
God's Governance: Analyzing the Doctrine of Divine Rights in Vatican City

Prateek Singh

Student of NLU Jodhpur.

ABSTRACT

The paper is an amalgam of definitions and opinions given by various scholars on the topic of God's Mandate in the past three centuries. It discusses the reasoning and ideology of scholars who propounded the theories of theological systems. Special emphasis has been given to the Vatican City, since it is one of the oldest systems of divine governance, still in existence, that too, with a prosperous kingdom. An examination of the powers vested into the Pope has also been done, while studying the limitations attached to them. Lastly, a thorough examination of the theological governance has also been presented, displaying how such governments cannot sustain in larger, diverse nations.

KEYWORDS: *theocracy, Vatican City, divine rights.*

DIVINE RIGHTS: THE PRINCIPLES OF THEOLOGY

'Divine right of kings' is a political-religious doctrine has been in existence for thousands of years. Vatican City has been chosen as a focus due to the unique nature of administration that exists here. The government has been a topic of interest because of the method of command being followed is no more considered conventional, in contrast to other methods of administration that exist alongside.

The idea of divine rights was considered the most common method of governance, and now that only a fraction of nations all across the globe chooses to follow it, makes the topic more intriguing and worthy for investigation.

The paper is an amalgam of definitions and opinions given by various scholars on the topic of God's Mandate in the past three centuries. There has been a special emphasis on the Vatican City, emphasising on the powers vested into the Pope.

What we call in modern times, a theocracy, is based actually on the divine rights of kings. God's mandate – an underlying concept - is a political and religious doctrine which asserts that kings directly derive their authority from God, a supernatural power superior to all that exists. These rights give the king powers that make his command completely absolute for the subjects of the kingdom, making him answerable to no one, but to God. The State is said to be a creation of God, established on earth and the king is an incarnation of God, ordained by him, to maintain law and order to terminate the possibilities of attaining a sheer anarchy.

The theory in its purest form believes that a monarchy is an institution created by the divine, but also acknowledges other forms of governance with respect.¹Hereditary right is indefeasible. A

king's heir is considered to be a king as long as he lives, irrespective of his willingness. This way, the right of kingship shall not be surrendered under any circumstances. Even if the heir refuses to take charge of the throne, he still remains the king.ⁱⁱ

- Kings can only be questioned by God, no one else. All laws that exist in the state are made by God, and not the man in-charge of the throne.
- Resistance to a king's order is a sin, regardless of the command's nature. He who does not obey the holy command of the king will be entitled to damnation by God himself. The command given by the king are not to be considered as commands given by the man in-charge of the throne, but as a direct command given by God.

The following passage was set as the published doctrine, using the language of the time: -

*"We will still believe and maintain that our Kings derive not their title from the people but from God; that to Him only they are accountable; that it belongs to not to subjects, either to create or censure but to honour and obey their sovereign, who comes to be so by a fundamental hereditary right of succession which no religion, no law, no fault or forfeiture can alter or diminish."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Further,

"Obedience we must pay, either Active or Passive; the Active in the case of all lawful commands; that is whenever the Magistrate commands something which is not contrary to some command of God, we are then bound to act according to that command of the Magistrate, to do the thing he requires."^{iv}

S. Peter and S. Paul have also instituted the idea of authority in the above notion by stating that the kings have been vested of their powers by divine forces and therefore whosoever resists that power shall face damnation.

According to the divine origin theory, it was the citizens of the State, who found the conditions too intolerable to survive, and thus requested God to provide them with a messiah to whom they surrender their rights, who shall be responsible for the welfare of all the members of the state.^v God aimed to bring peace and order into the society by placing the notion that men of all social ranks were both religiously and morally obliged to obey the government.^{vi}

This notion was strongly followed in the classic empires where rulers believed themselves to be descendants of God. The Hebrews believed that their government was created by the Lord. The theory of God's mandate was also used to support the dictatorship of James I of England who used to govern his kingdom without being answerable to any of his subjects' queries/concerns.^{vii} Divine origin was also being practiced by rulers in the middle ages.^{viii}

DIVINE STATE CONCEPTS IN VATICAN CITY

Vatican City is an independent country in Europe, enclaved by the capital city of Italy, Rome. The State is sacerdotal,^{ix} in nature, ruled by the Pope, who is often referred to as the Bishop and the Head of the Catholic Church. All the ministers of the State are Holy Orders in the Catholic Church. The ministers are housed in the royal Apostolic Palace that exists in the heart of the country.

It is believed that before the arrival of Christianity on the land, the soil was unsuitable for habitation. Once blessed by God himself, the region became prosperous and suitable for humankind.^x

The country is based on an absolute elected-monarchy system, in which the Pope is the Head of State. The office of the Pope gets to exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers over the entire State.^{xi} Under his guidance, day-to-day tasks related to governance of the Roman curia take place- there is bureaucracy of educated cardinals, priests, nuns, professors and laymen.^{xii} The organs of the government are referred to as congregation or secretariats, who function just like cabinet offices. These offices deliver decisions via letters, rescripts and admonitions. The Secretary of State comes directly after the Pope in the system of hierarchy. He is responsible for the working of the other office - the Council of Public Affairs, which is directly responsible for maintaining international relations, and also ensuring a sustainable foreign policy. While the Pope's rule is monarchical, it is not despotic. In no way can he forcefully impose his will on his subjects. He must always act on the recommendations provided by bishops and theologians, and also respect the will of the Holy See.

