

Thematic meditations

SATURDAY



THAT HE MAY REIGN

ON EARTH AS IN HAEVEN

43^e Pèlerinage de Pentecôte
de Paris à Notre-Dame de Chartres

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For His Kingdom to Come – The Doctrine of Christ the King

Dear pilgrim,

This morning you heard the teaching of the Popes and the Catechism on the kingship of Jesus Christ. But in a world that has forgotten God, that professes a radical separation between the religious and the temporal, can we still speak of Christendom or the Social Kingship of Christ? *“If I already have faith, if Christ reigns in the depths of my heart, isn’t that more than enough?”* And didn’t Christ also say, *“My Kingdom is not of this world”*? To delve into these questions and to show you the urgency of working for Christ’s reign in society, I propose that we return to the source of all doctrine—that is, the Gospel, the Word of God—and see, from there, how the contours of Jesus Christ’s kingship take shape. This is the central meditation of the pilgrimage: it may be somewhat theoretical, but it is fundamental to setting everything else in proper order.



Représentation du Christ-Roi à l'abbaye de Randol

Christ is King

This kingship was not first discovered by Pius XI in *Quas Primas* in 1925; it is affirmed in Scripture and is therefore a revealed truth. It is announced numerous times in the Old Testament: *“I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession.”* (Ps. 2) and again: *“All kings shall bow down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.”* (Ps. 71).

Similarly, the Archangel Gabriel announces it to the Virgin Mary when he says: *“The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.”*

Before Pilate, Jesus Himself affirms His kingship: *“You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born.”*

Jesus expresses this kingship in His final words to the apostles before the Ascension: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* Take note, dear pilgrim: Jesus does not merely say to baptize individuals but to baptize nations!

Finally, all Christians call for this kingship in the prayer Jesus taught us, the *Our Father*: *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Why is Christ King? For two reasons, as recalled in a well-known pilgrimage hymn:

- **“True King, You are by birth”**—that is, by His eternal birth as the Son of God. Jesus is God, and heaven and earth belong to Him by right. By reason of the hypostatic union (two natures in one person), Christ reigns by nature, as man, because He is the Incarnate Son of God.

Indeed, as St. Paul says: *“For by Him all things were created... all things were created through Him and for Him.”*

- **“True King, You are by conquest”**—that is, by His Passion and the blood He shed for the salvation of all men. Through Redemption, Christ has therefore acquired all power of jurisdiction, justice, and governance over all men (since all are called to salvation), as He has opened the gates of heaven to us through His blood.

Christ is therefore King, whether we acknowledge it or not.

A Special Kingship: First Spiritual, but also Social

And yet, Jesus specifies: *“My Kingdom is not of this world”*; and also: *“Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”*! Pilate, and with him all the Caesars of the earth, breathes a sigh of relief: *“Each to their own, God in the intimacy of the soul, Caesar to manage public life—this suits me perfectly!”*

So, what are we to think of this? In fact, it is true that Christ did not seek earthly kingship on earth. Indeed, His Kingdom does not come from this world, nor does it find its origin in this world, because it is primarily a spiritual Kingdom: Christ desires to reign first and foremost in our hearts.

After the multiplication of the loaves, the Jews wanted to make Christ their earthly king to bring prosperity and happiness politically: Jesus refused! No, *“My Kingdom is not of this world,”* because it is unlike the kingdoms of the world: the Kingdom of Jesus is primarily and fundamentally an interior and spiritual Kingdom, a reign over the hearts of men, and the purpose of this Kingdom is to lead men to paradise.

But He also reigns over the temporal, as shown by His response to Pilate: *“You would have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above.”* Indeed, Christ is fully human, and through His humanity, He reigns over all our being—body and soul—and therefore over all social bodies, and thus over society as a whole.

Distinguishing Temporal Power from Spiritual Power

All authority comes from God, but God truly delegates His power to the kings of the earth for temporal matters and commands men to respect their rulers. This is a very important point, clearly taught by Saint Paul.

Thus, Christianity has always distinguished between two orders, two perfect societies:

- On one hand, the State or the city, governed by temporal power (*“Caesar”*); it has its autonomy in its domain, namely the temporal order, and it has a precise goal: the natural happiness of men through virtue and the pursuit of the common good.
- On the other hand, the Church, which is Christ continued and communicated, whose proper domain is the spiritual, and which has a precise goal: the eternal happiness of men.

Thus, Christianity recognizes the legitimacy of the temporal order and its autonomy. When we speak of the social kingship of Jesus or of Christendom, it absolutely does not mean that bishops should govern countries or that the Gospel should become the constitutional law of nations. That would be to confuse things. It is like on a pilgrimage: we don’t ask the chaplains to plan the route or set up the

bivouacs, nor to be the chapter leaders—that is the role of the laity, and rightly so! This distinction is not modern; it is in the DNA of Christianity. As early as the 5th century, Saint Gelasius wrote: *“The spiritual power keeps itself away from the snares of the world and, fighting for God, does not meddle in secular affairs, while in turn, the secular power refrains from directing divine matters.”*

This is the proper understanding of Christian laïcité: the distinction of the two powers, which should not be confused with two radically different visions:

- Theocracy, where the spiritual commands the temporal, as in Islam (under Sharia law, only Muslims are considered true citizens of the state).
- Secularism, which separates (and even opposes) the temporal and the spiritual.

So, you might ask, why speak of Christ’s reign over societies? Each to their own, Caesar for the temporal, God for the spiritual, and the sheep will be well tended! But no, and for a very simple reason: Caesar and God care for the same sheep. A sheep, and even more so a man, cannot be divided. In other words, every man has a dual citizenship: citizenship for eternal life, since all men (not just Christians!) are called by God to eternal life; and citizenship on earth, since all men live in society on this earth.

