

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

Vol. VI, No. 6

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Oct./Nov., 1983

IMPERIAL BUREAUCRACY*

by Gary North

Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely [shrewdly] with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel (Ex. 1:8-12).

Who was this new Pharaoh? Old Testament scholars are divided, but Donovan Courville's reconstruction of Egyptian chronology points to Sesostri III. A major transformation of the Egyptian system of rule was imposed by this king. Courville writes: "During the period preceding Sesostri III, Egypt had existed as a feudal system, and historians speak of this period as the 'feudal age.' Under this arrangement, the territory of Egypt was divided into numerous local areas called nomes, over each of which was a prince or governor. He was not a servant of the Pharaoh and was permitted to rule undisturbed so long as he contributed his allotted quota to the king's treasury and perhaps to the army in case of need. . . . Under the reign of Sesostri III, this situation was changed. For the most part, these local princes were stripped of their power and stripped of their excessive possessions. For the first time in a hundred years or more, Egypt was now under the immediate and direct dictatorship of the pharaoh. . . . From this time on, we find no more of the tombs of these princes nor of the prolific inscriptions which they had previously left." (Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*, [1971], vol. 1, pp. 147-48.)

This centralization of political power was accompanied by an extensive building program. Courville argues that this program had to have been accomplished by means of slave labor. Furthermore, "Unlike the structures of the huge building program in the Pyramid Age, and again unlike that which occurred later in the XVIIIth Dynasty, this building was of brick and not of stone" (I, p. 148). This corresponds with the account in the Book of Exodus; the Hebrews used bricks to fulfill their assignments (Ex. 1:14). Another important

historical correlation is this: the building programs of Sesostri III and his successor, Amenemhet III, were in the eastern Delta region, which included the land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived. The cities of Pi-Raamses and Pi-Thom have been discovered in this region, but modern scholars have attributed the bulk of these ruins to Rameses II, a king of a much later date. Courville argues also that the list of the Ramessides kings in the Sothis list correlates to the earlier line of kings, which would explain why the land of Goshen was described as "the best in the land, in the land of Rameses" (Gen. 47:1).

Continuity and Discontinuity: Egypt's Theology

The religion of ancient Egypt, like all religious systems of the ancient Near East, viewed history as a struggle between chaos and order. Our world had its origin in the primordial waters of the underworld, the Egyptians believed.

Atum, the original god, created two other gods (male and female), which in turn created two more, and these two created Osiris (male sun god) and Isis, who gave birth to Horus, the falcon god of the sky. John A. Wilson concludes that chaos was not overcome by Re-Atum, the creator god, since the god of the underworld and the god of darkness continued to live, "but they continued in their proper place and not in universal and formless disorder." (Wilson, "Egypt," in Henri Frankfort, [ed.], *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, [1946] 1964, p. 54.)

The Egyptians lacked a specific mythological account of the creation of man. However, as Wilson makes clear, basic to Egyptian mythology was the concept of **continuity**. "To be sure," writes Wilson, "a man seems to be one thing, and the sky or a tree seems to be another. But to the ancient Egyptian such concepts had a protean and complementary nature. The sky might be thought of as a material vault above earth, or as a cow, or as a female. A tree might be a tree or a female who was the tree goddess. Truth might be treated as an abstract concept, or as a goddess, or as a divine hero who once lived on earth. A god might be depicted as a man, or as a falcon, or as a falcon-headed man. . . . There was thus a continuing substance across the phenomena of the universe, whether organic, inorganic, or abstract." There was no absolute distinction between creator and creature; instead, there was a **continuity of being**.

