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The Anti-Monarchic Tradition in the Old Testament and the Question of Diakonia*

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The institution of kingship is very prominent among the leadership patterns of the Old Testament. The debate, however, starts when we consider the question of who is, and should be the true king of Israel ? The man anointed by Yahweh, or Yahweh Himself? This debate has found expression and reflexion in the so called " Anti-Monarchic Traditions " of the Old Testament. The present paper seeks to introduce these traditions and deals with their dating and interpretation.

Introduction : The Beginnings of the Monarchy :

The very fact that the Old Testament preserves two contrasting traditions about the beginnings of the monarchy is sufficient to indicate that the monarchy was not originally a part of the Israelites' system of social government. They had to adopt it at a given moment in history. In the face of a growing political crisis in terms of the continuing Philistine threat,[1] as well as the continuous degeneration of tribal federation,[2] the adoption of a monarchial system of government was inevitable for the Israelites. However, such adoption could not go unnoticed and uncriticized.

The so called pro-monarchic traditions are reflected in I Samuel 9 ; 10 : 1-17 ; 11 and the Royal Psalms. They depict the king as the chosen, adopted, anointed and

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[1] A. Alt, ' The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine ', *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1966, pp. 173-8.

[2] Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, London : SPCK, 1968/72, p. 62. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel : Its Life and Institutions*, London : Darton Longman & Todd, 1961, pp. 12-13. Barnabas Lindars, ' Israelite Tribes in Judges ', *Supplement to Vetus Testamentum*, XXX Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1979, pp. 95-112 and A. Alt, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

appointed one of Yahweh. But there are anti-monarchic traditions too, which are reflected in Judges 8-9, I Samuel 8 ; 12, 13 and 15 and in the general Prophetic attitude towards the kings of Israel and Judah. These traditions depict the king as someone working against God : The present study is concerned only with these anti-monarchic traditions.

I. The Anti-Monarchic Traditions :

The first attempt to introduce a monarchial system of government was made in the days of Gideon. After his glorious victory over the Midianite nomads, " the men of Israel " requested Gideon to rule over them and that his generation should succeed him in the hereditary manner. But Gideon refused, saying the LORD would rule over them, (Judges 8 : 13-23). After Gideon's death Abimelech, one of his seventy sons, himself born of a Canaanite woman declared himself as king in Shechem. He brutally massacred his seventy brothers save the youngest, Jotham, who somehow escaped. Jotham told a fable of trees in which he described the king and kingship as being as useless as a bramble tree. Abimelech fell prey to an internal conspiracy of Shechemites and met a shameful death at the hands of a woman (Judges 9).

With the shameful death of the shameless first king Abimelech, the Israelites forgot about the monarchy for some-time. But about a hundred years later, when the Philistine threat was growing and the sons of the last judge, Samuel, showed no promise of giving adequate military leadership, the " elders " of Israel approached Samuel with the request to appoint for them a king. This demand was found highly objectionable both by Yahweh and Samuel. The major objections were : (1) that in demanding a king the Israelites had rejected Yahweh's kingship over them, and (2) the king would be a tyrant and exploiter in the manner of the Canaanite kings. Thus in demanding a king the Israelites were succumbing to a syncretism with the Canaanite system of government (I Sam. 8). But the Israelites were adamant in their demand. So Samuel gathered them all together at Mizpah and Saul was selected by lot to be the first king of Israel. (I Sam. 10 : 17-27). Thus political authority was transferred from Samuel to Saul and the former in his coronation address clearly stated that if the Israelites still acted wickedly Yahweh would sweep away both them as well as their king (I Sam. 12).

At the beginning of his reign, Saul had two big rows with Samuel. First, he kindled Samuel's wrath by not waiting for him to offer sacrifices. Samuel predicted that Saul's kingdom would be given to someone else (I Sam. 13). Second, when

Saul failed to comply with Samuel's instructions concerning the total destruction (*herem*) of the Amalekites, Samuel predicted that Saul as king had already been rejected by Yahweh and his kingdom would be divided (I Sam. 15). After this Samuel secretly annointed David as king (I Sam. 16). Even after Samuel's death when Saul, in great distress, contacted his spirit through a medium, the spirit of Samuel passed the dreadful decree of Saul's death. Saul did die in war against the Philistines (I Sam. 28-30).

