

Christ's Coronation in Politics

By

Dr. John Van Dyk

For the Graduate Programs of

Edinburg Theological Seminary

Edinburg, TX

Transcribed from the original by Seminarians Jose Gutierrez, Juan Guajardo, Bequi Roberts, Eileen Southmayd, Jesus David Aguilar,

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Other powerful anti-Christian, secular forces have gripped American Christianity as well. Take pragmatism, for example. How often is the call for united Christian action not stifled by the reply “It won’t work”? That’s pure pragmatism, you know, pure unbelief. Personally, I’m getting pretty tired of hearing the same old line: “In the Netherlands, or even in Canada, the situation is different. Here in America we have the two-party system, and for the sake of the nation we’d better keep it.” Can’t you just hear the apostles facing the Roman giant saying, “We’d better give in to emperor worship, you know, for after all, that’s the way the Empire stays together!”? I must say at this point that I was elated to hear two-party system has had the course in the U.S.! Christian community, wake up! Unite, and develop a common Christian political mind, so that indeed the peace, the *shalom* of the Lord may be brought to our despairing land.

What have I been saying? Simply this: to be a Christian means much more than merely to be a member of an instituted church and to engage in evangelism, missions, and works of mercy. The Christian task is not by any means exhausted by church and church-related activities. Rather, it is our task to regain the vision of the ecclesia, the body of Christ, busily reconciling the entirety of creation – and that includes political and economic life – to the will of the Lord.

Now you must not get me wrong. I am not saying that the instituted church is unimportant. To the contrary, the instituted church plays a vital and indispensable role. The instituted church has the special task to bring the gospel and to be the fountain of the regenerating power of God’s Word. The instituted charge has the crucial task to preach and to build up and to recharge the entire Christian community, so that the ecclesia will be armed with the Word and ready to go out.

What I am saying, however, is this: namely, that the sum total of our Christian life is not exhausted by the instituted church. In other words, we go wrong when we think that there is no more to our Christian task than to keep our theology pure, to keep the denominational church

free from error, to attend ladies' aids and men's societies, and to tell our neighbors to quit mowing their lawns on Sunday. If we take that position, then we fall back into the medieval grace/nature mentality. Instead, we need to recapture the vision of the early church and of the Reformation, the vision of the ecclesia, the body of Christ; the vision of the coming of the Kingdom; the vision of the total Kingship of our Lord over all of life, including the political and economic arena.

If you have somewhat understood the historical context which produced the "churchification" and personalization of Christianity and rendered it impotent in the face of onrushing spirits of humanism, then you will also understand that to crown Jesus Christ as King in politics requires a restored vision of the nature of power, of cultural, and more particularly, political power. There is a common notion and Christians to the effect that power is bad, worldly, and sinful. Perhaps the centuries of misuse of power have frightened the Christian community into ready submission and willing accommodation. That makes it more imperative that we regain the vision of Christian power. Power – I do not mean the power that stems from greed and ambition, the kind of power that corrupts and breeds contempt for the welfare of the land and seeks only to enrich itself at the expense of others. Rather, I mean the power that Jesus Christ himself talks about, namely, the power of the Spirit, the power of the Word through which all things were created and in which all things find their existence.

Look at it this way: when the Lord placed man in the garden and endowed him with a task, He thereby empowered him to carry out that task. From the beginning of history man was to be the crown of creation, wielding the power and authority and dominion over the whole world in the name of the Lord, as the Lord's representative. To be man meant to have power to unfold and to bring out what God had placed in the creation. When man fell, he snatched, as it were, that God-given power and authority away from before the face of the Lord and hogged it all for himself. The legitimate, rightful use of the power required for mankind and his culture to flourish now turned into apostate misuse of power. We read about such misuse already in the first chapters of Genesis. Throughout history we see the continual misuse of power, in century after century, civilization after civilization. But from the beginning it was not so. Power was a good gift of God, part of the very creation order itself, meant to enable man to work out and unfold the handiwork of the Lord. And here again, the redemption of Jesus Christ is a cosmic redemption, and that includes the very possibility of power. The antithesis now affects power, too: power used by those whose backs are turned to the Lord, and power in the hands of those who obediently listen for the Word of God to ring through the entirety of the cosmos.

To look at the history of man is to look at centuries of civilizations and cultures carrying out their task of unfolding the creation order. Men over the ages are busy digging in the earth, training animals, making ornaments, building houses, sharpening spears. Men in century after

century are doing things before the face of the Lord, making, doing, inventing, uncovering, developing, unfolding all that exists through the powerful Word of God.

