

VII. - Head, but also King.

And no man can say that he is Jesus the Lord, save by the Holy Ghost.

1 COR. 12:3b.

So far we took the words: Head and King, as univocal, but to a truer understanding it will be necessary to draw attention to the difference between the two. We immediately feel that the Lord can say to His own "You shall sit with me in my throne, as I sit in the throne of my Father", and "You shall reign with me as kings", but that it would make no sense to say "You shall be head, as I am the Head." In fact, there is between the two expressions is this significant difference, that the name of Head denotes the natural and naturally arising authority over the body and over what belongs to the body as members, whereas the name of King, on the other hand, expresses the possession of power as dignity and dominion. Hence the head remains the head, even if it becomes incapacitated by special circumstances, whereas the King, on the other hand, ceases to be king as soon as his reign is extinguished. A father remains the head of his family even though he is in exile from his family; a king ceases to be king as soon as another power expels him from the country.

This means that Christ is not the head of all people, but only of certain people who have been incorporated into his church through him, who have received the new life through him and who are partakers of the Atonement in him. The Scriptures therefore say that he is the Head of the congregation. That congregation is the core of his reign. For this congregation it is already real, what will only become real for our entire gender and the world at his return and after the judgment day. The congregation, because it is a body, cannot be conceived without a head, and the head of the congregation can be none other than Christ. The head belongs to the congregation as the mystical body. It is inseparable from it. And all that our own Head is to our natural body, all that the Christ is to the body of his Congregation. The congregation has its consciousness from Him alone. He controls and guides the movements of that body. He sees the dangers to which that body is exposed and averts them. He feeds and waters that body with spiritual food and drink. He cares for that body and maintains it. Without him, that body cannot exist for a moment. Between Christ and his congregation, therefore, the organic relationship has the most intimate character. He is to the body of his congregation what he cannot yet be to that which lies outside it.

Nevertheless, it must never be suggested that Christ is the Head for his congregation, but not also the King. His congregation is not outside, but in the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever belongs to Christ and lives as a member in His mystical body has entered the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' royal rule applies to him as well. It can even be said that the Church of the believers is Christ's bodyguard in His Kingdom. They are not only His members, but also His warriors. Each one of them has to fight the Lord's battle in his own way. The church is not a private, individual institution that is added to Jesus' Kingdom, but it is the living center of that Kingdom through which Christ allows the power of the Spirit to flow among the children of mankind throughout the whole world and throughout history. The Church is the indispensable centerpiece of His Kingdom, and it is only in the Church that His Royal honour and majesty not only operates, but is also recognized and honoured.

Let us leave aside for a moment to concentrate on the congregation on this earth; and even though the royal majesty of Christ extends far beyond the congregation, it is only in the congregation as such that people know about this Kingdom, recognize it, understand what it is, and honor and reverence Christ as King. In that congregation His rule is pure and powerful. He rules her by His Word and Spirit. And while outside that congregation all kinds of spirits and people rise up against Christ in order to oppose His royal rule, this royal rule is professed in His congregation, century after century. She honors Him not only as her highest Prophet and her only High Priest, but also as her eternal King. He is her Head by Himself. This does not have to be recognized and confessed first. This is a fact that was given automatically at the foundation of the Church; but that as the Head of the Church he is also her King, and is to be honored as her King, is not a natural fact, but a homage due to him only through acknowledgment and confession. He is and remains its Head, for no one can snatch His gifts out of His hand. But the Church can push Christ's Kingship into the background by wandering, as she is doing now so often. He does not cease to rule her and to be King over her for God's sake, but Kingship presupposes two things: 1°. the rule of the King, and 2°. the recognition and honoring of his rule. Not the former, but the latter can fall short of the heavenly King. A head of the family remains father and head of the family, even if he encounters disobedience and refusal to submit, but his authority is then subverted. And so, Christ remains the Head of His congregation, even if she wanders away from Him; but if the congregation loses herself in the wandering paths, she loses the awareness of His royal rule and lives on as if she had no King.

As a rule, Scripture expresses the Kingship of Christ over and in His congregation by calling Him: her Lord. Throughout apostolic literature this Lord is the fixed and constant expression, by which not the Triune God, but usually the Christ is meant. He is also called its King whenever the Church appears in connection with the world government of Christ, but when the Church is considered in itself, and the believers are taken in isolation, it is always: Our Lord Jesus Christ. So much is the real essence of the mutual relationship expressed in the name of Lord, that the Apostle tells us how "nobody can say Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit". This means that only those who have been incorporated into the body of Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit can acknowledge Him as their Lord, not in words, but in deed and in truth. Another person may speak of "Lord Jesus", but he alone can realize and fathom what this "Lord Jesus" implies, and only he who has become one with Christ can do so. Throughout the apostolic literature, the expression "Lord" is therefore not to be understood as God the Triune and not as the Father, but very specifically and almost exclusively as the Christ. Very occasionally, in quotations from the Old Testament, this highest name is used of Jehovah, but this is a very rare occurrence, and occurs mostly in quotations from the Old Testament; but the rule remains that the name Lord, without anything else and without any further indication, is to be understood of Christ and of no one else. When it says: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty", this refers to the Spirit of Christ. When it says: "Anyone who will call on the name of the Lord," this is transferred to the Christ. If it is stated: "There is a variety of ministries, but it is the same Lord", then, precisely because of the context, this is spoken of Christ. And likewise, when it says: Become strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power," then this too points to the Christ. Yes, the repeated expression: "in the Lord" does not refer to our hidden relationship with the Triune Being, but very specifically to the intimate relationship in which the redeemed stand to Christ.