II. The Dating of the Anti-Monarchic Traditions :

Whether these traditions reflect the contemporary situation or a later experience of disillusionment with the monarchy is a greatly debated issue. There are three main views popular among scholars ;

1. *The Anti-Monarchic Traditions belong to the Deuteronomistic Redactor(s)* : Wellhausen was the first to separate the kingship traditions in Judges-Samuel into the older pro-monarchic and the later anti-monarchic traditions.[3] Scholars like Smith, Driver, Pfeiffer and Caird accept a later date for the anti-monarchic traditions.[4] Among the scholars who attribute the anti-monarchic traditions to the Deuteronomistic redactor(s) are Noth and Clements.

The two main arguments of these scholars are : (1) the polemics against kingship which are reflected in Deut. 17 : 14-20 and which are comparable to I Samuel 8 : 1-18 ; and[5] (2) Samuel's denunciation of kingship on the basis of the " kings'ways " (I Sam. 8 : 11-18) reflect not the reign of Saul but that of Solomon, yet since the Deuteronomistic redactors were sympathetic with the Davidic rule they softened up the picture of Solomon's reign by attributing its evils to Saul's reign.[6] Hence the anti-monarchic traditions reflect the Deuteronomistic redaction of Israel's historical traditions.

The first of the above arguments may be objected to on the grounds that Deuteronomy 17 : 14-20 can with confidence be counted as anti-monarchic. North has observed that Deuteronomy

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[3] Maxwell Miller, ' Saul's Rise to Power : Some Observations concerning I Sam. 9 : 1-10 ; 16 ; 10 : 26-11 : 15 ; and 13 : 2-14 : 46 ', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXVI, 1974, p. 157.

[4] Bruce C. Birch, ' The Choosing of Saul at Mizpah ', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXXVII, 1975, pp. 447-498.

[5] D. N. Freedman, ' The Deuteronomic History ', *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* Supplementary Volume, 1975, p. 227.

[6] R. E. Clements, 'The Deuteronomistic Interpretation of the Founding of the Monarchy in I Sam VIII ', *Vetus Testamentum*, XXIV, 1974, p. 409.

17 : 14-20 misses the " severity of tone " found in I Sam. 8. " Permission to appoint a king is conditional indeed, but it is given without grudging." The king had to be from among the Israelites and was not supposed to conform to the ways of the Canaanite and Egyptian kings.[7] Whitley also has argued that Deuteronomy does not in principle condemn kingship but treats it from a retributive philosophical point of view.[8] The second argument may be criticized on the grounds that although the " kings' ways " described in I Sam. 8 : 11-17 do not reflect Saul's reign, they do reflect the ways of the contemporary Canaanite kings.[9] Secondly, Clements' argument that the claim that Deuteronomy is pro-Davidic has been contradicted on the grounds that it is generally regarded as a Northern tradition.[10] Thus the anti-monarchic traditions cannot be attributed to the Deuteronomistic redactor(s).

2. *The Anti-Monarchic Traditions Belong to the Prophets* : Among the scholars who believe that these traditions reflect elements older than Deuteronomy, the names of Lods, Whitley, McCarthy, Hertzberg and North may be mentioned. These scholars find parallels to these traditions in the Northern (Israelite) prophets Amos ' and Hosea's criticisms of kingship.

Amos and Hosea prophesied doom against Israel, the Northern kingdom.[11] Hosea's indictment of kingship and of the Israelite king that they were not of Yahweh, and Yahweh would exterminate them, forms a parallel with Samuel's denunciation of monarchy in I Sam. 8.

