

INTRODUCTION

“Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics.” That famous dictum of the French poet and essayist Charles Peguy could serve as the *leitmotif* of the four pieces presented here. To put it differently, a conversion theology that is not experienced in the context of the Kingdom of God but begins and ends with a focus on the inner life, is bound to lead to sentimentalism, sectarianism, and social quietism. Such a conversion, in effect, sells short the power of the Holy Spirit. The God of the Bible, who touches a human heart, is the Lord of history who has promised to transform the world into a new heaven and a new earth—and is sending out signals (“signs of the Kingdom”) that he is, indeed, doing so.

Biblical conversion may be accompanied by blissful feelings, but it is not *about* such feelings. Rather, it is about faithful service, so that God’s promised future may be reflected in our time. The living Word of God creates an interactive dynamic between our faith and the reality of God’s future. The term “prophetic theocracy” is one way to describe that dynamic.

I first encountered the term “prophetic theocracy” during the 1950s as I was reading Emil Brunner’s *Dogmatics*. I adopted the language, but rejected his interpretation. For Brunner, “prophetic theocracy” represented the dead past of Israel; for me it is the living legacy of the Hebraic heritage. In light of the pneumatological considerations that follow, I might point out one more difference in our theological approach. For Brunner, the Holy Spirit was primarily “*ein redender Geist*”—the voice of God in our inner beings. I much prefer the expression used by the “New Testament” scholar Ethelbert Stauffer: an “*allgeschichtliche Realität*”—operative in world history, and then also in the human heart. The fact that the mystery of the divine presence is felt with greater immediacy in one’s personal life does not lend it greater importance from the perspective of God’s redemptive dealings with the world.

In 1958, the Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, professor at the University of Leiden, arranged a World Council of Churches grant for me to spend a half-year of private study with Arnold van Ruler, his colleague in Utrecht. I gratefully remember how both these men have influenced my thinking, as is amply reflected in these essays. This is not to suggest, however, that either professor would lend his *imprimatur* to everything I propose here.

Three brief observations: I use quotation marks when referring to the two main parts of Holy Scripture. I do that in order to indicate that the terms “Old” and “New Testament” are problematic in a number of respects, but that a long tradition of their usage makes me reluctant to give them up. I also spell Kingdom with a capital K in order to indicate the qualitative difference between God’s Kingdom and all other kingdoms. Finally, I should mention that “Theocracy is not a Four-Letter Word” has appeared in RESTORE Magazine.