

*Velichko A.M.,
Doctor of Laws*

King and the Old Testament Church

"Whoever would say, undoubtedly, that due to natural conditions of human life kings are the highest representatives of the nation, its color, they embody spiritual strength of people"

Y.A. Bogorodskiy "Jewish kings"

I.

What should be the nature of the relationship of Church and State, whether they should be co-workers in the development of human or antagonists? How many spears were broken around this and other similar questions in theoretical debates! However, despite the variety of options, we are not afraid to say that, as a rule, all distinguishing theoretical versions are caused by only one circumstance - *personal understanding* of the author, what the state and the Church are. Today, the state is often understood as an equal to the machinery of government, the same as the Church with hierarchy of it. In fact, the Church is not only bishops, and all the believers in Christ. And the state is a society united by a single authority, and living under one law, not only the bureaucracy. And it is impossible to separate the Church from the State, if its members are simultaneously citizens of this political union. Earlier when society lived according to the laws of Christ, it was taken for granted. Not coincidentally, St. Gregory Palamas, who lived in the XIVth century, portrayed the civil war in Byzantium not as a political event, but as a *catastrophe of the Church*.

Indeed, earlier, when the government was recognized as the institution, created by God, the state considered itself obliged to carry out those tasks which were for the Church. At least, it intended to facilitate their implementation. This type of state is *a theocracy*, and it was the most common, even it is possible to state that it was the only one from the ancient years until the end of the XVIIIth century. The exact time when theocracy appeared is known for sure- Old Testament Israel of Moses' period. No other peoples, except the Jews, were elected by God as the custodian of faith. And no one of the best representatives of this ethnic group set out to make spiritual laws equal to the social ones.

I should say that earlier theocracy was respected so high that they often claimed that it was appearance of the royal power in Israel that meant absorption of spiritual essence of the world one. In fact, this viewpoint looks unreasonable and it does not correlate with the historical facts. After all, the main purpose of the establishment of the "kingdom of Jehovah" was to preserve monotheism, the doctrine of the worship to the single true God opposing to polytheism of all other peoples. Israel got *everything* to live in unity with God. So, obviously, in the nature of the first theocracy all the necessary religious, political, legal and social

institutions were initially included. And the royal power could perform as a destroyer of the theocratic basis only if it contradicted to its main purpose. As it often happens, those mistakes that were made, while the Jews were appointing the first king of Israel, as a consequence of their sin, it was represented as a norm. Of course, it is unacceptable from a methodological point of view.

In this regard, we have a unique opportunity not only to decline this thesis (or to affirm it, if someone is not content with the provided arguments), but also to explore the idea of royal power, how it was formed in Israel in those ancient times. This topic is extremely interesting, because the following Christian Empires - Byzantium and the Western one, Russia created their own royal authority basing on the Old Testament Israel model. Of course, multiplying ancient gifts, but they certainly were based on them.

II.

As you know, the royal power appeared in Israel not immediately. It was preceded by the reign of the great charismatic Moses and Joshua, and then the judges of Israel. This period of lack of a single, centralized and constant power is certainly unprecedented example in the history of human society. It is hardly possible to name any other country existing in a similar manner and controlled by individuals with undetermined status. But this is a sign that as earlier, so at that moment Israel was a matter of considerable concern of God. "When the Lord chose judges for them, the LORD himself was with the judge, and he saved them from their enemies: because the Lord felt pity to them" (Judges 2:18). Similarly, none of the peoples knew prophets (at least, in such quantity), which the history of Israel is so rich in.

The specifics of this transition period is very interesting, when the Jews called themselves united people believing in God, *Israel*, but did not realize its political and ethnic integrity. As a consequence, their religious consciousness always experienced deep crises. The Jews systematically violated their promises to God not to worship idols, for what they were immediately attacked by the enemies. In order to overcome them, the Lord immediately sent judges to the Israelites. Judges were given to the Jews from different tribes and they were never kings of Israel with all range of powers. Political significance of the judges was limited with the years of their lives. Only during certain periods *some* tribes and groups of the Jews recognized their power.

