

## PEACE AND THE REIGN OF CHRIST

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**D**URING the decade immediately following World War I Pope Pius XI in an encyclical letter to the whole Church solemnly instituted the feast of Christ the King. Seeing the world, even after the catastrophe of a world war, still reluctant to return to the principles of Christian peace and justice, the Holy Father felt the need of recalling to the minds and hearts of men the kingly power of Christ over the world. With that foresight in things spiritual, which is characteristic of the Vicars of Christ, he realized that if the world was unwilling to live by the law of God, it would only be a matter of time before the horrors of another world war would visit the earth. Now a few years after that second World War another Pontiff is again pleading with the leaders of nations to base their peace upon Christian justice and charity as the sole foundation upon which the principle of One World can rest. And again it is necessary to recall to their hearts and minds the obligation of subjection and obedience of all men to Christ the King.

Although the feast of Christ the King is of recent origin the title of king is not something newly attributed to Christ. There are sundry places in Sacred Scripture where reference is made to the regal character of the Son of God. In the book of Psalms we read the testimony of His royal ancestor: "In his days shall justice spring up and abundance of peace . . . and he shall rule from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."<sup>1</sup> Among the prophets of the Old Testament also the kingship of the coming Messiah is foretold. Isaias calls Him the Prince of peace upon whose shoulders shall rest the government of the world; Jeremias, the all-wise Judge of justice; Daniel, the Everlasting Ruler whom all peoples and tribes and tongues shall serve; Zachary, the King of the Jews, the Just One and Saviour.

It is in the New Testament, however, that the kingship of Christ is most clearly revealed. The Angel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary that her Son would "reign in the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."<sup>2</sup> All through His

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 71: 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1: 33.

life our Divine Lord taught with kingly authority and as one to whom was given all power in heaven and on earth. On the day of His death He finally confirmed His royalty when He solemnly testified in the praetorium before the Roman Procurator: "I am a King."<sup>3</sup>

The principal reason why Christ merits to be called a king is the hypostatic union between His nature and the Person of the Word of God. Because He is the Son of God He excels not only all men, but all the angels in heaven. Therefore all creatures are bound to adore Him, to be obedient to Him and to pay homage to Him as their King and Creator. As a consequence of this ineffable union He is also the one perfect Son of Man. Because as man He has not only the fullness of grace, the virtues and gifts, but also the highest degree of the light of glory and of charity, He has the right to be called the King of the universe.

Not only by this natural right is He king, but also by a dearly acquired right, that is, by the shedding of His Blood for the redemption of the world. By this act of meritorious love and infinite satisfaction He has earned the right to fealty from all those for whom He opened the gates of heaven.

It is clear from these things that the kingship of Christ is universal enough to include both spiritual and temporal rule. During His earthly life, however, the Saviour saw fit to refrain from exercising His temporal power. He successfully eluded over-enthusiastic Jews, who, after several wonderful miracles, wished to take Him away and make Him king. In the praetorium before Pilate He declared that His kingdom is not of this world. It was because the Jews did not recognize the spirituality of that kingdom that they rejected Him as Messiah. To their minds He was a fraud because He failed to deliver them from the bondage of Caesar to whom they had been subjected for so long. Since materialism had enveloped their minds and hardened their hearts they could not understand a kingdom of sanctification, a kingdom of remission of sin; they could not conceive of "a kingdom of truth and life; a kingdom of holiness and grace; a kingdom of justice, love and peace."<sup>4</sup>

According to Saint Thomas a king is one to whom belongs the universal power of governing others in order that a good end might be attained. A spiritual king, then, as Christ principally is, directs his subjects to a spiritual end, ultimately to God Himself. Christ as King of kings wields a most powerful influence over His subjects.

<sup>3</sup> John 18: 37.

<sup>4</sup> Preface of Christ the King.

Not only society as a whole but the individual members of that society come under His sway. Without His help men cannot observe the natural law or keep the moral code, or even make good positive laws. Today especially is this true as the world tries in vain to form a lasting peace without recourse to Him who is called the Prince of peace.

Every man and every part of man is influenced by the Saviour's kingly power: the just by His grace and charity; sinners by faith and hope; even heretics and pagans by His actual grace of illumination and inspiration. He exercises His power over the soul of man which He deifies; over the intellect which He illumines with His eternal truth; over the will which He disposes to obey Him and to be subject to Him; over the heart as One loved above all; over the body as a member of Christ.

And yet, as the present Holy Father has observed,<sup>5</sup> the rule of Christ over men and society is not recognized today. The authority of God and the existence of His eternal law are denied. Civil authority is completely divorced from dependence upon the Supreme Being. Men have almost entirely abandoned the unchangeable moral code in favor of a policy of expediency and convenience. As a result the past half-century has witnessed the elevation of the state to the last end of life, to the supreme criterion of the moral and juridical order, consequently fostering in the state an insatiable greed so that it is forever trying to bring the whole world under its dictatorial sway. All the principles of social life have come to rest on a purely human foundation, inspired by earthly motives and relying for their force on the sanction of a purely external authority. Individuals too have come to put their trust in the products of their own minds without reference to the First Cause of all.

The social, economic and political unrest in the world is due in large part to the desertion of Christ the King by His human subjects. While on earth He taught the principles of human living and exemplified them by a perfect life. He repeated again and again that only by reliance on the power of God and by subjection to His will can earthly happiness among men be attained. For security is not from wealth or influence or from the sword; the power to renew the face of the earth comes from within the heart inflamed by the Spirit of Love and Truth. Peace can be true and lasting only if based upon the solid rock of the natural law and divine revelation. Life can come only from the Author of life, the true and living God.

Man must be re-educated spiritually and religiously if peace

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Enycl. Summi Pontificatus*.

and harmony among men and nations are to be achieved. Human thoughts and human actions must proceed from Christ as rays of light from the sun, must be motivated by justice and crowned with charity. The dignity of man as an image of God and heir of heaven as well as the authority of legitimately constituted government must be upheld and defended. In a word, the world must end its rebellion and again become subject to Christ the King, so that a true One World may be established through that unity which the Saviour's dying wish: "that all may be one even as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John 17: 21.

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