

# Christ Our King

By Unknown

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## **An Explanation of the New Feast from an Historical and Dogmatic Standpoint**

We retained the memory of the kingship of Christ by calling Him "Our Lord." But a word thus used daily loses its special meaning and assumes the place of a proper name or noun. Hence the need of renewing the teaching that Jesus Christ is a King, and recently His Holiness the Pope instituted a festival on which, every year, this attribute of Our Lord will be duly celebrated.

As explained in the Encyclical of His Holiness, Christ is King in more than one sense. The extracts here given from a book of Sir John Seeley, Professor of History in the University of Cambridge, tell very clearly in what sense Our Lord is literally and historically a king. Sir John was not noted for his orthodoxy as an Anglican; but he was within limits, a master of historical exposition, and the extracts given are well worth reading.

## **An Application**

The compiler of this pamphlet wishes to point out a natural inference which it would not have occurred to Sir John Seeley to draw from his admirable exposition.

The exposition makes it very clear that, under the Old Law, God continued to be the King of Israel after human kings of the House of David succeeded one another. The human kings represented the Invisible King in administration, but not in the quality of Founder, not in the quality of constitutional Legislator, and not in the quality of final Judge of human conduct. There was no inconsistency, and there was no usurpation of divine power on the part of the human king.

Since such was the case under the Old Law, it is a fair inference that there may be a human head of the Kingdom, which Christ founded without any usurpation of the royal powers which belong to our Lord. The Pope cannot represent Him as Founder of the Church, and does not claim so to represent Him. The Pope cannot represent Him as Legislator giving a constitution to His Church, and does not claim so to represent Him. The Pope cannot represent Him as final Judge of human conduct, and does not claim so to represent Him. The Pope represents Him as teacher of the doctrine which He taught, as administrator of the laws which He enacted, and as judge of particular cases before him.

We now offer to our readers the admirable presentation of the proofs of Christ's kingship from the standpoint of the non-Catholic historian, coupled with a brief summary of the encyclical of Our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI.

## **The Kingdom of Israel**

*By Sir John Seeley.*

"Every Jew looked back to the time when Jehovah was regarded as the King of Israel. The title had belonged to Jehovah in a very peculiar sense; it had not been transferred to Him from the visible earthly king, as in many other countries, but appropriated to Him so exclusively that, for a long time, no human king had been appointed, and that at last when the people demanded to be ruled by kings like the nations around them, the demand was treated by the most ardent worshippers of Jehovah as high treason against Him. And though a dynasty was actually founded, yet the belief in the true royalty of Jehovah was not destroyed or weakened, but only modified by the change. Every nation of originality has its favorite principles, its political intuitions, to which it clings with fondness. One nation admires free speech and liberty, another the equality of all citizens; just in the same manner the Jews attached themselves to the principle of the Sovereignty of God, and believed the happiness of the nation to depend upon its free acknowledgment of this principle. But in the time of Christ all true Jews were depressed with the feeling that the theocracy was in a great degree a thing of the past, that they were in a new age with new things about them, that Greek and Roman principles and ways of thinking were in the ascendant, and that the face of the Invisible King no longer shone full upon them. This feeling had become so deep and habitual that at a much earlier time, the sect of the Pharisees had been formed to preserve the peculiarity of the nation from the inroad of foreign thought, and whatever ancient Jewish feeling remained had gathered itself into this sect as into a last citadel. In these circumstances the cry first of John the Baptist and then of Christ, 'the Kingdom of God is at hand,' could not be mistaken. It meant that the theocracy was to be restored, that the nation was called to commence a new era by falling back upon its first principles."

## **Jewish Expectations**

The religious Jews were looking for the appearance of one who should be neither more nor less than David had been. They expected, it seems, to see once more a warrior-king, judging in the gate of Jerusalem, or surrounded by his mighty men, or carrying his victorious arms into neighboring countries, or receiving embassies from Rome and Selencia and in the meantime holding awful communication with Jehovah, administering His law and singing His praises.

"Christ confounded their calculations. Professing to be the king they expected, He did none of the things which they expected the king to do. He revived the theocracy and the monarchy, but in a form not only unlike the system of David but utterly new and unprecedented.

