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### The Concept of Basileia in the Synoptic Gospels

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**THE CONCEPT OF BASILEIA  
IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.**

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**A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Biblical Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity.**

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by  
**Walter H. Mehlberg**  
May 1945.

Approved by:

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A mere cursory reading of the Synoptic Gospels is sufficient to show the great importance which Jesus attached to the concept of the Kingdom. At the very outset of His ministry we are told: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mk.1,14). The greater part of His parables were parables of the Kingdom. In the Beatitudes He set forth the blessedness of the Kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount He set forth the ethics of the Kingdom. In fact, the term "Kingdom" was found on His lips so frequently, that His enemies used that fact to formulate a charge against Him before the tribunal of Pontius Pilate, declaring that He had said "that He Himself is Christ a King" (Lk.23,2).

It is a fact worthy of note, however, that the term "Kingdom" is used with much less frequency in the writings of the Apostles. The usual term used to set forth this concept in the Epistles is that of "Church", ecclesia. It is true that Jesus founded the Church, although Matthew alone reports Him as using the term ecclesia (Mt.16,18; 18,17). The other two Synoptic writers omit the use of this term. It has been pointed out, however, that while the term "Kingdom of God" is not used with such frequency in the apostolic writings, it is nevertheless implied in the references to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Vol.1, p.591.

In the Patristic Writings the term "Kingdom" is used quite frequently as setting forth the Church, as the body of believers in an organized society.<sup>2</sup> L. E. Bennett, in his book The Realm of God points out that as a result of the teaching of Augustine in his treatise "The City of God", the great ecclesiastical theory was evolved, which brought these two concepts so close together as to merge the Kingdom in the visible Church. It gave rise to the "doctrine that the visible organized Catholic Church itself is the Kingdom of God, within which alone salvation is to be found".<sup>3</sup>

In more recent times there has been a growing literature devoted to a discussion of the "Kingdom of God", which is regarded by many as the greatest conception in the New Testament. This re-study of the passages relating to the Kingdom is said to be due largely to the influence exerted through the writings of A. Ritschl. L. E. Bennett quotes James Orr as saying "that Ritschl, and the members of his school, have done more than any other modern theologians to make the Kingdom of God the ruling conception in our Christian thinking".<sup>4</sup>

That the concept Basileia occupies a prominent place in the teachings of the New Testament, especially in the Synoptic

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<sup>2</sup> H. M. Herrick, The Kingdom of God in the Writings of the Fathers, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> L. E. Bennett, The Realm of God, pp.171-2.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, Op. cit., p.17.

Gospels, can hardly be denied. It has been correctly stated, that this claim does not rest merely on the frequency of the term in the Synoptic Gospels - although this is remarkable;<sup>5</sup> it is not based simply on the fact that most of the parables are parables of the Kingdom, but on the greater fact that all the teaching of Jesus, whether ethical, redemptive or eschatological, may be expressed in terms of it.<sup>6</sup>

In the speech of our own time, the term "Kingdom of God" has lost much of its original New Testament connotation. Often its association with "God" is overlooked, and men speak simply of "the Kingdom". It is a natural and easy step from that to the very unhappy phrase, "to build the Kingdom", or "to bring in the Kingdom". The pernicious modern custom of identifying every bit of social change with the Kingdom of God has done perhaps more than any one thing to obscure what the Kingdom of God really is.

It is the aim of this paper to set forth the basic meaning of the concept Basileia, as used by the Synoptic writers. It is, then, in a spirit of earnest inquiry that we take up the study of the Synoptic Gospels and their great central teaching on the Kingdom. - We are limited in this paper to a discussion of:

#### THE CONCEPT OF BASILEIA IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.

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<sup>5</sup> The word Basileia is used no less than 119 times in the Synoptic Gospels.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, Op. cit., p.35.

Part I.  
The Meaning of the Word Basileia.

It is a remarkable fact that neither John the Baptist nor Jesus, who came "preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mk.1,14), give us a concise definition of what the Basileia really is. It was not a new concept to the people of that day. In fact, the entire history of the people of Israel was "simply the history of the developing Kingdom of God in its earliest, preparatory form".<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the history of the Kingdom reaches far back into eternity, and its foundation rests upon God's eternal counsel of grace. The Apostle Paul says: "God hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph.1,4).

