CHRIST THE KING OF CIVIL RULERS

In the period of almost a quarter of a century that has elapsed since Pope Pius XI issued his Encyclical *Quas Primas*, on the Kingship of Christ,[1] many events have demonstrated the wisdom and the opportuneness of that sublime pronouncement. The deplorable state into which the world has fallen today is a striking confirmation of the Pope's statement, in the opening paragraph of the Encyclical:

> We remember that in the first Encyclical which we sent to all the Bishops we clearly signified—when we sought the supreme causes of the calamities by which we saw the human race oppressed and afflicted—not only that this deluge of evils has overwhelmed the earth because many men have excluded Jesus Christ and His most holy law both from their conduct and life and from domestic and public circles, but also that a certain hope of lasting peace will never dawn among people as long as individuals and states deny and renounce the rule of Our Saviour.[2]

In this Encyclical Pope Pius was concerned chiefly with the kingly power of Christ as Man. No Christian could doubt Christ's supreme authority as God; but for centuries controversies had been waged among theologians as to the nature and the extent of His royal authority precisely in His human nature. There were good theologians who denied that Christ as Man possesses direct authority over temporal things and earthly kingdom.[3] But this view is no longer tenable. The Pope asserts quite explicitly: "Hence, it follows, not only that Christ is to be adored as God by angels and men, but also that angels and men are to be obedient and subject to His rule as man."[4]

The Sovereign Pontiff points out the sources of the kingly power of Christ as Man—the hypostatic union and the work of the redemption. Then he explains that the authority of Christ the King embraces a three-fold power, legislative, judiciary and executive. It is chiefly concerned with spiritual things, but the Pope

[1] *AAS*, XVII (1925), 593-610.
[2] *Ibid.*, 593.
[3] Cf. Billuart, *Tractatus de Justitia*, Diss. 3, art. 6.
[4] *AAS*, XVII (1925), 598.

adds: "He would grievously err who would deny to Christ the government of all civil matters, since He receives from the Father the most absolute right over created things in such wise that all things are placed at His disposal." [5] Evidently, then, Christ in His human nature, as well as in His divine nature possesses full authority over the material things of earth. Temporal as well as spiritual power is included in the jurisdiction given Him by His heavenly Father, and of which He said: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." [6]

The question might be asked: Are men bound to obey Christ as man, not only insofar as they are individuals, but also insofar as they are members of a civil society, a state or a nation? In other words, are civil rulers in their official capacity, and not merely as private individuals, obliged to submit to Christ the King? Must they regulate and direct the people subject to them according to the supernatural teachings of the God-Man? And, if there is such an obligation of civic obedience to Christ the King, what particular duties does it impose on those who govern the state or nation?

The question is timely and practical. For, in recent years the view has been proposed that the civil government is purely natural in purpose and in authority, that the civil ruler as such has no direct obligations toward the supernatural law proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This view appears in a recent study of the ecclesiology of John of Paris († 1306), by Dom Jean Leclercq, O.S.B.[7] The author states—apparently with a measure of approval—that John of Paris ascribed to the state a purely natural scope, subordinate only to the natural law. He thus summarizes this doctrine, as enunciated in John's work *De Potestate Regia et Papali*:

> The *regnum* is then a strictly natural institution. John of Paris does not deny any of the consequences of this affirmation. Wherever men lived, there they were governed by kings, abstracting from all revelation and from every Christian institution. There were kings in the Old Testament because there was a genuine civil life. There were true kings among the pagans, and even after the coming of Christ all temporal rulers, whether Christian or not, realize the same concept of king. . . . The very character of the king's function assigns limits to his power. Destined by God to procure the common temporal good

[5] *Ibid.*, 600. [6] Matt., 28:18.
[7] *Jean de Paris et l'Ecclésiologie du XIII siècle* (Paris, 1942).

according to the inclination of nature, the king is bound to forbid all that is opposed to it. The norm of his actions is the natural law.[8]

The practical applications of such a view are indeed far-reaching.[9] It would mean that a civil ruler, even if he is governing a predominantly Catholic people, would not be bound to manifest officially any special homage to Christianity or to the Church. In his official capacity he would not be bound to respect any laws which Christ proclaimed over and above the natural law. He would not be permitted in conscience to restrict heretical activities or attacks on the Church, unless they recommend something opposed to the natural law, such as polygamy or free love or human sacrifice. Apart from such a case, he would be bound to give the same favor to heretical denominations as to the Catholic Church, for he would not be permitted to investigate officially the claims of the Catholic Church and acknowledge it as the one true church of God.