"It is not uncommon to describe the Jews as having simply made the mistake of confounding a figurative expression with a literal one. It is said that when Christ called Himself a king He was speaking figuratively, and that by 'king' He meant, as some say, God, as others, a wise man and teacher of morality; but that the Jews persisted in understanding the expression literally. Such interpreters do not see that they attribute to intelligent men a mistake worthy of children or savages. We do not find in history whole nations misled, bloody catastrophes and revolutions produced, by verbal mistakes that could be explained in a moment. Again, they attribute to Christ conduct which is quite unaccountable. A wise man may at times dilate upon the authority which his wisdom gives him, and in doing so may compare himself to a king; but if he saw that his words were so grossly misapprehended that he was in danger of involving himself and others in political difficulties, he would certainly withdraw or explain the metaphor. But it is evident that Christ clung firmly to the title and attached great importance to it. This appears in the most signal manner on the occasion of His last entry into Jerusalem. He entered in a public triumph preceded by those who hailed Him as

the son of David, and when requested by those who thought the populace guilty of this very misconception of mistaking a wise man for a king to silence their enthusiastic cries, He pointedly refused. Again, it is clear that this assumption of royalty was the ground of His execution. The inscription which was put upon His cross ran: 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.' He had Himself provoked this accusation of rebellion; He must have known that the language He used would be interpreted so. Was there then nothing substantial in the royalty He claimed? Did He die for a metaphor?"

## **The Conflict**

Jesus understood the work of the Messiah in one sense, and the Jews in another. What was the point of irreconcilable difference? They laid information against Him before the Roman government as a dangerous character; their real complaint against Him was precisely this, that He was not dangerous. Pilate executed Him on the ground that His kingdom was of this world; the Jews procured His execution precisely because it was not. In other words, they could not forgive Him for claiming royalty and at the same time rejecting the use of physical force. His royal pretensions were not in themselves distasteful to them; backed by military force and favored by success, those pretensions would have been enthusiastically received. His tranquil life, passed in teaching and healing the sick, could not in itself excite their hatred. They did not object to the King; they did not object to the philosopher; but they objected to the king in the garb of the philosopher. They were offended at what they thought the degradation of their great ideal."

## **The Sifting of Claim**

"The perplexed Jews sometimes endeavored to deliver themselves by applying practical tests. They laid matters before Him of which it might seem the duty of a king to take cognizance. By this means they discovered that He considered several of the ordinary functions of a king not to lie within His province. For example, they showed Him some of the tribute-money, and asked Him whether they ought to pay it. It was an obvious, but at the same time a very effective, way of sifting His monarchical claims. In the times of David the Jews had imposed tribute on surrounding nations; it was a thing scarcely conceivable that in the age of the Messiah they should pay tribute to the foreigner. If Christ were a commissioned and worthy successor of the national hero, it seemed certain that He would be fired with indignation at the thought of so deep a national degradation. Strange to say, He appeared little interested in the question, and bade them not to be ashamed to pay back into Caesar's treasury the coins that came from Caesar's mint. If there be one function more than another which seems proper to a king, it is that of maintaining and asserting the independence of his realm; yet Christ peremptorily declined to undertake this function.

"The ancient kings of Judah had been judges. Accordingly the Jews invited Christ more than once to undertake the office of a judge. We read of a civil action concerning an inheritance which was submitted to Him, and of a criminal case of adultery in which He was asked to pronounce judgment. In both cases He declined the office, and in one of them with an express declaration that He had received no commission to exercise judicial functions."

## What He Did Claim and Do

"What functions then did Christ undertake? We can enter into the perplexity of the Jews, for those which we have enumerated are the principal functions of the ancient monarchy. All of them Christ declined, and yet continued to speak of Himself as king with such consistency and clearness that those who were nearest to His person understood Him most literally, and quarrelled for places and dignities under Him.

"Among the Jews the notion of royalty was derived from that of divinity. Human kings were appointed late in Palestine, but from a much earlier time the twelve tribes had lived under a monarchy. Their national Divinity had been their king. He had been believed to march at the head of their armies and to bestow victory, to punish wrongdoing, and to heal differences when the tribes were at peace. The human king who was afterwards appointed was king but in a secondary sense, as the deputy of the Invisible King and the depository of His will. Now, it is important to remark that the human king represented the Divine King in certain matters only, and not in others. In the habitual acts of administration the king officiated, but there were some acts which Jehovah had done for the nation once for all, in which, as they were not to be repeated, none of the House of David could represent Him. Yet these acts were far greater than those which were regularly repeated and displayed much more magnificently the royalty of Jehovah.

"These acts were two — the calling of the nation and the institution of its laws (its constitution).

