

Three Theories of Power and Bits of Others

Jean-Marc Berthoud, *Authority in the Christian Life* (Montecello, Florida: Psalms 78 Ministries, 2020)

This book covers, in theory, all types of authority, making a very broad topic. Whether this is an advantage or a weakness depends on the sort of theory of authority that the book depends on in its explanation. That is, does the authority claimed by the state, for example, come to it the same way as the authority claimed by the family, or does it rest on an entirely different basis which requires a different exposition of the nature of authority? In the case of this book, there is enough variation and inconsistency as to make it preferable to consider the topics chapter by chapter. While his intention seems to be to develop a single theory of authority that applies to all administrations of authority, it keeps falling apart into different explanations.

According to the translator's preface this work has gone through a long process of development. It was first a series of lectures in 1976, and published the next year in *Documentation Chrétienne*. (www.ladoc.org) and a revised and expanded version appeared as a book in 2011. The English edition is been slightly revised further.

Prologue

Berthoud begins with definitions of three key terms, which may not be intuitive for many readers.

We must be careful not to confuse power with authority. *Power* (*exousia* in Greek, *potestas* in Latin) is a delegation of God of His own right to man. *Authority* is the exercise of this power. We must also be careful not to confuse power and force. *Force* (*dunamis* in Greek *potentia* in Latin) is the capacity for action, both for good or evil. Authority being the source and expression of power, power is the incarnation of authority. (*Authority*, p. 21)

The idea of power that readily comes to the mind of most people is related to the use of the word in non-political contexts. How much power an engine has, for example, is the amount of force it can generate to exert to do work. Thus we find on an online educational site, that "power is frequently defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others with or without resistance. The term authority is often used for power perceived as legitimate by the social structure," and that "authority is the legitimate or socially approved use of power that a person holds over another." In Berthoud's definition power is a matter of right or legitimacy, and authority is the use of this legitimacy, while the ability to use it (as distinct from the right) is a separate matter, that of force. The common contemporary usage, is that power is the possession of force, and authority is the legitimate use of it; right being a property of authority, not the nature of power.

When we look at more traditional usage of the terms in political philosophy, we see that it is Berthoud's usage that was standard: Thus for Locke "Political power is defined as tripartite right" (James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) and, this is the way the term was used by Aristotle as well as later political theorists of different views such as Althusius and Pufendorf. We have to make a few more points about Berthoud's definition. He defined power as having right, but also includes in his definition his theory of the origin of this right as a delegation of the original right by God, so he has slipped his political theory into the definition beyond what the term ordinarily means. Then when he ends up saying "Authority being the source and expression of power" he has just told us that it is God that is the source of

power. What he must mean is that authority is the possession and expression of power, and that power is incarnated in authority, but is not defined from the idea of authority as the incarnation of authority. Whether or not this is a problem of translation can't be settled without access to the French original.

Following his definitions Berthoud then warns of two errors: the challenge of the existing lawful authority by revolt or revolution, and pietism the view of "a salvation reserved for the personal benefit of souls only".

Chapter One: All Power Comes from God

Power, Berthoud says, belongs to God "by his very nature as Creator" and therefore "must necessarily reflect God's attributes: sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, love." If this relation is necessary, it means that the power of God is present if and only if sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love are present (bearing in mind the definition of power as right). Berthoud's later explanations about different areas where there is authority to use this power must be tested against this basic condition for the existence of the power.

He begins with Romans 13, which he says is normative, not descriptive. He cites here, as kindred thinkers Stephen C. Perks and E. L. Hebden-Taylor. He says "The primary purpose of power is to uphold the order established by God." Power, we recall, is that right delegated by God, so what he is saying is that God established an order, and to uphold that order he has delegated right to some authorities. Then he says that "The order that God has established and which the authorities that God has instituted have a duty to uphold its in its very nature in conformity to the divine will—that is, it corresponds to the Law of God." "God's requirements for justice for our world are revealed" through this application of the divine order by the power of divine origin. (*Authority*, p. 25) So there is (1) a divine order, and this order is not the creation, for the order is something that is applied to it. (2) There are authorities who have right (power) delegated to them to apply this order. (3) The result of the application of this order by these authorities is the revelation of God's requirements for justice, which he says corresponds to the Law of God. He does not in this context explain how the authorities apprehend this order so that they can apply it and reveal justice. This idea that it is the action of the authorities, including the state, that reveals God's requirements for justice is not his theory in the rest of book, we are happy to say. If he had said that the action of the authorities in exercising their power reveals the existence of justice, then we could understand it, but he says that it is the requirements for justice that are revealed. It is just possible that Berthoud believes this, as it is evident from his other writings that he is an Aristotelian and believes that the universals are immanent in the cosmos where they are accessible to the mind of man, so he could hold a view that justice is revealed by human action along side of other more Christian views. (See "Réflexion biblique et rhétorique grecque" at <http://calvinisme.ch/>)

