

F.A.C.S. REPORT

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"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)

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Introduction

In Australia today a debate is in progress about whether we shall be a monarchy or a republic. Our purpose is to try to answer this question from the Bible. Chapter eight of I Samuel is a critical one on the subject of political rule and the Christian's role in society; it is a key passage to help us understand our topic. It tells of an occurrence in the life of Israel, now thousands of years ago; but it is not widely accepted that something that happened that long in the past should provide instruction to us today.

However, it is also a very important text for it gives us revealed knowledge that we can use to determine how to respond to the monarchy-republic debate. This debate is certain to be with us through to the year 2,000. So, there's every reason for the Christian community to work out a biblical response to the issue.

Before I go further, let me give this warning. This essay is about things which, in Australian culture, ought not to be discussed in public: religion and politics. But I am going even further than that: I'm writing about both of them in the one article. So, for those of you who are typical Aussies, you might wish to read no farther. I suspect that most of you reading this, though, are not typical Aussies. You don't share the general Australian attitude to politics and religion because you've embraced religion in a particular way.

On the other hand, if you are a typical Aussie concerning the taboo on religion and politics, then perhaps it's this message you need to read. For, if there is one thing evident in Australian society, it is the very great silence by the Christian community in answering any of the overwhelming problems that our nation faces. For example, unemployment is at an all time high. But the 11% unemployment figure is terribly understated, for this only counts people on the welfare rolls. True unemployment should be measured by all those who wish to work who are unable to find work. This means, in some cases, there is unemployment in families where a wife

THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST: The Monarchy-Republic Debate

*or, How to Tell
When You Don't Have
a Biblical System of Government*

by Ian Hodge

seeks employment but cannot obtain it. It includes people who already have part-time or full-time jobs that are seeking more work to supplement their income. These statistics don't appear in the unemployment rate. Thus, our economic situation is far, far worse than anyone will admit.

Sydney's successful bid for the Olympics in the year 2,000 should not excite too many, since the economic experts cannot agree that all costs will be recouped. If the games must be subsidized by taxpayers then the Olympics can only leave the people of Australia, and especially those in New South Wales, in a worse economic condition than before. To be sure, some people will have benefited from the games. Some will get paid before, during and after the event for activities associated with the games. But they will get paid only at the expense of those who will be taxed for the event. Thus, the economy will be *worse off* to the extent that there must be any taxpayers' money used for the games.

Silence

It is not my purpose to provide an essay on the economy. What I am doing is trying to point out that while things such as this may horrify us, there is something even more terrible: the inability (or unwillingness) of the Christian community to provide specific biblical answers to the problems of life.

Of course I'm generalising. There are outspoken Christians on some things. Examples would be homosexuality and abortion. But there are a large number of other matters upon which Christians are silent. Why is that?

A part of that answer has to do with the attitude of many Christians to the Old Testament. They have the same problem with the Old Testament that some professing Presbyterians have with the New Testament: they don't believe it is the Word of God and that it is to be obeyed *today*. They think that the O.T. is some archaic set of rituals given to a tiny nation around the Mediterranean, and that somehow the New Testament changes *everything* in such a way that the O.T. can

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Editor: Ian Hodge

be ignored, cast aside, and forgotten about.

The great problem with this view is that if the Bible is a book to be ignored, if we do not follow its every jot and tittle, how will we know what to do? There are some who tell us to follow the leading of the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit inside the believer. Now I don't want to put this belief down and belittle it, for there is a certain truth about it. But one thing is certainly true: there is not one piece of biblical evidence that in the twentieth century, we are supposed to put aside the Bible as God's revelation to us and listen to voices within. Besides, how can we know for certain that the voice within is indeed the Third Person of the Trinity, and not some evil spirit, . . . or perhaps even the product of our own fertile imagination?

We must never let go of the fact that it is the Bible and the Bible alone that is God's revelation to us. We don't need to hold a prayer meeting to find out what God wants us to do, waiting for that "inner light" to get us off our seats and into action, even though we certainly need to pray more. But prayer is misplaced and misused when it becomes a substitute for studying and applying the revealed will of God as it is given to us in the Bible.

If there's one thing I would like you to remember from this essay it is that last sentence: prayer is misplaced and misused when it becomes a substitute for studying and applying the revealed will of God as it is given to us in the Bible.

