

Christian foundations of law

I enjoyed Augusto Zimmerman's South American input with his article on the Christian foundations of law in *Journal of Creation* 19(2). In it, he argues that civil government is a result of sin and that, 'The state was not envisaged in God's original plan for mankind, as it places some people in a position of authority over others.' While I certainly agree that the Bible makes clear that sinfulness requires the control of authority, I question this assertion.

Some sects argue that Jesus' words, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28) deny His divinity. To them subordination implies inequality. However, Jesus does not seem to have had that problem as together with this remark He affirms His equality with the Father (John 5:18; 10:29). Subordination and equality are not opposed.

Jesus applies Dan. 7:13, 14 to himself, both directly (Mk 14:62) and in His repeated application of the term 'Son of man' to himself. This term emphasises Jesus' humanity and, in the Daniel passage, it is 'one like a son of man' who will receive all dominion over all peoples, nations and languages. Certainly Jesus is God, but when He talks of His authority He frequently does so in relation to His condition as Son of man (Mk 2:10, 28; 13:26, 27, 34; 14:62). It is a man who will be served by men, just as it was a man whom God placed to rule in the Genesis creation. Jesus is the last Adam who receives from the Ancient of Days 'dominion and glory and kingdom'. It is hard then to see why authority of men amongst men should be seen so negatively.

Would Adam and Eve have had no authority over their children had they not sinned? I suspect very strongly not, as their parenthood would surely be modelled on God's good fatherhood. Likewise, is authority in marriage a



American 'fathers' signing the U.S. Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, 4 July, 1776. The document states as a 'self-evident truth' that all human beings are equally endowed by God with certain unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (Image courtesy library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.)

result of sin? Certainly Paul sees that sin has played a part in shaping the nature of that authority (1 Tim 2:14), but he also sees it as being modelled on Christ's relationship to the church, hardly a sinful one (Eph. 5:23). Rev. 21:24 even speaks of the presence of kings in the new creation.

Since sin certainly emphasises the need for authority and requires checks on its exercise, I think this does not change Augusto Zimmerman's argument very much, except perhaps in regard to the degree of respect due even to appallingly exercised authority, which sometimes must be opposed on some points. However, I understand that authority comes from God and that He is good.

Frances Cook
Santiago
CHILE

Augusto Zimmermann replies:

In reply to the letter of Frances Cook, which I appreciated to read, I think it is important to emphasize that my article described a situation of civil

authority, not family authority.

The power of civil authorities is certainly not envisaged in God's original plan. On the basis of the biblical worldview, the function of civil authorities is precisely to restrain the force of sin unleashed after the Fall.

But even after the Fall, Judges 21:25 reports that there was no monarch in Israel before the people chose Saul to be their king, but only judges under the direct authority of God to settle disputes among themselves. This passage is crucial for the biblical understanding of civil government, as it goes to reveal God's warning to the chosen people of what it would be like to have a human being, and not God, in the position of higher authority.

Lord Acton (prominent nineteenth-century English historian) used to cite this passage to argue that the power of civil authorities is not divinely inspired, although it must be always exercised under the rule of law, and, thereby, under God's higher laws.

Augusto Zimmermann
Melbourne, Victoria
AUSTRALIA