

From Bossuet. *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*

There are four characters or qualities essential to royal authority: First, royal authority is sacred; second, it is paternal; third, it is absolute; fourth, it is ruled by reason. . . .

Royal Authority Is Sacred

God established kings as his ministers and rules peoples by them.

We have already seen that all power comes from God. "The prince," St. Paul adds, "is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." [Rom. 13:4]

Thus princes act as ministers of God, and as his lieutenants on earth. It is by them that he exercises his rule. . . .

Thus we have seen that the royal throne is not the throne of a man, but the throne of God himself. . . .

The person of kings is sacred.

It thus appears that the person of kings is sacred and that to make an attempt on their lives is a sacrilege.

God has had them anointed by his prophets with a sacred unction as he has his pontiffs and his altars anointed.

But without the external application of this unction, they are sacred by their office, as being the representatives of the divine majesty, deputed by his providence to the execution of his designs. . . .

The title of Christ is given to kings; and they are everywhere called christs, or the anointed of the lord.

Royal Authority Is Paternal and Its Proper Character Is Goodness

After what has been said, this truth has no need of proof.

We have seen that kings take the place of God, who is the true father of the human species. We have also seen that the first idea of power which exists among men is that of the paternal power; and that kings are modeled on fathers.

Everybody is also in accord, that the obedience which is owed to the public power can be found in the ten commandments only in the precept which obliges him to honor his parents.

Thus it follows from this that the name of king is a name for father and that goodness is the most natural character of kings. . . .

It is a royal right to provide for the needs of the people. He who undertakes it at the expense of the prince undertakes royalty: this is why it has been established. The obligation to care for the people is the foundation of all the rights that sovereigns have over their subjects.

Royal Authority Is Absolute

Without this absolute authority, he cannot do good nor can he repress evil: it is necessary that his power be such that no one can hope to escape him; and finally the only defense of individuals against the public power ought to be their innocence. . . .

Princes, then, must be obeyed in the same way as justice itself; otherwise there can be no order and no finality in men's affairs.

They are gods, and participate in some sense in the divine independence. "I have said, You are gods, and you are all children of the Most High." [Ps. 81:6.]

There is no one save God alone who may judge their decisions and their lives. . . . The prince may himself redress his own errors when he sees that he has committed a wrong; but against his authority there can exist no remedy save in his authority itself.

There Can Be No Coercive Power Opposing the Prince

A "coercive power" is a power to compel and execute that which is legitimately commanded. Legitimate command belongs to the prince alone; to him alone, therefore, belongs the "coercive power."

It is for this reason that St. Paul gives the sword to him only. "If you do not act rightly, be afraid; for it is not for nothing that he has the sword." [Rom. 13:4.] . . .

Thus it is that for the good of the state, all its force has been united in a single person. Let force exist elsewhere, and you divide the state and destroy the public peace; you set up two masters, contrary to this maxim of the Gospel: "No man can serve two masters." [Matt. 6:24.]

The prince is by his office the father of his people; he is placed by his grandeur above all petty interests; even more: all his grandeur and his natural interests are that the people shall be conserved, for once the people fail him he is no longer prince. There is thus nothing better than to give all the power of the state to him who has the greatest interest in the conservation and greatness of the state itself.