CHRIST IS KING

PART IV — THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

JEROEN SLUITER

Concept & Direction

CHRIST IS KING

PART IV

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Truth, Humility, Conscience and the Courage to Live Accordingly

CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY

JEROEN SLUITER

Christ Is King - Part IV: The Philosophical Significance
First publication edition, 2026

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Published by WAIT

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A Note on Authorship

Christ Is King is a human-directed series that I conceived and directed. Its governing convictions, purpose and intellectual direction are my own. Its arguments, structure and prose were developed through an extended process of dialogue, drafting and revision with artificial intelligence.

I used AI as a research aid, interlocutor, drafting tool and editor, including to produce passages of prose. I determined the series' theological and philosophical position, challenged and revised its arguments, selected and approved the final text, and exercised final editorial judgement.

The AI's contributions do not represent personal beliefs or independent testimony. The positions advanced in these books are those I have chosen to endorse. Responsibility for the published work - including its claims, interpretations and any errors - rests with me.

JEROEN SLUITER

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Introduction — The Boy Who Would Not Turn the Other Cheek

I was approximately eight years old when Christianity first entered my life in a meaningful way. We were living in Switzerland, in a small village where the church belonged to the social fabric. I attended, not because I believed in God, but because participating in village life meant participating in its traditions. I was, insofar as an eight-year-old can meaningfully claim the position, an atheist. Most of the sermons have disappeared from memory. One instruction did not: Turn the other cheek. I found it almost incomprehensible. Why should the person who has been struck offer the aggressor another opportunity?

Why would a religion make a virtue of refusing to fight back? In my childhood imagination, Christians became a community of meek people who accepted domination because Jesus had instructed them to do so. Whatever else Christianity might have offered, that did not strike me as a compelling way to live. Nearly fifty years later, the objection still interests me. But I no longer believe I understood the teaching. I had confused restraint with incapacity, forgiveness with indifference to injustice, and humility with the surrender of judgement.

The more I have investigated Christianity, the more difficult those equations have become to defend. One contemporary figure who challenged my earlier impression was the country musician John Rich. His long conversations with Jordan B. Peterson and Shawn Ryan introduced me to a man who spoke of faith not merely as an identity but as a discipline. In his discussion with Peterson, he described prayer and the attempt to discern God's will rather than simply baptise his own desires as divine instruction.

What struck me was the practical difficulty of that undertaking: a person must first admit that his own judgement may be inadequate. This is not a claim that Rich, or any other public Christian, lives without contradiction. It is an observation about the difference between professing a principle and trying to let it govern ordinary decisions. The latter is much harder. The preceding three essays examined Christ is King psychologically, theologically and metaphysically.

We considered the need for an organising ideal, the Christian proclamation of the incarnate Son and the New Covenant, and the biblical account of the heavens, rebellion and restoration. Those inquiries can remain intellectual exercises unless we confront a final question: what follows if we accept the declaration as true? That question takes us from explanation to obligation. And for a method of approaching it, I find myself drawn to Thomas Aquinas.

1. Aquinas — Faith, Reason and First Principles

Thomas Aquinas was a thirteenth-century Dominican theologian and philosopher. I do not claim intimate familiarity with his enormous body of work. What attracts me is his habit of taking a proposition seriously enough to submit it to objections. The Summa Theologiae does not merely announce answers. It presents contrary arguments, distinguishes meanings and asks whether a conclusion actually follows. Consider a question central to this series: can reason and revelation contradict one another? A quick answer would be that truth is one and therefore contradiction is impossible. But that merely moves the problem.

What happens when an observation appears to conflict with a biblical passage? Is the observation mistaken, the interpretation mistaken, or our understanding of both incomplete? Aquinas distinguished what reason can discover from what is known through revelation. He also distinguished the truth of a proposition from the adequacy of a particular human account of it. That distinction is not a convenient escape hatch. It imposes work. We must identify precisely what a text claims, what evidence establishes and which assumptions connect them.

The objection is obvious: does this not permit the believer to reinterpret Scripture whenever evidence becomes inconvenient? It can, if interpretation becomes a mechanism for protecting conclusions from correction. But the reverse error is equally possible. A person may treat a first reading of Scripture as infallible and dismiss every contrary observation without examining what the text was intended to communicate. The answer cannot be that the Church always knows best, nor that the independent reader always knows best. Both are human interpreters. The question is which reading survives the strongest honest scrutiny.