The first stone in this foundation was laid in the Garden of Eden, immediately after man's fall into sin, when God in His mercy and in keeping with His eternal purpose promised man a Savior, who in the fulness of time would deliver him from the bondage of sin, death and the devil. Each successive promise, given to the fathers, concerning the coming of Christ, marked the approach of Him, through Whom the Kingdom would be fully established.

When Christ came, in answer to prophecy, to establish the Kingdom, His opening words announced its presence: "The time

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<sup>7</sup> James Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, p.846.

is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk.1,15).

What did Jesus really mean?

Since our study has to do with the basileia theou, then it follows that God is basileus, king, ruler. However, when the Scriptures speak of God as basileus, then it is always done with distinguishing epithets, e.g., "the city of the great King" (Mt.5,35); "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" (Mt.2,2). The functions of the king are described in the word basileuein, "to have authority, to reign, or to possess or exercise dominion; to be basileus generally". This verbal force is not lost in the concept basileia, which means "a kingdom, royal power or dignity, reign; the divine, spiritual kingdom, or reign of the Messiah, in the world, in the individual, or in the future state."<sup>8</sup>

Thus when the Scriptures speak of basileia theou, there is in the concept the idea of authority, power and dignity. However, the chief emphasis lies on the exercise of that power, the active use of royal powers. Thus the term: "God is King", as used in Scripture does not mean in the first instance, that "He has royal authority, which He may or may not use, according to His will", but rather that God acts and rules as King, and performs all the functions of a King. The basileia theou, then, in the strict sense of the term, is the divine activity itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> George Ricker Berry, Greek-English New Testament Lexicon, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> J. Schaller, Das Reich Gottes, Theologische Quartalschrift, Jahrgang 15., 1918. p.85.

That the term basileia has such verbal force, may be seen even in such passages, as do not specifically treat of the basileia theou. Jesus said: "If Satan be divided against himself, how shall his basileia stand?" (Lk.11,18). The point of the Savior's argument was this, that in case of such a division, not only would Satan's power be put in jeopardy, but his entire activity and rule would be destroyed. The same thought of active application of power appears in the Savior's words, when, in the same connection, He speaks of the basileia theou. He said: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Lk.11,20). Jesus conceived of the kingdom, then, as coming down "upon you", powerfully, from above, by an act of God. Thus, "the concept basileia, in its real sense, does not simply indicate royal dignity or authority, but rather the uninterrupted activity and rule of God".<sup>10</sup>

Even prior to the New Testament both in the Septuagint and in the Jewish Hellenistic writings the word basileia denotes rule, government, rather than the realm, the subjects. Philo speaks of the kingdom of Moses when he refers to his leadership and actually identifies basileia and nomothesia, nomothetike. The word is also used as a parallel to priestly office, supreme command. It is, therefore, apparent that the

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<sup>10</sup> J. Schaller, Op. cit., pp.85-6.

word basileia has verbal force and could very well be translated "to act as a king, to perform kingly functions".<sup>11</sup>

The meaning of the concept basileia as the rule of God is also set forth in the two terms commonly used to describe it: "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven". The distinction between these two terms, as will be shown, is only a formal one. The two genitives may be considered genitives of possession: the kingdom belongs to God and to the heavens. Lenski points out that "it is hard to keep out of the former the subjective idea: the kingdom which God rules; and out of the latter the qualitative idea: the Kingdom whose very nature is that of heaven".<sup>12</sup>

In rabbinical literature the use of the name of God was avoided in this way that the term Schamajim was substituted for the name of God. For this reason one finds in rabbinical writings, apart from the Targumim, the consistent use of the

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<sup>11</sup> F. E. Mayer, The Kingdom of God in the New Testament, Proceedings Texas District, 1942, p.17, footnote.

The same author points out that the word basileia is synonymous with authority, power, and the actual use of such power in the passage Rev.17,18, where "St. John compares the rule of Antichrist to that of a woman which 'has the kingdom over the kings of the world'. Our Authorized Version has translated very correctly: 'which reigneth over the kings of the earth'. The tyrannical rule of the Antichrist over the consciences of men is therefore compared to a kingdom. In other words, the term kingdom denotes the exercise of power. This is also the meaning of the word kingdom in Rev.11,15.17, where it is identified with God's great power and with His reign, whereby He rules over His enemies". Op. cit., pp.16-7.