The principal difficulty with this theory is that it is only concerned with the prophetic (especially eighth century B.C) era and does not take into account the historical situation contemporary to the origin of the monarchy. That there was a favourable attitude towards the monarchy before the eighth century B.C. cannot be historically proved. Secondly, these Prophets condemn the Northern kings, whereas Saul belonged to the pre-Schism era.

    [7] C. R. North, ' The Old Testament Estimate of the Monarchy ', *The Journal of Semitic Language and Literature*, XLVIII, 1931, pp. 11-12.

    [8] C. F. Whitley, ' The Sources of the Gideon Stories ', *Vetus Testamentum* VII, 1957, pp. 161-162.

    [9] I. Mendelsohn, ' Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of the Akkadian Documents from Ugarit ', *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*, No. 143, 1956, pp. 17-22.

    [10] D. N. Freedman, *loc. cit.*, n. 5 *supra*.

    [11] Amos 7 : 9 ; Hos. 3 : 4 ; 8 : 4 ; 10 : 9 ; 11 : 13 ; A. Lods, *Israel from its Beginning to the Middle of the Eighth Century*, London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1932, p. 335. C. R. North, *op. cit.* n. 7 *supra*, p. 4. Whitley, *op. cit.* n. 8 *supra*, pp. 161-162. Denis J. McCarthy, ' The Inauguration of Monarchy in Israel : A Form critical Study of I Samuel 8-12 ', *Interpretation*, XXVII, 1973, pp. 405-406.

It seems reasonable to assume that ever since the time of Saul, kings had been criticised by prophets, historians or individuals.

· 3. *The Anti-Monarchic Traditions Belong to the Time of Saul* : The present study adopts this point of view. It seems more probable that those anti-monarchic traditions reflect the contemporary period of the last Judges and of Samuel (which was also what the final redactors wanted their readers to believe !). Among the scholars who acknowledge this point of view are Anderson, Mauchline, Mendelsohn, Kaufman and Bright.

B. W. Anderson called the anti-monarchic traditions "the Samuel Source". He wrote :

> The Samuel Source is not just a reflection of the later unhappy experience of the monarchy, but represents the early criticism made by representatives of the tribal confederacy.[12]

It is interesting to note that even North, who in 1931 had suggested that the anti-monarchic traditions reflected the eighth century Prophetic critique of the monarchy,[13] a year later took the position that although these traditions belong to the later account of the origin of the monarchy, there is little doubt that they fairly represent the sentiments of Saul's contemporaries.[14] Mauchline, in his commentary on I and II Samuel, argues that there is no need to assign I Samuel 8 : 11-17 to Israel's later experience of monarchy. Even in the time of Samuel the information regarding the "kings' ways" was known from the example set by the Canaanite feudal kings.[15]

Thus there is no real problem in regarding the anti-monarchic traditions as reflecting opposition contemporary to the introduction of monarchy.

III. The Interpretation of the Anti-Monarchic Traditions

Having suggested a contemporary origin for the anti-monarchic traditions, the main question arises : Why was the introduction of a monarchial system of government opposed from the very

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[12] B. W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1956/67, pp. 124-125.

[13] North, *loc. cit.*, n. 7 *supra.*

[14] C. R. North, 'The Religious Aspects of Hebrew Kingship, *Zeitschrift für die altestamentliche Wissenschaft* 50, 1932, p. 29.

[15] John Mauchline, 1 *and* 2 *Samuel*, New Century Bible, London: Oliphants, 1971, pp. 91-92.

Cf. I. Mendelsohn, *op. cit.*, Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel from its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, London : Allen & Unwin, 1962, p. 234, John Bright, *A History of Israel*, London : SCM, 1960/72, p. 183.

beginning? Can this opposition be understood in terms of an agro-nomadic tension? The Old Testament contains at least three interpretations of the opposition to the monarchy.