The doctrine of continuity has a tendency to become the doctrine of the divinization of man. Furthermore, the divinization of man has an equally distinct tendency to become a doctrine of the divine State, or the divine Church,

* A chapter from the forthcoming book, *The Dominion Covenant Exodus*, scheduled for release in early 1984

or the divine Church-State. The State, as the most concentrated power in human affairs, becomes the mediating institution between the gods and evolving mankind. We can see this in the history of Egyptian kingship. Wilson's summary is to the point: "The king of Egypt was himself one of the gods and was the land's representative among the gods. Furthermore, he was the one official intermediary between the people and the gods, the one recognized priest of all the gods. Endowed with divinity, the pharaoh had the protean character of divinity; he could merge with his fellow gods and could become any one of them. In part this was symbolic, the acting of a part in religious drama or the simile of praise. But the Egyptian did not distinguish between symbolism and participation; if he said that the king was Horus, he did not mean that the king was playing the part of Horus, he meant that the king **was** Horus, that the god was effectively present in the king's body during the particular activity in question." The Pharaoh deputized priests to perform religious duties, just as he deputized bureaucratic functionaries to perform administrative duties, but State theory maintained that these deputies acted for him as the supreme incarnation of the gods. Egyptian theology was polytheistic, but it was also **monophysite**: "... many men and many gods, but all ultimately of one nature."

To understand the enormous significance of the Hebrews' stay in Egypt, we have to understand the central position of the Pharaoh. Joseph's ability to interpret the king's dream, and then to administer the collection and distribution of grain, elevated the Pharaoh's position, reinforcing the traditional Egyptian State theology. Then, two centuries later, Moses smashed the very foundations of Egypt by smashing men's faith in their king's position as a divine figure. Again, citing Wilson: "The gods had sent him forth to tend mankind, but he was not of mankind. This is perhaps the most fitting picture of the good Egyptian ruler, that he was the herdsman for his people. . . . The herdsman is primarily the pastor, the 'feeder', and a first responsibility of the state was to see that the people were fed. Thus the king of Egypt was the god who brought fertility to Egypt, produced the life-giving waters, and presented the gods with the sheaf of grain which symbolized abundant food. Indeed, an essential function of his kingship was that of a medicine man, whose magic insured good crops. In one of the ceremonies of kingship, the pharaoh encircled a field four times as a rite of conferring fertility upon the land." God blesses Sesostri I through Joseph. The arrogance of power led Sesostri III, his great-great-grandson, to enslave the heirs of Joseph. (Courville, I, p. 218.) Within a century, Egypt was in ruins, under the domination of foreign invaders, the Hyksos (Amalekites). We can better appreciate God's words to the (probable) Pharaoh of the exodus, Koncharis: "For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:15-16).

Slavery

The Pharaoh of the enslavement followed a pattern which had become familiar in the lives of the Hebrews. Like Laban in his dealings with Jacob, and Potiphar in his dealings with Joseph, the Pharaoh recognized the economic value of the Hebrews. At the same time, he resented certain concomitant aspects of Hebrew productivity, in this case, their fecundity. Yet he was unwilling to take the obvious defensive step, namely, to remove them from the land. He wanted to expropriate their productivity, to compel their service. It was not enough that they were in Egypt, bringing the

land under dominion, filling the nation with productive workers. Their productivity was a threat to the Egyptian theocratic State. These foreigners did not serve Egyptian gods, nor did they acknowledge the divinity of the Pharaoh, the link between the gods and mankind. They were foreigners in Egypt, and they threatened to fill up the land, making the Egyptians a minority population in their own nation. How, then, could the Egyptian State appropriate their obvious productivity without surrendering sovereignty to a foreign people and a foreign God? The answer, so familiar in the history of the ancient world, was slavery.

The Egyptians hoped to gain the economic benefits of a godly people's productivity on terms that were hostile to long-term productivity. They hoped to enslave the Hebrews, making it impossible for them to revolt, or to replace Egyptian sovereignty, or to flee. Yet they also expected these slaves to remain as productive as before. They wanted the fruits of godly behavior and God's visible blessings without having to humble themselves before that God and his laws. **They believed that by capturing God's people, they could enslave God Himself.** They would trap the God of the Hebrews, as someone might ensnare a wild stallion, by capturing its "harem." They would use the Hebrews as living amulets or talismans—magical devices that could be manipulated in order to call forth powers of the gods.

