited.

If there is no law beyond state law, no justice beyond and over the state, and no supreme court of Almighty God over all courts of state, then there is no criterion whereby the state can be called wrong. Then justice becomes what the state does, as in Marxism and fascism. (p. 340)

The state then proceeds to *actually purge out* all Biblical influence, just as a brood parasite (such as the cowbird or cuckoo bird) will push the host bird's hatchlings out of the nest to their deaths so that it alone rules the roost. The modern state cleans house on *any possible concession* that there is an authority above itself, particularly in legal matters. Rushdoony, describing the Pennsylvania murder trial of Karl Chambers, draws attention herein to a prosecutors allusion to the Scripture that "the murderer shall be put to death" in front of the jury, which became a controversial lightning rod involving an appeal all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1992 — all because the prosecutor had alluded to a source of law independent from the state. As Rushdoony summarizes it,

What the courts said in the Chambers case was that no independent source of law, no source outside the state, will be tolerated. Law is the state's creation. (p. 468)

The modern state wouldn't be much of a sovereign, a lord, if it didn't have its own gospel to proclaim from one end of the land to the other. It *does*, however, have a gospel: it is the social gospel of liberal Christianity, which has been denatured and distorted in terms of the statist idolatry that George Bernard Shaw identified. It is worth rehearsing here the salient points of Rushdoony's discussion of this alternate (and false) gospel, a gospel that mesmerizes far too many churchmen with its lying siren song.

The social gospel is really a *civil* gospel; it espouses salvation by the state and its laws, and its hope shifts from God to the state. This has a major impact on the doctrine of the atonement. In the 1930s, a pastor who adopted the social gospel began to preach also against the orthodox doctrine of Christ's atonement; he ridiculed it in language used by others who preceded him, calling it "butcher shop theology" to preach atonement by the blood of Jesus. This juxtaposition of the social or statist gospel and the denunciation of the blood atonement doctrine was an essential and logical one. If salvation is an act of state, the work of men who are essentially good and who unite to make a better world, to look for a change in men through Christ's atonement rather than through the civil gospel is not only false but misleading. As a result, whenever the civil revolution flourishes, Christianity is under attack. (p. 272)

There appears to be a studied blindness on those who promote this civil gospel: they can see evil in political structures other than their own, but the evils in front of them are invisible.

The advocates of the civil gospel are ready to see a fascist state as evil, but not a truly democratic and socialistic state. Sin, however, is not a monopoly of the left or the right, but common to all men. (p. 273)

The sad fact is, the decline of liberal Christianity into secular statism, the transfer of sovereignty from heaven to earth, to Hegel's "god walking on earth," viz., the state, has yet to solve the societal problems it had promised to cure. The reason for this is letter simple:

The civil revolution has no answer because it is a basic part of the problem.
(p. 292)

Because the civil revolution hinges on the Arminian and Pelagian doctrine of the goodness of man (a virtue suited to shaping natural law, as such theologians hold), its foundation exhibits fatal cracks at the outset. Placing unimpeded sovereignty into the hands of men who are by nature *evil*, as Calvinism holds, will inevitably manifest its folly by the subsequent disasters that will follow.

[Quoting Owen Chadwick:] "Human nature is good. This, said Morley, is the key that secularizes the world." However, if man is not good, if he is indeed sinful, fallen, and totally depraved, it becomes instead the key that damns the world. (p. 356)

In support of this contention, Rushdoony quotes from O. Halecki's studies of European secularization. That Rushdoony implicates Christians in the wholesale sellout of Christ's lordship is disturbing, but few are bold enough to tell modernist Christians, "Thou art the man."

