A KINGDOM TO COME

Richard D. Poll

Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History. By Klaus J. Hansen. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967. vi, 237 pp. $6.50. Richard D. Poll is Professor of History and Associate Director of the Honors Program at Brigham Young University; he is presently a member of the High Council of the B.Y.U. Eighth Stake.

In January, 1863, when Union fortunes were low in the Civil War, the governor of the self-proclaimed State of Deseret (Utah) sent these words to the legislature of that quasi-government:

> This body of men will give laws to the nations of the earth. We meet here in our second Annual Legislature, and I do not care whether you pass any laws this session or not, but I do not wish you to lose one inch of ground you have gained in your organization, but hold fast to it, for this is the Kingdom of God. . . . Our government [U.S.] is going to pieces and it will be like water that is spilt upon the ground that cannot be gathered. . . . Joseph Smith organized this government before, in Nauvoo, and he said if we did our duty, we should prevail over all our enemies. We should get all things ready, and when the time comes, we should let the water on the wheel and start the machine in motion. (pp. 167-168.)

For many years Mormon historians, including this reviewer, found in this language nothing more than the typical hyperbole of Brigham Young and frustration at the failure of Deseret's third bid for admission to the Union. Today, thanks to the research of James R. Clark, Dale Morgan, Leonard Arrington, Juanita Brooks, Hyrum Andrus, and now this important work by Klaus J. Hansen, the quoted statement evokes a concept and a theme which often recurs in the history of the L.D.S. Church in the nineteenth century.

The main elements in the doctrine of the political kingdom of God are these:

(1) The governments of this world will shortly pass away.

(2) The government of the kingdom of God administered by the L.D.S. priesthood will then rule during the apocalyptic events which precede the second coming of Christ.

(3) To prepare for this assumption of priesthood responsibility, Joseph Smith organized the nucleus of the kingdom of God prior to his death.

(4) This nucleus, the secret Council of Fifty or General Council, conducted this preparatory work from its establishment in Nauvoo until the 1880's, perhaps longer.

(5) The Council of Fifty was theoretically not a Church organization, and its membership and jurisdiction were not limited to the Church.

(6) The Council's functions were threefold:

To create among the Saints a political order after the fashion of the coming kingdom of God (i.e., a theocracy, or as some L.D.S. writers prefer, a theo-democracy).

> To direct and conduct political affairs in which the Church had an interest, through such institutions and individuals as might be available for the purpose (e.g., the officers of the State of Deseret).
>
> To stand in readiness for the day when the kingdom comes.

In defining the concept of the political kingdom, *Quest for Empire* breaks little new ground. That Joseph Smith established "a political organization intended to prepare the world for a literal, political government in anticipation of Christ's millennium" (p. ii) seems now beyond dispute. The Council of Fifty is likely to remain a tantalizingly mysterious body until its records become available for study, but evidence of the early Mormon commitment to the kingdom idea, like the quotation above, abounds.

Dr. Hansen's contributions are in exploring the context from which the kingdom concept emerged and in tracing the developing theme in much fuller detail than has been previously done. Even though the evidence which he has widely gathered does not, in this reviewer's judgment, sustain all the particular inferences which he draws from it, the general conclusion remains: "The historical implications of the political kingdom and the Council of Fifty are of the greatest magnitude" (p. ii).

That the book is an interpretive rather than simply narrative history becomes apparent in the first two chapters, the second less persuasive than the first. "The Kingdom of God and Millennial Tradition" sees the concept of the political kingdom evolving out of the strong millenarianism which marked the early Church and declining in appeal as the anticipation of the parousia waned. Poignant when expressed in 1903 (and possibly relevant today) are the words of one-time Council of Fifty member Benjamin F. Johnson: "We were over seventy years ago taught by our leaders to believe that the coming of Christ and the millennial reign was much nearer than we believe it to be now" (p. 19). Perhaps it is more than coincidence that interest in the kingdom doctrine is particularly strong today among Latter-day Saints whose estrangement from the secular world is most complete and whose anticipation of the second coming is most urgent.