The Pharaoh of Joseph's day acknowledged Joseph's access to accurate secret knowledge, and he honored him and his family, transferring the sovereignty of the State to Joseph. He placed his own ring on Joseph's hand, arrayed him in fine linen and gold, and placed him in the second chariot after his own (Gen. 41:42-43). The Pharaoh of the oppression wanted Jacob's heirs to produce on Egypt's terms, without the transfer of any of the king's sovereignty, but he expected to be able to control and even reduce that fertility, while appropriating the fruits of their labor. He was wrong; their fertility continued, and he was forced to attempt the murder of all the male infants in order to stop this Hebrew population explosion (Ex. 1:15-19). He, like the Pharaoh of the exodus, found that he could not control God through His people. Laban had discovered the same thing in his dealings with Jacob. God's plan was sovereign over Egyptian history, not the planning of the Pharaohs. The Pharaoh of Joseph's day had recognized this, and Egypt had prospered because he was wise enough to transfer the symbols and prerogatives of State sovereignty to Joseph. His successors sought to reassert their self-proclaimed divine sovereignty over the Hebrews, and the Pharaoh of the exodus saw Egypt's wealth and military power swallowed up.

The Bureaucratic Megamachine

It was not just the Hebrews who were enslaved. Sesostri III recentralized the Egyptian social and political order. He began to construct treasure cities, indicating that he had begun to use tax revenues in order to strengthen the visible sovereignty of the central government. Centuries earlier, Pharaohs had used State revenues to construct the giant pyramids—monuments to a theology of death and resurrection for the Pharaoh (and later, of the nobility)—but the Pharaoh of the oppression settled for displays of his immediate sovereignty. In Joseph's day, the Pharaohs did not build pyramids. Although Joseph had bought all the land of Egypt, excepting only the land belonging to the priests (Gen. 47:20-22), in the name of Sesostri I, the visible and institutional manifestation of that implicit centralization (public works pyramids) did not take place for over a century. When Sesostri III abolished the prerogatives of the regional princes, simultaneously placing the Hebrews in bondage, he asserted the sovereignty of **theocratic monophysitism**,

with the Pharaoh as the link between heaven and earth. He formally reversed the special position of the Hebrews, which Sesostrius I had acknowledged in return for special knowledge of the future—a special revelation which Joseph stated came from God (Gen. 41:16), thereby placing the Pharaoh under God's control. "What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:28), Joseph announced, making it plain concerning the source of history and agricultural productivity. Sesostrius III attempted to deny any sovereignty other than his own, and in a massive centralization of political power, he cancelled the special position of both the Hebrews and the regional princes. (Courville, I, p. 146.)

The Pyramid Age had demonstrated the degree to which a political order could be bureaucratized. Max Weber, the influential German historian-sociologist, devoted the last fifteen years of his life to a series of studies on the West's tendency to rationalize and bureaucratize itself. In 1909, he wrote: "To this day there has never existed a bureaucracy which could compare with that of Egypt." Lewis Mumford, who has specialized in the history of architecture, concluded that nothing short of total bureaucratization would have enabled Egypt to construct its pyramids. More than this: it required the creation of a social machine. Egypt became the first **megamachine**, to use Mumford's terminology. Egyptian society had to be molded along the lines of a pyramid—a hierarchy, with the divine Pharaoh as the capstone.

The divinity of the king had to serve as the universal faith, given the magnitude of the undertaking. "This extension of magnitude in every direction, this raising of the ceiling of human effort, this subordination of individual aptitudes and interests to the mechanical job at hand, and this unification of a multitude of subordinates to a single end that derived from the divine power exercised by the king, in turn, by the success of the result, confirmed that power. For note: it was the king who uttered the original commands: it was the king who demanded absolute obedience and punished disobedience with torture, mutilation, or death: it was the king who alone had the god-like power of turning live men into dead mechanical objects: and finally it was the king who assembled the parts to form the machine and imposed a new discipline of mechanical organization, with the same regularity that moved the heavenly bodies on their undeviating course. No vegetation god, no fertility myth, could produce this kind of cold abstract order, this detachment of power from life. Only one empowered by the Sun God could remove all the hitherto respected norms or limits of human endeavor." (Lewis Mumford, "The First Megamachine," in *Interpretations and Forecasts, 1922-1972*, [1972], p. 263.)