When you look more closely you will observe that power played an increasingly crucial role as society developed and became more complicated. Notice, for example, the power that the patriarchs wielded. They ruled their families, some of which were so big as to be practically little nations. Later on, certain powers and authorities were divested in a variety of persons, e.g., priestly power in the hands of temple servants and augurs, cultural power in business men.

In our times, we have learned to understand this diversity of power in terms of sphere sovereignty, i.e., the various spheres in society, such as state, school, church, and family, maintain their own kind of authority and power, derived directly from the Lord himself.

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Take careful notice, now, of how the humanistic anti-Christian forces have taken hold of that power and used it to drive the entirety of western civilization onto a road that leads straight to hell. There was no horsing around: the forces of apostasy seized the most crucial centers of power, that is the power that exist where it counts!

Already we have seen how first the process of secularization, then secularism, took over a supposed realm of nature and in so doing restricted the power of the church to a smaller and smaller area. Once humanism had gained control of the direction-giving cultural powers, Christianity, now in the form of the instituted church, stood on the sidelines, powerless. Its power had been reduced to some vague kind of spiritual power limited to church walls.

The forces of apostasy knew what they were doing. They took hold of the important areas of society, the ones that counted as far as the direction of our civilization was concerned. That's why not long after the Reformation the humanists took control of the universities, enabling them to train the future generations of humanistic leadership. While Christianity spent all its time in theological squabbles, humanism seized control of the political and economic enterprise. Simply by concentrating on the areas where power counts, the humanists gained mastery of our civilization.

A brief glance at our contemporary world serves to show what I mean. Look at education in America today, and observe how it is totally under the control of humanism. In fact, God's Word has by legislation been removed from our schools. The American institutions of higher learning have become bastions of humanism. Now think for a moment of the tremendous formative power of all this education--all in the hands of unbelief! What shall we say about the political and economic arena? Think again of how whole civilizations have their directions shaped by political and economic processes. In American politics today no more than lip service-- if that much-- is paid to the will of the Lord. The same story applies to labor and

industry. Vice, corruption, bribery, greed, selfishness, and lust for power are the order of the day. Everywhere there is apostasy of a kind that the lonely, isolated, individual Christian cannot even begin to counteract. These three areas-- education, politics/economics, and labor/industry-- form three vital centers of power that provide the thrust for the course of a nation. Remember, the course of a nation is nothing else than the walking before the face of God and the carrying out of man's task, either in apostasy or in obedience. The antithesis, remember, is not merely a matter of committing or not committing a certain act, nor merely a matter of doing a good deed or an evil deed, but rather, the sharp division that runs through the whole of the academic, the political/economic, and the industrial enterprise. The question is not can I as individual Christian exert a bit of influence here and there, but rather, what are the controlling forces, the spirits that have taken hold of the main sources of cultural power? What are the spirits of sin that drive the whole of western civilization deeper and deeper into apostasy? What misuse of power propels the entire western world to walk before the face of the Lord with back turned? What forces at what places cause western man, if not the world at large, to carry out the task of unfolding the creation order of God in open rebellion to the Lord? The question confronting the Christian community is, what centers of power, what driving forces that direct and shape our culture must be reclaimed by the all encompassing, reconciling healing power of Jesus Christ what we wield?

We mentioned three center of cultural power-- I.e., power rooted in the creation itself and ordained by God, needed to unfold the handiwork of the Creator -- namely, academic, political, and industrial power. There are other such areas as well. There is, for example, the power of the communication media, indoctrinating whole masses of people. The fact that there is no Christian daily press, no Christian weekly news analysis, and no Christian T.V. network in our land is an indictment of the effectiveness of the Christian community. Then there is the power of the arts. Think for a moment of the drama produced on television and piped into millions of homes; the music on the radio that grips the hearts of millions of young people; the pictorial arts used in advertising, splashed on every page of every magazine and paper and along all the highways of the land. All these carry a powerful message. We have only barely begun to understand the cultural power, the shaping, formative power of the arts. Such power needs to be counteracted by a powerful Christian alternative.

We, here in Chicago this week, are primarily concerned with the locus, the center of political power. The fact that political power is of crucial importance to the direction of a nation needs no long elaboration. Political power, too, like all power, is rooted in the creation order, I.e., created by God to be used by men to unfold the creation and to develop culture and civilization. Political power is therefore creationally good and holy. But here again, apostasy has ruined it, and has seized that political power, so that, as a result, political history is a long, sad story of human strife and grief. But thank the Lord for a cosmic redemption, so that political power, too, is in principle restored, ready to be exercised by the redeemed Christian community. Thank the Lord that the ecclesia, rooted in Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, may wield genuine political

power, in order that Jehovah may be praised and the shalom, the peace of God, may be known in the land and that his blessing may rest upon the nation.

