

Christ Is King ... and That Matters in Cases of Religious Liberty

In the newly translated *Pro Rege: Living Under Christ the King, Volume 1*, Abraham Kuyper reminds us that Christ is not only prophet and priest, but also *king*, challenging us to reflect on what it means to live under that kingship in a fallen world.

Written with the aim of “removing the separation between our life inside the church and our life outside the church,” Kuyper reminds us that “Christ’s being Savior does not exclude His being Lord,” and that this reality transforms our responses in every corner of cultural engagement, both inside the church walls and across business, education, the arts and so on.

Kuyper was writing to the church in the Netherlands over 100 years ago, but over at Gentle Reformation, Barry York helpfully connects the dots to the American context, particularly as it relates to the current debates over religious liberty and our lopsided emphasis on worship *within* the church.

“You can sing whatever you want in church, but you can’t come out of church and act on those beliefs—at least not with any special protection from the law,” York writes, pointing to a recent doctrine from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. “That legal viewpoint—already put into action in recent court and regulatory rulings—threatens public funding and tax breaks that now support Christian colleges, K-12 schools, poverty-fighting organizations and other charities.”

And yet, “Christ is our Sovereign King, who demands loyalty in every area of our lives,” York continues, pointing to the

following sentiment from Kuyper:

The confession of Christ's kingship has been so enormously weakened and diluted—not only among those who have fallen away from the faith of their fathers, but also among believers—that it sometimes seems to have been forgotten even in the preaching of the Word. Although great homage is paid to the Lord as Prophet and High Priest, complete devotion and loyalty to Him as the anointed King no longer grips the hearts of the people. His kingship has disappeared from view, even among believers.

Indeed, the church mustn't allow its allegiances and commitments to shift according to the whims and pressures of the world around us, legal, cultural, or otherwise, receding into the comfortable walls of the church where religious action is deemed "polite" or "appropriate."

For Kuyper, such a recession is due in large part to the forces of modernity and the illusion of power that comes with technological strength. "A human kingship imperceptibly came to power, leaving no place for the kingship of Christ," he writes. "That kingship of humanity established a throne of glory for itself in the world cities, and from that seat it now rules over entire nations and peoples by what people refer to as the modern spirit of the age." Within its walls, the church still maintains its light, Kuyper continues, but even there, the songs "have diminished in tenor and tone." Everywhere else, "it is clear that Jesus' kingship has been suppressed in the life of the nations."

In our own modern context, we see a similar inward focus, with many Christians hailing policies like the Johnson Amendment as their #1 priority, even businesses and cultural institutions are faced with a range coercive threats to prostrate their consciences and religious convictions before the state.

As York explains, our cultural engagement ought not be

influenced by the arm-twisting policies of the day, driven by tax incentives, government mandates, or acceptance by some cultural priesthood. We ought to fight for religious freedom even as we take action, and that action will be far more transformative if we maintain a proper view of Christ as King:

If we are going to have any hope of reversing the trend of shrinking religious liberty in our time and place, Christians today must recover the theology of Christ's kingdom that . It is because enough did understand Christ as King that Christians have, for centuries, started hospitals, universities, schools, soup kitchens, newspapers, businesses and even entire governments. Because enough Christians understood Christ as King, they have continuously worked to reform the secular institutions and systems in which they labor Monday through Saturday.

If Christians believed their faith only obliged them to worship, they would have done none of those cultural things. But they have. Generation after generation.

Christians didn't start any of those institutions for the tax write-offs. They didn't start them because judges or legislators first gave them the OK. Christians have been active culturally only because they were first loyal spiritually to their King. Good theology, more than public policy, spurs Christians to create and redeem the culture around them. We need true belief more than tax breaks. We need persevering faith more than public funding.

As that underlying belief and “persevering faith” moves into action and maintains its pace, transforming every sphere of society and illuminating truth, goodness, beauty along the way, the world will benefit both here and now and on into the not yet.

Only when we truly worship Christ as King, not just in the walls of the church, but through the work of our hands and the

word of our testimony, will the world get a glimpse of just what the King's kingdom is all about.

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