

### **Jesus' kingdom of grace is His rule in the hearts of those who believe in Him**

All people by nature are under the governance of Christ's kingdom of power. They are born into it. It is by God's action alone, through the Gospel and Baptism, that we become members of Christ's kingdom of grace. Through the Gospel ("*For I am not ashamed of the Good News. For it is the power of God to save everyone who believes it, the Jew first and also the Gentile*" Romans 1:16) and Baptism ("*He saved us, not because of any righteous works that we have done but because of His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit*" Titus 3:5), God creates faith in our hearts. Through these same means of grace, as well as through the Lord's Supper, Christ preserves His reign in our hearts. The Reformed churches, following the lead of Ulrich Zwingli (d. 1531), deny that God carries out His reign of grace only through the means of grace. They believe that the Holy Spirit does not need vehicles to enter into and work in the heart of man. Scripture, however, teaches otherwise.

Jesus has said that His rule is inside us. It is invisible. It is His rule in the hearts of those who believe in Him. He says, "*The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that people can observe it. <sup>21</sup> Nor will people say, 'Look! Here it is,' or 'There it is.' For, indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst*" (Luke 17:21-22). When God works faith in our hearts, He establishes His reign there. He rescues us from the power of the devil and makes us alive in Christ. Paul writes, "*However, God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, <sup>5</sup> also made us, even when we were dead in trespasses, alive with Christ. It is by grace that you have been saved*" (Eph. 2:5). He gives us a new will that delights in carrying out God's will ("*For according to the inward human being I delight in God's Law*" Romans 7:22). Christ does not carry out His rule by compulsion. Through the Gospel and the Sacraments, Christ develops in us a deep appreciation of His grace, so that we, according to the new man, desire to serve Him.

Since Christ's kingdom of grace is not of this world, it does not interfere with earthly kingdoms. It doesn't undermine or overthrow any worldly government. It isn't revolutionary. Those who advocate the social gospel or liberation theology long for a kingdom of God on earth. Christ's kingdom, however, does not advocate the overthrow of existing governments. In our Second Reading for today we read, "*<sup>1</sup> Let everyone be subordinate to the governing authorities! For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist have been ordained by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, he who refuses to subordinate himself to the authority resists God's ordinance, and those who resist it will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the governing authority? Do what is right, and it will praise you! <sup>4</sup> For it is God's servant for your benefit. However, if you do wrong, you should be afraid! For it does not bear the sword for nothing. It is God's servant, an avenger that is an agent of wrath to anyone who does wrong. <sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to subordinate oneself, not only because of God's wrath, but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For that is why you also pay taxes. For they are God's servants, who attend continually to this work. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what you owe them! If you owe anyone tribute, pay tribute; if taxes, then taxes; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour!* (Romans 13:1-7). Christ's kingdom is not extended by force or by the sword. It is established by the proclamation of the Gospel. "*When Jesus came near, He spoke to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. <sup>19</sup> Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit <sup>20</sup> and by teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you! Certainly, I am with you always, until the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Christ is also the head of the Church. He is the King of his kingdom of grace. There is no visible head of the Church on earth. No pope or any other official can claim to be the head of the Church. The Roman Catholic Church is in error when it claims that Christ's kingdom of grace is a visible organisation. It is invisible, for faith and the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be seen.

Thank God that, by His grace, we stand in His kingdom of grace. As Paul wrote, "*My fellow-Christians, I am telling you the Good News that I told you, which you also received and on which you also stand*" (1 Cor. 15:1). Since Christ carries out His rule in our hearts through His means of grace, we shall also treasure those means through which He will preserve us in His kingdom to everlasting life.