[Quoting O. Halecki:] "The attempt to create a culture which would be European without being Christian ... is now recognized as the main cause of the present crisis in European civilization." That churchmen in great numbers are a part of this revolution, this de-Christianization of the West, is an amazing as well as an ugly fact. (p. 296)

It is precisely here, at the door of the church, that the trail necessarily leads. Judgment begins at the house of God. Finger-pointing at the secular state misses the point. The answer is *not* the shift of power from state to church, but the God-ordained functioning of both state and church in their respective spheres, which requires *their abandonment of sovereignty* and acknowledgment of God as the blessed and only Potentate. The church, by and large, has tended to *reverse* its roles. It was chartered to speak prophetically, working toward justice in the social realm, and to minister mercy in the church realm. It has instead exacted harsh justice in the church realm and urged that unwarranted mercy be indiscriminately applied socially (often characterized in more loaded terms as "coddling criminals," support for a massive state welfare apparatus, and more). As Rushdoony puts it,

We see here the beginning of a long tradition whereby churchmen view civil offenses with mercy, and ecclesiastical offenses mercilessly. The church thus separated itself from its Biblical mandate, justice in law and society, and its Biblical mandate of grace and mercy in ecclesiastical matters. (p. 346)

Regrettably, this is not all. Not only has the church switched its priorities and inverted its mandates ... not only has it substituted humanistic law for God's justice ... not only has it secured its own subordination to the state and muzzled those Christians who saw such idolatry for what it was ... but the church has, by and large, attempted the unthinkable. To preserve the sovereignty of the humanistic state, far too many churches will restrict Christ

and the Scriptures *to the domain of the church*, declaring that He has no binding Word to speak to the secular state. All social life is to be thoroughly informed by humanistic values, not Biblical imperatives. Christ speaks only to the church: His reign is most decidedly *not* "from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:9-10). Christ, like Quasimodo, needs to stick to the church grounds, out of public view. Rushdoony explains how unworkable this stay-at-church Christ really is.

No more than the Romans could lock up Jesus Christ inside a sealed tomb can the churchmen of our day confine Him to the church. If they continue to try to lock Him into the church, He will shatter the church as He did the tomb. (p. 40)

Christ cannot be locked up *because He alone is sovereign; He alone rides the universe from the right hand of all power and authority*. The civil revolution, by first robbing Christ of His sovereignty and then imprisoning Him in the church, letting Him out only if He agrees to wear a gag in His mouth, has made a grievous error.

Rushdoony notes the contrast between the Christians of former eras and Christians living in our own era:

Christians, who were attacked by the pagan philosophers for their belief in predestination, were the champions of man's freedom, because they freed man from his environment and its controls and placed man under God, not under nature or the state. The same battle is again being waged, but all too many churchmen are on the wrong side. (p. 76)

What is he saying here? That too many modern churchmen are *not* champions of freedom because they place man *under the state*, or *under nature*, rather than *under God*. In a word, modern compromised Christendom *co-opts false sovereignties*. To do so, it must deny the total lordship of Christ over everything He hath made. The compromised church then enables the state to regulate, and finally coerce and persecute, faithful Christians who insist that Christ is Lord: that *Christ is sovereign* and the state and church *are not*.

John Owen put his finger on the reason for this kind of defection back in 1652, addressing the text of Luke 17:20 and the invisible sovereign Kingdom of Christ described therein. He held that such declension from Biblical faith arose when men "have been so dazzled with gazing after temporal glory, that the kingdom which comes not by observation hath been vile in their eyes." Men want to walk by sight: they want a God they can see, and so they've graduated from golden calves to modern power states. The God who dwelleth in unapproachable light, who exercises sovereign control by a single overarching decree over all time and space, has become the stone the builders have rejected.

That stone shall nonetheless become the head of the corner. This volume faithfully proclaims the Biblical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and alerts us all to the ever-widening consequences of the social outworking of Genesis 3:5 at the individual and corporate level. As Rushdoony observes, "The same battle is again being waged, but all too many churchmen are on the wrong side." Which side are *you* on?