1. *God's Rule Rejected in Favour of Man's Rule* : This interpretation is reflected in Gideon's refusal to accept the king's office (Judges 8 : 23) and Samuel's opposition to the Elders' demand for the appointment of a king (I Sam· 8 : 7-8). In both these instances the peoples' demand for a king was interpreted as their rejection of Yahweh as their king. Hence the opposition to the demand.

A question arises here : In what manner is the concept of Yahweh's kingship to be interpreted? The problem is intensified in the light of the fact that the idea of God's kingship is not peculiarly Israelite. It rather reflects the experience of an agrarian community in the realm of nature with its ever-recurring cycles of food and drought, the annual death of vegetation and the rule of chaos, and finally the ever-recurring annual victory of God's order over the chaos of waters and the resumption of the vegetation cycle. This idea is reflected in Canaanite and Mesopotamian creation myths.[16] On the other hand the idea of human kingship also belongs to a sedentary civilization and not originally to wandering nomads.

This would mean that the demand for a king (i.e. syncretism with the Canaanite political system) was opposed in favour of God's kingship (another Canaanite agrarian concept). Thus the so called "theocratic" interpretation of the idea of God's kingship does not help us to understand these passages.

This leads to the second interpretation : the idea of God's kingship means God's rule through His chosen people in the actual history of mankind. This is more characteristic of Israelite religious thought in the pre-monarchic era than the theocratic idea. It is significant to note that on both occasions when the demand was made for a king to Gideon and Samuel (Judges 8 : 22 ; I Sam. 8 : 20), the demand was pressed in a military context. A king was needed to fight Israel's battles. This reflects a very loose political organisation on the part of the Israelites—an organisation like that of nomadic tribal units—in need of solid monarchial organisation to match the Canaanites and other enemies in war. The demand for a human king was rejected in favour of Yahweh's continuing action in tribal wars.

Thus Gideon politely rejected the people's offer that he should " rule " over them in favour of continuing tribal charismatic leader-

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[16] John Gray (ed.), *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, The Century Bible, London : Thomas Nelson, 1967, p. 313.

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ship on behalf of Yahweh. His reply was, "I will not rule over you ... the LORD will rule over you " (Judges 8 : 23). This may well be taken to imply that Gideon rejected the idea of ruling people as an independent monarch but asserted that Yahweh would be ruling through him (Gideon) ![17]

In the case of Samuel the situation was different. He was the charismatic leader acting on Yahweh's behalf. The elders of Israel did not come to him to request him to rule over them as was the case with Gideon. They rather demanded of him the appointment of a king (I Sam. 8 : 5). This was not a rejection of theocratic philosophy but of Samuel himself. The people had rejected the idea of God's rule through Samuel. He naturally was furious. Had the elders asked Samuel himself to rule over them, the case most probably would have been very different. Thus the tension between the monarchic and the theocratic systems of government can be understood in terms of a tension between the continuing tribal charismatic system, in which nomadic freedom, mobility and charisma are blended together with the Canaanite agrarian system of kingship.

2. *The Idea of Kingship Rejected as a Canaanite Institution* : This interpretation is reflected in two instances. First, it is reflected in Jotham's fable (Judges 9 : 7-20) and in the reference to the " kings' ways " with which Samuel warned the Israelite elders a king would torture them. (I Sam. 8 : 11-17). Secondly, it is reflected in the condemnation of the heredity-principle in monarchial succession Judges 8 : 20-23 (I Sam. 8 : 1-5).

Jotham uttered his fable in agrarian language. It is accepted that his fable was more concerned with the current crisis caused by his half-brother Abimelech's brutal rule rather than with the institution of monarchy in general.[18] In the condemnation of Abimelech, the condemnation of assimilation into Canaanite

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[17] Such is the opinion of Lods, Gray, Kaufmann and Henton Davis, considering the facts that Gideon did have a harem and that after his death there was a scramble over succession it does not sound improbable that he had in fact assumed the office of a petty king even though emphasizing that Yahweh was ruling through him. Lods, *Israel* . . . ., pp. 342-343. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, p. 313 ; Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 262 and Henton Davis, ' Judges VIII, 22-23 ', *Vetus Testamentum* XIII, 1963, pp. 154-157.

