

The Coronation



A Brief Theological Summary

The Biblical Foundations for the Monarchy.

At the beginning of Genesis, humanity is ordained with a priestly and a kingly function, in that, humanity is created in God's image. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the idea of a monarch is met frequently, but is often met with ambivalence. Israel does not initially have a king, and it is only after the pleas of the people that God reluctantly grants Samuel permission to appoint a king (1 Samuel, chapters 8-12). Saul is then chosen, and he is anointed by Samuel. Various kings follow, some good, others less so. But crucially, none of these kings are above the Law - they are all equal under it. They do however provide an embodiment of the Covenant between God and his people.

There are certainly at least nine Royal Psalms through which we might picture the cultic role of the King in the Jerusalem Temple: 2, 101, 110 being clearly about enthronement; 21 and 72 relate to royal anniversaries or birthdays (divine begetting); 18 and 20 situate the sovereign in a critical situation of war or adversity; 45 relates to royal nuptials; 132 relates to a royal dwelling. Psalm 89 speaks of the anointing and election of David.

In the figure of Melchizedek, we see a reference to a 'priest-king', in which the monarch performs an intermediary role between God and people; almost a deputy of God on earth.

In the New Testament, we hear of that the kingship of Christ is declared from before his birth. The genealogies draw a line back to King David. The birth narratives draw a contrast with other earthly rulers. In his baptism, he receives something of a Messianic anointing. The Last Supper is an echo of Melchizedek's High Priestly prayer. Pilate asks him "So you are a king?" Jesus is crowned, with thorns rather than gold. Central to Christ's mission is the proclamation of the Kingdom. For Christians, we know not to confuse the kingdoms of this world with that of heaven, but the two are intrinsically linked.

The History of the Coronation Rite in England

The coronations of the Saxon kings were influenced by the legacy of Imperial Rome. We are able to date coronation rites in this country back to AD 574 when Aidan, King of Dalriada was blessed by the laying on of hands by St Columba. By the coronation of Aethelred II in AD 978, the rite was altered under St Dunstan. This rite has remained essentially unchanged to this day, with various modifications over time. The Coronation of Edward the Confessor, and his subsequent canonisation, solidified some elements. The regalia (more on those later) and the crown were introduced, and remained until the Commonwealth.

The liturgy we have today has been in constant use since the coronation of Edward III in 1327. By the late middle ages, a procession through London was added, perhaps to echo Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The Reformation had surprisingly little effect on the coronation, and it continued unchanged until the Civil War. The crown jewels were destroyed by Cromwell, and the coronation regalia had to be recreated by Charles II. All but the anointing spoon had been lost. The faithful reproduction of Edward the Confessor's regalia showed how deeply the significance of the items was felt. There have been further adjustments to the liturgy to the present day, but fundamentally, it remains as it was in 1042.

The Outline of the Liturgy

The Oath

From the time of the Rite prepared by St Dunstan monarchs have sworn an oath, as the prelude of the Coronation ceremonies. It is administered by the Archbishop, and the King will promise to serve his people, uphold the laws of the land, and maintain the Church of England. This is both a contract with the people, and a sacramental promise before God.

The Readings

The readings used at the coronation have been used for every recorded instance in our history. They are: Leviticus 26:6-9, 1 Peter 2: 13-19; Matthew 22: 15-22. It is hard to determine exactly what the connection between these readings is, and why they have become so intrinsically linked to the coronation rite. Ultimately though, they have in common the understanding that all human rule comes under the rule of God.

The Anointing

Anointing in the Old Testament serves to set something apart for God. The parable of Judges 9: 7- 15, the anointing of the bramble as King over the trees, suggests the pre-historical understanding of unction in relation to Kingship. The anointing of Saul confirms this.

Anointing became a part of the Baptismal liturgy from the earliest days of Christianity. The baptismal rite then becomes the foundation for all others, such as ordination, consecration or coronation. At the coronation, the oil of Chrism is used. This is the most special of our three oils (the other two being catechumens, for use at baptism; and infirmata, for the anointing of the sick). The oil for the King's coronation was consecrated by the Archbishop of Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in March of this year.

The King is anointed on his head, breast and hands. Gloves are then worn to represent the now sacred The anointing spoon used is the only piece of the original regalia that survived Commonwealth. This is often seen as the holiest part of the whole liturgy. For the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the first to be televised, a canopy was put over her to shield her from view of those in the Abbey, and the television cameras panned away. The anointing is a symbol, like baptism, of re-birth into a new role and vocation. It is a higher calling, symbolised by the King moving to a literally higher throne after this has taken place.

