

1991

On the Sovereignty of Nations... and the Kingdom of God

Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "On the Sovereignty of Nations... and the Kingdom of God" (1991). *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies*. 321.

<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/321>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Christian Studies at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.



On the Sovereignty of Nations...

and the Kingdom of God

BY PAUL ANDERSON

NORMALLY, THE editor's essay comments upon some aspect of the magazine's central theme, but this issue is an exception. Given the crisis in the Persian Gulf, one cannot responsibly be silent about it. On the other hand, with virtually every branch of the media already commenting on the crisis around the clock, it's hard to say anything new... that's still worth reading.

Having considered such possibilities as an "interview with God" or "patriotism redefined," my thoughts were drawn more and more to one of the key, underlying causes of war: a false view of the "sovereignty of nations" in contrast to a genuine understanding of the Kingdom of God.

To demonstrate the falsity of the sovereignty of nations idea, consider what it would be like if our state governments operated the way national governments did. Suppose that in response to Oregon real estate being bought up by incoming Californians, the Oregon state legislature decided upon a terrorist campaign designed to keep the housing market more affordable for the locals. Or, imagine the Michigan legislature declaring war on Ohio because Ohioans were taking up more than their fair share of the auto industry's job market.

These scenarios sound absolutely absurd. And yet, if the frustrating groups were international, a national government might not equally be taken back by such considerations. At least one culprit is a false conception of the sovereignty of the national state.

To put it into further perspective, it has only been a little more than three centuries that national disputes have been settled peaceably. For instance, it wasn't until the 1660s that the British system of government (on which the American is largely based) allowed for a "loyal opposition" instead of a violent one. Before Cromwell, the only way to effect a change of government was to

What would it be like if our state governments operated the way national governments did?

kill the current leadership. Any opposition, taken to its extreme expression, would have ended in an attempt to kill the ruler. Thus opposition jailed, tortured, or executed... simply as a precautionary measure.

However, someone changed the system. Someone stood up and said things don't have to be this way. Having sought to influence Oliver Cromwell for many years, early Quakers brought a statement to King Charles II, claiming that they believed the Spirit of Christ would never lead them to take up violence against others. This, and other factors, eventually contributed to the emergence of the two-party system of government. In the meanwhile, intramural political violence has become obsolete.

I wonder what it would take for the same shift to occur extramurally and globally. Currently, states behave on the level of gangsters and ruffians, "robbing the bank" if the repayment of debts becomes too onerous, or following up on threats, as though the issuing of ultimatums justifies their being acted upon. Unfortunately, Christians have sometimes retarded the advance of peace, sometimes due to provincial loyalties, and sometimes due to the failure to be genuinely Christ-like. But Scriptures teach that the Kingdom of God is never identical to human empires, and this distinction is needed now in our post-Modern age, as never before. Implications are as follows:

1. *All people are beloved of God, not just one's own.* While we rejoice at the amazing success of American and allied

troops, we still abhor the killing done in our names. We detest the killing of innocent civilians, but we also grieve for the killing of military victims... and even victimizers. To consider one's enemy through the eyes of Christ rehumanizes the faces of God's beloved children, who happen to be "opponents" during a particular skirmish.

2. *Responsibility for one's own extends beyond the clan.* To be willing to die for a cause is often easier than to stand by passively, allowing others to suffer victimization. Living by principle is easier when it only affects us. However, leaders who would, themselves, object conscientiously to war, find themselves in a quandary when charged with the custody of others. They feel responsible to protect "their own," and they are. However, if one's "own" may be enlarged to embrace all members of the human family, not just one's own clan, new possibilities for peace might surface. The Samaritan is our neighbor.

3. *Nations have no real sovereignty; only the Kingdom of God is eternal.* Might does not make right, and capital offenses are not justified if done in the name of the state. There is a higher Law, an eternal Principle, whereby the deeds of this life will be judged. Institutions? They will fade away. Governments? They will be dissolved in the passing of time. But one kingdom will abide: that City of God, which has Love as its Law, Truth as its King, and Eternity as its Measure (Augustine).

The sovereignty of nations is an idolatrous notion, and it also bears the additional liability of being false. There is one God over all, whose power is coined in terms of truth, love, and peace. These are values desperately needed for a new world order. Over the centuries, Christians have made fierce opponents on the battlefield; but if we really took the teachings of Christ to heart, we may make even better peacemakers. **EF**