Comprehending Australia's Christian Crown

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- November 2009 -



The symbol of the Governor-General

Supervising the six Colonies which became States in the Australian Commonwealth, and throughout the first one hundred years of Federation, a Christian Crown has served at the heart of the civic systems in our great island continent. Understanding the Christian character of the Crown is crucial to knowing how our civic culture is founded and what may be lost through unwise changes. While Australia could decide to become a republic, it would be a mistake to adopt a model which failed to exceed (or at least match) our existing system, just as it is an error to reject monarchy as inherently wrong.

A positive biblical perspective on kingship

Monarchy is often rejected conceptually by a number of God's people, based on a misunderstanding of the apparent rejection of kingship detailed in I Samuel 8:4-7, as Israel in fact rejected both Samuel and God:

> *So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him ... "... appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have".... And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected as their king, but me ...".*

Widespread misinterpretation of this text has led many Christians to reject kingship and monarchy, though the passage does not reject either. It simply indicates how God's people rejected him and they were wrongly attracted toward the customs of other nations (whether or not those customs have any goodness). While it is wrong to adopt any practices that are motivated by rebellion and by any attraction towards paganism, there is no rejection of kingship or monarchy in the Scriptures.

In fact those concepts are fundamental to biblical theology. So establishing his covenant with the patriarch Abram, Almighty God gave him the promise that *"I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you"* (Genesis 17:6). So the concept of kingship is biblically approved, and can be celebrated by God's people who agree to *honour the king* (I Peter 2:17).

Christian convictions undergirding the Australian Crown

Upholding a positive view of kingship, the Crown is founded to be a Christian entity, as can be seen from key aspects of the Coronation. This Christian service has remained largely unchanged for over one thousand years - though in recent times has included the monarch pledging to serve Australia and other crowned nations.

So offering the Bible, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland instructed Queen Elizabeth II as follows:

> *Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. ... Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God.*

Giving the Monarch an orb on which is the cross of Christ, the Archbishop stated:

> *Receive this Orb set under the Cross, and remember that the whole world is subject to the Power and Empire of Christ our Redeemer.*

Presenting the Sovereign with the Ring of kingly dignity, the following reminder was given:

> *... as you are this day consecrated to be our Head and Prince, so may you continue steadfastly as the Defender of Christ's Religion; that being rich in faith and blessed in all good works, you may reign with him who is the King of Kings, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Further, a Christian promise is required of the sovereign, in accord with the 1689 *Coronation Oath Act*.

The prophetic potential of monarchy

While many monarchies have operated with a secular or non-Christian ethos, the functionality of monarchy (like that of every institution) is vastly diminished when separated from Christian revelation. In the same way that such key social institutions as matrimony and fatherhood are enriched by Christian theology, and are best able to fulfil their prophetic potential when they explicitly honour God, kingship is enriched when it upholds Christ, and gives a testimony to his earthly ministry and is prophetic of his coming rule and reign. While marriage, fatherhood and kingship are age-old institutions, they are enriched fully in Christ alone, and in him they are best able to function as a witness or testimony of a divine reality.

The New Testament assertion of Christ as divine husband to his bride the church is clear from passages that enrich marriage and help it reach its prophetic potential. So husbands and wives are encouraged to pattern their union on the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Paul in fact said that in matrimony we see *a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church* (verse 32).

Similarly in Christ we come into relationship with our Heavenly Father, and gain enrichment for the parental responsibility which is therefore made more authentic in its witness to God's own dealings with humanity. Explaining how even non-believing fathers are somewhat prophetic, Christ brings us to our Heavenly Father who is the giver of gifts, and who sets an example of true fatherhood:

> *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"* (Matthew 7:11).

Similarly, kingship not only requires esteem and defence if it is to promote long-term civic stability, but it also requires prayer and theology for its prophetic potential. It is crucial to remind our culture that the civic system has been influenced by the revelation of Christ who seeks to give himself as a king who leads as a servant, and especially since monarchy (like matrimony and paternity) may exemplify his own great ministry.

This is clear from a key quotation of Christ (in Matthew 22:2) that brings together those three institutions:

> *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son ...".*

In that short statement we see fatherhood, matrimony and kingship, and we see Christ laying claim to these as divine gifts which have prophetic potentiality and which exemplify the good news. Sadly, the demise of matrimony, the fatherhood crisis, and attacks on the Crown can undermine the proclamation of the gospel.

But as marriage and fatherhood may be enriched fully only in Christ, so also kingship is enriched when the mission of monarchs is patterned on the ministry of the king of kings who (in Luke 22:26-27) has stated:

> *"... the one who rules should be like the one who serves .... I am among you as one who serves ...".*

Hence the monarchy-republic debate has more at stake than the consideration of civic arrangement. While republican systems could uphold Christian values (including servant-leadership) which could match those principles enunciated in the coronation of monarchs in the Westminster tradition, the republican proposal that was emphatically rejected by the voters of Australia on 6th November 1999 contained no such provisions. As the Australian Crown continues to be informed by the Christian revelation, it may exhibit superb value to provide outstanding neutral supervision to our civic system, and give servant-leadership that is prophetic of Christ's earthly ministry and his coming rule and reign. To achieve this requires not so much academic defence, as popular celebration.

Highlighting the Australian Crown

Esteem for our civic system may be enriched as we highlight and pray for the Sovereign, and the Vice-Regal leaders, and as we consider how the civic culture is informed and enriched by the Crown. So we may enjoy considering the promises made to the Sovereign by civic authorities. We may further take pleasure in pointing out to children and grandchildren the symbol of the Crown on which is the cross of Christ - on the badges and images of many authorities such as the Federal Police, the Australian Army, along with organisations such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and Royal Automobile Club of Australia, which the Crown commends.