— Martin G. Selbrede

SOVEREIGNTY

When the philosopher Hegel defined the state as god walking on earth, he expressed what long had been the faith of many men, both in pagan antiquity and since then. This claim by the state, or by its rulers, has long been apparent in the insistence on *sovereignty*. The word *sovereign* as an adjective is defined in five ways by *Webster's Dictionary*:

1. chief or highest; supreme; paramount
2. supreme or highest in power; superior in position to all others; chief
3. independent of, and unlimited by, any other; possessing, or entitled to, original and independent authority or jurisdiction.
4. excellent; efficacious; effectual; controlling.
5. of the highest degree; extreme.

The word *sovereign* comes from the Latin *super*, above, so that a sovereign in the nominative sense is one who is above all. One who is above all, is independent and unlimited by any other, and has independent and original authority and jurisdiction can only describe the God of Scripture. In the Bible, the word for *sovereign* is always translated as *lord*: *adonai* in the Hebrew, and *kyrios* in the Greek. Thus, the most common term for God in the Old Testament is *lord* or sovereign, and the most used designation for Jesus in the New is also *lord*, which is also used to refer to God the Father. The term in Scripture means owner, the one possessing dominion and rule, authority and power. It was a term used to describe pagan gods, and Nero (AD 54-68) is described in an inscription as *ho tou pantos kosmou kyrios*, Lord of all the World.¹ The whole issue between Rome and the early church was over lordship or sovereignty: who is the Lord, Christ or Caesar? If Caesar were lord, then Caesar had the right to tax, license, regulate, certify, accredit, and control Christ and His church. If Christ is Lord, then Caesar must be Christ's minister and obey His word (Rom. 13:1-4; Phil. 2:9-11). Paul is emphatic that every knee should bend and every tongue confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord."

But there is more. The source of law in any society is its god. In fact, the working god of a culture can be identified by ascertaining where law comes from. The first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in 1771, defined law thus: "Law may be defined, 'The command of the sovereign power, containing a common rule of life for the subjects.'" All too often, in past and present history, this sovereign power has been a king, emperor, congress, parliament, or a group of judges, all men playing at being gods. Since law defines good and evil, right and wrong, for men to make laws is to rebel against and to defy God.

When men set forth their own versions of the law, they thereby set forth their will as the governing power and authority, and their ideas about justice as true righteousness. It is thus inevitable that such a humanistic state will wage war against Christ and His church and realm. The first and governing law of God is this: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3), including the state, as Alan Stang has noted. As against this commandment of the triune God, the modern state has its own version: *Thou shalt not have Jesus Christ as Lord God over me*, for the state alone is sovereign and must rule over all things.

In the modern era, the doctrine of sovereignty by man or the state not only had the support of rulers (with respect to the state) but also Arminian theologians. Jean Bodin (1530-1596), a French nationalist, opposed Protestants who favored tyrannicide and held that sovereignty is supreme power over citizens and subjects and is *unlimited by law*. Hugo

¹ H. Bietenhard, "Kyrios," in Colin Brown, general ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 510-20.

Grotius (1583-1645), the Arminian theologian and political theoretician, held that the "maintenance of the social order...is the source of law." He thus stressed its social utility. However, he did not disagree with Bodin, stating, "That power is called sovereign whose actions are not subject to the legal control of another, so that they cannot be rendered void by another human will."² It is true that Grotius placed human sovereigns under God. He said, "God is the Lawgiver; and man cannot change a law that God has established, since an inferior cannot prevail as against a superior."³ The Scripture, however, tells us that Nathan could indict David the King, saying, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). Again, Peter and the other apostles said to the rulers, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Many texts can be cited to confirm the fact that it is a sin to obey the word of man rather than the word of God:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. (Gen. 3:17)

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Sam. 15:22)

And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. (1 Sam. 15:24)

7. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

8. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such things ye do.

9. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:7-9)

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Gal. 1:10)

What Scripture requires of us is obedience to God and the defense of God's realm. The tax revolt, while against a form of taxation which Scripture does not permit, is a defense of one's own wealth or money rather than God's Kingdom.