This point, however important it is, is not our message. On this occasion we are going to take the Bible and the Bible alone and look at one of the top-

ics of debate currently going on in Australia. We're going to find the Bible's answer to this issue. You might like to say that we're going to attempt to make Christianity and the Christian faith relevant to daily life. Our religious belief does not permit us to escape into another world, there to spiritualise everything in a way that lets us ignore the issues of life. Rather, Christianity requires of us that we are to recognise our place in the universe, that God created the world, and that we are put here for a purpose — His purpose, in fact. Our purpose is not to escape this life, however difficult it might be at times. Rather, our purpose on earth is to fulfil our callings under God, to be His servants and stewards, and work for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth — as it is in heaven.

Escapism

Too many Christians are escapists. They are looking for the rapture to take them from the cares and the troubles of this world. They want a world for which they are not responsible, they want a place where they don't have to make any effort to do something that might be difficult. They are, as the Bible tells us, like little children who have not grown up, lacking a sense of responsibility and the ability to take responsibility for their lives and their society and work for something better.

But however much some Christians might want to do this, it must be made clear that this is not what we read in the Bible. In the Bible we are told to be overcomers, to run the good race, to fight the fight. We are instructed to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).

I say this mindful of the fact that I'm one of the first to complain and groan about life, and look for ways to escape my responsibilities. But while we can all recognise this propensity in ourselves and others to be escapees, retreating from daily life, we must also recognise that the Bible does not permit us to remain with this attitude without falling under its condemnation. If we say we're Christians and we're escaping our responsibilities, we must change. Not that we can change ourselves, but there is certainly a requirement that we put some effort into doing the things that are required of us.

There are some who join Christianity because they want an easy religion. But they have made a grave mistake. If they want an easy religion,

one which permits them to avoid the problems of life, then they should become monks in a Buddhist monastery. It is certainly not the Christian faith as found in the Bible which allows escape from the cares of the world. Just read the stories of Joseph, of Moses, or of king David. Read how Daniel and his three friends found themselves in situations that would simply not let them escape this world. And read, in the New Testament, about our great Lord and Saviour, how He went around healing the sick, dealing with people's problems, and dealing with problem people. For those who have joined Christianity seeking a life of ease there's some special news: you're in for a surprise.

This, hopefully, helps us understand that we have an *obligation*, a religious duty, to make sure that we do not ignore daily issues. Our faith and our belief requires us to answer these questions, not just for ourselves, but for others. And, once we've found the answer, we have an ongoing obligation to work for the establishment of God's answer to the particular issue.

There are some who say we're not supposed to try to establish God's answers to particular issues in society. This, they say, amounts to "imposing" our faith on others. Well, that might be so. But if we're not supposed to work to establish God's righteous standards in society, whose standards should we introduce? Should we impose the devil's standards? Anyway, it's undeniable that *someone's* standards will form the basis of society. Now the question we should ask ourselves is this: Which set of standards are the *right* ones to impose on society?

The Bible gives us two choices: we can have either God's righteous standards, or we can have someone else's unrighteous ideals. People act as if there is a third choice, as if there is some standard of action that we can have that somehow does not fit into either of these two categories. This, however, is false reasoning, and a form of escape from the truth we find in the Scriptures.

The King Established

The great debate in Australia until the end of the decade will be overshadowed by the Olympic issue. No doubt, the Olympic cause will add to the clamour for a republic, although there has been some negative response to the Prime Minister's attempts to use the event in his republican cause. Almost certainly it is not something that will aid the monar-

chists.

The first thing to notice about the monarchy-republic debate, however, is that it is a very limited argument. The discussion is always conducted as if these are the only two choices. These choices, unfortunately, are framed in terms of atheism: man will devise for himself, unaided by divine revelation, either a monarchical or a republican system. On this basis, it is not the *form* of government that is essential; it is the *substance* of government. And a government based on atheism, whether that be a republic or a monarchy, is bound to be essentially *unrighteous* in substance, irrespective of whether the external form is right or wrong. Thus, we should not lose sight of the real issue in this debate.

The Bible, on the other hand, provides a third alternative. By confining the debate to only two choices, we are not given the chance to present the case for a *better* system of government than can be devised by man. This is the kind of government the Bible talks about, a government of righteousness, joy, peace, long suffering, and fellowship with the God who created us in His image. This, after all, is man's chief end, and it would be a great pity for ourselves and the rest of our countrymen if we, as Christians, were to remain silent during this political debate when we have a better alternative at hand.

