

The Perfection of the Royalty of Christ

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In Christ, the perfection of royalty is taken to a limit that can only be verified in Him. He retains in his royalty, however, all the formality of all the characteristics proper to a king as we find them described by Aristotle and Saint Thomas.

1. “It is necessary,” says the Angelic Doctor in his commentary on the *Politics*, “that the king, who perpetually rules and has full power in all things, differ in nature from his subjects, in a certain way by magnitude of goodness; and that, nevertheless, he be of the same genus as them, at least according to human species. But it will be better still if he is of the same race.”¹ Now, Christ rules for life: *He will reign forever* (Luke, 1:32). He enjoys a fullness of power in all things: *the power which he wrought in Christ, raising him up from the dead, and setting him on his right hand in the heavenly places. Above all principality, and power, and virtue, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And he hath subjected all things under his feet, and hath made him head over all the church, which is his body, and the fullness of him who is filled all in all* (Eph 1:20–23). Christ is our leader in that he communicates to us the grace he merited through his Passion, but his reign extends even to the angels over whom he is leader by his authority. And how could his kingdom *not be of this world* and extend effectively and universally to heavenly goods if Christ were not king even with regard to earthly kingdoms? *He hath subjected all things under his feet*. Now, by reason of his divinity he differs in nature from his subjects; but he is also of the same genus: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). He is of their species: *the Son of man* (John 1:15), *the son of Adam* (Luke 3:38). He is of their race: *There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver* (Isa 59:20; Rom 11:26). He is not even a stranger in regard to his royalty: *and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father* (Luke 1:32).

2. “In itself it is always better to have a king by election than by simple succession ... because the reign ought to be a voluntary government ... When the subjects do not want the government of the king, he straightaway ceases to be a king and becomes a tyrant. For the tyrant is a master of subjects who do not want him as master.”² Now,

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¹Thomas Aquinas, *In Polit.* I, Lect. 10. [Unless otherwise noted, I translated all texts of Thomas Aquinas directly from the Latin text found on <https://aquinas.cc/>]

²Thomas Aquinas, *In Polit.* III, Lect. 14; *In Polit.* V, Lect. 10 (*Reportatio*). [These two texts from the Commentary on the Politics are now attributed to Peter of Auvergne who is said to have been a student of St. Thomas.]

Christ is a king who was chosen by his people because “the annunciation requested the consent of the Virgin, in place of all human nature,” and this consent was perfectly free.³ It was fitting to announce to the Holy Virgin that she was going to conceive Christ “so that she could offer to God the voluntary gift of her obedience; to which she promptly offered herself, saying: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.*”⁴ Now, the Holy Virgin did not consent only to the maternity, but also to the royalty of her Son: *The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever* (Luke 1:32).

3. The good king governs free subjects, the citizens, whom he treats as friends of the house. “The tyrants may well desire to have friends, but they will never have any. It is by seeking only their own good rather than the common good, that they have little or no communication with their subjects. Now, friendship is founded upon something common. The ties of friendships are formed either by reason of a commonality of descent, or by a likeness in behavior, or by some societal relations. But there is little or no friendship between a subject and a tyrant because the subjects do not feel loved . . . On the contrary, when the good princes apply all their powers for the common good, the subjects know that it is to them that the society owes a whole host of advantages, the kings make a great number of friends in showing themselves the friends of the people. . . It is, therefore, difficult to shake the throne of a prince who rests on the general affection of his subjects.”⁵ Now, does not Christ tell us: *I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends* (John 15:15)? *Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God* (Eph 2:19). “The king ought to know, therefore, that he is enthroned to be in his kingdom as the soul is in the body and God in the world. . . considering as his members all those who are subject to his government.”⁶ But Christ treats his subjects as his own members: *We are members of his body* (Eph 5:30).

4. But perhaps there is nothing that marks the sovereign perfection of the royalty of Christ as much as the manner in which he looks to the good of his realm. “The tyrant,” says Aristotle, “seeks his own advantage, but the king seeks the good of his subjects.”⁷ Contrary to the tyrant, who seeks the common good with a view to his own good, the king is good in the measure that he sets his own good to pursue the common good of the

³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q. 30, a. 1.

⁴*Ibid.*—“He did not accomplish His design without adding there the free consent of the elect Mother, who represented in some sort all human kind . . .” —Leo XIII, *Octobri Mense*.

⁵Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum* I, cap. 10. [*De Regimine Principum* was long thought to be written by Thomas in its entirety. In the mid-twentieth century, however, scholars realized that only the first two books of *De Regimine Principum* were Thomas’ own work, while the rest of the work was written by Ptolemy of Lucca, one of Thomas’ students. Some unknown fourteenth century editor had fused the two texts together. Now extracted from the apocryphal *De Regimine Principum*, Thomas’ two-book work is properly known as *De Regno, Ad Regem Cypri*. I translated this passage from De Koninck’s French version of the text.]

⁶*Ibid.* cap. 12. [In fact, this text is from Book II, cap. 1. I translated this passage from De Koninck’s French version of the text.]

⁷Aristotle, *Ethics* VIII, ch. 12, 1160b. [In fact, this quotation is not from chapter 12 but from chapter 10 of Book VIII.]

realm. There is, however, only one king who is able to reach the limit of this perfection, and it is Christ. Every other king ought to possess, according to the order of commutative justice, certain personal goods—goods which are his to the exclusion of others. But in the case of Christ the King there is an identity between his proper good and the common good of his realm. This good, in effect, is nothing other than objective beatitude—the vision of God as he is in himself. Now, the divine good is the proper good of Christ according to his divinity, but not according to his humanity. God can only be the proper good of God. Incommensurable to the limited capacity of the creature, the proper good of God is incommunicable as the proper good of the creature. God can only share it with him under the aspect of the common good. Thus, even the soul of Christ does not itself have, in the beatific vision, a comprehensive knowledge of the divine essence: its formal beatitude is limited. The proper good, however, which is identical to Christ in his divinity, and the common good of his soul, are the same good of the same person. Therefore, in his case, we are bound to say that the proper good of the person of the king, and the common good of his realm, are identical. Moreover, the Word was made flesh, he is Savior, he governs, not for himself, but *for us and for our salvation*—uniquely *ad utilitatem subditorum* [for the utility of his subjects]. For himself he does not even reserve a stone on which to lay his head. This is why the reign of Christ the King is the most perfect that can be.