The construction of the pyramids required a reliable organization of knowledge, both supernatural (priesthood) and technological (bureaucracy). The great Cheops (Khufu) pyramid contains at least 2,300,000 stone blocks, each weighing two and a half tons, on the average. These stone blocks, if cut into cubes one foot on each side, would circle two-thirds of the earth's surface at the equator. Such a construction task could not have been carried out without a bureaucratic transmission belt. It would not have been possible to build the pyramids apart from a significant depersonalization of the men who made up this massive human machine.

Mumford has summarized the nature of this bureaucratic machine: "The removal of human dimensions and organic limits is indeed the chief boast of the authoritarian machine. Part of its productivity is due to the use of unstinted physical coercion to overcome human laziness or bodily fatigue. Occupational specialization was a necessary step in the assemblage of the human machine: only by intense specialization at every part of the process could the superhuman ac-

curacy and perfection of the product have been achieved. . . . These human machines were by nature impersonal, if not deliberately dehumanized; they had to operate on a big scale or they could not work at all; for no bureaucracy, however well organized, could govern a thousand little workshops, each with its own traditions, its own craft skills, its own willful personal pride and sense of responsibility. So the form of control imposed by kingship was confined to great collective enterprises."

What kind of society emerges from an economic and political system which is determined to construct pyramids to glorify the eldest sons of a kingly line, and to glorify each one's transition from the god Horus to the god Osiris (at death)? Such a bureaucratic society infringes upon the ability and responsibility of individuals to extend dominion across the earth. Such a **concentration of capital** in a single bureaucratic enterprise absorbs the resources that could otherwise be used to finance smaller, decentralized businesses. It also concentrates so much responsibility into the hands of a single monarch or bureaucratic regime that **an error on the part of the hierarchy can threaten the survival of the entire social order**. This is the kind of centralization, though on a less intense level, which brought down Egypt at the time of the exodus. Egypt lived or died in terms of one man's decisions.

Another important danger of bureaucracy is its lack of creativity. "Now the important part about the functioning of a classic bureaucracy," Mumford writes, "is that it originates nothing: its function is to transmit, without alteration or deviation, the orders that come from above. No merely local information or human considerations may alter this inflexible transmission process—except by corruption. This administrative method ideally requires a studious repression of all the autonomous functions of the personality, and a readiness to perform the daily task with ritual exactitude." This kind of bureaucracy leads to a static social order, until it snaps from external pressures, or disintegrates from its own weight and inability to generate productive resources. Both events took place in Egypt: disintegration into feudalism, and then a revival of centralization, which was followed by national defeat immediately after the exodus. Yet Egypt could not throw off the static rule of the Pharaohs, for the Egyptians remained faithful to their monophysite theology. The only major change, late in Egyptian history, long after the exodus, was an extension of the process of divinization to the common man, so that he, too, might become Osiris after his death, as the Pharaohs had before him. Egyptian culture was remarkably stable; it was the longest-lived of all the ancient kingdoms, but E. O. James is correct when he refers to its characteristic feature as the **cult of the dead**, one which assumed "gigantic proportions." The pyramids are the most visible, most impressive, and most representative monuments to Egyptian religion and society.

What kind of society was it? Mumford's words ring true. "Bureaucratic regimentation was in fact part of the larger regimentation of life, introduced by this power-centered culture. Nothing emerges more clearly from the Pyramid texts themselves, with their wearisome repetitions of formulae, than a colossal capacity for enduring monotony, a capacity that anticipates the universal boredom achieved in our own day. Even the poetry of both early Egypt and Babylonia reveal this iterative hypnosis: the same words, in the same order, with no gain in meaning, repeated a dozen times—or a hundred times. This verbal compulsiveness is the psychical side of the systematic compulsion that brought the labor machine into existence. Only those who were sufficiently docile to endure this regimen at every stage from command to execution could become an effective unit in the

human machine." Here was a culture devoid of any concept of progress, a culture which ignored its own history, except insofar as it built monuments to the dead. It did not even have an accurate chronology of its own kings, as Courville's study demonstrates, a problem which Western historians have wrestled with for two thousand years. The Greeks paid more attention to Egypt's dynastic chronology than the later Egyptians did. Egypt was a society without a future, so it was not particularly concerned about its past. As Wilson writes, "For the Jews the future is normative. For the Egyptians, on the other hand, the past was normative; and no pharaoh could hope to achieve more than the establishment of the conditions 'as they were in the time of Re, in the beginning.'" The State would, at best, be able to preserve the status quo. Static peace, not any fundamental alteration, was the ideal, despite the fact that certain kings—Sesostris III, Thutmose III—were able to expand the dynasty's reach into Asia Minor.