In Exodus 18:13-23, we find the background to biblical government. Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites, God's people, were to appoint judges over 10s, 50s, and 100s. We cannot comprehend this system of government without asking the question: what were the *functions* of the judges? Were they to be rulers over the people, making laws, collecting taxes, controlling business production, managing the economy, printing money, borrowing when it suited them, and preventing people buying from abroad? Was it a part of their God-ordained duty to establish passport control to prevent foreigners from working inside the borders of Israel? Were they to have their own army? If so, who was to pay for it, how much should they pay, and how was the money to be collected? Should they have a police force? Should they disarm the Israelites in an attempt to reduce murder and injury?

We find no examples of a Department of Defence, or a Department of

Social Security in the Old Testament pattern for Israel. There was no Department of Foreign Affairs and no department to register and control the establishment of businesses. Curiously, there was no centralised taxation office. Somehow, with God on the throne of the nation, these would be unnecessary. No doubt there were people alive then who thought, as some do today, that since many people in Israel did not obey God, there should be an alternative system of government, with centralised leadership, offering the government and control that God seemed incapable of implementing.

Prayer is misplaced and misused when it becomes a substitute for studying and applying the revealed will of God as it is given to us in the Bible

What is evident in the pattern of government for Israel, however, is that there was no centralised authority. The judges were local, over groups of 10, or 50, or 100. Their name helps us to understand their function: they were *judges*. Now judges do not make legislation: they administer the laws already made. And Israel had no need of a legislative body for God Himself had given them all the laws they would ever need. It was up to the judges to *apply* the law to the situations of life and establish justice and righteousness in the land.

There was a very good reason they did not need a centralised government: they had such a government not at the human level, but at the divine level. By following the instructions from God, the Israelites were recognising that their political government was divine in its origin and divine in its day to day administration. They were, to use a word that is thrown around today with little understanding, a Theocracy. Now this word theocracy is made up of two Greek words: *Theos*, meaning God, and *kratos*, meaning rule or power. A theocracy, thus, is no more than the rule of God.

For many people the idea of theocracy is nothing new. Many denominations claim to be theocratic, ruled by God. This does not mean they are perfect in all that they do. But it does

recognise the *principle* that the church is not a law unto itself: it takes its instructions from God. Christian homes are also governed by the theocratic ideal. Many Christians try to apply biblical standards in the way they raise their children, in the manner in which they handle affairs in the home. This is to say that the Christian home is also a theocracy, so it is not a word we should be afraid to use. Israel was a theocracy in the same sense. It was ruled by God insofar as the people obeyed God's commandments.

Now the question we need to ask is this: was Israel a monarchy or a republic? It was, in one sense, ruled by the King of the whole universe. God had given them laws by which to live, was active in their daily life by providentially providing for their every need, and expected their total allegiance in return. Israel could thus claim to be a Monarchy. In this sense Australia, too, should be a Monarchy.

An even more important question arises, however. Should Israel have a king at the human level, one who would reflect the King of the universe? There is no explicit instruction that they should, although Deuteronomy 17:14-15 recognises the fact that they would eventually have a king at the human level. Did they need one? No. Did they want one? Inevitably, yes.

The King Rejected

Circumstances do not change much over the centuries. It is curious to see how similar the ancient people of Israel were to people today. By the time Samuel had become an old man the people in Israel had a problem. Samuel had made his sons judges over Israel. But they were not like their father: "they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3).

The people had a problem. Their judges were unjust. And what was their solution to this problem? Did they ask for a replacement of the unjust judges? Did they seek to have the injustices of the judges addressed among other good judges? Did they go directly to God with their complaint against the judges? The answer to all these questions: No! They asked for a king instead, "to judge us like all the nations" (v. 5). The remaining elders in Israel thus wanted a *non-biblical system of government as a means of correcting injustice*.

Now this point cannot be stressed too much. Here was a great opportunity for Samuel and the elders to reestablish justice in the land by replacing Samuel's sons with righteous judges. But the people did not want this: *they wanted a human king to save them from this particular problem.* They wanted a king who would intervene in the judgments of the unjust judges and overrule them.

This is why Samuel was displeased with the request. It is also why God declared that the people's call for a king was a rejection of Him as king. This was the people's way of declaring that they did not want God to rule over them. Note again that they had a legitimate complaint. They had a real problem to resolve, and they could have settled it *and kept God's reign over them.* This solution, however, was rejected. They wanted a human king.

Their request was quite radical. No one in Israel had this power, the power of the kings in the nations around them. The idea of distributed leadership prevented one judge sitting in authority over all other judges. There was true plurality of leadership. God alone sat at the top of the hierarchy, and His absolute rule was just and righteous. But His rule was administered through decentralised leadership at the human level.