A Catholic who would accept this view could have a ready answer to those who bring up the discrimination and restrictive measures still employed by some governments in Catholic lands against Protestant missionary efforts, as in Spain and in some South American countries. He could condemn the attitude of these governments as an outmoded interpretation of the relation which should exist between Church and state, and emphatically declare that learned Catholics, particularly in the United States, disclaim it. For, he would declare in pursuance of his accepted principle, even the government of a predominantly Catholic land must abstain from passing judgment on the merits of religions that claim to be based on revelation, and may not curtail the activities of the various denominations unless they are harmful to public order and morality as prescribed by the natural law.

However, it is very difficult to see how this opinion can be reconciled with the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church, that governments, through the rulers, must acknowledge the sovereign dominion of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and obey and protect His law. No clearer statement of the obligation of civil

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

[9] I am not concerned with the accuracy of Dom Leclercq's interpretation of the views of John of Paris, though I am inclined to believe that objections could be raised to certain features of it. I am merely discussing the theory he ascribes to John.

rulers to Christ the King could be found than that proclaimed by Pope Pius XI:

> Nor is there any difference in this matter between individuals and societies, both domestic and civil, for men joined in society are no less under the power of Christ than individuals. . . . Therefore, let the rulers of nations not refuse to fulfill by themselves and through their people the public duty of reverence and homage, if they wish to promote and to augment the prosperity of their country, while preserving uninjured their authority.[10]

It should be noted that these words definitely exclude any objection to the effect that the obedience to Christ demanded of civil governments means merely obedience to the natural law of which Christ, as God, is the author. In this passage the Pope is clearly speaking of Christ as Man, and the law which Christ in His human nature proclaimed was certainly a positive, supernatural law, exceeding the demands of the natural law. It should be noted that just previous to this paragraph the Pope had stated, quoting Pope Leo XIII,[11] that not only Catholics are under the dominion of Christ, but even the unbaptized, so that the whole human race is under the power of Jesus Christ. This statement emphasizes the difference between the authority of the Catholic Church, which extends only to the baptized, and the authority of Christ the King, which embraces all mankind.

The doctrine of the Kingship of Christ is therefore not to be confounded with the doctrine of the relation between Church and State. In the course of the centuries there have been many discussions on this latter subject, and many varied views proposed. The medieval view that the Pope has direct jurisdiction over all civil governments is now abandoned. The principle that the Roman Pontiff possesses indirect jurisdiction is certainly to be admitted, but it is not interpreted by all in the same way. But the doctrine that organized civil society, as well as every individual, is subject to the positive supernatural law of Christ as Man must be maintained in view of the clear pronouncements of the Pope. Even if Our Lord had not consigned His religion to a Church, authorized by Him to incorporate all men into its membership, He would still be a King of all men and of all nations. In the words of St. John, Christ is "the ruler of the kings of the earth." [12]

[10] *AAS*, XVII (1925), 601.

[11] Enc. *Annum sacrum*, 25 May, 1899.

[12] Apoc., 1:15.

To avoid difficulties based on the accepted doctrine as to the end of civil society, we must distinguish carefully between the *natural* good of the citizens and their *temporal* good. The two terms are by no means synonymous. The direct purpose of civil society is, indeed, to promote the common *temporal* good—that is, the good of the citizens in the present life. But in view of the elevation of all men to the supernatural order, their temporal good embraces the practice of the supernatural virtues, as well as of the natural virtues. Hence, to promote the welfare of its citizens, a government must concern itself with their observance of the supernatural law of Christ as well as of the natural law.

The doctrine just set forth is excellently synthesized by Bishop Wright, of Boston:

> By the promulgation of the social rights of Christ the King the Holy See has proclaimed the existence of a single radical sovereignty in the temporal as well as spiritual order, a sovereignty resident in a single transcendental authority to which not merely individuals destined for an *end* in the *al di là*, but even societies, *functioning* purely in the *al di qua*, and with their final causes strictly temporal, must be subject.[13]

Bishop Wright goes on to confirm these statements by a quotation from the Encyclical *Tametsi futura prospicientibus* of Pope Leo XIII,[14] in which the same doctrine is proposed that was later asserted in the *Quas Primas* concerning the headship of Christ over social groups as well as over individuals.

How is this doctrine to be applied in practice? Of course, in the concrete, the particular circumstances of time and place can greatly modify and restrict the manner and measure of the homage and obedience that a government can and should manifest to Christ the King. But here we are concerned with what *per se* is required for the fulfilment of this obligation. It is quite evident that, although "men joined in society are no less under the power of Christ than individuals," as Pope Pius XI expressed it, the parallel between personal and civic duties cannot be followed out in every respect. A government cannot be baptized, nor is it liable to eternal pun-

[13] John J. Wright, *National Patriotism in Papal Teaching* (Boston, 1942), 254.