The Egyptians believed, as did all the ancient religions except orthodox Hebrews, that the creation originated in chaos. Order developed from chaos and is in perpetual tension with chaos. Mircea Eliade's voluminous studies have surveyed this theme in dozens of pagan cosmologies, and Egypt was no exception. Rushdoony has summarized this theme in ancient religion: "True social order requires peace and communication with both chaos and deity, and society either moves downward into chaos or forward into deification. The significance of the Tower of Babel is thus apparent: it denied the discontinuity of God's being and asserted man's claim to a continuity of being with God and heaven. The Tower was the **gate** to God and **gate** of God, signifying that man's social order made possible an ascent of being into the divine order. The Egyptian pyramid set forth the same faith." (Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* [1971], p. 40.) Egyptian culture was inescapably statist. "The one and the many were brought together in the person of the king. The Egyptian language had no word for 'state.' For them, the state was not one institution among many but rather the essence of the divine order for life and the means of communication between heaven, earth, and hell. Life therefore was totally and inescapably statist. In this perspective, anything resembling liberty and individuality in the contemporary sense was alien and impossible. . . . Deification was entry into the oneness of the divine order, and membership in the state in this life was similarly participation in the divine oneness manifested in the pharaoh and protection against the horror of chaos and meaningless particularity." (Rushdoony, *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.) The product of such a theology was imperial bureaucracy.

The Pharaoh of Moses' day looked at the remarkable growth of the Hebrew population, even in the face of

affliction, and he grew fearful. What if these people allied themselves to an invading army? How was it that they could multiply like this? What would stop their growth? This population growth, promised to Abraham four centuries before (Gen. 17:2), was a threat to all the plans of the Pharaoh—an uncontrolled factor in a human megamachine. Growth, in a static culture, represented an anomaly, something beyond the calculations of the planning agencies. Uncontrolled growth—growth outside the bureaucratic plan—was a destabilizing factor. It had to be thwarted. Yet the Pharaoh was powerless to put a stop to it.

Conclusion

Imperial bureaucracy is one of the manifestations of the society of Satan. It is a top-down system of central planning that imagines that the planners are near-gods, that they have sufficient imagination and a God-like comprehensive knowledge to set forth their decrees, and their words shall come to pass. Imperial bureaucracy is produced whenever men believe, in short, that at least some men—the central planning elite—are essentially divine, or what is the same thing, that they have no god above them to whom their subjects (slaves) can successfully appeal.

The Egyptian State created a bureaucracy so vast, so all-encompassing, that nothing in man's history rivaled it until the rise of the modern industrialized socialist commonwealths. The State enshrined the cult of the dead in a desperate attempt to achieve life beyond the grave. Life was seen as static, something which possesses unchanging continuity with life after death, at least for the Pharaoh. This static culture was statist to the core.

When the exodus came, it did not simply free an enslaved population from physical bondage. It freed them from a static, hopeless society that was doomed, even if economically successful, to endless boredom—a kind of living death. The "living" death of the Pharaoh's mummy was mirrored in the living death of the society. Israel was freed from a society which was based on the theology of the divine State. No king in Israel ever claimed to be divine, for only God has that right of absolute sovereignty. The people of Israel, even under the worst of kings, were never to live within the imperial bureaucracy of a centralized divine order. The freedom God provided for them was thorough, and the heart of it was religious: the denial of total sovereignty any place on earth except God's "holy of holies" in His temple, not in some dead man's pyramid. After the exodus, there would be no more pyramid-building, even in Egypt, where the "uncreative" Hyksos rulers (Amalekites) constructed a feudal, decentralized kingdom. The megamachine was broken. For that, even the Egyptians should have been grateful.

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