The hour is late. Now is the time to unite, to develop a communal Christian political mind, and to swing into action. Now is the time, else it may be altogether too late. The powers of darkness are not sitting still. Secularism is getting ready for a final onslaught. Already it has conquered all major areas of life and all centers of community, namely, the instituted church. Already all kinds of secular theologies are rampant, and think of the enormous influence of a book like Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*.

Indeed, the time is short. Humanism is leading our land into an ever-deepening bankruptcy. The will of the Lord must be made known to our nation. We must demonstrate the power of the Spirit, the power of the Word, also in a political way. Now is the time,

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while the hour of grace is still here. If we are not faithful now, not bold and full of the power of the Lord, then perhaps we will see the church of Jesus Christ die in our land, choked and strangled by the forces we did not attempt to communally withstand. And who is to say, perhaps the Lord is about to ask us, what have you accomplished after 2000 years of Christianity in the western world? Where is the Lord's will done today, also in the political arena? Who is to say, perhaps the Lord is ready to spew us out of his mouth, and say: you have horsed around long enough! It is enough! Perhaps the future of the ecclesia lies in the Orient, or in Africa. Who is to say? But we, who know the will of the Lord, and who have all his power—for we are rooted in Him—we must regain the vision of the ecclesia, and the vision of Christian cultural power. We must stop confining our sense of community to the Sunday service in a church building. The time is now!

We must see, then, that cultural formative power is not something inherently evil, something to be shunned. Only the misuse of power always leads to disintegration. When power becomes a personal, private possession greedily claimed by men, then power leads to powerlessness. But the wielding of power redeemed by Jesus Christ leads to blessing.

To heal and to bless—that is the Christian political task. Not so long ago I spoke about these matters with a friend who is engaged in the study of political science at one of the larger secular universities. Initially he did not want any part of a communal Christian political enterprise. Said he, “To heal and to bless, yes, of course that is the Christian task. But at the same time, the church should stay out of politics.” Separation of church and state, you know. “The church,” he continued, “is the area of special grace, while politics is the realm of common grace. There we can all work together.”

This argument is very commonly employed by Christians of all kinds. To me, such thinking demonstrates that we still have not escaped the medieval institutionalism that we talked about earlier. As a matter of fact, to use this line of argument reveals a prior submission to a spirit of secularism, in spite of the good intentions and the sincerity with which it is put forth. You see, here we have that pernicious two-realm theory again, namely, that there is a spiritual area of church, faith, morality, in short, a realm of the sacred, and an area of the secular, namely, the state, politics, law, philosophy, and science. Supposedly, then, the area of the sacred is subject to special grace, while the realm of the secular or natural is the domain of common grace. Usually coupled with this medieval, scholastic view is the loss of the vision of the ecclesia, so that the Christian community is identified with and limited to the instituted church.

What is our reply to the call for separation between church and state? Well, of course the instituted church must not engage in politics; of course we endorse separation of church and state, i.e., instituted church and state. But at the same time we say again: Christianity is not at all exhausted by the instituted church. Christians are members of an instituted church, yes, but they are also citizens, and they also engage in education and in business and in all sorts of things. There, too, they are members of the body of Christ, of the ecclesia. That means that the ecclesia comes to expression in one way in the instituted church, clearly visible on Sunday, but it comes to expression during the week as well in education and in works of mercy, and it ought to come to communal expression also in the world of politics and labor. The church as institute must not engage in politics, right! But the ecclesia, the body of Christ, certainly must do so!

What about the matter of common grace and special grace? Here again, the vision of the Christian community, under the influence of medieval scholasticism, has been severely curtailed. The medieval theologians had adopted Greek philosophy as something “natural,” and restricted the Christian witness to the instituted Church as an area of special grace. Greek philosophy and science, they said, is something common, something neutral, something under the guidance of a natural common light of reason which all men share, Christian and non-Christian alike. In saying this, however, they demonstrated that they had lost sight of the radical fall of man and the radical redemption of Jesus Christ—a fall and a redemption which goes to the very root of things. The medieval theologians, in other words, had no eye for the radical antithesis.