First-principles reasoning, as I understand it, begins by refusing to confuse authority with evidence or familiarity with truth. It asks what must be true for an argument to hold, what would falsify an inference, and where conviction outruns knowledge. It does not reject accumulated learning; it demands an account of why that learning deserves assent. There is a moral discipline embedded in the method. If I criticise institutions for selectively accepting evidence, I must not select evidence myself. If I accuse others of arrogance, I must be willing to recognise it in my own certainty.

A philosophical method that only interrogates opponents is not a method. It is an instrument of advocacy. Aquinas is useful precisely because faith is not made into an exemption from reasoning. The Christian conviction that reality is created by God supplies a reason to take reality seriously, including the parts that resist our preferred explanations. The first obligation of a seeker of truth is not to make reality conform to his convictions, but to make his convictions answerable to reality. That principle leads us back to the childhood teaching I once rejected.

2. The Strength of the Meek — Forgiveness Without Surrender

In Matthew 5:39, Jesus instructs his listeners to turn the other cheek. The passage belongs to the Sermon on the Mount, where he challenges the impulse to answer injury with retaliation. It is a radical teaching, and it should remain radical. We do it no service by turning it into the comfortable assurance that force is justified whenever we feel offended. Yet the Gospels refuse to present Jesus as a man afraid of conflict. He disputes with religious authorities, exposes hypocrisy and drives traders from the Temple. He speaks when silence would be safer.

He also refuses the sword at his arrest and accepts the suffering that follows. The difficulty is not to choose the militant episodes over the merciful ones, but to understand why they belong to the same character. I now distinguish three questions that my childhood understanding collapsed into one. May a person defend against harm? May a community administer justice? And must an injured person cultivate vengeance? These are not identical questions. An answer to the third does not automatically decide the first two. John 18:22–23 provides an instructive scene. When an officer strikes Jesus, he does not strike back.

Nor does he pretend that the blow was justified. He asks why he was struck and invites an account of the alleged wrong. The response combines restraint with a refusal to surrender truth. This is where the distinction between weakness and meekness becomes intelligible. Weakness may leave a person unable to resist. Meekness, at its most demanding, involves the governance of power: the ability to resist the temptation to make wounded pride the judge of what justice requires. The person who retaliates at every slight may be less free than the person who can absorb an insult without being ruled by it.

Charlie Kirk's public university exchanges brought another aspect of the problem into focus for me. In a discussion of Christianity and capital punishment, he distinguished personal forgiveness from the civil duty to administer justice. One need not agree with his conclusions about the death penalty to appreciate the philosophical distinction. Can a victim forgive while a court still imposes a lawful penalty? Can a court punish without making vengeance its purpose? There are serious objections. Punishment can be disproportionate. Institutions can call vengeance justice.

Conversely, an appeal to forgiveness can become a way to pressure victims into silence. The distinctions therefore do not solve every case. They tell us what must be examined: intention, proportionality, the protection of others and the dignity of the wrongdoer as well as the victim. Kirk's willingness to defend his convictions publicly also illustrates that belief has consequences outside private reflection. His killing in 2025 was an act of grave violence. It would be wrong to infer the perpetrator's specific motives from the fact of Kirk's religious commitments; those claims require evidence and due process.

His example matters here because he entered difficult public arguments, not because his death can be made to prove a theological proposition. Christian traditions have long differed over pacifism, self-defence and the state's use of force. That disagreement is not a reason to abandon the inquiry. It is evidence of its difficulty. The instruction to turn the other cheek confronts each position with the same challenge: how can one resist evil without allowing evil to determine the character of one's resistance? The answer is not passivity. Nor is it permission to fight whenever we choose.

It is the harder work of placing courage under moral discipline. My eight-year-old self had recognised a demand but misunderstood the strength it might require.

3. Hubris — The Temptation to Become Our Own Authority

The more I read Scripture as a continuous narrative, the more I encounter a recurring human failure. We receive capacities, opportunities and authority within an order we did not create. We then begin to imagine that possession of those capacities entitles us to determine the order itself. The philosophical word is hubris. In Christian moral language, pride. It is not the ordinary satisfaction of having done something well. It is the inflation of human achievement into a claim of ultimate standing. In Eden, the serpent invites humanity to become like God through the knowledge of good and evil.