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A little excursus would be helpful at this point. The common translations of Romans 13 say authorities and authority.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities (exousiais). For there is no authority (exousia) except from God, and the authorities [not in the Greek] that exist are appointed (tetagmenai – set in order) by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority (exousia) resists the ordinance of God.

Exousia is power, so the text speaks of power not authority, in Berthoud's terms. For one example of how these terms have been used historically, compare this to the medieval political text *Liber Augustalis*.

These descriptions of princely authority in the *Liber Augustalis* are steeped in the language of Christian theological and Roman legal thought. The prince is established by God; his rule is sanctioned by God; he derives his authority from the people; he rules for the good of the people and out of reverence for God; he is responsible for the health and well-being of society. (K. Penington, "Law, legislative authority and theories of government, 1150-1300" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)).

Within the vocabulary that Berthoud is willing to allow, as well as the vocabulary of Romans 13 which speaks of the power and the order, a somewhat more sophisticated conception is possible with a place for the people of the commonwealth. One would never guess the existence of these Christian political traditions from a reading of Berthoud's book. Over the past 2000 years there has been much Christian thought about politics. The existence of possibilities not explored in this book should be kept in mind.

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From here he goes on to say that "all power possesses a necessarily spiritual character, for it is a manifestation of the sovereign power of Christ's universal grace." (*Authority*, p. 25.) This seems to be Abraham Kuyper's common grace theory, for it is a doctrine of an administration of grace separate from the people of God, and regardless of the religious disposition of those who are the means of this grace, namely all authorities.

In his next section Berthoud reverts to his official theory of the source and of the knowledge of the extent of power. "All earthly power is thus *dependent on God* as receiving, by delegation, a share of His power. Thus, the exercise of power is always limited by the prescriptions of God's revealed Law." (*Authority*, p. 25) In what way is that power limited? In what way is God's law revealed? By New Testament commandments? By the Ten Commandments? By the equity of God's law revealed in the Mosaic code? By commandments made through the prophets (to the kings of Israel, for example)? By precedents in Old Testament history approved by the prophets? By moral maxims in the Psalms and Wisdom literature? Do these prescriptions include the punishment and removal of authorities? If so, who is authorized to do so? Berthoud's apparently simple theory opens a host of questions, and these have been addressed before, by other Reformed writers, so we should expect a discussion of these questions with some answers.

He then distinguishes his view from the contemporary political theories of liberal democracy and totalitarian regimes, that do not regard their power to be derived from God.

His next section "Power Must be Effective" is a single paragraph saying that where the effectiveness of power is denied or destroyed power no longer exists. "Ineffective power is nothing more than the negation of power itself." (*Authority*, p. 27) An explanation would have been helpful. For example, where mobs were allowed to riot as in recent cases in cities in the United States, did the right of the mayors and governors to rule cease to exist? Are these places now without civil government?

We can begin to formalize Berthoud's theory of power. **For power (the right to rule) to exist:**

1) Sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love must be present in that power.

2) The power must be effective. (Already mentioned in (1) but developed with separate emphasis.)

Berthoud now summarizes his theory a little further.

The normative description of the exercise of power is contained in God's Law-Word, and its strength lies in the universal sustaining grace of God, that *common grace* by which Christ upholds all His creatures in order to preserve them from their innate tendency to chaos, corruption, and death, a tendency that stems from their present state of depravity. The divinely-ordained temporal power manifests its working within the framework of the institutions established by God and, in particular, by the working of justice: just punishment of the one who does evil, praise for the one who does good. (*Authority*, p. 27)

The new element here is institutions established by God. So far we have in **the framework of the exercise of power:**

I.) The order which was established by God which must be upheld and imposed.