"The origin of other nations is lost in antiquity, but we can still trace the movements of the primitive shepherd who separated himself from his Chaldean countrymen in obedience to the divine impulse, and lived a wandering life among his flocks and herds, ennobled by his unborn descendants as other men are by their dead ancestors, rich, as it were, by a reversed inheritance from the ages after him, and actually bearing in his body Moses and David and Christ. His life was passed in mysterious communion with the Sovereign Will, which had isolated him in the present and given him for compensation a home in the future.

"This then was the first work which the Invisible King did for His subjects. He created the nation over which He was to reign. And the Jews in after times loved to speak of Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God, that is, who had watched over the growth of a family into a nation, who had sealed that family for Himself and chosen the nation.

"But this had been done once for all. The king of the House of David might represent to the people the invisible King at the head of an army or on the judgment seat; but he could not represent to them the Founder of their commonwealth, the God who had been, as it were, their dwelling-place in all generations.

"The covenant between Abraham and his invisible Guide had been simple. No condition but isolation and the sign of it, circumcision, had been imposed on the first Hebrew; he received and obeyed occasional monitions, and he was blessed with a continually increasing prosperity. But the family grew into a nation and there the covenant was enlarged. He who had called the nation now did for it the second work of a king and gave it a law. No longer special commands imposed on special persons, but general laws binding on every Israelite at all times alike, laws regulating the behavior of every Israelite towards his brother Israelite and towards the Invisible King, laws which turned a wandering tribe of the desert into a nation worthy of the settled seat, the mountain fastness

girdled with plain and cornfield and protected by Jordan and the sea, with which at the same time their Patron endowed them.

"In this work of legislation He was represented by Moses, of whom it is therefore written that 'he was king in Jeshurum.' This was a work done once for all. No king of the house of David ever represented the Invisible King in His capacity of legislator. To study the divine law diligently and administer it faithfully was the highest praise to which a David or a Hezekiah could aspire.

"Thus the kings of the house of David were representatives of the Invisible King in certain matters only. The greatest works which can be done for a nation by its shepherd were quite beyond their scope and province.

"We can now perceive how Christ might abdicate all the functions they had undertaken and yet remain a king in a much higher sense than they, and in what respect the conception of the Messiah formed by the Jews of His time might differ from that of Christ Himself. It was the fatal mistake of the most influential body of the nation, that mixed body which is called the Scribes and Pharisees, to regard the Mosaic law as unalterable. They fell into the besetting sin of lawyers in all ages. Assuming that nothing remained for the Messiah to do in legislation, they were driven to suppose that He, too, like the ancient kings, would be but an imperfect representative of the Supreme King. And so they were driven to conceive Him as occupied with administration or conquest, and, had their dream been realized, the Christ would have appeared in history far inferior to Moses.

"On the other hand, Christ fixed His thoughts solely on the greater and more fundamental works of an heroic royalty. He respected the Mosaic legislation not less than His contemporaries, but He deliberately proposed to supersede it by a new one promulgated on His own authority. He undertook the work rather of a second Moses than of a second David, and though He declined to take cognizance of special legal cases, we never find Him refusing to deliver judgment upon a general point of law.

"But He went still deeper, and undertook a work yet more radical than that of Moses. Not only did He announce that the work done on Sinai was to be done over again by Himself, but even the earlier and primary work of the Invisible King done in Ur of the Chaldees, the Call which had brought the nation into existence He declared Himself commissioned to repeat. In that proclamation, 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' we have hitherto seen only a restoration of the ancient theocracy; but a closer consideration will show us that the restoration was no mere resumption of the old system at the point at which it had been left off and in the original form, but a recommencement of the whole history from the beginning; not a revival of the old covenant, but a new covenant, a new election, a new legislation, a new community.

"In the early time there came a voice to Abraham which said: 'Get thee out of thy kindred, and from thy country, and from thy father's house, into the land of which I shall tell thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' And now there was heard throughout Palestine a voice proclaiming: 'There is no man that hath given up father or mother or house or children or lands for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold more in this present life, and in the world to come life everlasting.' The two calls resemble each other in sound; in substance and meaning they are exactly parallel. The object of each was to create a new society which should stand in a particular relation to God, and which should have a legislation different from and higher than that which springs up in secular states. And from each

such a society sprang, from the first the ancient Jewish theocracy, from the second the Christian Church.