It is all an echo of the call for all the baptised to ascend to the heavenly realms.

The Presenting of the Spurs and Sword

The King will then be presented with gold spurs. They were made for Charles II, and will be held at the King's ankles. The Bible doesn't have a lot to say about spurs, but they are related to the age of chivalry.

The King is then presented with the swords of state. Swords are usually weapons of destruction, but in this instance, become sacred. Three swords are carried before the monarch into the Abbey at the start of the service: The Sword of Mercy (which is blunt), The Sword of Spiritual Justice and the Sword of Temporal Justice. They speak directly of the idea of Christian kingship. The Jewelled Sword of Offering is a later addition from 1821. These potentially lethal weapons, which can also be a sign of the cross, represent that leadership can involve some unpleasant decisions.

The Investing with the Armills, the Stole Royal and the Robe Royal

The armills are effectively gold bracelets, binding the Sovereign to his people. The current ones were presented by countries of the Commonwealth for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The Robe Royal is the most obviously priestly vestment worn by the King the coronation. The stole royal is much like the stoles worn by clergy when they performs priestly functions. It is another symbol of the priestly kingship of the Sovereign.

The Orb

The orb represents the sovereign's power. It symbolises the Christian world with its cross mounted on a globe, and the bands of jewels dividing it up into three sections represent the three continents known in medieval times. During the Coronation

service, the Orb is placed in the right hand of the monarch when invested with the symbols of sovereignty. It is then placed on the Altar before the moment of crowning.

The Ring

It has been worn by all monarchs since Edward VII. It may be compared with both a wedding ring and a bishop's ring.

The Sceptre and Rod

The Sovereign's Sceptre, representing temporal power, contains the Cullinan I, the largest colourless diamond in the world. The Rod of Equity and Mercy is topped with a dove. It represents the spiritual power. They both date from 1661.

The Crown

The crown's symbolism is twofold: it is as once the headdress of the High Priest and the diadem of Kingly rule. Throughout the New Testament, the crown is more associated with suffering than with majesty. The St Edward's Crown dates from 1661 and is extremely heavy (about 5lbs) and so is soon replaced with the lighter Imperial State Crown.

The Coronation of the Consort

After the Coronation of the Monarch, the Queen Consort is crowned. This mirrors the coronation of the King, but is simpler. Queen Camilla will be crowned with Queen Mary's Crown which was made in 1911. She will also receive the Queen Consort's Sceptre which was made for Mary of Modena (wife of King James II) in 1685.

The Eucharist

From its origins, the Coronation Rite has contained the Eucharist. There have only been two occasions in history when

this has not happened: at the coronation of King John in 1166 (he was under Papal Interdict) and James II (who had converted to Roman Catholicism). It is a central part of the service, and places the whole event in the context of Christian worship. Traditionally, only newly crowned Monarch, consort and those at the centre of the liturgy receive communion, which is from the Book of Common Prayer.

Theological Summary

The Coronation is a series of rituals, some of which can trace a direct line back to King Solomon. In the 10th century, St Dunstan drew together the “modern” rite. Only Holy Roman Emperors and Monarchs of France and England received both crowning and anointing. The English Coronation Rite is now the only one of its kind remaining.

The moving of the Coronation to the new Westminster Abbey by Edward the Confessor gave it a home to this day. When Edward was made a saint in 1161, this added a further mystery and holiness to the event.

The anointing of the Monarch is both a sacrament and an ordination. The old self of the recipient is removed, and they take on a new identity. It is both a setting apart of the candidate, and an outward sign of the ultimate destiny of all the baptised. The shape of the liturgy is a baptism within a Eucharist.

The readings used point towards temporal rule, but have their root in the struggle of God’s people against the powers of their own day.

The whole thing sits under the ultimate rule of God. Although it is an Anglican celebration of a unique kind, it is not one that needs to exclude other Christians or people of other faiths. It is expected they will play a role in the proceedings.

At the end of the liturgy, the Monarch proceeds to the Shrine

of St Edward. The Coronation Regalia are removed, and the Monarch goes out of the Abbey to be acclaimed by the people.

God Save the King!

Acknowledgment

The material for this brief summary has been taken from the study guide “The Theological Significance of the Coronation Rite” compiled by the Revd William Gulliford. Copies of this more comprehensive text are available from Mthr Alice.

The Coronation at St Thomas’s

Saturday 6th May from 10am.

Big Screen
Food and Drink
Children’s Activities
Crown Competition

www.stthomaschurch.co.uk/coronation
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