II.) The authorities who hold delegated power and impose God's order.

III.) Institutions which are established by God which provide a framework for the action of the authorities.

These institutions depend on God and on the order established by God for their source and purpose. They do not arise in society nor in history. We have still to learn what these institutions are, and whether the power of the authorities can exist outside of them. The chapter ends with a further element of the framework, the presence of the judge is equivalent to the presence of God Himself.

IV.) God is present in the administration of power by the authorities.

This point IV is already evident as the implication of point 1. Sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love must be present in that power.

Chapter Two: Power Is Always Personal

"We must affirm that the exercise of power is always *personal*, never *collective*. The one true God, who reveals His wisdom and power in creation ... is a personal God." (*Authority*, p. 30) He then takes up the "*anonymous powers*" which he clarifies in a footnote. "These are personal powers invisible to mankind—demons—but the effect of their action is impersonal, in opposition to the personal action of God and the angels. The impersonality and anonymity that often characterizes modern life is a sign of Satan's hold on our world."

Well, they are sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal, being death, life, angels, demons, the present, the future, height, and depth (Romans 8:38f.), ruler of the kingdom (exousia) of the air (Ephesians 2:1f), rulers (archas), authorities (exousias), powers (kosmokratoras), spiritual forces of

evil (pneumatika tan poneirias). Also they are powers, and weren't we told that all powers are from God, and in Colossians 1:16 that they were created by and for Christ? And yet in Ephesians 2:1f the ruler of the *exousia* of the air is said to be the spirit now at work in those who are disobedient. Something much more complicated is going on than Berthoud allows for. [See Michael W. Kelley, "Principities and Powers" *Christianity & Society*, April 2003, pp. 6-15 and also Hendrick Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Herald Press, 1962).] It also shows that there is a lot more power being exercised than has made it into Berthoud's political theory so far. He has a way of excluding these, but at a cost to his theory.

[The] power that comes from God on the earthly plain must also have a personal character. The anonymous, collective, irresponsible, administrative, the consensual *group dynamic* power of corporations, committees, majorities, and bureaucracies is not the power that the Apostle Paul speaks of in Romans 13:1-7.

He qualifies this somewhat. "A shared, collective, communal power, to the extent that it tends toward irresponsibility, ceases to be a power proceeding from God." (*Authority*, p. 31) He goes on to suggest that it is power proceeding from Satan. This gives us a third condition **for power (the right to rule) to exist:**

3. The power must be personal; not anonymous, collective, irresponsible, administrative, the consensual *group dynamic* power of corporations, committees, majorities, and bureaucracies tending toward irresponsibility.

But does that not exclude all or nearly all the power of the modern state from being a power proceeding from God that must be obeyed?

Does this opposition between personal and collective power even make sense? Certainly God is personal, but mankind is also people, nations, collectives who act as such. So how can they be expected to exercise power the way God does? Berthoud contrasts the community to the collective. "It is when individuals conform their thinking and action to the precise demands of God's Law that community is created. Such a community may have powers with a collective appearance ... but here too power must be first and foremost the exercise of the personal responsibility of each individual... The same is true of any power possessing a collective appearance. (*Authority*, pp. 32-33)

When individuals, then, acting as members of a group such as a counsel, first conform their decision to God's Law, then the decision that emerges is the result of God's Law governing each individual's decision, and this gives the appearance of a collective decision. The explanation seems to suppose that God's Law actually tells the individuals what to do about every decision. The process as described, though, guarantees that every decision by a community is according the God's commandments, otherwise it would be a collective decision and lacking power as collectives do, and not be a community decision. Of course the application of God's law is individual, subjective and invisible, so it may often be open to dispute whether a legitimate decision has been made. It leaves us with the theoretical result, nevertheless, and the only case in which someone can actually be confronted by a command by a power that is contrary to what God has commanded, is when that power is an individual, for a collective power that commands contrary to God's commandment cannot exist.

It seems that in the civil realm we only have to worry about kings and dictators.