In "Mormonism and the American Dream" the author interprets the concept of the kingdom as "nothing less than a heroic attempt to reconcile kingdom building with the American political tradition" (p. 35). This seems doubtful, because the times when the Council of Fifty was most active and the preaching of kingdom doctrine was most enthusiastic were when the Mormon ties to the United States were most strained. Certainly Nauvoo in the Prophet's last year was not governed in "the American political tradition," nor was early Utah, where the Council of Fifty nominated candidates and all elections were virtually unanimous. The difference, insisted upon from the beginning, between the political kingdom and the Church had semantic usefulness for such arguments as George Q. Cannon's in 1862: "No people are less open to the charge of mingling the two and seeking to destroy the distinctions between church and state than the Latter-day Saints" (p. 32). But this seems merely a defensive gambit, for the same speaker, in the same year, foresaw that the Saints would "become a political power, known and recognized by the powers of the earth" before the pre-millennial devastation of the world (p. 11).

Since the kingdom builders rejected *vox populi, vox Dei* for the testimony that the voice of the *Prophet* was the voice of God—in all things—their commitment to the American political tradition was nebulous and expedient. Resistance or indifference to Federal authority was frequently justified by distinguishing between a divinely-inspired Constitution and the evil men who were prostituting its principles—an argument occasionally heard in political sermons today. As for the doctrine of "separation of church and state," only when the end of the nineteenth century saw the political kingdom indefinitely postponed did it become an operating principle *within* the Mormon community.

Parenthetically it may be observed that the early L.D.S. commitment to the kingdom concept was not attended by a dogmatically narrow construction of the proper functions of secular government—including the United States government. In his presidential platform, 1844, Joseph Smith called for Federally-compensated emancipation of slaves, a national bank with branches throughout the country, and a protective tariff, while his successor, Brigham Young, participated in the subsidized transcontinental railroad project and petitioned Congress for funds for territorial schools. Nor has any interpreter of the Fourteenth Amendment placed a broader interpretation on the doctrine of Federal supremacy than did the prophet when he said, a generation before the amendment was adopted:

> Whenever that body Congress passes an act to maintain right with any power, or to restore right to any portion of her citizens, it is the *supreme law of the land;* and should a State refuse submission, that State is guilty of *insurrection or rebellion,* and the President has as much power to repel it as Washington had to march against the "whisky boys at Pittsburg," or General Jackson had to send an armed force to suppress the rebellion of South Carolina. (Quoted in G. Homer Durham, *Joseph Smith: Prophet-Statesman* (1944), p. 136.)

Those who today seek to make the kingdom doctrine a single-edged weapon against "big government" do not take their cue from the first exponents of that doctrine.

In treating "The Establishment of the Government of God," Dr. Hansen is vulnerable to criticism on historiographic grounds. Upon substantially the same evidence that Clark, Andrus, Mrs. Brooks, and others have used, he organizes the Council of Fifty on March 11, 1844, and identifies most of its members. But then he speculates about remote origins of the kingdom idea, possible connections with the Danites, with Freemasonry, and with plural marriage—"part of the social order of the political kingdom" (p. 54). He explores some of the doctrines and activities of the Council, tentatively accepting reports that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were successively ordained "King on earth" (p. 66) and saying both yes and no to the question of possible application of the principle of blood atonement (pp. 69-70).

The resort to plausibility when evidence is insufficient or lacking is risky business. Occasionally in the chapters on Nauvoo, where most of the hard evidence has already been published, and in his closing chapters on the demise of the kingdom, where hard evidence is almost non-existent, this reviewer be-

lieves that Dr. Hansen goes beyond a safe depth in pursuit of some of his minor hypotheses. It is not unlikely that subsequent research will bear him out on some of them, but the present state of knowledge does not justify his avowing them as confidently as he sometimes does.