Many cases are known, when the compatriots made them pay for successful actions against militant neighbors. Moreover, in the Scripture there is a story how the army under the command of the judge, pursuing the enemy, did not receive any help from their relatives (Sud.8, 5, 6). They gave no food for those who were in need, fearing in case of failure that enemies could revenge them. In general, the judges reminded the following dictators of Rome - people with unlimited jurisdiction. But their powers had even more temporary features than the Roman rulers. And during the days of worries if judges coped with the help of God, but in general, the situation in Israel was unmanageable.

Israel of those years represented a sad spectacle of *decomposing ethnic group*, that had lost his own religious exclusivity, and it did not gain its sense of national unity. It was a state close to chaos and anarchy. The whole cities and tribes worshiped Baal and the tribe of Dan called Levite, and with him they organized a demonstrated worshipping to idols (Sud.18, 1-31). *Moral savagery*, as it was wisely noticed, became the norm of life. Ignoring of the Law of Moses and all the rights of other people became widely spread. Countless concubines were even in the house of a highly spiritual person and kidnapping girls and other men's wives became commonplace. Levitical priests openly changed their own duties and violated the law. Political state of Israel left much to be desired, and hostility between different tribes was not a great surprise. As a result, Israel was usually under the yoke of any of the warring neighbors.

And the cry of an inspired writer: "In those days there was no king in Israel," repeated several times, was completed with an awful statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did what seemed right to him" (Sud.17, 6, 18 1, 19.1, 21.25). This indicates not only that the Israelis constantly fall into temptation and renounced from the God. But it also is a clear proof that they did not have a single force that made the nation united, political power, without which the Old Testament Church never left the boundaries of the formless community of many different religious groups. In other words, it did not become the Church in the literal sense of the word. Without any doubts, such outstanding people, as Moses and Joshua made Israel united both spiritually and politically. But with their death national, political and religious unity of the Jewish people almost disappeared. At that moment of time about which we are talking, Israeli state of the period of judges was a mechanical combination of several republics united with the single faith and historical traditions.

At this moment, having been persuaded on the example of neighboring nations in the proper manner of autocratic reign, the Israelites wanted to have a king. It was then, as an inspired writer wrote: "And all the Israelites, as one man, and all the tribes of Israel became united. "We can say that at this moment Israel became *politically* mature enough to be aware of its national unity, being no longer satisfied with the life of tribes and clans and temporary authority. And it started to become the Church, "council of the people of God" (Sud.20. 2, 11). Although it was still in a religious relativism, the consequences of which the following events, described below, became.

III.

Whatever they said, but the imperial power by itself did not become betrayal of Israel to God, as they sometimes believe. It is necessary to recall that it was the Lord's promise to Abraham and Jacob 's descendants, (Gen.17, 6, 35,11). In his turn, Jacob sent the memory of this promise of God to Judas (Byt.49, 10). Balaam foretold about the future king of Israel as well (Chisl.24, 7). In the law of Moses it is also written *when and how* God will give a king to Israel: "When you come to the land which the Lord, your God, gives to you, and say," I will set a king over

me, like all the nations that are around me, "then set the king over you, which the Lord will choose "(Vtor.17, 14).

This last verse is the most important! The king of Israel had *to be set by* the Lord. What happened in reality? Exactly what God foresaw: the Jews decided to set a king over them themselves, and that king was a copy of the rulers of the neighboring peoples. There is only one important thing: the neighbors of the Jews were *pagan*. To what will it lead, we shall see soon. Thus, the sin of Israel was in its own will.

They waited not for the king sent to them by God, but they *chose him*. It is amazing! The Jews, knowing that the Lord had chosen them, did not want to be the children of God, "a kingdom of priests", and wished to live "as everybody", i.e. as pagan neighbors. They offered the royal power to anyone, but they did not ask for the king from God. It is easy to check that for the time of searching they never rose their eyes to the heaven, but they roamed round the earth.