Nevertheless it seems that much could be said about personal power especially in connection to responsibility. I don't seem why, for example, people acting in a collective cannot also be held personally responsible for their actions. The collective may obscure the action of the individual, and it may act psychologically on him to make him feeling lacking in both discretion and responsibility. There could also be a sociological analysis along the lines of the work of Jacques Ellul. But all the more reason to hold the individual ethically responsible within the collective. I would like to see this topic much more fully and systematically developed.

The theory of power (right) contained in points 1-3 we will call the **Intrinsic Theory** of power. It holds that the power that come from God only exists when it present with certain characteristics of God's power, for it must have sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love and be exercised in a personal manner. Having stated these criteria Berthoud ignores them and develops a different theory of power.

Chapter Three: The Power of Mob Riots and the Disintegration of Authority

Berthoud wants to talk about contemporary riots, especially those in the United States in the summer of 2020. He treats them as revolutionary riots expressing anarchy and rebellion. But they were not. They were suppressive riots, organized by the powers that be to terrorize the law abiding people and suppress lawful dissent.

Berthoud begins with the usual revolutionary mobs, manipulated by agents to engage in violence, as is typical with communists. "Such mob action, as we have recently observed in the United States, goes hand in had with the dissolution of authority formerly delegated by God to those established by Him to restrain public violence. However, the present humanitarian and sentimental religion so widespread in America both amongst Christians and unbelievers has now made the task of upholding law and order on the streets extremely difficult." These mob actions, were planned, organized and led by paid organizations working for the powers that be. The police were ordered to stand aside and let it happen. But when any citizen tried to resist the mob the police immediately went into action to arrest that individual. People resisting the mob were prosecuted vigorously by the magistrates who dropped charges against the rioters. These magistrates were put in office by funds from the same parties who paid the rioters.

The powers that be in our time are, at the top, sometimes the hidden hand of powerful agents, sometimes open ones such as George Soros. These control both the office holders and the street rioters to insure that they work together toward the same ends. None of them hesitates to use violence when it furthers their ends. Berthoud's argument through the chapter that the state hesitates to use force duo to modern sentimentality simply isn't true. He could have also looked closer to home to see how the yellow vest demonstrations were handled in France. No delicacy by the state there!

Berthoud should have written a chapter about the Deep State, and the powers behind it who form a real government. They are not elected or appointed to any political office, and most are anonymous, although there are some well known paymasters, such as Soros. They control the official officials of the state through bribery and blackmail, assisted by the secret state agencies such as Mossad, the CIA and MI6. These definitely are the powers that be, and being at the top are the closest to God in Berthoud's hierarchy. Theodore Roosevelt tells in his autobiography how in the New York legislatures in the 1880s members were surveilled and entrapped by the police force working for the party bosses. This is now done on a world wide level. These powers also enjoy the support of the media and the universities.

What is the status of these powers? Are they the authorities who must be obeyed? Why or why not? Berthoud labels the final section of this chapter “Even Misguided Powers are a Sign of Order.” Berthoud repeats his summary of Romans 13 that existing, “and consequently sinful” powers are instituted by God and to oppose them is to oppose the order established by God. “This, according to Paul, would even apply to the power of a state that has swerved from its true purpose.” (*Authority*, p. 40) But Paul does not say this. He says we should obey the powers because they support the good. Berthoud continues:

We must understand by such an injunction *that the very existence of misguided powers is a sign of order in relation to the absolute disorder that would exist with anarchy, chaos unleashed. ...*

For this reason, under no circumstances, even when power had become the “beast” (Rev. 13), can Christians—or any person (for Romans 13 speaks of “all souls”)—claim an individual right to revolt against such a power. Order, even a wicked one, is better than the total human license to do evil.

Earlier (p. 32) he had said that the “Bible (in Revelation 13) explicitly informs us that it is Satan himself who gives the Beast its demonic and seemingly irresistible power.” So now Berthoud’s common grace theory of government has reached the point where even Satan is in the hierarchy of powers that be, and in fact is a means of grace, in this administration of common grace.

Berthoud has by this point developed a different theory of power from the **Intrinsic Theory**, which held that the power that comes from God only exists when it present with certain characteristics of God’s power, for it must have sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love and be exercised in a personal manner. He now and through the rest of the book expounds what seems to be his actual theory, that power (right) comes from God and remains power even without the moral qualities of God, and even when channeled though Satan. This theory at times borrows from sphere sovereignty, in that it sees multiple channels of administration, but power is not halted in his view when its exercise reaches into another sphere. The theory also borrows from Kuyper’s common grace idea. Power here seems to be the right to impose order. It ought to impose God’s order in the light of God’s law, but it in no way loses its character of power (right) if it acts apart from and even against God’s law. We will call this the **Imposed Order** theory of power.

