

Gerald Kuester: Is Jesus Christ Your King?

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by Gerald Kuester

Is Jesus Christ Your King?

Today, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. The full liturgical year culminates on this day. Outside of Easter, this is the most important day of the Christian liturgical year. It is an important day because on this day Christians affirm their belief that Jesus Christ reigns supreme in their lives and that he will eventually triumph over the forces of evil, which are destroying his father's creation, and he will begin his public reign as King.

Most of us find the concept of kingship repugnant. When we think of kings, we often imagine cruel, oppressive monarchs. Thus, we do not want our image of our benevolent God to be associated with our image of kings.

Nevertheless, there is an important place for male authority in our society. We need good male authority figures – for our sake and for our children's sake. Moreover, I believe that the male authority figure is a part of God's plan for her creation. For example, in nature we see that majestic male figure in the bull moose and the stag elk. In everything God has created, she has put a potential for it to be holy and sacred. This includes kings. Unfortunately, humankind, more often than not, makes the scared, profane.

I think we all can imagine what a profane king would be like. He would be cruel, domineering and self-centered. However,

what would be the qualities of a sacred king? I suppose that I could come up with several by examining the reigns of good kings in the Hebrew Bible like King David and King Solomon. However, I can identify with someone who is a little more contemporary.

The person that I am thinking of was not called a king, but he was someone who had an anointing to lead his people. That person was Pontiac, chief of my people, the Ottawa.

As historians tell us, with the defeat of the French in North America in the mid-Eighteenth Century, white settlers started to move across the Appalachians with the support of the British government. They increasingly disrupted the lives of the indigenous peoples with whom they came in contact.

Chief Pontiac became very concerned about the situation. Although the British had treated him well, they did not treat his people in the same way. As a result, Pontiac decided that the British had to go. He skillfully organized all the tribes in the area west of the Appalachian Mountains. He planned a coordinated attack on all the forts in the area except at Niagara. His plan almost worked. The Indians were able to capture eight of the ten British forts. They failed to take the heavier garrisoned forts at Detroit and Fort Pitt.

When Pontiac, who led the attack against Fort Detroit, saw that the attack would not achieve the desired outcome and many of his braves would be killed, he settled for peace.

Although the Pontiac uprising failed, the British did warn settlers not to move west of the Appalachian Mountains. This land was for the Indians, they said. However, many ignored the warning and moved into the frontier, which resulted in increased fighting. Realizing that his people were fighting a losing battle, Pontiac then sought peace over bloodshed.

I think Pontiac was an effective leader and he was what we would expect in a sacred king, or queen for that matter,

because he was more concerned about the welfare of his people than his personal comfort. It has been said that after the French Indian War, the British recognized Pontiac's leadership and actively courted him. Pontiac, however, refused to be compromised by these overtures because he saw that his people were in jeopardy.

Another important quality of a king is being wise. The stories of King Solomon's wisdom are legendary. Likewise, Pontiac also showed great wisdom when he settled for peace rather than sacrificing his warriors in a fight to the last.

Another quality of an anointed leader, which Chief Pontiac exhibited, was his ability to center his people, to get them to focus on the task. Pontiac was able to do that because he had a vision, a vision of a pan-Indian nation, which he effectively communicated.

Does Jesus Christ meet these simple criteria of an anointed leader? Certainly, we would all agree that Jesus Christ was concerned about his people, particularly the least of his brothers and sisters. In addition, he was very wise as we learn from his Sermon on the Mount teachings. Moreover, as for his ability to center his people, to get them to focus on the task, Jesus too was able to do it because he had a powerful vision. His vision for the coming Kingdom of God, where people would experience life and freedom instead of slavery and death, has drawn many into his company.