<sup>12</sup> R. C. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, p.174.

term Malkuth Schamajim, which is translated literally by Matthew as basileia tōn ouranōn, while Mark and Luke commonly use the term basileia tou theou. Thus in the Synoptic Gospels these two terms are used alternately in the parallel passages, which indicates that both terms have the same meaning. The term basileia tōn ouranōn is used only by Matthew. The plural form tōn ouranōn is a Semitism.<sup>13</sup>

It is to be observed further, that the term Malkuth Schamajim as "Kingdom of heaven" is never used to designate the area in which God rules. The term merely sets forth the fact that God rules, and thus signifies the kingship, the kingdom of God. The Malkuth Schamajim is therefore something which man has the power to reject. Man has the power to refuse to acknowledge God as his Lord and King, "to cast off His yoke". This possibility at once suggests the fact that the Kingdom of God is not visible in the world. If it were otherwise, then there could be among men only an acknowledgment of the fact that God is King.<sup>14</sup>

One may consider whether the term "of heaven" may have a peculiar coloring, and that it speaks of the rule which comes from heaven and comes into the world. If that is so, then it becomes apparent that the term basileia is really of wider significance than "Kingdom"; that its essential meaning is

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<sup>13</sup> Kittel, Op. cit., p.570.

<sup>14</sup> Kittel, Op. cit., p.571.

not "Kingdom" but rather "rule". Professor Moffatt, in his translation of the New Testament, renders it "realm" of God. More accurate is the translation "reign", "rule" of God, like its Hebrew equivalent Malkuth.

Such a "rule" from heaven could not, in its very nature, represent a kingdom which could be influenced by earthly conditions or brought about by human efforts, but solely and alone through an act of God. In the Judaism of the time of Christ the term Malkuth Schamajim means the "kingship", the "rule of heaven", i.e., "the rule of God". It is the Kingdom which is governed, not by earthly powers, but by heaven.<sup>15</sup>

It is to be noted also in the usage of this term in the Synoptic Gospels, that the term "Kingdom" is also frequently used in an absolute sense, without any qualifying additions (Mt. 4, 23; Mt. 9, 35; 13, 19; 24, 14.). In all of these instances the concept "of God" is to be supplied, as the context in every such instance clearly shows.<sup>16</sup> There is, after all, only one Kingdom - it belongs to the heavens; it belongs to God. The term "Kingdom of heaven" serves to distinguish it from the kingdoms of this earth, which have natural boundaries and are maintained by force of arms. "The Kingdom of God" has as its opposite: the kingdom of sin, of evil, of Satan. Thus the term "Kingdom of heaven" may be said to indicate the

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<sup>15</sup> Kittel, Op. cit., p. 583.

<sup>16</sup> Kittel, Op. cit., p. 583.

nature and character of the Kingdom; while the term "Kingdom of God" may be said to indicate its source and end. It proceeds from God in order that it may fulfil God's end and purpose of grace in Christ Jesus.

We gain an even better understanding of the meaning of the term basileia when studied in the light of its parallels. Thus basileia and doxa are used interchangeably in the parallels: Mk.10,37 and Mt.20,21. The Zoe into which a man enters (Mt.18,9), is the Kingdom, as this appears from the parallel (Mk.9,47), where the term basileia is used. The scribes and Pharisees attempted to "shut the kingdom of heaven against men" (Mt.23,13), while in the parallel (Lk.11,52), the term kleis tes gnoseos, "key of knowledge", is used. Thus basileia theou is the same as gnosis theou. - Now, the use of these terms as synonyms shows that the "Kingdom of God" as God's dealing with man is soteriological, the explanation of which lies in the soteriology as proclaimed by Jesus and His Apostles.<sup>17</sup>

We come even closer to a true understanding of this term basileia when we note that in some passages the Kingdom is identified with the person of Christ. Thus Mk.11,10 speaks of "the kingdom of our Father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord"; while the parallels (Mt.21,9 and Lk.19,36) speak of the person of Christ. Still clearer is the identi-

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<sup>17</sup> Kittel, Op. cit., p.584.

fication in the passage Mk.9,1 which speaks of such as shall not taste of death, "till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power"; while the parallel (Mt.16,28) speaks of "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom". Again, the Christians are said to be waiting for the appearing of the "Son of man" and Lord, even as they wait for the coming of the Kingdom itself, Mt.25,1 - Lk.12,35. Jesus Himself was conscious of the fact that with Him and in His person the Kingdom of God had come, as John expresses it (John 1,14). This identification of the incarnate, exalted and ever-present Christ with the Kingdom of God determines also the christological kerygma, which sets forth the coming of the Messiah as a single, not to be repeated, act. Marcion says in his "Panchristismus" - "In evangelio est dei regnum Christus ipse". 18

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18 Kittel, Op. cit., pp.590-1.

