

Rulers

God and Our Rulers

Being a person never greatly taken with politicians and political rulers, I've always been a bit dismayed by St. Paul's words in the *Epistle to the Romans*, 13; 1, "...the authorities that exist are appointed by God" ('New King James' version). Suggesting that we pray for our rulers, and obey the civil law is, after all, one thing – the idea that rulers not only have God's authority, but are his direct appointees is something else, and goes much further. Romans is thought by many scholars to date from about AD 55 to 58. Would Paul have written in these terms if he had been writing during the Neronian persecution (after AD 64), or the persecutions of Decius (250-1) or Diocletian (302)? The *Book of Revelation* seems to depict the civil authorities in rather different terms, seeing them, or at least Rome itself (Rev. 17: 9), as the Whore of Babylon, drunk on the blood of the Christian martyrs (Rev. 17:6); Revelation is generally dated c. 95, or perhaps as early as c. AD 70.

What, I wonder, would St. Paul have made of those imperial persecutors, or of our rulers today, be they from the British Parliament, the E. C., or the recently re-elected American administration of Barack Obama? Well, he would see rulers intent on destroying human life in great numbers, whether it was Nero, trying to pass the blame of Rome's disastrous fire from his own shoulders to those of his Christian victims, or our present-day rulers seeking to export the megaholocaust of abortion from the places, in the West, where it is so entrenched, to the Third World, by means of condition-based aid programmes.

Would he, then, be so ready to call civil rulers God's appointees? I am always reluctant to submit to the temptation to disregard those parts of Scripture that don't seem to support my own ideas - to adopt the popular pick-and-choose attitude to Scripture - and I am conscious that the Bible often portrays despotic rulers as his agents in the task of correcting his people. Nero, Decius, and the others certainly fulfilled Jesus's prediction that his followers would inevitably suffer for allegiance to him, but were they actually God's agents? Are we - Christians today in the West - a people in need of chastisement?

November 2012