"It is not now so hard to understand Christ's royal pretensions. He declined, it is true, to command armies, or preside in law courts; but higher works, such as imply equal control over the wills of men, the very works for which the nation chiefly hymned their Jehovah, He undertook in His name to do. He undertook to be the Father of an everlasting state, and the Legislator of a world-wide society."

## **The Judge**

"When Christ declined the office of civil judge, it does not follow that he declined all judicial functions. ... The fact appears upon the surface of our biographies that Christ, however carefully abstaining from the function of the civil magistrate, was yet continually engaged in passing judgment upon men. Some He assured of the forgiveness of their sins, upon others He pronounced a severe sentence. But in all cases He did so in a style which plainly showed, sometimes startling those who heard, that He considered the ultimate and highest decision upon men's deeds, that decision to which all the unjustly condemned at human tribunals appeal, and which weighs not the deed only, but motives, and temptations, and ignorances, and all the complex conditions of the deed — that He considered in short heaven and hell to be in His hand."

## **Summary of the Encyclical**

By way of introduction His Holiness recalls to the Catholic world the warning sounded in His first Encyclical to the effect that "evil and discord have spread throughout the world because the greater part of mankind banished Jesus Christ and His holy law, from their lives, their families and their public affairs and that there never would arise a sure hope of lasting peace between the peoples of the world as long as individuals and nations continued to deny or refused to acknowledge the rule of Christ, Our Saviour. It is necessary for all men to seek "the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ." In that Encyclical He proclaimed it to be the "purpose of our Pontificate" to restore the "Kingdom of Our Lord." Meanwhile a steady movement back to the Sovereignty of Christ has inspired the Holy Pontiff with renewed hopes of better times. The Holy Year, too, has served its purpose of deepening the reign of Christ in the hearts of men. During that year of grace "The Kingdom of Christ appeared suffused with a new light." The celebration of the sixteenth centenary of the Council of Nicea, too, occurring as it did during this Holy Year, inspired further propagation of Christ's Kingdom, for it was at that Holy Synod that the dogma of the consubstantiality of Father and Son was defined and that there was inserted in the creed the formula "of whose reign there will be no end." All these events coming together, "gave us so much joy that we are constrained to speak and promulgate the cult of Jesus Christ Our King."

Then follows the main body of the Encyclical, explaining fully the Holy Father's mind and intentions regarding the Kingship of Christ. In part it is as follows:

"Since ancient times it has been customary to bestow upon Christ the title of King because of His lordship over all created things." He reigns in the minds of men. ... Likewise He reigns in the wills of men. ... He is recognized as the King of our hearts because of that love which surpasses all understanding and also because of the supreme attraction for us of His divine meekness and kindness. ... We assert that it is necessary to vindicate for the Christ-man both the name and power

of a King in the full meaning of the term. Since He is the Word of God, of the self-same substance as the Father, He must have in common with the Father all that pertains to the Divine Nature, and in consequence He possesses full and absolute sway over all created things."

His Holiness Pope Pius proceeds to a citation of numerous scriptural passages which proclaim that Christ is King. The Old Testament writers, notably David and the Prophets, frequently refer to the "Prince who shall come out of Jacob"; Who "shall rule from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." Isaias refers to Him as the "Prince of Peace" whose "empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace." Jeremias says: "A King shall reign and shall be wise."

### **Predictions of Prophets Fulfilled**

That these prophecies were fulfilled is amply proven by numerous texts from the "Gospel Writers"; notably that in which is contained the announcement of the Archangel informing the Virgin Mary that she shall conceive and bear a son on Whom God will bestow the throne of David his progenitor, and that the new-born child shall reign in the house of Jacob for all eternity, and that His Kingdom shall be without end.

As a result of this doctrine found in Scripture, the Church in her liturgy, proclaimed Him to be Sovereign Lord and King of Kings. St. Cyril of Alexandria points out the basis of this Royal dignity when he says: "He obtained dominion over every creature not by force nor because of mere external reasons, but because of His very essence and nature." He reigns as God and man. He rules by right of conquest brought about by His redemption of mankind. We, therefore, no longer belong to ourselves, for Christ has bought us at the highest possible price. Our bodies, too, are members of Christ.

### **Nature of This Supremacy**

It consists of a threefold power of which, if one element were missing, it would no longer contain the idea of a true and real supremacy.