Part II.  
The Spirituality of the Kingdom.

Since the concept basileia, as used throughout the Synoptic Gospels, never indicates an area in which God rules, "a realm", but rather sets forth the fact that God rules, and, in the strict sense, is the rule and activity of God, we may well ask: What is the real nature of the Kingdom?

The Pharisees once came to Jesus, absorbed in their own apocalyptic hopes, and asked Him, "when the kingdom of God should come" (Lk.17,20).<sup>19</sup> In His reply, Jesus set forth the Kingdom in its true spiritual aspect. He said: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk.17,20-21). Thus Jesus did not answer the question of the time of its coming, which lay on the surface of their inquiry, but rather answered and corrected the false view which lay behind their question.

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<sup>19</sup> The nationalistic view of the Kingdom entertained by the Jews of Christ's own day, is presented by George Boardman in these words: "The Jews of Christ's own day, construing the Old Testament prophecies of the Kingdom literally, conceived the promised Kingdom, or rather misconceived it, as being an outward, territorial, Hebrew Kingdom. While they looked forward to its nature as being a theocratic sovereignty, its monarchy absolute and its territory world wide, they also looked forward to its method as being Jewish, its founder a Hebrew, its king a son of David, its Capital Jerusalem, its constitution Mosaic, its regime Levitical. In brief, the Kingdom of God was to the Jews of Christ's day the kingdom of mankind reconstructed on a Hebrew basis".  
George D. Boardman, The Kingdom, p.14.

Setting forth the spiritual nature of the Kingdom, the Savior declares that "it does not come with observation" (Lk.17,20). In his Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings points out that "the word 'observation' is not used in the modern, active sense of observing, watching closely, but in the old sense of being observed, having attention paid to it. This is the sense in which Walton in his Compleat Angler uses the word: 'I told you angling is an art, either by practice or a long observation or both'." <sup>20</sup> Thus the advance of the Kingdom is not evident to the senses of men. It moves onward and diffuses itself without being perceived and commented on. And the reason for this is that it is not outward and material, but rather spiritual. Men are not to say: "Lo, here! or, Lo, there!" Its coming lies beyond the range of the human eye or ear; it is set up in the hearts and consciences and wills of men. Surely, the coming of such a Kingdom must needs be "without observation".

The nature of the Kingdom is explained still further, when Jesus adds the words: "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk.17,21). This saying of Jesus has called forth much discussion in an effort to determine His exact meaning. What did Jesus really mean?

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<sup>20</sup> James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol.3, p.582.

The real difficulty seems to lie in the translation of His words: entos humōn. Some translate these words "among you"; others, "upon you"; still others suggest "it is imminent", i.e., it will be in your midst in a moment. Still others, "within you"; so Luther also translates: "inwendig in euch". It will be necessary to examine these views.

Some commentators favor the rendering: "The kingdom of God is among you", or, "in the midst of you". They argue that the immediate context favors this translation, inasmuch as the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees who expected the Kingdom of God to be ushered in with great pomp and circumstance. That, He said, was a fundamental error. Men would not be able to point the finger at it and say: "Lo, here! or, Lo, there!" for, "behold that the kingdom of God is (already) among you, in the midst of you". And in support of this view, they point to the words of John the Baptist (which are also indicated in the margin of the Authorized Version): "In the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not!" (John 1, 26). However, the words mesos (John 1, 26) and entos (Lk. 17, 21) are not identical. - Of course, this does not mean that the Kingdom of God was not among those Pharisees; it was indeed, although they did not know it.

It appears, however, that this word of our Lord: "The kingdom of God is within you", like so many of His sayings,

goes further than the immediate occasion required. These words were not only addressed to the inquiring Pharisees of that day, but to mankind in general. We have a similar manner of speech in the words of Jesus to that nobleman from Capernaum, when He said: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe" (John 4, 48). The plural form "ye" already shows that He was not only speaking to that nobleman. He had in His mind's eye the great mass of Galileans, who, indeed, acclaimed His miracles, but had no intention of accepting either Him or His teachings. And in the sorrow of His heart Jesus spoke to all of them as represented at that moment by the nobleman, who came seeking His help.