Now Jehovah asks in Malachi 1:6: Am I a Father, where is my honour, and am I a Lord, where is my fear? The Lord in the Old Testament expressed the dominion that is due to God over all created things, and the same distinction as between the Headship and the Lordship of Christ also comes to the fore here. God is Father, in so far as He gave birth to all creatures; but next to this is a second position, not of Father, but of Lord. Everything belongs to Him. Everything exists only through and for Him. He alone leads the high divine regiment over all creation. A son shall honor his father, and so shall all creatures honor their God, but there is more than that. God is also the Lord, the Giver, the Controller of all creation, and as such all

creation must fear Him. And so, it is with the Christ. Here, too, it is he to whom the mystical Body owes its existence, and this is expressed in the statement that he is the Head of the Body, just as God is the Father of all creation. But just as with Jehovah it is added that he is also the Possessor, the Owner, the absolute Disposer of all creation, so it is also added with the Christ that he is the Lord of his own, over whom he has full control, so that they have to honor him not only as their Head, but also as their Lord.

To the extent that he is their Head, they are his members; to the extent that he is the Lord of all, they are his servants. Existing for his honor, for his glory, and called to consecrate themselves and all that is considered theirs, to give in his service, and to sacrifice for him. The expression Head of the congregation refers more to what belongs and flows from Christ to the congregation; the expression Lord, on the other hand, refers to everything that he, as the Lord, has to expect and demand from his own. A king takes taxes and tribute from his subjects, he demands homage and honor from his people, and he demands that those who can fight, be incorporated in his hosts, in order to throw down oathly resistance for the sake of his name. Now the word subject is not used in Scripture. It has become customary in dogmatics to say that Christ cannot be King without subjects, but Scripture does not know this word. It belongs more to kings, as the nations had, than to the much nobler Kingship of God or of His Christ. It is said that the Church is submissive to Christ, but that only means that she has to obey His high command; but the word 'submissive' is never used as if the whole nature of the believer were to be absorbed into it. On the other hand, the word servant and handmaid and servant of war is used repeatedly, and always in connection with the Lordship of Christ.

The servant of Christ should not be misunderstood. This would have been avoided if our translators had translated the word not as servant, but as slave or serf, because that is what it actually says. The word servant was chosen because the word slave has a vile connotation in our ears and would not be in keeping with our relationship to Christ. But when we read the word "servant" in Apostolic literature, we must always remember that a servant in those days was something quite different than today. Nowadays a servant is a free man, who rents himself out for service by agreement, as was the rule in Israel; which is evident from the parable of the laborers. But Paul's letters were all written to churches in heathen cities, at Rome, at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Colossae, etc., and in that heathen world slavery existed and ruled. One was born as a slave, or bought as a slave. This meant that the owner of the slave had an absolute right of disposition over the slave. He, the

slave, was not a person to his lord, but his possession, his property, belonging to him in body and soul. The slave had no rights in civil society. His lord could discipline him as he pleased, sell him and dispose of him, and to a certain extent he even had the right to decide over the life of his slave. And such a slave was called *doelos* in Greek, whereas a hired servant was called *diakonos*. Now the word *diakonos* is also used for the relationship to Christ, but then in relation to an appointed minister in the church. That is why our caretakers in Christ's church are still called deacons, a name that comes from the word *diakonos*. But if the Apostle does not want to express a ministry, but the relationship of each member of the congregation to Christ as their Lord, then he uses the word *doelos*, which does not indicate a free servant, but a slave, and in that sense could have been translated by what in the Middle Ages was also called a serf. Even though our translators have avoided the word 'slave' because of the less noble connotation, and have therefore substituted the word servant and handmaiden, it should never be forgotten that the expression 'servant and handmaiden of Christ' has a much deeper meaning than the name of a servant would indicate to our ears.

Our Catechism has sensed this, and has therefore taken up the word serfdom again, even calling the serfdom of Christ our only comfort in life and death. That sole comfort is, according to the Heidelberger, that I am not my own body and soul, both in life and in death, but my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ's. Ownership now refers to possession, to ownership. Christ owns us, we are his property, and in that sense the serf had best expressed the meaning. We did not originally belong to Christ; we were under the power of another lord, who ruled us.