The Vatican government has been careful not to base the Church's claim to international sovereignty on the independent status of Vatican City State. International agreements for the State are approved by a representative of the Pope as supreme pastor of the Catholic Church. This concept of sovereignty of the Holy See has been signed by Italy and the papal Secretary of State in the Lateran Treaty of 1929, which resulted in an end of the so-called Roman Rule.

The Lateran Treaty mainly elucidated the sovereignty of the Pope and discussed the financial and political provisions for the State. The judicial foundation of the State is based on the *societas perfecta* theory, formed by the Church, declaring the Vatican as fully capable of maintaining its welfare. It was therefore considered as a self sufficient and absolutely autonomous territory. Owing to the religious sanctity held by the Vatican, the Holy See declared the State to have a completely neutral stance on all international politics.^{xiii}

As ideal as these sound, modern scholars regard State as a human organisation instead of something that has been 'gifted' by God. State is not given to mankind. It was obtained after several centuries of extreme dedication and cooperation to achieve such an organisation. Calling it a gift would be a simple mockery of thousands of years of human deliberation towards sustainable living.

Further, people no more recognise the originate power of God as a criterion of the wrongness of any given form of government -to say that God selects a specific human as ruler is against basic common sense. This theory has also been termed dangerous because in a theocratic State, the King is answerable to no one. Irresponsibility to human opinion might be a grave danger in the hands of an unscrupulous man and might even lead the State towards tyranny.

If the entire population is of the idea that the king can do no wrong, not only is this wrong on a municipal level, where the ruler is entitled to steal his subjects' rights in order to maintain his rule, but also on an international sphere where the king shall do as he pleases, without any serious consideration, as happening in the tyrannical nation of DPRK.

Although theocratic governments have been successful in historic times, it is not feasible to govern a modern nation based on these principles. Most modern countries have populations with

diverse cultures and backgrounds. Not only would it be impossible, but also harshly unwise to govern a population with varying values under the same principles. Followers of one religion cannot be governed under the principles of another. Citizens cannot be forced to bow down to one religion and disregard others. Though possible in a small, homogenous society like Vatican, but absolutely impossible in a large, diverse nation with cultures often contrasting each other's. In such civilisations, equal representation of all communities is necessary, thus a democracy or an aristocracy would be the only suitable method of governance.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the paper, the Divine Rights of Kings concept has been both praised and criticised by scholars from all around the world.

The concept has been appreciated because no other method of administration has ever been so successful in gaining control over its people. Even though it may not follow the most ethical approach, it is, however, been termed as a highly effective way of governance as long as the King does not commit any mischief and does his work with sheer sincerity.

On the other hand, the concept has been criticised because it does not really follow the most logical or scientific approach. This could be one of the reasons for the downfall of the popularity of this concept.

Vatican City is one of the few nations around the world that follows this concept and it has proved to be highly effective as far as we are concerned about the governance. The country is one of the most peaceful in the entire world and also has a sustainable economy. Therefore, it may be asserted that the State of Vatican City is being run very successfully under the reign of the Holy Church.

ENDNOTES

ⁱJPSOMMERVILLE, THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS, WISC HISTORY PORTAL (LAST ACCESSED ON 19.11.2018), [HTTPS://FACULTY.HISTORY.WISC.EDU/SOMMERVILLE/367/367-04.HTM](https://faculty.history.wisc.edu/sommerville/367/367-04.htm).

ⁱⁱJN FIGGIS (1896). THE THEORY OF THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS 5-6(CAMBRIDGE, UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1914).

ⁱⁱⁱ FROM AN ADDRESS OF KING CHARLES II. KING CHARLES II (1681). HISTORY OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE 108 (CAMBRIDGE, UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1681).

^{iv}SUNDAY XVI. THE PASSAGE IS QUOTED BY HOBBS AS GIVING THE BEST EXPRESSION OF "THE DOCTRINE OF THE KING'S PARTY." (BEHEMOTH, PART I, 1980).

^vUN GHOSHAL, A HISTORY OF INDIAN POLITICAL IDEAS: THE ANCIENT PERIOD AND THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION TO THE MIDDLE AGES 174-175 (DIGITAL LIBRARY OF INDIA 1923).

^{vi}PHILIP B. KURLAND, CURIA REGIS: SOME COMMENTS ON THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS AND COURTS TO SAY WHAT THE LAW IS, 23 ARIZONA LAW REVIEW 581 (1981).

^{vii}AS SHAAPERA, THEORIES OF THE STATE: PERSPECTIVES ON THE NIGERIAN VARIANT 20 (EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL, ESJ, 8).

^{viii}ALLAN B, SCOTUS ON THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF POSSIBILITY 95-107 (AMERICAN CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY 67).

^{ix}http://www.catholic-pages.com/vatican/vatican_city.asp, Catholic Pages, last accessed on 21.11.2018.

^xTM ECCARDT, SECRETS OF THE SEVEN SMALLEST STATES OF EUROPE: ANDORRA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MONACO, SAN MARINO, AND VATICAN CITY (HIPPOCRENE BOOKS 2005).

^{xi}<https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Europe/Vatican-City-POLITICS-GOVERNMENT-AND-TAXATION.html>, Nations Encyclopedia, last accessed on 21.11.2018.

^{xii}FRANCIS XAVIER MURPHY, CITY OF GOD 98-112 (THE WILSON QUARTERLY (1976).

^{xiii}LATERAN TREATY, ART. 25, PARAS. 1 AND 2.