

XXIII. - Mystical and Instrumental.

Who shall change our humiliated body, that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working, by which he also can subdue all things to himself.

PHIL. 3:23.

We must not remain silent of the manner in which we have to imagine the exercise of Jesus' kingly power. The apostle testifies to us that his is the "working by which he can also subdue all things to himself." In Revelation, the Christ himself speaks of "the sword of his mouth" (2:16). The Christ is said to "reject the adversary by the spirit of his mouth." And he is also shown holding in his hand "a sharp sickle to reap the harvest of the earth." We hear the hymn on Pathmos, that "the Lamb is worthy to receive the power" (5:12), and later the jubilation that now "the power has become of the Christ" (12:10). The Hebrew letter tells us that the Christ "carries all things by the word of His power." It is the apostle's fervent prayer that "the power of Christ" may dwell in him, and where he strikes the apostolic spell, he says he does so "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 5:4). Already during his walk on earth we read repeatedly that "the power went out from Jesus" (Luke 8:48) and that he commanded "with power the unclean spirit" (Luke 9: 1). And at his departure from this earth he leaves us the word of comfort: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. However, although this series of statements establishes the conviction that the Christ, in order to carry out his royal office, has at his disposal an all-sided power, such a general statement is not satisfactory, and it is therefore worthwhile to examine the exercise of power by the Christ in more detail. Not, of course, as if we could ever succeed in analyzing this exercise of power in such a way that we could see through its entirety. Even in all physical power, there always remains, at the end of the day, an inexplicable something that we have to accept without being able to explain it; and especially in all spiritual power, there always lies at the bottom a certain mystery that defies further explanation. The power of love, the power of faith, the power of heroism fascinate us without our being able to peep into their essence, and how could we ever succeed in tracing back to their roots the wonderful power that once worked and still works in Christ? But even though we know in advance that the riddle we are facing here is not entirely amenable to solution, the limited nature of our knowledge need not prevent us from striving for a general conception of the manner in which Christ exercises power as our King.

It is obvious that we must distinguish between the actions that Jesus performs directly Himself and those that He performs through His appointed servants and subjects. With those servants we should not only think of human persons, but also of angels. An earthly king uses an army of officials to carry out his reign and has an armed force at his disposal. Through these officials he has his orders conveyed to whom it may concern, and with the strong arm he enforces obedience to his orders. To a certain extent this is the same as the fact that Christ, by virtue of his royal majesty, also gave some people to be apostles, others to be evangelists, to be overseers, to be shepherds and teachers, in order to pasture his flock. These ministers are not only charged with proclaiming the Gospel and communicating the command to believe, but they are also vested with a certain power, with which they exercise discipline, and by means of which a certain spiritual regiment is maintained on earth. If one now adds up all these ministers of the Word, all these bishops and deacons from all churches throughout the world, then one finds an immense army of thousands and tens of thousands of ministers who stand at the service of Christ in His royal regiment, and in so far as they are faithful, actually exercise a part of that regiment in Jesus' name. Yet this host of human servants is still small compared to the vast host of angels who are always ready to serve Him in the spirit world. These angels are always faithful servants who skillfully obey the commands that emanate from the King's mouth; they are not bound by any earthly impediment, and they are always "sent out for the sake of those who will inherit salvation'. It is therefore quite wrong to think of the position of our King at the right hand of God as an isolated one. On the contrary, there is no emperor or king on earth who can even remotely compare the wide range of his officials and the rich development of his armed forces with the phalanx of the servants and agents and subjects of our King. Even if we were to learn nothing more about the mystery of the miraculous power exercised by Jesus himself, we would not be able to form too comprehensive a picture of his regiment. His twelve disciples have increased in the course of the centuries to thousands and tens of thousands, and the twelve legions of angels, of whom he spoke shortly before his death, have now expanded to include all the hosts of heaven. His is in no way an isolated position, but even in the higher spheres he appears surrounded by "the angels of his power'.

Yet this exercise of power by his servants on earth and by the angels of his power requires further explanation. After all, the usual machinery of the civil service, which the earthly king has at his disposal, is absent here. With an earthly king, his highest advisers appear in person in order to hear his wishes and to advise and