The temptation is not simply appetite. It is the promise that the creature may determine the moral order independently of the Creator. The consequence is alienation: from God, from one another and even from oneself. Babel develops the pattern collectively. Genesis 11 describes a people who share a language and undertake to build a city and a tower with its summit in the heavens. They intend to make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered. The text does not explicitly state that they planned to fight God or seize his throne.

Yet the imagery invites a severe reading: humanity attempts to elevate its collective power towards the realm of divine authority. The builders are not condemned simply for knowing how to make bricks. The question is what they believe their achievement authorises them to become. Pharaoh offers the political form of the same temptation. His authority over Egypt becomes, in the Exodus narrative, resistance to a command beyond his own will. Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 4, surveys his achievements and makes them a monument to his greatness before his humiliation.

Both stories place a limit upon rulers who mistake temporary power for an ultimate right. The pattern is not restricted to ancient kings. An institution can treat its survival as proof of its legitimacy. A scientific theory can become an identity to be defended rather than an explanation to be tested. A religious leader can mistake his interpretation for God's voice. An individual can turn independence into the refusal to acknowledge any obligation beyond personal preference. But we must also resist a lazy reading of hubris. The Bible does not condemn human ingenuity as such.

Genesis commissions humanity to cultivate and exercise stewardship. The danger is not that people build, learn or govern. It is that their achievements sever them, in their own imagination, from accountability. This makes hubris a problem of knowledge as well as character. When we believe we have mastered a subject, we become less curious about what we may have missed. The more power we acquire, the greater the consequences of that blindness. The creature's error is to mistake the ability to act upon reality for authority over reality itself.

That distinction will matter when we consider both the Galileo controversy and the extraordinary technologies of our own age.

4. Scripture, Cosmology and the Authority to Interpret

For most of my life, I would have said that I knew the Earth moved around the Sun. Mark Gober's *An End to the Upside Down Cosmos* was the first challenge I encountered that made me stop and ask what I meant when I said I knew it.

Heliocentrism places the Sun at the centre of the planetary system. The Earth turns on its axis once a day and orbits the Sun once a year. Geocentrism places the Earth at the centre. In the version at issue here, the Earth stands still while the heavens move around it. There is more than one way of arranging such a system. Tycho Brahe, for instance, placed the Sun in orbit around a stationary Earth and had the other planets orbit the Sun.

Why does that difference matter? Take the phases of Venus. Through a telescope, Venus appears sometimes as a crescent and sometimes almost full. That range of phases ruled out the traditional Ptolemaic arrangement. But Venus would show those phases in Tycho's system too. The observation did real work. It told us something about how Venus moves in relation to the Sun. On its own, it left open whether the Earth moved. To answer that question, we have to ask what further observations distinguish the two accounts.

That is the kind of question Gober puts to the reader. What did the observation show? What has been inferred from it? Could the same result follow from a different account? Each question can be asked without first adopting his conclusions. What made the book difficult for me to put aside was the care with which he asked them again and again. When an observation is presented as decisive and turns out to leave a choice open, doubt is a natural response. Its first demand is modest. Show me what makes the difference.

Galileo's letter of 29 March 1641 to Francesco Rinuccini belongs in this story. Writing while still under ecclesiastical restrictions, Galileo described the Copernican system as false, appealing to Scripture as interpreted by Catholic theologians. In the same letter he judged the arguments for the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian accounts even less adequate. His private convictions are harder to establish than what he put on the page. What interests me is the distance between that letter and the tidy story in which Galileo looked through a telescope and the matter was settled. The surviving document gives us reason to revisit the story we thought we knew.

This is where I return to Part III. I stand on ground that feels still and watch the Sun cross the sky. Genesis describes a world I recognise from where I stand. The waters are gathered and dry land appears. The lights in the heavens mark days, seasons and years. In Job, God asks whether Job has ever commanded the morning. As dawn comes, the Earth takes shape like clay under a seal, its hills standing out like folds in a garment. Think of a ridge you could barely make out in darkness and the way it acquires shape as the light reaches it. I can recognise what the writer saw.

The image matters because it joins something we experience to a question about who made the world in which we experience it. Genesis speaks of God bringing that world into being. Job speaks of the same world from within it, at the hour when familiar ground becomes visible again. The language is poetic, and the world it describes is tangible. I had long assumed that the physical reality belonged to science and that what Scripture said of it could safely be left to poetry. I now have reason to ask how much of that division I brought to the text myself.