If this ancient argument favouring a human monarch sounds familiar it ought to since it is the one used by many supporters of the monarchy today, as we will discuss later in this essay. Defending a continuation of the monarchy on the grounds that this is our history sounds impressive, but it is not a biblical argument. We should turn to the Bible, not history, to determine what kind of government we ought to have. While history might be a guide, it is not an infallible guide, and should be rejected in the light of biblical teaching.

A Christian Constitution?

There's an associated argument defending our constitution as if it is a Christian document. The argument implies that our present monarchical system should be maintained because it is a part of our apparent Christian Constitution. I say apparent because I do not think it is established that our Constitution is in fact Christian in content, even though it might be Christian in name. Thus, one publication argues that "the Christian nature of the Aus-

tralian Constitution is evident in the way it recognises the sovereignty of God. . . ." The trouble with this statement is that the Australian Constitution most certainly does not recognise the sovereignty of God. The closest it gets is the preamble, "humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God." Then it proceeds to enact laws and principles which have no foundation in Scripture at all. This is not recognising the sovereignty of God: this is *denying* the sovereignty of God.

At the time of the framing of the Australian Constitution, there was almost no recognition that the parliaments of Australia should only enact laws that have a foundation in God's revelation. Thus, for example, the Australian Constitution in its first paragraph, grants "legislative power" to the Federal Parliament. In the biblical pattern, only God has legislative power; human institutions have only *administrative* powers to administer God's righteous legislation. Neither has the Parliament had granted to it by God the power to make laws concerning trade and commerce (S. 51(1)), taxation (S.51(ii)), bounties (S.51(iii)), currency, coinage, and legal tender (S.51(xii)); and so the list goes on through most of the powers of the Parliament.

In short, the Australian Constitution pays lip service to the idea of Christianity, then sets about destroying any semblance of a Christian constitution by granting to the Federal Parliament powers it has no biblical right to have. While it is true that many of the laws of the land reflect a biblical origin, this foundation is being eroded, and has been eroded for over 300 years. The "secularization of the European mind" has seen to that.¹ Also, those laws that still maintain their similarity to their biblical roots are generally found at the state or local level, not at the Federal sphere. This, not surprisingly, is in keeping with our thesis that the Bible teaches a local and decentralised form of government.

If we have a Christian history, and we do because of our British origins, it is not to be found in the Australian Constitution. It will be found elsewhere, in the ideas and structures of our society that have the Bible as their origin. Nowhere, however, does the Bible give us an instruction, or an example, to build a centralised government to fulfil the tasks outlined in the Australian Constitution.

A monarchical system of government is often defended because the British monarch, at the coronation service, swears to uphold Biblical law. This, however, begs the question. Has God ordained that we should elect a single person, a figurehead, who is to ensure His laws are upheld in society? And if a monarch is to have this function, should he also have the power necessary to *enforce* biblical law? More importantly, if God's warning in I Samuel is valid, should the monarch today, who swears to uphold the law of God, abolish his office and position as an act of obedience to this law?

Another argument for the monarchy echoes the sentiments of the Israelite leaders. They wanted a monarch to protect them from unjust judges, as if God could not do this for them. The Israelites would settle for a system just like our present one, where the monarch has the power to veto bills in order to "protect" the people, not from unjust judges, but from unscrupulous politicians.

It is worth noting here that whenever people get themselves into difficulties they go looking for a political solution. For these Israelites, their problem was, so they claimed, that Samuel's sons were not judging them properly. They wanted a king, to be like the other nations. This is a curious response. They could no doubt have asked for Samuel's sons to be replaced by better judges, ones that could not be bribed. But they chose to ignore this option, and instead wanted to be like other people.

This tells us something else: that being one of God's people sets a person apart. It makes him different. His home and his business do not operate like those around about run by non-Christians. Just like the Israelites, however, many of God's people don't want to be seen to be different. Radicalism is not the way to win friends and influence people. It is better to conform to the surrounding culture.

This was the problem with the Israelites. They no longer wanted to be different. Even though they had firsthand knowledge of God's blessing in the establishment of their nation, they still wanted to be like the nations around them.

This amounted to rejecting God as their king. They turned against Him by demanding a king — a human king. In short, they wanted to abandon the idea

1. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1975).

of localised government, of rulers over 10s, 50s, and 100s, in favour of a centralised government headed by a king. They wanted a king with power, this is why God said that when they eventually complained He would ignore their pleas.

President or King?

It is possible to see from this that God never intended a monarchical system to be implemented among His people. A monarchy is recognition that the people reject God as king. This is the point of 1 Samuel chapter 8. If God could condemn the Israelites for having a human king, then He most surely is in a position to condemn His people today for wanting the same thing — and for the same reasons. A monarchical system of government, either in the home, the church, or in society, does not appear to be an available choice for the Christian.

