



THE HOLY EMPEROR: THE GROUND OF POLITICS TO COME

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Our friend Charles Coulombe has written a wonderful book that I am reading right now, [*Blessed Charles of Austria: A Holy Emperor and His Legacy*](#). Though I am only about half-way through the book, I was so struck with the contents of the chapter called "A King is Crowned" that I would like to reflect on some of its contents with our readers.

That chapter describes the coronation rite that Blessed Charles von Habsburg underwent on December 30, 1916, at the Church of the Assumption of the Buda Castle (known more commonly as the Matthias Church) in Budapest. Blessed Charles (Karl) was already Karl I, Emperor of Austria. This separate rite made him King Charles IV of Hungary, and it was administered during the Coronation Mass by Cardinal János Csernoc, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary.

What is fascinating and deeply moving about the prayers of the rite are the Christian and chivalrous ideals they so beautifully enshrine, ideals which were manifest in the all-too-brief reign of that blessed recipient of the crown jewels of Hungary.

We might look at that man known as "the Peace Emperor" as a tragic figure, a failure even. He died at the age of thirty-four, the exiled emperor of a defunct empire and the exiled king of a defunct monarchy (the latter of which he attempted to reclaim, but in vain). Even prescinding from these larger tragedies, we might be tempted to lament Blessed Karl's "untimely demise." But all of this would be to miss the point. He reigns now in Heaven. And on earth, he became and remains an icon of loyalty to Christian social order amid the vicissitudes of revolution; of love of Christendom in the face of hateful nationalisms; and of commitment to true faith, peace, and justice in an atmosphere of perfidy, hostility, and horrible injustice. In other words, he was and remains an image of so much of what we need right now. As with his Lord and Master — whose own "untimely demise" came at a slightly earlier age than Karl's — his death was a victory.

From the testimony of Cardinal Csernoc, we know that Blessed Charles studied the Hungarian coronation rite beforehand and pondered very carefully the inner meaning of its texts. The Cardinal prepared Karl to a priest devoutly preparing himself for ordination. He prayerfully internalized the duties, obligations, and burdens it was going to impose upon him, while giving only second place to the magnificent pomp of the ceremonies. The man desired to unite the internal motions of his soul and his external acts to what the prayers demanded of him. If all of us would take so seriously the liturgical ceremonies that surround our own reception of the sacraments, how different the world would be!

Later, his lovely wife, Empress Zita — who was herself crowned and enthroned Queen of Hungary in this same Coronation Mass — said this of the coronation rite:

The thing that impressed both of us most about the whole ceremony was the moving liturgical side of it all — especially the oaths that the King took at the altar before his anointing to preserve justice for all and to strive for peace. This sacred pledge given in the cathedral was exactly the political program he wanted to carry out from the throne. We both felt this so strongly that hardly any words were necessary between us.

In these days when statecraft seems so hopelessly doomed, it is good to reflect on what once was — and will one day be again (more on that later).

Here is the “Primate's Prayer” that forms a part of the Hungarian Coronation Rite:

Almighty and everlasting God, Creator of all things, Commander of angels, King of kings and Lord of lords, who caused your faithful servant Abraham to triumph over his enemies, gave many victories to Moses and Joshua, the leaders of your people, exalted your humble servant David to the eminence of kingship, enriched Solomon with the ineffable gifts of wisdom and peace, hear our humble prayers and multiply your blessings upon your servant, whom in prayerful devotion we consecrate our king; that he, being strengthened with the faith of Abraham, endowed with the meekness of Moses, armed with the courage of Joshua, exalted with the humility of David and distinguished with the wisdom of Solomon, may please you in all things and always walk without offense in the way of justice. May he nourish and teach, defend and instruct your Church and people and as a powerful king administer a vigorous regimen against all visible and invisible powers and, with your aid, restore their souls to the concord of true faith and peace; that, supported by the ready obedience and glorified by the due love of these, his people, he may by your mercy ascend to the position of his forefathers and, defended by the helmet of your protection, covered with your invincible shield and completely clothed with heavenly armor, he may in all things victoriously triumph and by his [power] intimidate the unfaithful and bring peace to those who fight for you, through our Lord, who by the vigor of his Cross has destroyed Hell, overcome the Devil, ascended into heaven, in whom subsists all power, kingship and victory, who is the glory of the humble and the life and salvation of his people, he who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Note the heavy emphasis on faith, justice, and peace.

In that part of the rite when the Cardinal presented Charles with the Sword of Saint Stephen, the following prayer was recited:

Accept this sword through the hands of bishops, who unworthy, yet consecrated by the authority of the holy apostles, impart it to you by divine ordinance for the defense of the faith of the holy Church and remember the words of the psalmist, who prophesied, saying, "Gird yourself with your sword upon your thigh, O most mighty one," that by it you may exercise equity, powerfully destroying the growth of iniquity and protect the holy Church of God and his faithful people. Pursue false Christians, no less than the unfaithful, help and defend widows and orphans, restore those things which have fallen into decay and maintain those things thus restored, avenge injustice and confirm good dispositions, that doing this you may be glorious in the triumph of justice and may reign forever with the Savior of the world, whose image you bear, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns forever and ever.