In a single paragraph he brings up the topic of the lesser magistrates “to intervene against and even suppress a harmful tyrannical power”. But he does not explain how this can be legitimate in his hierarchical theory of power.

Chapter Four: Why God Delegates a Differentiated Form of Power to Men and Women

This is actually the second time Berthoud takes up this topic. In the chapter on personal power he takes as an example the man and woman in the context of the family. There he was not so much concerned with Pauline injunctions but of the function of authority within what could be termed a sphere sovereignty context. The “father of the family has a power (delegated by God) over his entire family, including wife and children. ... This paternal power comes from God; it belongs to him and he cannot share it with his wife, children, or servants.” (*Authority*, p. 33) But he immediately adds that also the wife has her own power from God over the children, which she cannot share either. “These two powers can and should *reinforce* each other, but they must not be *confused*.” But if ‘the husband leaves home temporarily, he delegates his power to his wife, who

then exercises a double authority, that of her husband and her own.” So the power is delegated from God, and can then be re-delegated to someone who has another power, but it cannot be *shared*. I suppose this means that it can only be exercised by one person at one time. All this appears to be applications of a general theory of sphere sovereignty.

In chapter four he takes a different approach appealing to Biblical citations, taking up the usual texts about the creation order, the Fall and headship in the New Testament context. There is much talk about symbols and representation. I find much of it incomprehensible. One odd text should be mentioned, though. To describe how power should be used in “any kind of creational hierarchy” he cites Ephesians 6:5-9 on the treatment of slaves. Why is slavery a creational hierarchy?

Chapters Five and Six: The Exercise of Power

In chapter five he explains that power is an expression of God’s love, and that love is not a feeling “but *an act of the will directed toward good*.” This is really an exposition of his point **1) Sovereignty, justice, effective power, wisdom, truth, goodness, and love must be present in that power**. He adds to this that the love must also go in the other direction, that to “honor, respect, and lawfully obey is the expression of an individual’s love for the person in authority over them.” (*Authority*, p. 49)

In chapter six he presents the exercise of power as a sort of evangelism having the role that Paul assigns to the law in Galatians 3, for from the exercise of power men learn a moral order.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we must be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:23-24)

Consequently the result of the failure of the state to punish evil (he uses the example of abortion) has very serious consequences.

When public authority no longer publicly distinguishes the radical difference between good and evil by its civil judgments, it renounces its role as precursor to the kingdom of God. When opinion, supported by faulty law (and this supported by the false teaching of a false church), tells you that what you have done—in this case an act of murder—is a good deed, how can you recognize evil, repent before God, find His forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and do what is right? Ultimately, it is the Christian preaching of the kingdom of God and the Christian life itself that becomes impossible. This is the darkness Christ speaks of in which it is no longer possible to work (John 9:4). (*Authority*, p. 54)

Though he speaks of false church supporting the state in this abrogation of law, nevertheless he cannot bring himself to speak of a false state. Nevertheless in these two chapters he has moved back closer to the **Intrinsic Theory** of power.

Chapters Seven and Eight: The Limits of Christian Obedience to Authority

He begins by contrasting the Zealots of first century Judaism to Jesus’s commands to submit to unjust and even unlawful commands and return good for evil. “This is how the sinful inhabitants of the Roman Empire, as well as their unjust institutions, were won over to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the rebellious attitude of the nationalist and revolutionary Jews ended in their appalling and utter failure and annihilation in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. There is only one

type of just violence, and it is that of the powers established by God for punishing the evildoer.” (*Authority*, p. 58)

To battle against the unjust violence of evil in this world through the physical violence of revolution only leads to *an increase of evil*. All rebellions and revolutions only work to consolidate the structures of injustice that people seek to overthrow with an optimistic and wicked zeal.