We were under the power of another lord who had dominion over us. But from the power of that former lord and master, Jesus has bought us. As it is written in 1 Cor. 6:20: "You have been bought dearly," and again in 1 Cor. 7:23: "You have been bought dearly; do not become the slaves of men." Jesus paid for that redemption. Paid, as the apostle Peter testifies, not with gold or silver, but with His own precious blood. Through that payment and redemption, we have now been redeemed from our former dependent state and have passed into the possession and property of Christ. The ruler of the world was Satan. His power ruled over us. But from his power we have now been loosed. We are no longer bound to him. As far as he is concerned, we have been made free. But not in order to be our own lord and master now, but to change lord and master. Instead of Satan, the Christ has now become Lord and Master over our hearts. We now belong to Him with body and soul, with our whole person and all our powers and gifts. Not for ourselves,

but for Him we have to exist, to live, to tolerate, to bear and to suffer. And this is the deep meaning and significance that lies in calling the Christ our Lord. We ourselves can therefore not assert any right, because He has all the right over us. We may no longer seek or mean anything of our own apart from what we are of Christ, for we belong to Him completely, with all that is in and of us. His will determines what we must want. Against His will there is no more room for our own will. We are completely absorbed in Him. In Him we lose ourselves. And it is by losing ourselves in Him that we gain the full freedom of the children of God. Not the fish on the beach, but the fish in the water is free, but is also completely and in all parts enclosed by the water. And so it is that only by being incorporated into Christ and merging into Christ have we rediscovered our true element of life, and we continue to enjoy it, as often and as long as we ourselves are nothing and Christ has become everything to us.

Our relationship to Christ as our Lord is thus grounded in the Redemption Work itself, but not as something secondary, but rather as something that flows directly from the appearance of Christ as Messiah. The Lord's Messiahship of Christ goes back to the work of creation itself. By virtue of our creation, we were God's property. Belonging completely to God, and existing only for His honor, respecting no other will but His, and accepting our fate from His high and holy disposition. That was paradise. That was our original condition. But man has broken away from this relationship through sin. He has pushed through his will against God's will. He has tried to exist not for God, but for himself. He strove to become his own lord and his own master. The sinner therefore imagines that he has achieved this goal and become a free man. But this is appearance, not reality. By separating himself from his God, man has become a "slave of sin", and has passed into the service of the Tempter. He does not know it, he does not acknowledge it, he denies it; but the fact is that he has done the deceiver's will and thereby passed into his dominion. What Christ has now accomplished with his self-sacrifice is that the supremacy over our sinful hearts has been broken, and that the bond by which Satan bound us is loosed from our necks. But now man cannot stand like this. He cannot live by himself. A human being is destined to be the vehicle and instrument of a will that stands above him. And that is why the Christ now assumes the sovereignty over His redeemed. He accepts them as His own into His circle of life. He drives them by the Spirit to exist and live for Him alone. E11 this is now expressed by saying that the Christ has become their Lord, and that they are His property and His servants and handmaidens. The word Lord, and not the word King, is most often

used in this sense, because, according to our earthly relationship, a Lord is more than a Viscount. In our earthly household a King does have authority over his subjects, but not in an absolute sense, whereas the lord of a slave cannot encounter any opposition and has absolute authority over him, without dignity and without any condition. The King-ship of Christ over His own is thus included, but the expression the Lord is stronger and implies a more complete right of control. The aim of this Lordship of Christ is indeed to lead us back into the dominion of the Triune God in the end, so that God may be all in all again, but before this ultimate goal is reached, the reign has been given to Christ, and He is "the King of kings and the Lord of lords". For those who have a deeper understanding of the different meaning of a Lord and a King, the title of our Lord is therefore much more penetrating, much more encompassing and all-encompassing; a Kingship, if we may say so, in an elevated degree.

The same thing is expressed when the redeemed is called a warrior servant of Christ. The Christ then appears to us in the image of our Lord Commander, and especially in the days in which Paul wrote this implied that the servant, under the strictest discipline, renounced all self-will and knew no other glory than to carry out the will of his Lord Commander punctually and with absolute submission. Nowadays this relationship has changed a great deal, but whoever reads the Scriptures must of course take such an expression in the sense in which it applied at the time. And then the concept of a servant of Jesus Christ contained two ideas. First, that the servant of war renounced all self-will in order to be guided by nothing but the order and command of his commander. But also in the other place, that the servant of war was bound, all his courage, all his strength, all his enthusiasm and even his life to his commander.

If he had to, he had to die for his commander and for the glory of those who commanded him; something which of course included all lesser suffering and all lesser devotion.

The only difference between the two expressions, that of servant and warrior of Christ, was that in the word *doelos*, or servant, more attention was paid to what Christ did for us, and that in the word warrior more prominently what we have to do for Christ. But both expressions agree in that they express Jesus' rule and Jesus' Kingdom over His redeemed in the most decisive way. Whoever accepts Jesus as his Redeemer and glories in his calling to eternal life, but fails to immediately deduce that the Christ is therefore his Lord, his King, his absolute Commander and

absolute Disposer of his fate and life, of his powers and faculties, runs the serious risk of making his own name illegible in the book of life.