Even the winner of the Midianites, the judge Gideon received this proposal, but he wisely refused, knowing that it was necessary to ask God about it (Judges 8.22). The Jews did not follow him, and soon the attempt to usurp the kingdom was made by Abimelech, who started with the fact that he killed all his brothers about 70 people (Judges 9,5). And two tribes recognized him in this quality.

Finally, a similar proposal was made by all the elders of Israel to the judge Samuel, "and Samuel did not like it," (1 Sam. 8.6). Of course, the reasons are understandable. That's why, in response to the wishes of the Jews, God allowed him to appoint Saul as a king, the judge told his compatriots: "Here is the king whom you have chosen, as you required" (1 Sam. 12,13). Frankly showing that in this case not God's will but a human desire was on the basis of imperial power. It is understandable why Lord told Samuel so bitterly, "They rejected not you, but me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Tsar.8, 7). And Samuel gave His words to the Jews: "You rejected your God, who had saved you from all your troubles and your sorrows" (1 Tsar.10, 19).

So what king did the Jews choose, whom did they want? The "democratic" king, if it is possible to say like this, was copied from the *neighbors, he was radically* different from the king, who had been prepared for them by the Lord. A Pagan king, who did not know God, could only be what he really was: "He will take your sons, and appoint them to his chariots", "He will take your daughters to cook and bake bread," "He will take your fields, and your vineyards, and take your olive-yards, and give them to his servants, " He will take your servants and your maidservants and your asses, and he will use them in his needs. " "And you will rebel against your king whom you have chosen; and the LORD will not answer you "(1 Tsar.8 ,10-18).

This is absolutely inevitable, as power which does not know God, becomes *self-sufficient* and, only because of this, it is godless. So is the law which has lost its Divine basis, it becomes *immoral*, but it remains the law only because of its form. The King of Israel had to become the focus of a theocratic beginning, that foundation on which the Old Testament Church would be built. Did Saul correspond to this quality?

In his own way Saul was religious, "just as unemotional and severe people could be whose piety is not alive, internal necessity of the soul, but it is rather a habit, as something learned by heart and taken from the outer world." Of course, he constructed an altar to God (1 Sam. 14.35), but it was a matter of his *personal conscience* and Saul did not aim to provide a religious revival of the Jews. And although he made the persecution of witches and sorcerers, but he himself subsequently fell into the temptation to use them for his own needs.

However, the Jews did not want anything else from him. Nowhere in the Scripture it is written that they obliged Saul to become a servant of God. Even his appointing as a king by Samuel according to the direction of God happened *secretly* from the people (1 Sam. 10, 1). No, he was a secular ruler, as we would say today, with a strong sense of *personal religiosity*. And Saul himself was not an ideal type. The Lord told Samuel many times about him, "I regret that I have appointed Saul as a king: as he turned back to me, and he did not perform my commandments" (1 Tsar.15, 11).

Of course, what morals could the king have, who deviated from God? To answer this question it is enough to imagine on what historical background these events took place. Here, for example, is an episode of the siege of the city of Jabes of Halaad by the Ammonites, when those who are willing not to kill the besieged Jews, if they allow to gouge out the right eye to each of them, as a mark of dishonor of Israel (1 Tsar.11, 3). Here is a vengeance to the king Adoni-Bezek who was captured by Judas: his thumbs were cut off on his feet and his hands, and he collected scraps under the tables. However, he did the same with 70 captive kings during his reign (Sud.1, 6, 7).

Meanwhile, it is obvious that the appointment of the king to Israel, as a landmark event, making a precedent for all future times and peoples, needed in a special person. The first king had to combine all the best qualities of the ruler, and the candidate for this role had already been chosen by God. As the Virgin Mary became Goodness, but not any other girl, so the king of Israel was to be a holy and pious David, but not Abimelech or Saul. Even the choice of the tribe testified for this: the tribe of Benjamin, which Saul belonged to, was the smallest in Israel. Moreover, shortly before it, this tribe was subjected to a terrible defeat by the other Jewish tribes for evading from the law. And Judah's one, which David belonged to, was the most numerous, the strongest and steady in faith.