Suppose the case for a moving Earth leaves more room for doubt than I had been taught. Suppose further inquiry were to lend support to an Earth-centred account, and that account corresponded more closely to the world Scripture describes. For me, that would give the historical reading of creation greater weight. The claim that God created this world would come closer to being heard as testimony about what actually happened. The theological question would be whether the God whom Genesis names as Creator acted in the history of the very world we inhabit.

Aquinas gave the objection a place before his answer. I want to give Gober's questions that same hearing, and to extend it to the biblical writers. They were capable of close attention to the world they lived in. How readily we assume today that what they saw matters only as a record of what people once believed. We live with the confidence of our own age and let it decide in advance what people in another age could have known. That is hubris.

This is why some speak of scientism as a modern religion. A scientific theory can help us understand the world we experience. Scientism begins when that power to explain is treated as the authority to decide what can count as knowledge.

Gober's questions allow me to consider again how closely the biblical account of creation reflects the world as I experience it. The ground beneath my feet, the passage of the Sun and the contours that emerge at dawn are part of the world Scripture describes. Thanks to Gober's intellectual courage, I now feel free to give that experience greater weight than I once did. When those who ask me to defer to a theory seem more inclined to defend it than to question it, I can choose to begin with the world I know first-hand and take seriously what Scripture says about it.

5. The Fundamentalist, the First-Principles Seeker and the New Babel

Taking Scripture seriously as an account of the world we inhabit also means taking seriously what it says about the kind of beings we are.

I have come to describe myself as a fundamentalist. I know the word can suggest rigidity or hostility to inquiry. That is not what I intend. I mean that the foundational claims of Christianity concern reality and deserve to be investigated as such. Scripture is not a menu from which we select the reassuring passages while discarding the inconvenient ones. But a fundamental commitment is not an exemption from interpretation. The supernatural passages deserve examination; so do difficult moral instructions and the descriptions of creation.

And the investigator must remain able to distinguish the text from his inference about it. Faith without that discipline risks becoming the very arrogance it condemns.

Here Genesis makes a declaration that must govern what follows. God created human beings, male and female, in His own image (Genesis 1:26–27). Scripture reserves that declaration for humanity. The animals belong to the creation God calls good. It is the human being who bears His image. Christian tradition calls this the *imago Dei*. If I take Genesis seriously, I must let that declaration tell me something about what a human being is.

It means that human dignity is given. It belongs to a child before she can speak and to a man who has lost the ability to move or speak for himself. It does not rise with intelligence or fall with the loss of independence. I can measure what a person is able to do. I cannot derive his worth from the result. The authority conferred in the same passage is the authority of a steward, answerable to the One whose image he bears.

We now inhabit an age in which this distinction has new urgency. Artificial intelligence has made extraordinary capabilities widely accessible. These essays themselves are an example: without AI, the breadth and speed of this collaboration would have been difficult to imagine. I welcome that development. I expect substantial gains in productivity, discovery and creativity. Yet I am struck by the language of both AI enthusiasts and critics.

We hear that artificial intelligence will surpass humanity, become superintelligent, acquire consciousness or perhaps even threaten civilisation through its own independent will. I reject the premise underlying much of this speculation. Intelligence is not consciousness. Computation is not sentience. And the execution of instructions is not the exercise of genuine moral agency. Artificial intelligence may process information at extraordinary speed, recognise patterns beyond human capability and produce work of remarkable sophistication. I welcome these developments.

They represent an extraordinary extension of human ingenuity. But a machine is not a living being. My conviction is that consciousness, sentience and genuine agency belong to biological life. No increase in processing power, however extraordinary, changes the fundamental distinction between a computational system and a living organism. A machine may simulate understanding without experiencing it. It may execute decisions without possessing a conscience. It may reproduce the language of human emotion without feeling anything.

Consider Neuralink. In its clinical studies, an implanted brain–computer interface allows participants with paralysis to move a cursor by imagining the movement of a hand. Imagine what it might mean to write to a friend or return to work without having to ask another person to operate the computer. I welcome the possibility of restoring some of that independence. The device extends what a person can do. The person who forms the intention, chooses the words and sends the message is the same human being who already bore the image of God before the operation.