consult him; written orders are prepared; and there is a broad service of clerks and messengers who, by couriers, by post and telegraph and printing press, bring the king's will and orders to the knowledge of his subjects. And also, with an earthly King, the appointments of the servants and the appointments of the heads of his armed forces are made by written orders, and between all the servants there is a hierarchical relationship that passes from person to person. With King Jesus, on the other hand, all this falls away. He is not on earth. He is enthroned in the heavens. And no servant on earth has ever seen the King, heard his voice or received a personal order from him. It is true that on earth there is a certain organization in the Church through which the appointment of His servants is made and supervision and discipline is exercised over the congregation, but all of this goes beyond personal, visible contact with the King. He remains in heaven, and all this organization of his Church takes place on earth, among men, if we may so express it, on his own accord. Hence the abuse that constantly crept in and so often perverted this organization. So perverted, that all too often His servants on earth not only fell asleep and became idle, but finally organized themselves into a mass that opposed the King and persecuted and oppressed His loyal subjects. Compared to the governmental organization that a king has on earth, the organization of his servants on earth makes a very poor impression. It lacks personal contact, it lacks a direct ad hoc command, it lacks a direct personal appointment, and the possibility exists that this earthly organization might turn against its goal. Our King did leave his Word to the Church on earth, with the demand that his Church should live by that Word and draw its strength from it, but that Word is not a Khoran. That Word is a historical product. It has arisen in Israel in the course of the centuries and therefore bears an Eastern historical type. It does not give a concrete series of laws and decrees, but it tells history, it tells about God's power, and it gives statements and testimonies of prophets, but not in such a concrete form that it could be considered a book of law, in which one only has to store the applicable article for every case. However great the power of this Word may be, it is of an entirely different nature than the code of an earthly ruler; it exerts its influence in an entirely different manner; and it moves the spirits to conform to the will of Jesus, but in an entirely different manner than a law or decree on earth. It follows that all kinds of disputes may arise concerning the meaning and significance of this Word; that both scientific and spiritual studies are required in order to understand it and apply it to life's situations; and that a high level of spiritual guidance is therefore required in connection with this Word, which cannot originate with men, but must originate with the King Himself. Even if we limit ourselves to the normal

organization of the Church on earth and the government that it exercises in Jesus' name, an invisible intervention by the King himself is already necessary and indispensable here, one that has a completely mystical character and cannot be explained by the earthly institution. With the angels, this mystical intervention by an act of the King is equally indispensable. The King must know his guard of angels, know for what service each angel is suited. He must communicate his command to each angel so that he knows what his task is, and the King himself must protect his angels and lead them in such a way that they carry out his high command in the manner that he desires. This part of the Royal Regiment, which is served by ministers or by servants from the angels or from mankind, thus demands a power in the King to know to the smallest detail what is going on on earth, and to arrange, direct and regulate everything in such a way that his will is carried out, his command carried out, and his Royal authority maintained.

And next to this exercise of Jesus' royal power by means of subjects, office bearers and angels, there is the direct influence of the King on the entire course of our human life, bathed in a much deeper mystical glow. Our King is not a passive King, who, seated at the right hand of the Fathers, merely watches and waits to see what will develop on earth from the service of his followers, but he actually reigns, interacts with the things of this world and personally exercises his royal rule. Many people do not see this. They think of Jesus as ascended into heaven and now residing in the Father's house, in contact with the angels and the blessed, but deprived of direct influence on things here below. He established his Church, he gave us his Word, he blessed us with the Sacraments, and furthermore he makes the fruit of his sacrifice valid with the Father, but furthermore, in their view, he is awaiting what is happening on earth, watching how things are going on earth, passively tolerating what is happening, and so anticipating the end of things, as if he will once again intervene in the course of things. There are those who then still accept a certain free and strong communion between Jesus and the redeemed soul, and who enjoy themselves in that supposed communion with their Savior, but, all this goes beyond His royal power, even beyond His royal office. It is in all things the High Priest of their confession, whom they seek here, who now lives to pray for them and will prepare a place for them in the Father's house, but as King Jesus is also to them a *roi fainéant*, i.e., a King in name, who awaits what is to come, but without actually exercising a reign on earth. Others do not even admit to this mystical community, and imagine that Jesus left behind only the memory of his appearance, that the impression of his life, suffering and death still lingers, that his

example still wins and attracts, and that his Word, which he left behind, as an illustration of a holy ideal, still endears itself to our hearts, but that there is no question of any direct influence, which Jesus would exert on earth, even now, in a thoughtful and fully conscious way. In their view, a Kingship of Jesus may await his return, but in the centuries that elapse between his ascension and his return on the clouds, there is no question of it. It is an honorary title, and also among the angels and the blessed above, but not as far as our human life on this earth is concerned. Now on earth we have a certain fellowship with Jesus' spirit through the word and example he left us, and through the memory of his entire appearance, and one day in the Father's house we shall see a completely new fellowship with Jesus unlocked, when we see him as he is; but during the years we spend here on earth there is nothing for us but history and the ideal, and all personal contact with Jesus rests on imagination and fiction. In fact, the destruction of Jesus' Kingship, or at least the inactivity of that Kingship, and the assimilation of Jesus' position to that of every one of the saved who went away from us and was taken up into the deserts of glory.