[18] A thorough discussion of all opinions is found in Barnabas Lindars, ' Jotham's Fable : A New Form Critical Analysis ', *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXIV, 1973, pp. 355-356. Lindars has mentioned Budde, Reuss, Wildberger, Smend, and J. D. Crossan who regard this fable as condemning monarchy in favour of nomadic ' feeling '. Lindars does not agree. He finds here only a criticism of Abimelech. The fable, he argues, is addressed not to the accepting bramble but to the refusing olive, fig and vine. The moral is : when worthy members of society refuse to accept political responsibility, they are assumed by the worthless fellows and there is a crisis.

culture can be observed, as Abimelech was half-Canaanite.[19]   The
selection of the agrarian fable seems reasonable and deliberate
on the part of Jotham, since he was addressing Canaanite society
(Judges 9 : 7).   It is significant to note that Gideon, even though
offered the king's office, refused to accept it, whereas Abimelech,
having Canaanite blood in his veins, declared himself king even
though nobody asked him to do so.   This declaration was in direct
contrast with the nomadic conception of freedom.   This was the
point Jotham tried to press hard when he said that unlike the useless
bramble who accepted the king's office on being approached by
other trees, Abimelech had assumed office even without being
approached by anyone.   Hence his reign would endure only if the
people had " acted in good faith " in giving Abimelech the kingly
honour, which evidently was not the case (Judges 9 : 19).   Other-
wise, the self-crowned king Abimelech was heading for doom and
destruction (vs. 20).

Samuel, on the other hand, denounced the elders' demand for
a king on the grounds that the king would be a tyrant who would
employ the Israelites in palace-service, both of the industrial and
military type, and that he would collect heavy revenue from the
fruits of their flocks and harvests—so much so that they would
cry to Yahweh for release from their king, but Yahweh would
not answer (I Sam. 8 : 11-18).   It has already been pointed out
that these " ways " of the kings reflect the tyrannous rule of the
kings of the Canaanite city-states.[20]   Here may be observed a
subtle contrast between Samuel's " rule " and that of the proposed
king.   This tyranny of the king's rule had already been experienced
by Israelites in the short reign of Abimelech and it is not improbable
that Samuel was familiar with the Abimelech traditions.   In any
event, he denounced the proposal for a king for fear of the king's
possible conformity with the Canaanite brutal ways of monarchial
government.

Secondly, both Gideon and Samuel condemned the hereditary
principle of monarchial succession.   When the men of Israel
requested Gideon, " Rule over us, you and your son and your grand-
son also . . ." (Judges 8 : 22a) ; Gideon's reply was, " I will not
rule over you, and my son will not rule over you . . ." (v 23a). Simi-
larly, in the Samuel account the elders of Israel began their speech
with, " Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your
ways . . ." (I Sam. 8 : 5a).   This suggests that the elders had already
adopted the principle of heredity.   Since they were not satisfied
with Samuel's rule (as he was " old "), his being king would mean

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[19] David Daube, ' One From Among Your Brethren Shall You Set King
Over You ', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XC, 1971, pp. 180-1.

[20] c.f., n. 9 *supra*.

his worthless sons succeeding to the throne after him. Thus they requested the appointment of a king.

This hereditary principle of succession seems to belong to agrarian cultures, as it probably reflects their conception of fertility and is foreign to the nomadic system of the democratic and/or charismatic assumption of power. That the hereditary principle is more agrarian than nomadic is illustrated by the fact that after Gideon's death Abimelech the half-Canaanite son, appealed to this principle (Judges 9 : 2), whereas Jotham did not claim himself as the hereditary successor to the crown. He rather opposed Abimelech's arrogance in doing so. This historian's repeated reports about the sons of Eli and Samuel (I Sam. 2 : 12-17,; 8:3) being worthless is a deliberate step to express the anti-heredity sentiments of promonarchic Israelites. This is further expressed in Samuel anointing David to be king in Saul's place even during Saul's lifetime and regardless of the fact that Saul also had a son, Jonathan. Thus once again in the opposition to kingship one may observe a tension between the nomadic tribal type and the agrarian Canaanite monarchial type of governmental systems.