Silence, however, is not a permissible response to evil when it is done to others. Christians must speak out against it. Berthoud suggests that those who do not speak out fail to do so because they have deified the state. “We deify the state, which has become the Sovereign in our eyes, the source of all law and property.” But isn’t it Berthoud who says the “presence of the judge is equivalent to the presence of God Himself?” (p. 28)

Chapters Nine and Ten: Obedience to God

The point at which our obedience to the authorities ends is the point where obedience to God requires something else. “That is, submission to the powers established by God can never be a pretext for doing the evil that these powers might order us to do or for neglecting to do the good that these powers forbid us from doing.” (*Authority*, p. 64) Good and evil are always defined by God’s law, so “if the power established by God commands us to do things which are not contrary to God’s Law, even if we are forced to endure abuse, as long as these unjust constrains *do not compel us to acts of injustice*, we must (if we have no lawful recourse) not only respectfully submit to power, but *we must obey it*.” But these commands are commands that we go along with acts of injustice, acts *against us*, but also the same commands have and will be given to others, being acts of injustice against them. So isn’t there a sense in which these *do compel us to acts of injustice? That is the nature of an unjust command as such*.

Further, God has commanded the state what to do. Is it just for us to collaborate with the state in its rebellion against God? Berthoud tells us, “if a misguided power orders us to commit unjust acts (contrary to God’s Law), *we must disobey man in order to obey God*. If we can’t flee elsewhere or hide, we will have to submit with faith to the unjust measures that the authorities will take against us. It is by the strength of the Holy Spirit that we disobey the wicked injunctions of a misguided and evil power.” But why is this true in the one case and not the other?

The rest of the chapter is given to providing Biblical examples, and the next contemporary examples. A more persuasive case would have been made had he added a chapter reviewing the Biblical examples, for example those provided by John Knox, of wicked rulers being removed from power.

His first contemporary example is this:

A Christian employee or businessman cannot obey orders from his superiors that require him to engage in malfeasance or fraud. In a respectful spirit, he must first peacefully seek to dissuade his superiors from taking such actions. This must be done in a spirit of faith and supplication to God. If this attempt fails, he must simply refuse to obey such orders while peacefully accepting the consequences of such an act. (*Authority*, p. 70)

If it is fraud, why does he not take the matter to the police or a prosecutor? Why instead commit misprision of a felony? Berthoud’s next two actions make more sense. “Secondly, a fight of this

magnitude against the evil powers that hold the business world captive to injustice is not solely the work of the person engaged in it. *The prayer and faith of the local church must also be behind such a struggle...*” and “it is essential that the church provide teaching on the business life that is both fundamentally biblical and fully conscious of economic realities, so that the Christians who attend such a church know how to conduct themselves in this realm of business.”

His other examples are from medicine, the police, the magistrate (he observes that this is “a particularly difficult—we might even say impossible—situation in our day”), the soldier, the teacher, and finally in the church itself.

Chapters Eleven through Thirteen: The Christian Exercise of Power

The institutional power of God manifests itself in two ways on earth: through the physical sword of the magistrate, the instrument of the state, and through the spiritual sword of the Word of God, wielded by the church of God.

The state exercises lordship over other people by the power of the sword. The church does not use coercion, or physical force. Nevertheless it is “aristocratic or hierarchical” in nature, “for the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, appoints men specifically chosen and trained by Him and to whom He has delegated His authority to govern His house according to the commandments included for this explicit purpose in the Word of God. The ministers of God in the church are thus in no way instituted by popular election, by the democratic vote of all believers, but by God Himself.” (*Authority*, pp. 91-92) The role of these people is to govern. Just what their office is in the usual ecclesiastical language he does not say, unless the use of the word “ministers” is not a reference to their power from God, but the common sense to clergy.

Besides this aristocratic aspect, there is a democratic aspect to the church. This he takes to be mutual instruction by the people. “At a time when the “teachers” of the church are all too frequently merely false teachers dispensing false and harmful doctrine, God often uses the faith of the humblest to keep His church alive and to defend it from error, the lies of the devil.”

He then turns to the “exercise of this power in the church through the consistorial authority of the elders” by “acts of discipline that culminate in the exclusion of the hardened wrongdoer from the fellowship.” We are left to wonder who these elders are, and where they came from. Are they the aristocratic ministers mentioned previously? We read in 3 John 10 that a certain Diotrephes would “not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” So already in the lifetime of the apostles it was the true Christians who were being expelled, so this mechanism isn’t in itself reliable.