The impression of Joseph Smith's last months which emerges from *Quest for Empire* is one in which preoccupation with the rapid establishment of the political kingdom underlay the 1844 presidential bid (which the author thinks the Prophet took seriously), the probing for colony sites in Texas and the Far West, and the defections of the group which launched *The Expositor.* The Prophet is seen simultaneously exploring several alternatives because he was not so certain about *how* the Lord intended to build the kingdom as he was that the kingdom *must* be built soon. He suppressed *The Expositor* to prevent exposure of the kingdom and in so doing brought his own death.

A fascinating chapter is "The Mantle of the Prophet," which analyzes the fragmenting of the Church after the martyrdom in terms of competition within the Council of Fifty. The actions of Lyman Wight and James J. Strang are more understandable in this context; the victory of Brigham Young is attributed to his successful insistence that the Council was not the directing body of the Church. Then, ironically, Young took the idea of the political kingdom to the Great Basin and kept it a central element in the Church for a generation.

The key role of the Fifty in directing the exodus and the establishment of political institutions in the West has already appeared in the published diaries of John D. Lee and Hosea Stout. Dr. Hansen believes that in 1845 the Saints wished to leave the United States, but that they readily adapted to the new situation created by the Mexican War. He flatly rejects the "frontier" thesis as an explanation of the State of Deseret. "The fact is that the Saints had migrated to the West precisely for the purpose of setting up their own government" (p. 127). Further, under the Council direction they acted speedily to "realize as many of the ideals of the political kingdom of God as possible before affiliation with the United States" (p. 127). When circumstances required, they sought statehood first and accepted territorial status reluctantly. Says Hansen, "Frank Cannon's assertion that the Mormons attempted to gain admission to the Union in order to escape its authority, as paradoxical as this may sound, is thus basically correct" (p. 135). Although Mormon theology accorded special significance to the Constitution and many of the Saints felt ties of affection for the nation, the migrating Church wanted no government except self-government, and the effort to approach self-government within the territorial context produced endless difficulty with the non-Mormon populace of Utah and the Federal government itself. Not until the twentieth century did conventional national loyalty achieve the high position which it now enjoys in the L.D.S. system of values.

Dr. Hansen acknowledges the difficulty of tracing how the Council of Fifty provided political direction during the years until Brigham Young's death in 1877. Since the fact that the L.D.S. hierarchy directed political and economic decision-making is not seriously disputed, this difficulty relates to procedures, not substance. The continuing existence of the Council, the talk of "cutting the thread" between "this kingdom and the kingdoms of this world" as Johnston's army approached, the indifference of Utah to the Civil War, and the sentiment

expressed by "Governor" Young in 1863 make it clear that the idea of the kingdom still flourished. Hansen believes that the Council was behind the Schools of the Prophets and the drive for political and economic autonomy in the late 1860's and early 1870's, but he presents no documentation.

The revival of the Council of Fifty in 1880 is represented as a defensive measure against the onslaught triggered by the Reynolds decision and the announced Church intention to defy the court and continue plural marriage. Little is known of the tactical details; Hansen believes that the question became one of how much to yield without abandoning the kingdom itself.

In this view of the Woodruff Manifesto, Dr. Hansen parts company with many interpreters of this phase of Mormon history. His preface suggests: "When . . . Woodruff issued the so-called 'Manifesto' ostensibly ending the practice of polygamy, he did so apparently to save not only the church but also the kingdom of God . . ." (p. ii). Support for this interpretation is not presented in the book, and it seems to this reviewer that the events which compelled the Manifesto must have made it apparent to the most committed Church leaders that the concept of *imperium in imperio* was also doomed—especially if Hansen is right in his insistence that the kingdom of God, rather than plural marriage, was what the anti-Mormons were most opposed to all along.