However, just as we reject the idea of a human king, so must we reject the idea of a President. It is not the names that are used that should attract our attention. We need to ask what will be the functions of a king or a president? We should also ask what will be the functions of the parliament in either system? For if power is not decentralised in the manner in which the Bible indicates, then it is difficult for us to support either the monarchy or the republican idea as these are presently formulated. In terms of the Bible, neither of these political systems is the one God says we should have.

When Israel demanded a king, it was saying to God that it wanted a system of government where His rules no longer applied. Today, whether we have a monarchy or a republic the same issue is at stake: no one wants a system of government where the basic rules are decreed by God Almighty. Rather, people today, just like the ancient Israelites, want to turn their back on the Kingship of Jesus Christ and enthrone in His place a king, or a president, or a national parliament.

This is what is being offered to us in the guise of the monarchy-republic debate. When we are seeing increasing power being transferred to Canberra, when the people no longer have their judges over 10s, 50s, and 100s — that is, when they no longer have local government — then we can see that the people have rejected God as their

king and are demanding a king, just like the nations. They might call this ruler a president, but the position of power is the same even though the name might change.

Israel's ancient system was a republic without a president. There was no centralised bureaucracy collecting disproportionate taxes, handing out pensions, jobs-for-the-boys, telling people how to run their businesses, and confiscating people's property to

There is something even more terrible: the inability (or unwillingness) of the Christian community to provide specific biblical answers to the problems of life.

establish mining rights in the centralised government.

Most of all, we will be against the modern notion of a republic which attempts to centralise power in the National Capital. Along with this, the move to abolish the States is a step in the wrong direction, and can be resisted on biblical grounds. If anything is to be abolished — or at the very least have its powers severely reduced — it is the Federal Parliament.

Doing What's Right

If Christ is presently King and Ruler of the nations as the Bible portrays Him, then it is incumbent on the rulers of all nations to respect His kingship in their systems of government. Christian government is not an option available to the Australian government and others around the world: it is the kind of government that all rulers are morally bound to implement. They are duty bound, in the words of Symington, "to display the glorious excellency of the Prince of the kings of the earth, who possesses undisputed sovereignty over all." Symington continues,

This object, therefore, they are bound to keep distinctly before them, in the formation of their constitution; in the establishment of their various institutions; in the shaping of their policy, whether domestic or foreign; in the selection and appointment of their functionaries, whether supreme or subordinate; in their legislative enactments; and in all their separate acts of ad-

ministration. Not an establishment are they at liberty to set up; not a law are they entitled to pass; not a step are they free to take; not an alliance are they permitted to form, without having supreme regard to this high and glorious end. Hostility, or even indifference, to this, partakes of the very essence of rebellion against their sovereign Lord.²

What we have in our text is a clear method of telling exactly when the people have moved from the biblical system of government. Consider these:

1. He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants.

2. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.

3. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants.

God's response is interesting. "And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day."

Our taxes today are far higher than these indicated in the Bible that Israel would suffer for its rejection of God as King. Today, we pay well over 50% of our income in personal and other taxes. What makes us think that God will hear our pleas today any more than He promised to listen to those of ancient Israel? Truly, we get the government (and the taxes) we deserve.

The choice, thus, is not between a monarchy or a republic: the real choice is whether or not we want God to be our King. If we answer that question, all these other issues will fall into place. We will most probably have

2. William Symington, *Messiah the Prince* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, [1884] 1990), p. 232.

neither a president nor a king: we won't need one. So, if you think taxes are too high, if you don't like the idea of a huge public service living off the productive efforts of the rest of the people, there's only one solution to these things. We must put Christ on the throne of this nation. This will occur insofar as we, His people, establish our homes, our families, our churches, our businesses — and most of all, our political systems — in the way He commands it. Anything short of this is

High Treason to the Faith.

So, we must choose. Sitting on the fence is not an option. Besides, people who sit on fences are bound to get knocked off sooner or later. It is far better to make a conscious decision and choose which side of the fence we want to be on, rather than find ourselves pushed to one side when we preferred to be on the other.

Thus, the question before us is not whether we want a monarchy or a re-

public. While it may be convenient and pragmatic to support the present system, if this is more than a short term strategy while we get a proper biblical alternative organised, then we've sadly missed the mark.

The real issue is whether we will choose Christ to be our king, or whether we will remain like the nations around us. How do you propose to answer that question?