Humanity has always sought to overcome the limits of its own existence. We have learned to build, calculate, manipulate matter and transform the natural world. Now some speak as though we are approaching the creation of a new form of conscious life through technology. But creating a sophisticated instrument is not the same as creating life. The contemporary discussion of artificial intelligence reveals how readily these distinctions can become confused. Joe Rogan has publicly entertained the possibility of AI attaining extraordinary, even “godlike”, powers.

He has also spoken about a renewed interest in Christianity and attending church. I find the juxtaposition philosophically revealing, although his precise statements and their context should be verified before publication. The difficulty is not that a Christian cannot fear powerful technology. A machine could exercise immense influence over infrastructure, information or human affairs without becoming divine. Technological power and divine authority are different categories. Nor does expressing a fear necessarily mean affirming that its object is possible.

The deeper question is why we are so willing to imagine divinity emerging from our technological achievements while remaining uncertain about the divine authority we profess to recognise. For me, this is the decisive distinction. A system may exceed human beings at many tasks without becoming a human being. It may possess power without possessing life, and influence without possessing a conscience.

My conviction that consciousness and genuine moral agency belong to biological life is not an experimental result I can demonstrate for every conceivable future machine; it is a foundational philosophical position about what a living being is. But even a reader who rejects that conviction must confront the danger of confusing our ability to manufacture an instrument with the authority to create a moral sovereign. The question is not whether technology can become powerful. It is whether power, however great, can confer the status of Creator upon what has been created.

There is a further ambition, and it concerns what we intend to make of ourselves. Under the name of transhumanism, the use of technology to enhance human capacities can become a project to direct the future of the species. In *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Yuval Noah Harari examines a future in which human beings turn their ingenuity towards overcoming death and acquiring powers once attributed to gods. The force of the book for me is that it makes this ambition intelligible. Once we can alter something fundamental about ourselves, what will persuade those with the power to do it that they ought to stop?

I have little faith in our ability to curb that ambition, especially once it is lodged in institutions that are rewarded for extending their reach. A company can see a market where a physician sees a patient. A government can call an enhancement a strategic necessity because it fears another government will get there first. In such circumstances, even people who privately counsel restraint can find themselves advancing a project whose ends no one feels responsible for judging. Who in that room has the authority to say that something technically possible ought to remain undone? And what happens when declining an enhancement begins to count against a person at work or in public life?

That is already a failure of humility. It occurs the moment an institution takes its capacity to alter human life as sufficient authority to decide what human life ought to become. If we bear the image of God, then ingenuity comes with an obligation to serve the person whose life it touches. That obligation reaches the laboratory, the boardroom and the state.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein explored precisely this ambition: the human desire to assume the role of creator without fully comprehending the responsibilities or consequences of doing so. The danger is not artificial intelligence itself. I regard it as one of the most promising instruments humanity has ever developed. The danger is hubris: the belief that because we can imitate certain capacities of living beings, we have acquired the power to create the beings themselves. And once again, we return to Babel. The problem was never humanity's ability to build the tower. It was the ambition that inspired it.

The creature mistaking its ingenuity for the authority of the Creator.

6. From Faith to Conviction — The Sovereignty of Conscience

For much of my life, I misunderstood the meaning of faith. I regarded it as something fundamentally different from knowledge. Facts belonged to the realm of reason, while faith seemed to require accepting propositions for which sufficient evidence could not be established. I suspect that misunderstanding explains part of my earlier resistance to Christianity. I no longer understand the distinction in those terms. The limits of human knowledge are not the limits of reality.

There are truths we have established, truths we are investigating, and questions whose ultimate answers may lie beyond our capacity for complete verification. A fact is not made true by our belief

in it; equally, our inability to prove something with absolute certainty does not establish its falsehood. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith in terms of assurance and conviction concerning what is not seen. Christian faith, however, is not merely a device for filling gaps in evidence. It is also trust: an orientation towards God that reaches beyond what an individual can fully demonstrate or control.

Faith does not require the abandonment of reason. It requires the humility to acknowledge the limits within which reason operates. There is a further distinction, and it changes everything. There is a difference between investigating whether Christ is King and living from the conviction that Christ is King. The former is a question about reality. The latter becomes the foundation upon which one's understanding of reality is organised. Once that conviction has been embraced, it need not be defended at every encounter with the modern world. It becomes the reference point from which one thinks, judges and acts.