Even personal qualities of David were absolutely different from Saul. There was no king in the history, whose name was universally known and pronounced with such respect and reverence as the name of King David. Nothing to say about the Jews, all Christian nations connect his name with Christ and pray to the Lord using the words from David's songs. Just imagine how high the personality of David was by itself.

An approach to the powers of the king differed significantly, when Saul and David were appointed. In the first case, Samuel declared Israel "*law of the kingdom*," given above (1 Tsar.10 25), which were copied from the pagan neighbors. In contrast, in the Book of the Second Law, i.e. in the Law given by God, where an *ideal of the king* of Israel was revealed, *his duties were*

described. These were exactly the duty, and it is very important! Serving of the king was to be serving to God and Israel. And Saul and his contemporaries regarded the king as an unlimited dominion over himself.

Who was a true king of Israel supposed to be and what did he have to do? Israel needed not a military leader, a judge or a legislator. The Law of Moses, given directly by God, the Jews already had. Judges and heads of the tribes could cope with the attacks of enemies. No, the Israelites needed a *king-priest*, the head of the Old Testament Church. This was clearly predicted about in the prophecy of Anna, mother of Samuel, and Samuel himself (Tsar.11 1, 10, 2, 35). Therefore, Lord told the Jews: "From your brothers put a king over them; you may not put a foreign king over you, who was not from your co-brothers "(Vtor.17, 15). For what? Obviously, natural Israeli man brought up in the spirit of the law of Moses.

When the king sits on the throne, the Lord continues, "he must rewrite a copy of this law into the book, which the priests- Levites have: and it will be with him, and he will read it all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord, our God, and to keep all the words of this law, the heart to not be lifted up, and that he turned not aside from the commandment to the right nor to the left "(Deuteronomy 17,18-20). That is the most important of his servicing.

Of course, having all the power, having the right to all what Samuel warned the Jews, he, however, as a servant of God, could not afford to use them. All his subjects by the unwritten law of the king, considered to be slaves. But according to the law, they were his *brothers*. Not coincidentally, one of the characteristics of Israel as a state was equal ownership of all Jews of the land. In the surrounding peoples of Israel ownership of land belonged only to the top of society, the political elite. Therefore, wealth and poverty were close neighbors. On the contrary, Israel's Law stated that *every* Jew, as a member of the contract with Jehovah had its land equal with other one, providing his or her welfare. In other words, everybody had equal land. Another distinctive feature was the equality of all the Jews before the law.

It was such a drastic revolution in consciousness, a precedent had no more analogues among neighboring peoples! Long before the theories of equality and "human rights", social state and the "right to a decent human existence" (and besides them, we should add), the rights of every Jew were protected by the law as a person, equal with all other Israelis before God.

It is clear, because the choice of Saul by the Israelis is the same carefree, evasion of Divine Providence, as well as replacement of the Lord by idols, the kingdom of heaven by the kingdom of the earth, and faith with hypocrisy. This aspect is very evident in the 12th chapter of the first book of Kings, where Samuel compares the sin when the Israelis elected a king with their constant deviation from the true God. He says that the imperial power is an *institution pleasing to God* , if only and this is extremely important - the king of the Jews himself will walk after the Lord and listen to Him (1 Sam. 12,14, 15). Obviously, because only in this case, the government and the authorities can fulfill their destiny in God's eyes. After all, their goal is an actual one - to save fallen people.

Halas, Israel was not looking for the king-priest. Having left the God, they gave themselves to Baal, and wished to have not a benevolent ruler, but the king of pagan people. Not surprisingly, that very soon there was an open conflict between Saul and Samuel, symbolizing the king who had forgotten about his duty to serve Him (1 Sam. 13, 8-14). In other words, it was a rejection from the theocratic foundations of royal power.