A true heir to the holiness as well as to the crown of Saint Stephen, Charles the Blessed cultivated the virtues requisite to carry out these serious obligations I have underlined above. Would that our modern rulers would realize that the sword is to be wielded for such purposes. Instead, their bellicosity is directed to far less noble pursuits, and directed by the hidden hands of the oligarchs and monied interests who themselves (unlike Blessed Karl) will never don the military uniform or see the crimsoned field of battle.

A man who is not in control of his passions, whose desires are not subject to the moral law should never wield the sword of royal power. It is precisely here that most of the wicked kings in the past committed their crimes. A thought comes to mind, though, that we can practically apply to ourselves and to whatever powers we possess that are in any way analogous to the sword (the power to fight, to punish, to kill, to silence, to fend off, or even to speak harshly): They ought to be used for the causes of faith and equity, and in defense of the defenseless. In other words, they ought to be wielded in such a way that justice, mercy, right order, and therefore peace are pursued. In this, we find solid motives for disciplining our passions and rightly directing our energies.

The orb is the symbol of the universal dominion of Christ over all the earth, and when it was ceremoniously handed to the monarch, there was no accompanying prayer, presumably because it is not investing him with such power. (That very orb may be seen here, at the lower right of this photo of

the Hungarian crown jewels.) But immediately before receiving the orb, Karl received the scepter, which symbolizes the king's temporal authority over his subjects. As he placed it in Karl's hand, the Cardinal offered this prayer from the ritual:

Accept the Rod of virtue and equity. Learn to respect the pious and to intimidate the proud; guide the straying; lend a hand to the fallen; repress the proud and raise the humble, that our Lord Jesus Christ may open to you the door, he who said of himself, "I am the Door, whoever enters by me, by me shall be saved," and let him who is the Key of David and the Scepter of the House of Israel be your helper, he who opens and no one may shut, and who shuts and no one may open; who brings the captive out of prison, where he sits in darkness and in the shadow of death, that in all things you may imitate him, of whom the Prophet David said, Your seat, O God, endures forever; a rod of righteousness is the rod of your kingdom. You love justice and hate iniquity, therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

What might a modern elected head of state in former Christendom say of this prayer? He might say what Emperor Napoleon III said to Cardinal Pie when that great churchman lectured him on the obligations of the state to Christ the King. The Emperor said that all this was not "timely." We might respond to them, as Cardinal Pie did to the Emperor, "If the time has not come for Christ to reign, then the time has not come for governments to last."

Charles Coulombe writes of Blessed Emperor Karl's intense devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This was not a superficial or maudlin devotion. It was manly and also profound, joined as it was to the Habsburg's genuine Eucharistic piety. We should recall in this context that the Sacred Heart devotion has a definite political dimension, one which was not lost on the holy Emperor.

There is a furious debate going on about "integralism." (Actually, what I have seen is less a "debate" than a one-sided exercise in puerile name-calling, which would be remedied by people giving serious attention to the wonderful and scholarly book, [*Integralism: A Manual of Political Philosophy*](#) coauthored by two heavy-duty scholars, Father Thomas Crean and Dr. Alan Fimister.) While considering these aspects of the Church's social teaching, we would be wise to keep in mind that sacrosanct principle of theology, [*Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*](#), and engage ourselves and some calm and meditative reflection on the liturgical tradition of the Church, including the prayers just cited. They are only part of a larger corpus of venerable ceremonies surrounding imperial and royal coronations (indeed, Charles cites a

few more in his book; Dom Guéranger cites other texts from different ceremonies in his Liturgical Year). Sadly, that corpus of liturgical prayer is something from which many in this “debate” have been deracinated.

That the polity outlined by the above prayers constitutes a “once and future politics” is not merely a pipe dream of some nerdy traditional Catholic “larpers.” If we attend to numerous approved prophecies, including those of [Venerable Bartholomew Holzhauser](#), we may be confident that there will be a return of Christian monarchs and integrally Catholic societies functioning under them. The timing is not ours to implement. Meantime, let us do what we can to lay the foundations for this complete social transformation by doing what we ought to be doing anyway: Christianizing ourselves and our families more and more, and keeping in our hearts and minds the clear conviction that as with individuals so with political societies: there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church.

Brother André Marie is Prior of St. Benedict Center, an apostolate of the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Richmond New Hampshire. He does a weekly Internet Radio show, [Reconquest](#), which airs on the [Veritas Radio Network's Crusade Channel](#).

This article comes courtesy of [Catholicism.org](#).

The [featured image](#) shows a portrait of Blessed Karl (Charles) of Austria.