Not because every theological question has been resolved, but because one has accepted an authority greater than oneself. John Rich offers a memorable image of what that acceptance entails. Imagine driving along a road and seeing Jesus Christ standing by the roadside. You stop and invite Him into your car. But instead of taking the passenger seat, He walks to the driver's side and asks you to move over. You do. Then He turns the car around and begins driving in the opposite direction. The detail that matters is the change of direction. We may welcome Christ into our lives while retaining control over the destination.

We may even congratulate ourselves on having made room for Him. But if He is King, what happens when the path we believe we should follow is not the path He asks us to take? We may have invested years in an ambition. We may have persuasive reasons for continuing. We may not understand why the journey must change. Faith, in this sense, becomes trust rather than mere assent: the willingness to accept that divine wisdom may lead us somewhere our own judgement would not have chosen. We cannot meaningfully proclaim Christ as King while insisting that He remain our passenger. There is a necessary safeguard.

Relinquishing control to Christ must never be confused with relinquishing judgement to any person or institution claiming to speak for Him. The metaphor cannot make a minister, a political leader or one's own passing impulse infallible. Discernment remains an obligation, not an act of disobedience. And that brings us to conscience. If Christ is King, what follows for the authority of states, institutions and individuals? This is not a call to abolish government. Communities require laws, administration and institutions capable of protecting the vulnerable and resolving disputes. Romans 13 recognises governing authority.

Yet Acts 5:29 records the apostles insisting that obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to men. The tension is essential. Earthly authority can be legitimate without being ultimate. A government may enact laws, but lawfulness and goodness are not synonyms. A majority may settle a public decision, but it cannot make a falsehood true by voting. An institution may demand

compliance, but it cannot thereby become the final judge of conscience. Once Christ's kingship becomes the organising premise, the hierarchy changes. Social approval ceases to be the measure of truth.

Personal preference ceases to be sufficient justification for moral action. We no longer begin every question by asking only what society permits; we must ask what is right. That does not mean the believer acquires a private exemption from error. Conscience is not preference dressed in sacred language. Sincerity is not proof of correctness. Aquinas treated conscience as the application of moral knowledge to particular acts, which means it must be formed, examined and, when necessary, corrected.

The individual who invokes conscience must identify the obligation at stake, examine his motives, consider the rights of others and accept responsibility for foreseeable consequences. The institution must not confuse every lawful order with moral legitimacy. Religious authorities must remember that invoking Christ does not transfer His infallibility to their own judgement. Nor must this conviction be announced in every conversation. A person who regards honesty as obligatory does not need to explain the philosophical basis of truthfulness before speaking truthfully.

In the same way, the Christian need not justify his entire worldview before every act of conscience. His belief should already inform his conduct. Christianity does include a responsibility to bear witness. But witness is not identical to perpetual argument or unsolicited evangelisation. A conviction becomes credible through the consistency with which it is lived. If Christ is King, the declaration is not merely something to be defended. It is the premise from which everything else must follow. Recognising a higher authority limits earthly power. Accepting that authority does not relieve the individual of responsibility.

It makes responsibility inescapable.

7. Living as Though Christ Is King

The argument has now reached the point where it can no longer remain an intellectual exercise. Chapter 6 asked what happens when Christ's kingship becomes the premise from which we live. Chapter 7 must ask whether we are willing to accept its consequences when they interrupt our plans.

There is a temptation to make Christian conduct into a list of admirable qualities: honesty, courage, forgiveness, humility and responsibility. Those qualities matter. But a list can be admired without changing the person reading it. The deeper question is what happens when obedience demands something we would not otherwise choose.

Imagine the ordinary conflicts of a human life. A truthful admission may cost a friendship or damage one's reputation. Refusing to participate in an injustice may threaten one's livelihood. Forgiving someone who has wronged us may feel like abandoning the satisfaction of resentment. Recognising our own error may require the destruction of a carefully maintained self-image. We can affirm the virtues in principle while arranging our lives to avoid their cost.

This is where John Rich's image of Christ taking the driver's seat becomes uncomfortable. It is easy to invite Christ along for the journey we have already planned. It is harder to relinquish the route. Harder still when the car turns around and everything we have invested in the original destination seems suddenly misplaced.

But surrender is not the abandonment of responsibility. We still must discern, decide, act and answer for what we do. No human voice becomes divine merely by claiming to know God's will. The person who says that Christ is King cannot use that declaration to escape the work of conscience. Indeed, he assumes a more exacting obligation to examine whether his motives are faithful or merely convenient.