1. He is a Redeemer in whom we must believe and a lawgiver whom we must obey. Executive powers must be equally attributed to Him, since it is necessary for all to obey His commands and for none to escape them without meeting the punishments He established.
2. His Kingdom and supremacy is chiefly Spiritual. "My Kingdom is not of this earth."
3. It is, moreover, temporal, in as much as He has received from the Father an absolute right and power over all created things. It embraces, therefore, all men. All mankind is under the power of Jesus Christ. Nor is any distinction made between individuals, the home, or civil society since men are no less under the power of Christ when united in society than as single individuals. He alone is the source of individual and public welfare. He alone is the author of prosperity and true happiness both in individual citizens and in states. Overlooking this fact is the evil at the root of present disturbances. They have driven Jesus Christ out of laws and public affairs.

If men, instead both privately and publicly will recognize the sovereign power of Christ, the signal benefits of a just freedom, of calm order and of harmony and peace will pervade the whole human race. Just as the royal rights of Our Lord render the human authority of princes and heads of states sacred to a certain degree, so too they ennoble the duties imposed by obedience on the citizen.

As for the effect of this upon concord and peace, manifestly the vaster this kingdom is and the more vividly it embraces mankind, so much the more will men become conscious of the bond of brotherhood that united them.

In order that these wished-for results may be more abundant and may last longer in human society, it is necessary for the royal dignity of Our Lord to be more recognized and spread abroad as widely as possible. To this end it seems to us that nothing else can help as much as to institute a particular feast-day that will belong to Christ Our King.

The Feasts of the Church during the passing of centuries were introduced one after the other according as the need or welfare of Christian peoples seemed to acquire it. For example, when respect for and worship of the Blessed Sacrament grew weak, the Feast of Corpus Christi was instituted as a means of recalling to the people their duty of publicly venerating Our Lord.

Now when we, therefore, command that Christ Our King be venerated by Catholics throughout the world, we are providing for the special needs of our own day a very effective remedy against the pests which pervade human society. The plague of our age is what is called "laicism" — denial of the rule of Christ and His Church over mankind, both in society and in the individual.

We are sustained by the holy hope that the Feast of Christ Our King which will be celebrated hereafter every year, will at last lead back society to Our Blessed Saviour, an end which all men devoutly look forward to.

All indeed can see that, since the end of the last century, the way was being prepared for the long desired institution of this new Feast day. The cult was spread and defended in books. The supremacy of the Kingdom of Christ was also recognized in the pious practice of all those who dedicated, even consecrated, their families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; even whole nations were likewise consecrated. Eucharistic Congresses marvellously assisted in solidifying this royal power of Christ over mankind.

This Holy Year now drawing to a close appears to be a most propitious occasion in which to effect therefrom Our holy purpose of which we have been writing. Therefore, when we consider the innumerable petitions addressed to us, as well as the events of the Holy Year, we think that the day has finally arrived to announce that all mankind should honor Christ the King at a special feast.

Therefore in virtue of Our Apostolic authority, we institute the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King, and decree that it be celebrated everywhere on the last Sunday of October, that is on the Sunday preceding the Feast of All Saints. Likewise we decree that on this very same day, there is to be renewed, annually, the consecration of all mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an act of consecration which Our Predecessor of holy memory, Pius X, had previously commanded to be done every year. But this year we wish the consecration to take place on the thirty-first of this month, on which occasion we ourselves will celebrate solemn Pontifical Mass in honor of Christ the King. At that time the consecration to the Sacred Heart will be made in our presence.

There is no need for us to explain at great length to you why we instituted the Feast of Christ, the King, as a distinct feast despite the fact that the royal dignity of Christ appears to be already amply recognized, at least by implication, in other feasts already decreed. It is enough, we believe, to tell you that although the material of all these feasts of Our Lord is Christ, the formal object is quite distinct from that of the new feast which expressly recognizes by name both the royalty and Kingly power of Christ.

As we close this letter, Venerable Brothers, it is our great pleasure to point out briefly what advantages for the Church, for society, and for each Christian, we hope will flow from this public cult of Christ, the King.

In the first place, the recognition of the Church's liberty and independence from civil power.

Secondly, the recalling to nations, their duty, as a nation and as private individuals, of rendering obedience to Christ. This, far from reducing their liberty, will broaden it, and moreover, lead to the road of perfection.

May the Lord grant that the many too outside His Kingdom shall long for and accept the sweet yoke of Christ, and all men who are His subjects and His children, shall through His mercy bear this yoke not because they are forced to do so, but with pleasure, with love and in the spirit of holiness.

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