[14] *Acta Leonis*, XX, 304-305.

ishment. On the other hand, a government through its lawful rulers can express homage, it can adapt its legislation to the moral principles laid down by the Son of God. However, in its supervision and regulation of the conduct of its citizens in relation to the law of Christ, the state must confine itself to matters that affect the common good.

The government has the obligation to express in some public manner its dependence on God and on Jesus Christ. A beautiful example of such an acknowledgment is found in the opening paragraph of the Constitution of Ireland: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, from whom is all authority and to whom, as our final end, all actions, both of men and states must be referred, we, the people of Eire, humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, etc." Furthermore, at least occasionally there should be religious ceremonies at which the rulers will assist in their official capacity. These ceremonies should be in conformity with the belief and worship of the Catholic Church. As Pope Leo XIII expressed it:

> It is a sin in the state not to have care for religion, as something beyond its scope, or as of no practical benefit; or out of many forms of religion to adopt that one which chimes in with the fancy; for we are bound absolutely to worship God in that way which He has shown to be His will.[15]

The civil rulers have the obligation to permit the Catholic Church to teach its doctrines to the people, whether baptized or unbaptized. In the event that the Gospel is being announced for the first time, the rulers have the right and the duty to investigate the claims of the preachers before giving positive approval. Since the Church received her commission to preach directly from Christ Himself, she has the right to announce her message in non-Christian lands whether the government consents or not. However, the usual procedure of missionaries to pagan lands has been to seek governmental confirmation of their mission, when it is prudently possible to follow this procedure.

The state is bound to promote religion. To quote Pope Leo XIII again:

> All who rule should hold in honor the holy name of God, and one of their chief duties must be to favor religion, to protect it, to shield it

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15 Encyc. *Immortale Dei*, *ASS*, XVIII (1885), 163.

under the credit and sanction of the laws, and neither to organize nor enact any measure that may compromise its safety. This is the bounden duty of rulers to the people over whom they rule. . . . Wherefore, care must especially be taken to preserve unharmed and unimpeded religion, the practice of which is the link connecting man with his God.[16]

However, the civil rulers have no right to force their subjects to embrace Christianity or to enter the Catholic Church. Pope Leo XIII enunciates the principle: "The Catholic Church is wont to take great care that no one shall be forced to believe unwillingly."[17] That some medieval princes transgressed this rule cannot be doubted; but their method was not in accordance with genuine Catholic principles. Similarly, the civil rulers should not prevent the *private* exercise of false religious cults, when no harm is thereby done to the public welfare. But it is fully within their right to restrict and to prevent public functions and activities of false religions which are likely to be detrimental to the spiritual welfare of the Catholic citizens or insulting to the true religion of Christ. Nowadays, it is true, greater evils would often follow such a governmental course of action than would ensue if complete tolerance were granted; but the principle is immutable. It is the same principle that our government employs when it prohibits the preaching of ideologies destructive of our constitution, however sincere may be those who proclaim them.

It is especially in the realm of marriage that the obligation of the civil government to uphold the law of Christ is manifested, more particularly with reference to the granting of divorces. Some theologians have believed that in certain circumstances, as far as the natural law alone is concerned, a divorce *a vinculo* with the authorization of the civil power would be permissible.[18] But, whatever may be said of this opinion, it is certain that by the positive law of Christ the civil authority now possesses no power to grant any couple a divorce with the right to remarry.[19] The rulers of a nation are obliged to recognize this fact, and realize that under no circumstances may they positively grant a citizen the permission to marry again as long as his legitimate spouse is living.

[16] *Ibid.*, 164.
[17] *Ibid.*, 174.
[18] G. Joyce, *Christian Marriage* (New York, 1933), 30.
[19] Cf. Gasparri, *De Matrimonio* (Rome, 1923), II, n. 1136.

However, in certain circumstances a Catholic ruler could *tolerate* a marriage custom at variance with the law of Christ. Several instances are on record within recent centuries when the Pope, as civil ruler, tolerated the remarriage of a Jew, while his wife was still living, in accordance with the custom of his people, in order that he might have offspring.[20]

On the other hand, since the bond of marriage can be broken under the Christian dispensation in certain extraordinary circumstances, with the authorization or dispensation of the Church as in the case of the Pauline privilege and *matrimonium ratum non consummatum*, the civil authorities are bound to recognize these exceptions as lawful, and to abstain from inflicting any penalties on those receiving such concessions. This, too, is a duty of the state toward Christ, since it is through His authority that these exceptions are authorized or granted by the Church. Similarly, the government is bound to recognize the exclusive right of the Catholic Church to establish impediments for the marriages of baptized persons.[21] Although the actual institution of a matrimonial impediment is an act of jurisdiction on the part of the Church, yet the authority to make impediments comes from Christ Himself. For it was He who established the contract of Christian marriage as a sacrament, and by that very fact deputed the Church to exercise authority over the conditions required for the lawful and valid entrance into Christian marriage.