"Epilogue: The Metamorphosis of the Kingdom of God," contains some perceptive observations about what has happened to the "quest for empire" in the twentieth century. There is no speculation about when, or how, or if the Council of Fifty disappeared, but the doctrine of the kingdom of God—the political kingdom—is shown disappearing in Orwellian fashion. "The hierarchy could exorcise the separatist tendencies of Mormonism best by insisting that they never existed. The intellectual transformation of Mormonism could best be accomplished under the pretense that it was not going on" (p. 185). The political kingdom was swallowed up in that other-worldly kingdom of God whose coming was now associated with an indefinitely future millennium, and what George Q. Cannon had said for tactical purposes in 1862 now became doctrine: "No people are less open to the charge of . . . seeking to destroy the distinction between church and state than the Latter-day Saints" (p. 32).

This is a well-researched and well-written book. The notes, grouped at the back, are full but not conveniently identified with chapters and pages. The essay on sources shows that the author has done his homework; titles not mentioned there are found where appropriate in the notes. There are a few of those minor technical flaws which permit reviewers to show that they are on the job. Frederick L. Paxson's judgment on Mormon separatism is found on page 349, not 394, of *History of the American Frontier* (fn. 24, p. 205). Footnote 80, p. 211, has to be wrong unless John Mills Whittaker was able to confide to his journal in 1887 what Lorenzo Snow said in the Salt Lake Temple in 1900; and the use of the same Snow quotation twice in four pages (p. 178 and p. 182) is hardly justified by the author's indication of awareness that he is doing so. The book repeats itself in a few other places, and its tendency to build a larger hypothetical structure than its evidence will sustain has already been mentioned.

Quest for Empire should be widely read and discussed among people who are seriously interested in Mormon history, partly for the intrinsic interest of its

semi-secret subject, partly for the light it throws on some current political attitudes, and partly for its illustration of the process of institutional and doctrinal adaptation in a Church which has been reluctant to interpret its ninth Article of Faith, "we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things . . . ," as meaning that doctrines and policies of importance are subject to change.

How important was the political kingdom? Dr. Hansen observes at the beginning: "If few Mormons, in 1844, knew what kind of kingdom their prophet had organized that year, fewer know it today" (p. 5). That few knew about it in the nineteenth century may simply mean that it was not quite so important as Dr. Hansen believes—that it was an attractive idea, like the United Order, which was talked about more than acted upon, experimented with when circumstances permitted, but always peripheral to the main business of the Church. The observable political, economic, and social solidarity of the early Church does not *require* a kingdom doctrine to explain it. Still, the information so far discovered prompts a hope for new evidence by which to test Dr. Hansen's detailed interpretations and general conclusions.

That few know or care much about the kingdom idea today is probably only partly the result of limited information about the historic reality. Many Latter-day Saints, leaders and followers, understandably find the Church's thriving and comfortable present more congenial than its strange and sometimes disturbing past. Which, says Dr. Hansen, is paradoxical:

> Without the existence and activities of the Council of Fifty, which contributed significantly to the building of the Rocky Mountain Kingdom, Mormonism might well have failed to enjoy its present stature and prestige within the framework of accepted American religious values and persuasions (p. 190).

STRANGE PEOPLE IN A STRANGE LAND

Ted J. Warner

The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History. By Howard Roberts Lamar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966. xiii, 560 pp. $10.00. Ted Warner, a specialist in the history of the southwestern United States, teaches at Brigham Young University and is President of his Latter-day Saint Elders Quorum.

Howard R. Lamar, professor of history at Yale University and author of *Dakota Territory, 1861-1899: A Study of Frontier Politics* (1956), has extended his investigations to the Far Southwest and produced a scholarly, highly readable, and interesting account of that frontier region. Four territories are considered: New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. He describes how American government and institutions, such as the two-party system, trial by jury, and free schools, came to be established in a region where different races and cultures in varying degrees of development existed from 1846 to 1912. Despite the differences in the four territories, Lamar notes that many physical and economic problems were of common concern. Indeed the author suggests that because of