In this passage (Lk.17,21) <sup>21</sup> the entos, an adverb used

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<sup>21</sup> R. C. Lenski makes this comment: "The phrase "entos humon" means neither in animis vestris, for certainly the Kingdom is not in the hearts of these Pharisees, or merely intra vos (R.V. margin), "among you", "in your midst", in the hearts of the believers scattered here and there among the Pharisees. The phrase does not locate the Kingdom, but states its character as something internal and not, like earthly kingdoms, external. The pronoun "you" is general, and does not mean "you Pharisees" or "you" any definite person. So the Pharisees sit on their observation towers in vain; the Kingdom, being spiritual and internal, comes right under their noses, and with their unspiritual eyes they never see a thing of it or of its coming. Luke's concern is to report this word of Jesus and therefore says nothing more about the Pharisees. The Pharisees needed to be told that the Kingdom is within, spiritual; to this the Lord adds for His disciples that this Kingdom, after its spiritual work is done, will come suddenly, like lightning, in judgment on the world, vv.22-24." - R. C. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, p.555.

as a preposition, with the genitive, has the meaning of "within". It is used as a noun (Mt. 23, 26) to entos, translated "the inside".<sup>22</sup> This also seems to be the consistent meaning of entos as used in the Septuagint.<sup>23</sup> We are justified, therefore, in thinking it possible that, in answering the question of the Pharisees, Jesus was giving expression to a truth of the widest and most lasting significance. "The kingdom of God is within you", i.e., the Kingdom, in its most proper and necessary nature and character, is an inward one, inward to the hearts and souls of men. Thus these words point to the rule of God in the hearts and souls of men.

This aspect of the Kingdom, as the spiritual rule and activity of God within the hearts and souls of men, is not

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<sup>22</sup> George Ricker Berry, A New Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Paul M. Bretscher gives the result of his investigation of the use of entos in the Septuagint in these words: "Whatever evidence there may be in the Septuagint ought to prove valuable, since Luke seems to have been well acquainted with this translation. According to Swete, there are seventeen quotations from the Septuagint in Luke's Gospel and twenty-three in Acts. In Hatch and Redpath I find that entos occurs in the Septuagint eight times, of which one instance is doubtful. The clear cases are: Ps. 38 (39):3; 102 (103):1; 108 (109):22; Song of Sol. 3:10; Sir. 19:26; Is. 16, 11; 1 Macc. 4:48. In three of these passages we have the bare entos followed by the genitive of a personal pronoun as mou or autou, and in the remaining four we have entos preceded by the definite article ta and followed by a genitive (pronoun or noun). In all seven instances entos clearly means inside of (e.g., Ps. 103:1: "all that is within me bless His holy name"). - Paul M. Bretscher, Luke 17, 21, Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. XV., No. 11, pp. 731-2.

altered in the least by the fact, that the Scriptures frequently speak in figurative language of "entering into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5, 20); or of "sitting down in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8, 11); or of "eating bread in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 14, 15). It is apparent, that these expressions are mere figures of speech, and set forth the changed condition of those, in whom God has established His rule, rather than a change in their outward location. That an inward, and not an outward, change is indicated by these expressions is evident from the fact that outwardly these people remained in precisely the same circumstances. "To enter the Kingdom" (Mt. 5, 20) or "to eat bread in the Kingdom" (Lk. 14, 15) means simply to come under the rule of God, and to enjoy all the blessings of that rule.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J. Schaller, Op. cit., p. 157.

Part III.  
The King and the Kingdom.

The spiritual aspect of Basileia as the gracious rule of God is clearly indicated in Christ's own attitude toward His kingship, and in His announced mission and work.

Since Christ is the King of the spiritual Israel (Mt. 2, 2), the New Testament also speaks of the Kingdom of Christ (Mt. 16, 28; Lk. 23, 42). Jesus Himself said: "My Father hath appointed unto Me a Kingdom" (Lk. 22, 29). Paul speaks of the "kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5, 5). From this it is plain that the Kingdom of Christ is at the same time the Kingdom of God; and that one may not speak of the Kingdom of God apart from the Kingdom of Christ. We have here the spiritual concept of the Kingdom in its relation to the eternal King, which runs through the whole New Testament.