Chapter Thirteen begins with an extended discussion of how the exercise of power by the Christian must be done under self-discipline through the power of the Holy Spirit. It then turns to a discussion of revolutionary movements, their various types and their illegitimacy. He concludes with what he considers the real source of change.

The change that God desires to see taking place in an unjust world is not first of all an external, formal change that leaves the root of sin within man intact. Let us repeat, such changes will in the long run merely consolidate the lasting nature of evil in society. But through a spiritual change, through an act of new creation in man, through our regeneration in Jesus Christ, God will work, though His children’s ever-increasing obedience to His commandments in every area of life, to the restoration of all things.... (*Authority*, p. 104)

The method is pretty much the same thing that the pietists teach, whom Berthoud excoriated at the start of his book, only they don't expect to gain social results, but to steadily lose ground.

Chapter Fourteen and Fifteen: Why God Requires Hierarchies and their Separation

There was some form of order built into creation before the fall, the differentiation of men and woman, and the inherent generation of families, clans, tribes and nations. But sin made the hierarchy all the more important. "It is for the protection of the life of our soul and body, for the protection of the life of human society, the family, the community, the nation, and creation that God has ordered us to live according to these hierarchical relationships of power and submission in conformity to the Law of God." (*Authority*, p. 106)

The temporal and spiritual powers should be distinguished and separated, though both should exercise their power in subordination to the authority of God. The magistrate holds power directly from God and not by delegation from the church. However, the mediatorial Kingdom of Christ is through the church, and only this can save and transform man. "Temporal power therefore must never trespass beyond its own specific and limited domain and usurp the characteristics of religious power." By "religious power" Berthoud seems to mean messianic, salvific pretensions. This is what he says the modern state has done by becoming the welfare state. "For it is to the state that the people of our day turn to find solutions to their problems, whether physical, spiritual, or moral." (*Authority*, p. 110)

This needs to be stated much better. The physical and the moral seem very much the business of the state as has been explained to us so far. Weren't we even told (p. 51) that the role of the state actually amounted to a sort of pre-evangelism?

Berthoud sets about to clarify this concept by the example of the public response to natural disasters, such as drought. It used to be that in those circumstances farmers would turn to "solemn fasts of repentance" (if Reformed) or penitential processions (if Roman Catholic). But now the turn to the local and regional governments for subsidies. "And, for their part, the clergy of our canton did not for a single instant notice that this was a form of idolatry. At no time were they struck by the idea of calling the people under their care to repentance, to a humbling of themselves before the sovereign God so that he might be appeased in His righteous anger against the many infidelities of His people." For not considering the drought a punishment for sin Berthoud calls them dualistic and positivistic Kantian, incapable of perceiving a relationship between divine Providence and meteorology. Berthoud should explain this relationship and show which it indicates that the drought is a particular punishment for sin. Perhaps these clergy were thinking of the tower of Siloam, not about Kant. Also why the state is not permitted to provide relief for the resulting conditions?

Berthoud next points to the problem where the clergy derive their salary from the state, and thus are reluctant to criticize the state, and indicates that this does not mean that the state may be morally neutral either. He then itemizes the distinctiveness of the church from the state:

The distinction of the church in relation to the state; its institutional independence and its primary union with God (its unity); and, more importantly, its separation from sin (its holiness), the seductions of the world, and the deceptions of the devil battling against the fulness of its doctrine (its catholicity); and its rejection of doctrinal error (its apostolicity), all have the essential purpose of enabling the church to fulfill the exercise of its own spiritual authority. (*Authority*, p. 112)

The historical problem he sees is that where there is a state established church it is not faithful to its doctrine, whereas the free Evangelical churches that have grown up outside it in response to the problem have not opposed the secularization of the state, its departure from the standard of God's law. One of the tasks given to the church by God is to reestablish the functioning of the state in the order God intended.

As the state is not only operating in disregard of God's law, but is also teaching a secular viewpoint through the state's schools, Berthoud sees it as imperative to expand homeschooling and to found Christian schools.