There is no such thing as a common natural light of reason that all men share and that is irrelevant to man’s fall into sin. Men’s thoughts and reasonings, as well as all his doings, are done before the face of the Lord, either in loving obedience or in proud apostasy. Man’s “reason” is not exempted! There is no common neutral ground. In that sense, common grace and special grace are not two separate blessings bestowed on two separate realms. Life is of

one piece. We may not separate common grace from special grace. I'm afraid that we have theologized those terms into a complicated problem. It seems to me that actually the matter is quite simple: the entire world exists through the power of the Word, i.e., through the power of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus the fact that it rains is due to that creating-upholding-structuring power of God's Law-Word. If you wish to call that common grace, fine, but then don't restrict that to a realm outside of the instituted church and the faith of the believer. The instituted church, too, and our faithlife can exist only by that upholding-preserving power of God, which is that very same power that allows the sun to shine and the rain to fall. Of course, you may speak of special grace, if you mean by that God's love and mercy as He comes down and calls men and women to repent and to be redeemed and to be confronted by the task of reconciling the whole world through Jesus Christ to God the Father. You may speak of special grace, yes, but don't you restrict it to the ecclesiastical matters of instituted church and so-called spiritual life. By special grace we are redeemed to reclaim the entire world for the king, politics included!

The sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the natural (or material), the area of special grace and the area of common grace—this kind of dualism is a medieval scholastic lie, and we do well to

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Get rid of it at once. Our life is not a combination of the sacred and the secular, of the spiritual and the natural. We talk altogether too much about a so-called spiritual life, as if it is a part of a combination with a natural or some other kind of life. All of life is either sacred or secular, spiritual or natural, depending on how we stand before the face of the Lord. When Paul talks about the spiritual man and the natural man, the new man and the old man, then he is not talking about parts of the man. On the contrary, he is talking about the whole man, as he stands before the face of the Lord. The whole of the old, natural men must die, so that the whole of our life becomes spiritual, that means, totally expressing the Spirit of God. It will not do to take time to be holy! All our life is either holy, i.e., redeemed by Jesus Christ, so that we walk in obedience, principally in a perfect way, or our life is unholy, secular, an abomination to the Lord. We cannot flit back and forth between the sacred sanctuary and a secular world of politics. Our task as body of Christ is to bring the will of the Lord to bear on politics, so that the very political enterprise itself becomes holy and spiritual, a sweet savor to the Lord. To walk before the face of God, as his called-out people, his ecclesia, in love and in obedience and in unity, and to do his bidding, also politically—that is the task we must now willingly and eagerly undertake, boldly, prompted by the power of our Lord.

Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus Christ is King—not just a king of some kind of vague, spiritual, intangible realm, but King of kings and Lord of lords. He is not just a king of the

instituted church as guardian of morality, but King of the totality of life. He is not just a king of a supposed sacred, religious area, but a King in whose hands are all power and all might, a King to be acclaimed by the works of our hands, not only in missions, evangelism, and theology, but by our walk as his body in politics as well; a King who rules the hearts of his people so that they go in and out, as brothers and as sisters in the Lord, busily doing his will.

And then his Kingdom will come. It is, in fact, already among us. Wherever we act in obedience, there the Kingdom manifests itself. Our job is now to act obediently politically at this juncture of history. Our job is to see ourselves as the ecclesia, redeemed, ready to reconcile the political world unto God the Father. That political world is at the present gripped by humanistic forces which bring only despair and ultimately death. That political world leads the nation straight to hell. That spirit of apostasy we must now oppose by means of the Spirit of the Lord-- a Spirit which rules in our hearts and which must now come to expression.

When we walk in obedience, the Lord will bless us, and through us, the Lord will bless our nation. Now is the time, as our land staggers with turmoil. Now is the time for shalom, now is the time for the sake of the land in which we live, for the sake of the work of reconciliation and of the coming Kingdom of the Lord.

Long enough have the powers of unbelief held sway over our civilization. Long enough have the forces of apostasy driven our western culture on and on to the brink of ruin. Long enough has the name of our Lord been trampled upon. Too often we have prayed for the coming of his Kingdom, and not worked for it.

If I discern correctly, I see the angels in heaven looking down at the misery and the brokenness in our world, the despair and the collapse, and I think I can see them urging us on to joyfully demonstrate the glorious Kingship of our Lord—also over politics—and in so doing to be blessed, and in so doing to be a blessing.

Listen!

*“Christ shall have dominion, over land and sea;
Earth’s remotest regions shall His Empire be.
And in Him forever all men shall be blest,
And all nations hail Him King of kings confessed!”*

XXX... machine the world had ever seen. Look at them go, those early Christians, full of fire for the Lord, expecting his return and his Kingdom momentarily. Lions and the stake cannot stop them as they bring the good news that Jesus has made all things new. There they are, the

ecclesia, the body of Jesus Christ, committed to living a radical lifestyle all across the line.