3. *Opposition to Monarchy Understood in Terms of Inter-Tribal Feuds* : This is also a possible way of interpreting the anti-monarchic traditions. Right from the time of Settlement there were inter-tribal problems among the Israelite tribes as well as between the tribes of Israel and the inhabitants of Canaan. The latter type of problem is illustrated in Abimelech's massacre of the seventy sons of the Manassehite Gideon (Judges 9 : 16). This slaughter carried out in Shechem with the help of the Shechemites, is reminiscent of the slaughter of the Shechemites by the sons of Jacob (Gen. 34). Interestingly enough, in both cases a woman is involved : in the earlier, Jacob's daughter Dina, who was allegedly treated like a harlot (Gen. 34 : 31) and in the latter, Abimelech's mother, a harlot of Shechem (Judges 8 : 31). In both accounts there is a reference to Hamor, the father of Shechem (Gen. 31 : 4 ; Judges 8 : 28). These similarities in the two accounts suggest that there was a continuing and bloody enmity between the Israelites and the Canaanites.

Samuel's rejection of Saul as king can be understood in terms of an inter-tribal feud. Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin—a tribe which reached the verge of extinction in a war against the other Israelite tribes (Judges 20-21 ; I Sam. 9 : 21). The hostility expressed towards Saul symbolizes the general hostility with which the Benjaminites were regarded (II Sam. 16 : 5-8 ; I Kings 36 : 46). In the blessing of Jacob, Benjamin had been described as "ravenous wolf" (Gen 49 : 27).

According to the anti-monarchic traditions Saul was not anointed to be king at Samuel's will. He happened to be selected by lot and the people had no choice but to acclaim him as king (I Sam. 10 : 20-23). But this acclamation could not endure long. It died down immediately after David's appearance on the political scene (I Sam. 18 : 7).

One reason why David's authority was accepted over against Saul's (I Sam. 16 ; 18 : 7 etc.) was that he belonged to the tribe of Judah (I Sam. 16 : 1 ; 17-58)—a tribe which was always generally regarded with favour in the traditions, especially those handed down in Judah (Gen. 49 : 6-12 : Deut. 33 : 7 ; Judges 1 : 2 ; 8 : 20).

Before the arrival of David, the tribe of Ephraim had been depicted in a favourable light as Joshua and Samuel were Ephraimites (Ex. 13 : 8 ; I Sam. 1 : 10), but in the post-Davidic times the tribe of Ephraim became the target of obloquy, since Jeroboam I, the archetypal royal evil doer belonged to that tribe (I Kings 11 : 26). These inter-tribal feuds reflect the nomadic origin of Israelite society. They also suggest that opposition to the monarchy was not only caused by anti-Canaanite reactions but also by inter-tribal politicking. These two elements were always present in the critique of kings and kingship from time to time.

Thus the beginnings of the institution of monarchy reflect a subtle tension : a tension between the desire to retain the nomadic heritage and the desire to solve the current political crisis by adopting Canaanite systems : a tension between anti-Canaanite feelings on the one hand and inter-tribal feuds on the other. Ultimately it is the tension between the nomadic and agrarian modes of life. The institution of monarchy was born and survived in the midst of continuous tension. To sum up, the present writer can do no better than to quote de Vaux :

> We may even go further and say that there never was any Israelite idea of the state. Neither the federation of the tribes nor the post-exilic community were states. Between the two, the monarchy, in its varying forms, held its ground for three centuries over the tribes of the North, for four and a half over Judah, but it is hard to say how far it penetrated or modified the people's mentality. The post-exilic community returned to the pre-monarchical type of life with remarkable ease ; this suggests some continuity of institutions at the level of clan and town.[21]

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[21] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 98.