Isn't interesting that the qualities that make a king sacred are those same qualities that we associate with women? Don't we associate women as those in our society who willing self-sacrifice? In addition, the church, especially the Eastern Rite, hold up wisdom, an attribute of God, as a feminine concept. The Greek word for wisdom is the feminine name Sophia. Moreover, with respect to having a vision, the women in all societies create visions in the stories they tell. Women are typically the storytellers in most communities. I

suspect that Chief Pontiac's vision of a pan-Indian nation was not his original idea. For a similar vision has cropped up many times among various Native American peoples. Pontiac probably heard about this vision from his grandmother who heard it from her grandmother. For among my people the older women in the tribe transmit the stories. I believe that women not only transmitted the vision of a pan-Indian nation, I strongly suspect it was a woman who came up with this vision because it has to do with forming relations, which is a feminine quality.

By now, I hope that I have convinced you that the concept of a king, or anointed leader, is not all bad. A king can actually be considered sacred or holy when he exhibits both masculine and feminine traits in his reign. In the case of Jesus Christ, I think that he has demonstrated those qualities so that I can call him a king, a sacred and holy king.

What about you? Based on the criteria of a sacred king that I just gave you; can you claim that Jesus Christ is your king?

I have had to ask myself this same question. The answer lies in the gospel message. If we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, or visit the imprisoned, then we should experience Christ in our lives and not only as an itinerant healer and teacher that is portrayed in the gospels, but also as a king.

Like many of you, I have fed the hungry, helped the homeless, cared for the sick and visited the imprisoned. However, as I think back on those times, I cannot honestly say that I experienced Christ in those experiences. To be perfectly honest, when I have visited with some prisoners on death row, I felt like I was experiencing something demonic. No, I cannot say as though I met anyone who I would call a king, much less a teacher or healer.

However, on deeper reflection I have noticed a change that has

come over me as I have been in personal relationship with the least of my brothers and sisters. For one, I have a greater passion for the work to which the Great Spirit is calling me. I feel more centered and assured. Moreover, I feel a presence of God's spirit that empowers me. Sometimes it empowers me just to sit and listen non-judgmentally to tragic stories. For example, recently I met with a father whose son is on death row. He could not understand why I wanted to save his son from the death penalty, especially since the son wants to die and the father would just as soon get the whole mess over with so that he can get on with his life. A part of me wanted to quit when I heard this. The thought came to me that, if the man's own father thought his son should be executed, why should I be wasting my time trying to save him? I am not sure why I did not give up. Nevertheless, I cannot.

May be Pontiac faced the same dilemma. He saw his people facing extreme hardship, and rather than give up he had a vision of a revitalized Indian nation. Well it did not necessarily turn out the way he imagined it to be, but his vision has lived on long after his death and I can see a revitalized Indian nation that I don't think he even imagined.

As for me, I too have a vision. That is the end of the death penalty in the United States. I do not think I would have had this vision if I did not sit with prisoners on death row and with their families. As strange as it may seem, I do not think my vision, or for that matter Pontiac's vision, is incompatible with the Jesus' vision of a just society.

Just as Pontiac's vision empowered him to sacrifice for his people, and my vision empowers me to sit and be patient when a part of me wants to quit and run, I think Jesus' royal vision of a just society can empower each of us.

I do not know if I am experiencing the presence of Jesus Christ as king in my life, but I do know that I am experiencing a power in my life that leaves me awestruck and

speechless. It is like being in the presence of a mighty, benevolent king, a sacred king, a king who has the authority to separate the sheep from the goats, but who would rather be compassionate than judgmental.

If you do not feel particularly empowered by Jesus Christ, the King, or if you feel the need to be more centered in your life or even to find some meaning or a vision, perhaps you need to spend a little more time in personal relationship with those least of your brothers and sisters who are in need. I know that many of you have spent a great deal of time with those whom we considered marginalized and can give wonderful testimonies of being empowered by Jesus Christ because of your experiences. When you feel empowered, know that the power you are experiencing is coming from the King, the sacred and holy king, whose power is generative and is a source of blessing.

On Thursday, we will celebrate the wonderful American tradition of Thanksgiving. There is much to be thankful for—our health, our families, our almost free society. Especially, we should be thankful that Jesus Christ is our king.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who gave your Son Jesus Christ a realm where all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; make us loyal followers of our living Lord, that we may always hear his word, follow his teachings, and live in his Spirit; and hasten the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord; to your eternal glory. Amen.