Thus, Grotius on two counts strayed radically from the faith. *First*, while formally retaining God's sovereignty, he insisted that a human sovereignty prevails upon earth. Sovereignty or lordship is an indivisible concept. A sovereign is either a sovereign, or he is not. In reality, there are no half-gods or half-sovereigns. Modern sovereigns, like those of antiquity, soon began to claim total power, and their laws became absolute. Totalitarianism begins with the belief that human sovereignty or state sovereignty exists. It is noteworthy that the U.S. Constitution, while not without faults, never uses the term sovereign or sovereignty; it was held to belong to God alone. In recent years, although its roots are in John Marshall and the Supreme Court, federal sovereignty is routinely asserted. At the time of America's War of Independence, the Calvinists were strongly opposed to royal sovereignty, and "in western Pennsylvania a loyalist official found Presbyterians 'as averse to Kings, as they were

² Charles S. Edwards, *Hugo Grotius, The Miracle of Holland: A Study in Political and Legal Thought* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 100; cf. 53, 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

in the Days of Cromwell, and some begin to cry out, *No King but King Jesus.*"⁴

Since Grotius's day, the sovereignty of God has been denied in favor of the sovereignty of the state. Grotius had declared that a human sovereign cannot alter God's law; at the same time, he held that no inferior can question or deny a superior's will, so that men were bound by their human rulers false laws. For him, *men were* required to obey man rather than God. This was Grotius's *second* great error, to require submission to human sovereigns, obedience to man's law rather than God's law. This made the current form of the state the actual and working god of the society. In the modern world, we see the state less and less willing to recognize any independent realm belonging to Christ. The denial of religious freedom is an ugly fact of our times, because the new god, the state, refuses to allow the church, the last uncontrolled realm in American life, to escape controls.

In a number of church and state or religious liberty trials, I have heard state and federal judges declare that they will not permit any reference to the Bible or to the First Amendment, because they are ruled only by the *latest decision* from the U.S. Supreme Court. We are today in a situation like that of Greece and Rome, of whom Wardman wrote, that, in the age of Augustus Caesar,

Rome was going through the common experience of Hellenistic states which prostrated themselves before their rulers, the sense that other gods are remote and that the god of the here and now is the current ruler.⁵

These developments are logical and natural. Sovereignty cannot be restrained, because a god is by definition beyond all restraint or control by those under him. To control a god is to be god over god. In Scripture, God's palace is His Temple, and His throne room is the Holy of Holies. Habakkuk 2:20 thus declares, "the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." There is no word nor law that can be spoken to correct, supplement, or contradict the law-word of it. It is sufficient for all the Lord's purposes.

Rulers early recognized that they could not be sovereigns if God and His word are sovereign. During Cromwell's days, John Eliot organized the Christian Indians into villages that were strictly self-governing in terms of God's law. Charles II, on coming to the throne, ordered their destruction. Today, we see an increasing denial of the freedom of Christians to live in terms of every word of God (Matt. 4:4).

Sovereignty cannot be restrained or controlled. If God is sovereign or lord, man must obey His every word, and man has no right to complain, any more than the clay can complain to the potter (Rom. 9:17-21). However, if the state is sovereign or lord, man has no rights nor freedom as against the state. The question we must answer with our lives is this: Who is the Lord, Christ or Caesar, the triune God or the state?

Similarly, from whence come our laws, from God or from man? If the state is our god, the state is our lawgiver. If the Lord of Hosts is our God, then He is our Lawgiver, and the Bible is our law. Isaiah declares,

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isa. 8:20)

"The testimony" is God's revelation as a system of belief and a rule of duty. If men will not obey the every word of God, there is no light in them, or, no dawn or morning, no future,

⁴ A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life*, 97, cited in Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1985), 49.

⁵ Alan Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft Among the Romans* (London, England: Granada Publishing Company, 1982), 69.

for them.⁶ Unless we return to our Lord, our Sovereign, and His law-word, there is no meaning for us, only darkness and death. We need to say with Isaiah,

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. (Isa. 33:22)

⁶ Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1846-47] 1953), 193.