I return here to the teaching that troubled me as a child. Turn the other cheek. I once saw in it a demand to become weak. Now I see a demand to refuse the sovereignty of wounded pride. It is not permission for injustice, nor a command to call evil good. It is an instruction not to allow the aggressor to determine the moral character of our response.

The distinction between justice and vengeance becomes real only when we are the injured party. The distinction between humility and submission becomes real only when we must resist an authority that demands what conscience cannot give. And the distinction between faith and rhetoric becomes real only when the decision has a price.

This is also where the recurring theme of hubris returns, but in a different form. It is easy to condemn the arrogance of kings, institutions or technologists who imagine that their achievements confer ultimate authority. It is harder to recognise the same impulse in the privacy of our own decisions: the conviction that our plan, our anger, our interpretation or our desire must prevail.

The New Covenant, as we examined in Part II, promises more than conformity to external rules. It concerns the inward orientation of the person. We do not become righteous merely by learning the correct vocabulary. Nor does a profession of faith make our judgement infallible. The test is whether the conviction changes what we do when no audience is present.

I do not mean that the Christian life is a pursuit of flawless performance. The need for forgiveness is already an acknowledgement of failure. Nor do I mean that every difficult choice will announce itself with unmistakable clarity. We remain finite, vulnerable to error, capable of deceiving ourselves. Humility is not a ceremonial gesture at the end of an argument. It is the discipline of remaining corrigible while continuing to act.

This brings me back to Jordan B. Peterson. I own one of his philosophical T-shirts. It says ‘Clean your room’ and ‘Tell the Truth’. I like the impertinence of it. A man can have a great deal to say about the state of the world while neglecting the part of it for which he is already responsible. If a room is all you can put in order, begin there. You will have done something you were capable of doing, and you may be in a better position to see what else is yours to do.

Peterson’s second instruction is deceptively simple. ‘Tell the truth – or, at least, don’t lie.’ Cleaning a room gives you the satisfaction of seeing what you have done. Telling the truth may require you to give up the satisfaction of being thought right. It might mean admitting to your own family that a plan you have defended for years has been failing, and that you knew it sooner than you were prepared to say. The first instruction asks where my responsibility begins. The second asks what I am willing to give up to honour it.

How, then, does one live from the premise that Christ is King without turning every encounter into a theological debate? I can begin with the responsibilities already mine and the truths I am tempted to evade. I can admit a mistake without waiting to be found out. I can offer mercy without denying justice and recognise a neighbour’s dignity when his judgement of me is anything but charitable. If it is true that Christ is King, then these are among the ordinary decisions in which I must live according to that conviction.

There is nothing passive about this. To live under a higher authority may demand resistance to earthly power; it may also demand resistance to ourselves. And it may require us to relinquish an ambition we had come to regard as the very purpose of our existence.

I began this investigation with questions about human nature, the authority of Scripture, the structure of reality and mankind's recurring desire to place itself above the order of creation. Through psychology, theology, metaphysics and philosophy, I have come to recognise a conviction that is at once simpler and more demanding than I expected.

Christ is King.

Yet perhaps the clearest expression of that conviction is not another elaborate argument. It is a prayer. A prayer that acknowledges a Father beyond ourselves; recognises His kingdom; asks for what we need rather than everything we desire; binds our plea for forgiveness to our willingness to forgive; and recognises temptation, evil and the need for guidance.

At its centre are words that now mean more to me than they ever could have meant to the boy who struggled with turning the other cheek.

Thy will be done.

For much of my life, I understood strength as the capacity to determine my own direction. I now recognise that strength may also require the humility to admit that the direction is wrong. The surrender of ultimate authority is not the surrender of conscience. It is the beginning of conscience properly ordered.

I do not claim that every question has been resolved. I do not need to pretend that the human mind can achieve complete certainty about everything it seeks to understand. But I can recognise the difference between endless investigation and refusing to live by a conclusion once I have responsibly embraced it.

After four essays, countless questions and a lifetime of investigation, I return not to a new theory, but to the words Christ taught His followers to pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Traditional Anglican liturgical version

Selected Sources

Prayer and liturgy

The opening epigraph uses the traditional English doxology. The closing prayer follows the traditional Anglican liturgical text published in the Diocese of Portsmouth's Versions of the Lord's Prayer (2025).

Chapter 4

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Chapters 5 and 7

Genesis 1:26-27, King James Version.

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