

# Spiritual Dimensions of the Canadian Monarchy:

*A Coronation Anniversary Reflection through History "...a visible sign that points to invisible realities..."*

by Jacques Monet, sj

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"The Coronation is indeed the greatest and most moving historical pageant of our time... It is a religious act, a solemn sacrament." So Governor General Vincent Massey spoke on the evening of June 2, 1953. And none of us then alive have forgotten that glorious and great day.

We are marking the Jubilee of the Queen's Coronation – another celebration after all last year's remarkable festivities for her Golden Jubilee. Last year's 50th Anniversary of the Queen's accession was a wonderful moment to give thanks to God for her reign and to thank her for her service. But now – we might ask – what are we doing, we Canadians proud to be living in a secular, multicultural and multi-faith democracy at the dawn of the XXIst century by celebrating the anniversary of a religious, Anglican ceremony that took place two generations ago in another country? I suggest we are being asked, firstly to consider that dimension of our monarchy which we seldom – I think – pay attention to: **its spiritual character**; and secondly to reflect on the Queen's anointing and crowning as a **sacred person**.

A few weeks ago in his column in the *Globe and Mail* [May 26, 2003], Jeffrey Simpson, wrote a comment on the different reactions in the United States and in Canada to religious expression in public life. Among other things he said: "no one would dream of putting "In God we trust" on the Canadian coinage." My reaction was: "we don't need to." We already proclaim on every one of our coins that our Sovereign reigns. "D. G. – *Dei Gratia*. By the grace of God."

What elements constitute, then, the spiritual dimension of our monarchy?

Let me underline first that The Queen's style and titles as reigning *By the grace of God* and being the *Defender of the Faith* do not mean that Canada's sovereign is Supreme Governor of the Anglican Church. (There were times in some parts of Canada when, arguably, this may have been true, but it most certainly is not since 1953). I will not go on about that now, but – since this year is also the Jubilee of the Queen's Canadian titles – I will recall Mr. St. Laurent's declaration to the House of Commons in introducing them on February 3, 1953. About *Defender of the Faith* he said:

*The people of this country know that the things of this world are not conducted exclusively by the will of men and women but rather by men and women as agents of a Supreme Being... In this country there is no established church, but there are people who have faith in the direction of human affairs by an all-wise Providence, and who believe that it is a good thing that the civil authorities proclaim that their organization is such that it is a defence of their continued beliefs in a Supreme Power that orders the affairs of mere human beings.*

This is a text well worth meditating on, 50 years later in a Canada that has

changed very much but in which at least four out of five Canadians still proclaim this faith.

So we proceed to the **spiritual character** of Monarchy over time.

In the beginning [in Mesopotamia, millennia ago] at the dawn of history there were kings. And these kings had power – to make laws; to maintain the internal stability of society; and to make wars to protect the social order from external attack. The source and origin of these two powers was in the divine power of gods or goddesses who transmitted it to them.

(By the way, notice how these two powers continue explicitly associated with the Canadian monarchy. The Queen, the Governor General proclaim the law; the Governor General is designated Commander-in-Chief.)

Later our Jewish ancestors in the Faith, under attack from the Philistines, turned to God as the source of kingly power and cried out for a king "to rule over us like other nations." The Book of Samuel tells us how God answered their prayer by sending the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul with oil that filled him with God's divine grace. Henceforth the Kings of Israel combined the religious character of the kings of Mesopotamia and the distinction of ruling by popular will. Among them, it is King David who remains the outstanding personality in whom all the religious and civil functions of the Israelite monarchy were harmoniously combined. He achieved the ideal, and so became the model of the Messiah, whose power would extend (in David's own words) "from sea to sea and from the great river to the ends of the earth."

Much later still, when the followers of the Messiah chose their kings, the anointing ceremony of the Jewish kings became the source and inspiration of their own anointing and crowning services. The first, Peppin the Short was elected in A.D. 751 and anointed King of the Franks to the singing of the biblical anthems *Zadok the Priest* (sung immediately after the anointing) and *Be strong and of good courage* (sung right after the crowning). Which hymns – first sung at the Coronation of Peppin the Short and thereafter in France – went directly into the first English Coronation service in 973 when King Edgar, first of all England, was anointed at Bath by St. Dunstan. And – I am told – they have been sung at every Coronation since, including that 50 years ago on June 2, 1953.

Need I underline how all these features are part of our own Canadian polity. The crown's proclamation and maintaining of laws; the commandership in chief; the reigning "by the grace of God"; our Dominion's motto, and that of the RCMP (*maintiens le droit*). Canada is a young and modern country but many of the symbols we have chosen to express our sovereignty go back through the mists of the ages of Faith to the reign of King David; and to the roots of royal power in the divine.