If the state were regulated only by the natural law, many strange incongruities would arise in connection with marriage. The state would be justified in making impediments for the baptized and could disregard those made by the Church. Thus we should have the baffling paradox of a person permitted to marry by the supernatural authority of the Church and forbidden to marry by the natural authority of the state—God being the source of both types of authority! Again, under a civil government which protects the natural indissolubility of marriage by stringent anti-divorce laws, the state as the representative of God would be obliged to reject the validity of a Pauline privilege which the Church would grant as the representative of the Son of God!

Sometimes the argument is raised that the Popes in recent

[20] Cf. M. Rosset, *De Sacramento Matrimonii* (S. Jean de Maurienne, 1895), I, 521.

[21] Can. 1038, §2.

times, when delivering exhortations to the civil rulers of the world have referred only to obligations of natural law, from which we may conclude that these represent the whole duty of those in civil authority. But the answer is simple. The Popes are well aware that in view of the tragic neglect of the moral law that characterizes the activities of governments today, there would be a great improvement of conditions if civil rulers could be induced to obey even the natural law. It should be noted, too, that when the opportunity presents itself the Popes have not failed to indicate that the law of Christ binds those in posts of civil authority. Thus, Pope Pius XII, in his Encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, asserted: "In the recognition of the royal prerogatives of Christ and in the return of individuals *and of society* to the law of His truth and His love lies the only way to salvation."[22] Again, at the consecration of twelve missionary bishops on October 29, 1939, the Holy Father stated: "Most happy are those states that establish laws inspired by the doctrine of the Gospel, and do not refuse to render public homage to the majesty of Christ, the King."[23]

No one can be so optimistic as to believe that the ideal of a Christian state is going to spread throughout the world in the near future, apart from the extraordinary intervention of Divine Providence. Yet, that should not prevent Catholics from proclaiming unhesitatingly the absolute necessity of a return to Christ on the part of governments as well as of individuals, if there is to be any lasting peace in the world. This was the message of Pope Pius XI, at the beginning of his pontificate: "True peace, the peace of Christ, is impossible unless we are willing and ready to accept the fundamental principles of Christianity, unless we are willing to observe the teachings and laws of Christ, both in public and private life."[24] We must not compromise with the spirit of the times so far as to admit that the state is bound only by the natural law. We must unhesitatingly proclaim that the state cannot attain its destiny, save through Christ the King, even though that destiny is temporal, not eternal happiness. The words of the *Quas Primas* should be our unhesitating message to the harassed and unhappy world of today:

[22] Encyc. *Summi Pontificatus*, AAS, XXXI (1939), 420.
[23] Hom. *Audistis*, AAS, XXXI (1939), 596.
[24] Encyc. *Ubi Arcano Dei*, AAS, XIV (1922), 690.

When once men recognize, both in private and in public life that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony. Our Lord's regal office invests the human authority of princes and rulers with a religious significance; it ennobles the citizen's duty of obedience. . . . If princes and magistrates duly elected are filled with the persuasion that they rule, not by their own right but by the mandate and in the place of the Divine King, they will exercise their authority piously and wisely; they will make laws and administer them, having in view the common good and also the human dignity of their subjects. The result will be order, peace and tranquility, for there will be no longer any cause of discontent. Men will see in their king or in their rulers men like themselves, perhaps unworthy or open to criticism, but they will not on that account refuse obedience if they see reflected in them the authority of Christ, God and Man.[25]

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[25] Encyc. *Quas Primas*, *AAS*, VII (1925), 601.

CAUSA NOSTRAE LAETITIAE

Mary at her birth was not only an object of delight in the eyes of God, and of admiration to the angels, but she was also a cause of joy to the whole world.

—Fr. Nicholas O'Rafferty, in *Discourses on Our Lady* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1948), p. 20.

THE TIMELINESS OF THOMISM

In order to avoid the errors which are the primary source of all the evils of our times, it is necessary religiously to hold fast, now as never before, to the teachings of the Angelic Doctor. He has given us a complete refutation of the erroneous views of the Modernists. As regards philosophy, he has defended, as we have already seen, the value and power of human reason and has proven by unquestionably valid arguments the existence of God. As regards dogmatic theology, he has clearly distinguished the supernatural from the natural order and has placed in bold relief both the reasons for faith and the nature of Christian dogmas. In the field of pure theology he has shown that the articles of Faith are based not on mere opinion but on truth itself and are, therefore, unchangeable.

—Pope Pius XI, in the Encyclical, *Studiorum ducem*, issues June 29, 1923.