John MacArthur & Grace Community Church

As an appendix there is a statement from Grace Community Church on their refusal to comply with Governor Gavin Newsom's order to end indoor church services. The church makes a sphere sovereignty argument, that there are three institutions established by God: the family, the state, and the church. "Each institution has a sphere of authority with jurisdictional limits that must be respected." The institutions do not have authority outside of these jurisdictional limits. So that "government officials have no right to interfere in ecclesiastical matters in a way that undermines or disregards the God-given authority of pastors and elders." There is a limit to power.

This is not Berthoud's argument that power (right) must always be obeyed unless there is a conflict with a command from God, which takes precedent. The church's argument is that outside its legitimate sphere, and institution has no power. Even if the state's commands were entirely in accord with what God's law commands, it would not have authority outside its sphere.

When any one of the three institutions exceeds the bounds of its jurisdiction it is the duty of the other institutions to curtail that overreach. Therefore, when any government official issues orders regulating worship (such as bans on singing, caps on attendance, or prohibitions against gatherings and services), he steps outside the legitimate bounds of his God-ordained authority as a civic official and arrogates to himself authority that God expressly grants only to the Lord Jesus Christ as sovereign over His Kingdom, which is the church. His rule is mediated to local churches through those pastors and elders who teach His Word. (*Authority*, p. 137)

Omissions

There are certain topics one would expect to be covered in a book of this type which are barely mentioned, or left out entirely. Already noted is the theory of legitimacy for the lesser magistrates to restrict or remove a tyrannical ruler. It receives acknowledgment in one paragraph but is not explained. Another of these topics is one in which the ruler receives his authority from the people. This idea has always been in the awareness of Christian thinkers. Even Roman law made some perfunctory acknowledgment that the emperor received his power from the people, but during the middle ages the idea received a much more extensive development.¹ In Berthoud's theory civil power cannot come from God through the people. It comes from God to those who exercise it, and never reaches the people; only its effects do so. When Berthoud mentions popular government it is always to condemn the idea that the source of right and wrong has its origin in the will of the people.

¹ See for example, Walter Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd, 1966)

Even though law as moral authority determining right and wrong is completely separate from power in his own theory so that power can exist and be exercised without the other, he cannot conceive of this separation as soon as popular government is mentioned. So for example, the South Dakota state motto is “Under God the People Rule” which does not claim that the popular government is the source of moral order. Berthoud only mentions popular government to condemn it, not to consider it as a viable political theory.

Another view he does not consider is that of the state ruling while itself being under the rule of law, thereby limited by law. This despite the fact that he quotes one of the classic statements of this view from Henry de Bracton.

The king himself, however, ought not to be under man but under God, and under Law, because the Law make the king. Therefore, let the king render back to the Law what the Law gives to him, namely dominion and power, for there is no king where will, and not Law, wields dominion. (*The Laws and Customs of England*) (*Authority*, pp. 109-110)

Berthoud seems to think that this merely means that Law comes from God. Berthoud is not interested in a discussion of constitutionalism, either of this type or another. One can speculate that he does not see constitutionalism as part of Biblical law, and as constitutionalism plays no part in his theory of power either, constitutionalism is irrelevant.² But this constitutional idea is that it is the law that conveys the power, and when the state acts outside the law it acts without power. To say that the law comes from God or to say that the power comes from God are different aspects of the same idea of authority. How this authority is conveyed to particular agents who exercise it is determined by the constitutional law.

Also missing is a theory of political representation. Berthoud thinks that authorities represent God, as expressed in point IV. He is not interested in the possibility that the civil subjects or the church members are represented in those institutions by the authorities in any way, because his political theory, or we might say none of his several actual theories, does not have any place for the idea.

This is a strange book. It begins laying out a theory of conditional power, the **Intrinsic Theory**, then passes over to a theory of unconditional power, the **Imposed Power** theory, where there is a hierarchy in which one type of power, the commands that come directly from God, overrides other forms of power delegated through authorities, but only at the points where they contradict. It offers us as a good example John MacArthur’s still different sphere sovereignty theory, without seeming to recognize that it is different. It ignores the vast amount of previous Christian thinking on the subject offering other possibilities. While it includes valuable reflections and insights, the better they are the more they lack sufficient exposition and systematic development. Certainly at this time Christian books explaining authority are needed, but this isn’t one of them.

² For the view that the Biblical law does provide a constitution see: E. C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic* (American Presbyterian Press, 1980)