However, this idea runs completely counter to what Scripture has revealed to us. You only have to read the series of letters of Jesus to the churches in Asia-Minor in the second and third chapter of Revelation to feel the contrast. In those letters Jesus himself speaks to the churches in such a way that he shows he knows them in detail; that he judges their doings right down to the smallest and most distinguishing details; that he has their destiny in his hand; and that he has such a disposition over their future that he already now executes all kinds of judgments on them with royal power, punishes and blesses them, threatens them or enriches them with promises and has their future in his hand. There is no question of a wait-and-see, passive attitude here. Jesus is present in the congregation, Jesus knows her, Jesus assesses her past and her present situation, He even knows the few erring teachers who have arisen in her midst, and He tells her that if she does not repent, He will intervene, make her feel His power, and finally take her lampstand away from her. And the apostles give the same presentation in their letters on every point and in every area. Jesus is the King, Jesus is the Lord, who gives power to those who need it in order to do His will. Jesus rules as King over every person, over every servant, in every sphere of life. It is always the Lord, the King, who comes to the fore and experiences His workings and effects in the persons and in the congregation. Yes, did not Jesus himself cut off all pretense that his kingship would be merely nominal and titular, just before his Ascension, when he

introduced the baptismal command for the incorporation of the nations with the solemn declaration that all power in heaven and earth had been given to him? Note, not only in heaven, but also on earth. Not only in the realms of salvation would he shine in majesty, but that majesty would also be revealed on earth. Just as his apostles openly declared after the first miraculous healing that not they, but Jesus had performed that miracle of healing.

Thus, Jesus has the power to approach souls, to act on people's minds, to lead, direct and steer them according to His will. All distance here is lost. As our Catechism expresses it: "According to his human nature he is no longer on earth, but according to his divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit he never leaves us. In the spiritual there is no distance. Spiritually, earth and heaven are one spiritual unity. Nothing separates us from our King or our King from us. He knows not only that there is a Church on earth, but in that Church he knows each one of his own head by head. He shares with divine compassion in their sufferings and in their struggles. Their lives are hidden in him. And every morning and every evening his guiding power from High goes out to the souls. And not only does this royal regiment apply to individuals, but it also encompasses the course, fate and development of an entire congregation, indeed of the entire Church on earth. And since the fate of his Church on earth always depends on and is controlled by the destiny of the nations and peoples, his influence and effect likewise extends to the history and the destiny of the peoples. The latter is not only, and not even especially, taken in view of the wars they are engaged in and the transformation they undergo, but also in view of their inner degeneration, development and deformation. The destiny of a people is controlled by the spirits that rule that people, religiously, morally, scientifically, artistically and socially. The struggle of these spirits has as its outcome the mood of the people, their aspirations, their spiritual collapse or elevation, and with this is inextricably linked the mood of the spirits that will rule in the Church of that country. Thus, the fate of the Church is most closely related to the spiritual development of each people. If, therefore, Jesus is to reign as King in his Church, he must also rule over the entire spiritual development that such a people undergoes. The one is inseparable from the other, and whoever nullifies Jesus' royal power over the peoples and nations, automatically nullifies his royal power over his Church as well. And therefore, we must hold unconditionally to what we profess in our Catechism: "That Christ therefore ascended into heaven, that he might prove himself there as the Head of his Christian Church, through whom the Father rules all things."

Thus, our King has a governing, directing and guiding power, not only over the individuals of the faithful, but over the life of the world as a whole, over individuals and situations, over the course of history and events, over the development of nature and over the spirits that present themselves as having power among the nations. The after-effects of Jesus' appearance or the memory of his life and death are not relevant here. The mystical communion of the faithful with their Savior is soul-searching, but it is not the Royal Regiment. In order to grasp that Royal Regiment as a necessary truth, which controls the destiny of the world, Jesus, as he is seated at the right hand of the Father, must be served by a power, a force, an influence, an effect, which can be stopped by nothing, which finds no limits to it, and which, working through everything, in fact subjects all things to him, makes them accessible to him, unlocks them for him, and allows him to rule by his Royal Authority. Whoever honors in our King nothing else than the faculties that were put into human nature at the creation of the first man, cannot find that strength, that power, that might in him, even if one expands those faculties of our human nature to their highest tension. That is why the Apostles, as often as they explain this Royal Regiment to us, constantly refer back to the Godhead of the Mediator, of whom it is to be confessed that "he is before all things and that all things exist together through him."