The first-century Christian church was not a Sunday church. These early believers were full-time Kingdom workers, everyone of them. For them the unity of the body of Christ was not merely some vague spiritual thing that came to expression only on Sunday when they broke bread and drank wine. Indeed not! Break bread and drink wine they did, yes, and yes, they came together on Sunday to hear the Word and to sing hymns, to praise and to worship. Then, recharged, as it were, by that Word, they were equipped to go out the rest of the week to bring the power of Jesus Christ to the land, communally, as the one body of the Lord, the ecclesia. That's why the Roman authorities were so worried about them. It is very important to notice that the Romans never got upset about a number of successful oriental religions that swept through the Empire at that time. Why not? Because these various religions and cults were ready to accommodate to the public form of imperial worship while keeping their own rituals a private affair. These pagan cults were willing to acknowledge the political lordship of the Roman emperor while at the same time keeping an idol as their own personal, private king. But this was not the case with the Christian community. Not the emperor is king, they proclaimed, but the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the King, by whose power men breathe and emperors rule. Consequently the Christians, unlike all the pagan cults, refused to bow before the Roman emperors. By that refusal they demonstrated that they acknowledged the coronation of Christ in politics. For these early Christians, Christianity was not a matter of private faith and morality, but a matter of openly, publicly, communally living a radical Christian lifestyle all across the line.

No wonder that Christians were persecuted in Rome less than thirty years after Christ was crucified. No wonder that John was a political prisoner on Patmos. No wonder that the Christians in Smyrna suffered political and economic persecution.

But now look what happened. Soon after the communal Christian witness had broken down the pagan darkness, and soon after the very political structure of the Roman Empire had fallen, a new kind of paganism arose: the instituted church now began to expand into a great monolithic super giant, colossus before whose power even the emperors must bow. What happened? It's this: several hundred of years after the initial impact of Christianity upon the Roman world, the vision got lost, i.e., the vision of ecclesia, the vision of the coming of the Kingdom, the vision of the task of reconciling all things to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. Instead, slowly but surely the ecclesia, the body of Christ, came to be more and more identified with membership in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, a church that more and more became a mediator between God and men, a keeper and dispenser of grace, capable of sending people to heaven or to hell. More and more the task of Christianity became a church task. No longer was there the vision of the task of reconciliation; instead, it came to be believed that the only reason

for the existence of Christianity was to maintain a powerful--and pure, of course!--instituted church. More and more Christianity came to be identified with the existence of the instituted church.

That was the situation in the Middle Ages, the so-called Christian era. There were no atheists at that time. Everyone was a Christian, for everyone was automatically baptized into the instituted church-- the realm of grace. The instituted church was the center of life, the hub of civilization, the source of all ultimate authority. Armed with a complicated and imposing theology, it ruthlessly stamped out heresy and wielded immense power over all areas of life.

Meanwhile, a stranger had crept into the den. At times he came a-sneaking, at times he received red-carpet treatment. Who was he? The stranger was composed of a combination of all kinds of pagan, non-Christian ideas and patterns of thought and philosophies that worked their way into the life-style of the ecclesia. This stranger, an unrecognized and therefore doubly dangerous foe, produced at least two important effects.

First, the stranger caused division. Some Christians, for example, began to follow Plato, and some began to follow Aristotle. But since Plato and Aristotle--both pagan Greek philosophers--did not agree, their Christian followers did not agree either. The result was heresy and strife within the Christian community. By the way, we must learn an important lesson from this state of affairs: synthesis, i.e., the combination of mutually exclusive pagan and Christian patterns of thought, always breaks the power and the unity of the Christian community. The present fragmentation of the church into a thousand pieces is the tragic result of synthesis. And we invite further division and grief if we refuse to develop a common Christian political mind, and instead continue to accommodate to humanistic politics.

Meanwhile, the strife in medieval Christianity demanded a hard hand on the part of the instituted church. Hence, the first effect produced by the stranger, the pagan philosophies, is this: the instituted church increased its monolithic power as it was forced to deal with so much heresy and division, and in doing so, solidified the identification of Christianity with the church.

A second effect proved to be more important. The foreign unchristian ways of thought that had penetrated the church obviously ran into continuous conflict with orthodox theology, for after all, what communion is there between light and darkness? Now note carefully! Instead of the Christian community returning to a radical lifestyle and ejecting once and for all, all pagan elements, i.e., instead of engaging in a radical reformation, the medieval church decided on a path of compromise. As the adopted pagan spirits began to assert themselves more and more forcefully, more and more the vision of ecclesia and of the coming of the Kingdom receded into

insignificance. Finally, under the leadership of certain brilliant