Only later, after the *saint kings* David, Solomon, Josiah the image of the king of Israel became closer to its ideal. "People's desire was brought into agreement with the theocracy: the king was given to the people, endowed with all the usual legal rights - in short, the one whom the people wanted to have. But to be a truly theocratic king, he was not supposed to exercise the rights in practice, he did not have to govern the people in a usual sense, as to show them an example of obedience to God and His Law. So, over the king there was the Law, making this institution in the best agreement with the theocracy. The king was the executor of the will, but not the public one, but the will of God, the law for the people meant the will of the king, but this will was controlled by religion. The king who did not correspond to his vocation was overthrown, but again, not by the people and by God via the people. "

This period of time remained in the memory of Israelis as a ideal political and religious welfare. No wonder that soon the Jews began to cherish the king as the foundation of the life, "the lamp of the life" (2 Sam. 21.17), without whom the whole state would come in disorder. He was considered to be the governor of Jehovah, a priest, a *Divine body that could impact* on the Jewish people.

Certainly, in the eyes of the Old Testament Church royal status had a sacred character. It was not occasionally considered in Israel that the king offered himself as a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable by God. But he sacrificed in a spiritual way. But the Levites only reproduced the spiritual sacrifice of the king in their symbolic actions, bringing not a spiritual sacrifice, but a sacrifice of flesh of a lower value.

IV.

As you can see, the formation of a united state from a group of Jewish tribes headed by the king was not the end of the theocratic century but *the emergence of Israel* as a religious empire, which had not only to keep the faith in one God, but also to distribute it among a great number of people. The fact that King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, where he resided himself, united the royal status with the priest one in the minds of the Israelites. In turn, King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem which became a visible symbol of religious and national unity of Israel. The king as a head of the state and a priest, united Jews in his turn. But he was obliged to follow the laws, which formed his status and raised it to God. It was the first, yet the Old Testament, but brilliant in its conception "*symphony*" of the kingdom and the priesthood, the Church and the State.

Not coincidentally, the idea of royal power, being developed in Israel, was extremely popular among the descendants. Creating the Church of Christ did not mean rejection from the Old Testament theocratic principles. Brilliant Byzantium accepted the ideal Israel and developed it. It is from the Old Testament Israel the idea of a king-priest, a king of the mission, chosen by God, a defender and a protector of the Church came to Byzantium. As one researcher remarked, "The Old Testament in Byzantium was fundamental, almost constitutional significance, it serves the same norm in the political sphere, as the New Testament - in the sphere of morality. The history of the Jewish people, carefully purified from all historical and Jewish in course of the Christian reading, considered as an outline of what would be, or at least what should be in the history of the Empire, as a way to understand under what conditions and in accordance with what the biblical prototype ruler acquired or lost legitimacy, the son inherited the power after his father, and the king would be able to call himself a priest. "

Without political clearance, without the support of the authorities neither Old Testament Israel nor the Catholic Church of the time the Christian emperors could be created. Of course, this "symphony" of the kingdom and the priesthood was possible only under one condition - the theocratic character of the power of the king and the theocratic minds of the state population. And violation of at least one of its members will inevitably lead to a crisis of this amazing structure. If a theocratic state is destroyed - the church was persecuted. In turn, the crisis in the Church almost automatically breaks the state, it *corrupts* it.

As it is known, the destruction of religious unity was essentially the main reason for the division of the Jewish people into two kingdoms - Israel and Judah. Religious disorder resulted in lowering of the national consciousness, and soon the Southern Kingdom of Israel en masse stopped to realize its national unity with the Jews of the northern kingdom. Relations between them were not just neutral but hostile. If sometimes these two states concluded an alliance, it was only for purely military or political reasons. And inside the kingdom of Israel expansion of national consciousness as a result of infidelity to God and the faith of their fathers took place. Together with the pagan cults and the pagan understanding penetrated here, which catastrophically quickly ruined a national portrait. And no wonder, that the kingdom of Israel, which included over 2/3 of the Jews within its borders, fell much earlier than Judah, where commitment to Jehovah was still present, and where the temple of Jerusalem took place, it fell almost irretrievably.