In Christian countries the religious character of monarchy soon came to be expressed in a distinct and extra title. The first and foremost of these being *Rex Christianissimus* (the Most Christian King). It was borne by the Kings of France since the early 1300s – and of course by all those Kings of France who

"reigned over" Canada between 1534 and 1760. In time, the title gave rise to its own philosophy and theology of monarchy which I would summarise as follows:

*The most Christian King, chosen by the people, anointed in the name of God with a charge or duty to order his kingdom by protecting his subjects from any enemy and maintaining the rule of law, from which flow liberties... freedom of the person, of public discussion, of use of property.*

Throughout the Middle Ages (1200-1450) other such titles expressing this religious character of monarchy were granted to Kings and Princes. Such were Champion of the Faith and Defender of the Church, the Apostolic King, the Most Faithful King, each based on the same principle and theory regarding the maintaining the law, the defending of the territory and the protecting of the rights of a Christian people. In 1512 King Henry VIII of England began pressing Pope Julius II for such a title. After some negotiation and a brilliant theological treatise against Luther he was invited to select one from among those still available. He did; and on October 11, 1521 he was granted *Defensor Fidei* by Pope Leo X, "as a permanent memorial of his orthodox faith and of his zeal and skill in its defence."

We must note that the title is not connected with the Act of Supremacy, 1536, which made Henry VIII "the only supreme head on earth of the church of England" or with that of 1559, which made Elizabeth I "the only supreme governor of this realm, as well in all spiritual and ecclesiastical things or causes as in temporal." Its origin and context is the philosophical and theological mindset of the ages of Faith, whose reflection on the Biblical notion of kingship provided a model for their own: namely – and I repeat – that a king, chosen or assented to by popular will, was endowed with God's grace to maintain the law and defend the values of an ordered society as well as the integrity of the territory against external enemies.

And this I suggest is the true meaning (could there be any other?) the title *Defender of the Faith* has for today's Canadians.

The Queen's anointing 50 years ago made her a **sacred person**. Its Jubilee invites reflection on the sacramental (so to speak) character of our Canadian crown.

The Crown is a visible sign that points to invisible realities; it is a valid expression of those realities; and it recreates and strengthens these realities by its own activity and being.

As we know, the Canadian Crown is a very complex reality. Among other characteristics, it is made manifest in a team of 12 people: the Sovereign who wears the Crown by hereditary right; the Governor General who fully exercises its sovereignty by right of appointment; the 10 Lieutenant Governors who, by derivation, participate fully in specific aspects of its sovereignty. All are equally valid expressions of the same institution; all are dedicated to the same charge and duty. They cannot be separated. It is in the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor's offices that the Crown's constitutional responsibilities are mostly exercised; it is in them that the Crown is made present to us locally; and it is in

them that the different ways of being Canadian can be taken into it and made exemplary to us. But both these offices would be terribly impoverished of their meaning without that of The Queen.

As the heir of her ancestors, she it is who connects our generation to the hopes of the past and in her grandchildren who reminds us of our responsibility to prepare the future; it is her office that stands not only for the deep historical roots of the monarchy that go back 6000 years, but also for the stability of its representation here in Canada throughout her own, now happily lengthening, reign; it is her office that links our Crown to millions of women and men across the world – of every creed, colour, and race – diverse in practically everything except their common recognition of her as a sign and symbol of our community.

She it is who calls us to a dedication, an openness, and a service that go beyond the advantages of self, who appeals to us to share with all parts of the world the spiritual traditions of conciliation and reconciliation, of sympathy, tolerance, and understanding that we have inherited from our rich and precious Canadian past.

She expresses the ideals of our "new nationality," dreamed of by Champlain, LaFontaine, the Fathers of Confederation, and defined again towards the end of the 20th century by Pierre-Elliott Trudeau as "full of understanding and generosity, nobler, and more inspired by love than could be a citizenship based on language and blood relationships".

She represents moral, spiritual, transcendent faith-filled values such as charity, duty, honour, kindness, thanksgiving, tolerance, unselfishness, – love – all virtues that burst into the other world.

She is a **sacred person**. Her service is of a spiritual character.

She it is that makes it that the Crown, (to use her own words) "can represent everything that is best and most admired" in the Canadian experience.

She it is who brings transcendence.

She it is whose **sacred person** keeps inviting us to realize that an ordered, human society cannot subsist unless it is founded on values that go beyond the material, the ambitious, and the powerful. That an ordered human society cannot subsist unless it is inspired by Faith.

She it is whose **sacred person** keeps reminding us of our call to be open to the spiritual, to adhere to values, and to serve realities that are greater than one's self; ever affirming that only thus shall we maintain the right and be protected from the enemy... from all evil.

In this light we should consider the words of Governor General Georges Vanier on Victoria Day, 1960:

*Our best hope of controlling otherwise purposeless and undisciplined movement is to base our actions upon a spirit of love and of hope... I speak of prayer and of spiritual values, because I believe we must shape our lives on moral standards, personal as well as public. Let us begin to associate prayer with power, faith with fire, charity with clear, swift action. These spiritual shafts should shatter clouds of doubt and fear, and guide us into the future.*

And thus it is we offer this prayer – for our own sakes: **God Save the Queen!**