The temporal cannot be severed from the spiritual, even though it is distinct from it. In fact, the temporal order must necessarily be open to the spiritual order for the simple reason that the men for whom Caesar is responsible on this earth are all called to the inheritance of the saints in heaven; their hearts are made for God, and so is Caesar’s.

The structures of society, which are Caesar’s domain, *“greatly help men either to be lost or to convert,”* as Father Calmel said. Because we are made to live in society, we are greatly shaped by it—by education, laws, customs, and culture: all these things can prepare the way for the Kingdom within us or, on the contrary, make it harder to reach.

As Pius XII said: *“The shape given to society, whether in conformity with or contrary to divine laws, determines and influences the good or the harm of souls, meaning that the fact that men—all called to be vivified by the grace of Christ—breathe, in the earthly contingencies of life’s course, either the healthy and life-giving air of truth and moral virtues, or, on the contrary, the morbid and often deadly microbe of error and depravity.”*

This is why Christ’s Kingdom, which primarily concerns the heart and the holiness of men, must logically also extend to society itself because it is just and good: it concerns the salvation of men! This is what is called *“the primacy of the spiritual.”*

Christendom

This harmony between the temporal and the spiritual is called Christian civilization or Christendom: *“a civilization where the temporal is continually irrigated by the eternal,”* said Gustave Thibon.

Christendom is not merely a nostalgic memory of an idealized past... *“If we seek to bring peace and beauty to the earth, it is not to replace Heaven, but to serve as its footstool,”* said Dom Gérard. When we speak of Christendom, we advocate for a society where the gentle law of Jesus Christ permeates once again. It is essential that men are able to lead, on earth and within society, a life worthy of Heaven, worthy of Jesus Christ.

For there are only two possibilities: either the institutions of society conform to the natural order and thereby promote the life of grace and holiness; or they oppose the natural law, inclining men toward sin. This applies equally to schools, labor laws, laws concerning morality, family, leisure, and culture.

Let us, however, be wary of idealizing such a Christendom! The history of Christianity has sufficiently shown us that societies animated by the Christian spirit do not thereby become earthly paradises. Even in a Christendom, there will always be sin, and people who seek to lead others astray or corrupt the hearts of the innocent; but there is a significant difference between the influence of a bad individual and the pervasive influence of a society steeped in evil. For we need society to develop as both men and saints. As the proponents of abortion laws themselves admitted: when the law changes, the entire mentality of a people changes. Pius XII remarked that once subversion of the natural order reaches a certain degree, evangelization becomes difficult; John Paul II echoed this idea, speaking of “*structures of sin*” that suffocate us.

Let us also remember that the world of grace is a world of freedom, and it is not about coercing men to believe or to become saints, for faith is either free or it is nothing.

“*To penetrate mentalities, morals, and societal structures with the Christian spirit*”—this is the essence of Christendom. A civilization in which the environment protects the soul from the intoxication of evil through just laws, and creates the conditions favorable for the encounter of the soul with God. A temporal order where every man can breathe, if he so chooses, the pure and life-giving air of truth and virtue; a society in which good is encouraged and evil is suppressed, where a natural and Christian ambiance facilitates the noble life of man and Christian.

Conclusion

In summary: why must Christ reign? On the one hand, it is a matter of justice and truth: everything belongs to Him, and every knee must bow on earth, in Heaven, and under the earth, as Saint Paul tells us. On the other hand, it is a matter of charity: the form given to society—whether in conformity with or contrary to the Gospel—determines the good or harm of souls, as Pius XII says.

Adveniat regnum tuum, sicut in caelo et in terra. On earth as it is in Heaven, meaning in the temporal order as well as the spiritual order. May Your Kingdom come, which means it is up to us to work so that Christ reigns in fact on earth as He already reigns in Heaven.

A lofty dream, you say? Dreams can become reality when they align with God’s plan. So let the laity work, in their proper place and at their level. Christendom begins when a Christian decides to sanctify the place where he is, to observe divine law, and, if he has the power, to ensure its observance.

Additional Quotes

Saint John Chrysostom, Homily on Mt 19:5 (PG 57, 280B): “*On earth as it is in Heaven... Jesus asks each faithful person who prays to do so universally for the whole earth. For He does not say, ‘May Your will be done in me or in you,’ but ‘on all the earth’: so that error may be banished, that truth may reign, that vice may be destroyed, that virtue may flourish, and that the earth may no longer differ from Heaven.*”

Gustave Thibon, *Au secours des évidences*, Mame, 2022, p. 155: “*Man is spirit and flesh, an immortal soul and a ‘social animal.’ This means that the Christian faith here below needs to be encased in morals, traditions, practices, and external signs, all of which are earthly paths to Heaven. In other*

words, there is no Christianity without Christendom, and it is one of the worst errors of some believers to minimize, or even eliminate, in the name of interior life, the external, local, and sociological aspect of religion."

Dom Gérard, Demain la Chrétienté: "[Christendom] is an alliance between earth and Heaven, an alliance of nations with eternal Wisdom. It is the political system in the broadest sense, spiritually inspired by the Church but temporally autonomous, which allows the dual and unique law of God to reign: the Decalogue, the summary of natural law, and the Gospel with its law of Love and its Beatitudes, taught by Christ Himself."

Charles Péguy: "My young friend, the future will teach you that it is unfortunately not enough to be Catholic. One must also work in the temporal order if one wishes to wrest the future from temporal tyrannies."

Father Calmel, On Our Roads of Exile, the Beatitudes: "He who desires, in civil society, all justice and immediately, lacks political sense. He does not understand that the life of the city develops over time and that a certain duration is necessary to correct (...) and improve. To wish to immediately destroy all injustice is to unleash worse injustices."