As a King, Jesus received no human sanction, but He Himself assumed the title and established the Kingdom. Although He was born of the royal line of David (Lk. 1, 32; 2, 4), yet He never once based His claim to being a King on His royal descent. When the people, in their enthusiasm, wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him their King, He Himself defeated their purpose (John 6, 15). When He was requested to use the right of a king and settle a dispute, He refused (Lk. 12, 13-14). When the Jews, before the tribunal of Pilate, charged Him with claiming to be a King, Pilate, borrowing this designation from His Jewish accusers, asked Him: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" (John 18, 33). But Jesus replied simply: "My Kingdom is

not of this world" (John 18,36). When Pilate wrote the superscription on the cross, it was his purpose to mock and ridicule the Jews. The Jews, on the other hand, used it in order to mock and blaspheme the Crucified. Yet, whatever the intentions were, that superscription proclaimed an everlasting truth: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19,19).

His mission and work as the promised Messiah was a fact which Jesus always knew and on which He acted. The first recorded words from the lips of Jesus: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Lk. 2,49), clearly show that at that early date He was fully aware of the purpose of His coming. It was in the conscious knowledge of His Messiahship that Jesus came to Jordan at the beginning of His public ministry, that He might be baptized by John. At first, John hesitated; but he was encouraged to do so by the words of Jesus: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mt. 3,15). He simply put aside, without argument, the objection of the Baptist, and followed the Hand that pointed Him to the open door of 'the Kingdom'.<sup>25</sup> And there, at the Baptism of Jesus, His Messiahship was publicly and divinely attested, for we are told: "And, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3,16-17).

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<sup>25</sup> Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I, p. 283.

On this scene Dr. David Brown makes the comment:

"When with this we compare the predicted descent of the Spirit upon Messiah (Is. 11, 2) 'And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him', we cannot doubt that it was this permanent and perfect resting of the Holy Ghost upon the Son of God - now and henceforth in His official capacity - that was here visibly manifested.... In the words: "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", the verb is put in the aorist to express absolute complacency, once and forever felt toward Him. The English here, at least to modern ears, is scarcely strong enough. "I delight" comes the nearest, perhaps, to that ineffable complacency which is manifestly intended; and this is the rather to be preferred, as it would immediately carry the thoughts back to that august Messianic prophecy to which the voice from heaven plainly alluded (Is. 42, 1), "Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold; mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth". 26

The comments of Edersheim on this baptismal scene are of equal interest and value. He writes:

"Jesus stepped out of the baptismal waters "praying" (Lk. 3, 21). One prayer, the only one which He taught His disciples, recurs to our minds. We must here individualise and emphasise in their special application its opening sentences: 'Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!' ..... He knew His Mission; He had consecrated Himself to it in His baptism: 'Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name!' ..... And as the prayer of Jesus winged heavenwards, His solemn response to the call of the Kingdom - 'Here am I'; 'Lo, I come to do Thy will' - the answer came, which at the same time was the predicted sign to the Baptist..... The ratification of the great Davidic promise, the announcement of the fulfilment of its predictive import in Psalm 2 was God's solemn declaration of Jesus as the Messiah, His public proclamation of it, and the beginning of Jesus' Messianic work. And so the Baptist understood it, when he "bare record" that He was "the Son of God" (John 1, 34)". 27

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26 Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Critical and Explanatory Commentary of the Bible, in loco.

27 Edersheim, Op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 283-5.

However, it is at the Cross of Christ, and especially in His teachings about His death and resurrection, that we are at the very heart and center of the Kingdom of God. On the one side, it is to be observed that much of Christ's teaching on the Kingdom of God is intimately connected with the unique title, "Son of Man",<sup>28</sup> which He habitually applied

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<sup>28</sup> A brief survey of some of the passages in which the Lord speaks of His person and His work as the "Son of Man" will show how the use of that term reveals the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. - Jesus used this name with almost unbroken regularity when it was His purpose to lay emphasis on the fact of His humiliation. He said on one occasion: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Lk. 9, 58). In this state of humiliation, He also lived as a man among men, sharing all the ordinary wants of human nature, as He said: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking" (Lk. 7, 34).

The Lord also used this name in order to emphasize the fact that He came in our nature for the purpose of serving mankind. He said: "The Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20, 28). Through this fact, that He gave His life a ransom for many, He became the one source of blessing and salvation to all mankind. No doubt, it was with this very fact in view that He had said early in His ministry: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1, 51).

Jesus also used this term "Son of Man" to set forth His divine authority. He said: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day" (Mk. 2, 28). "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Mt. 9, 6). "He hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man" (John 5, 27). The fact of His deity is set forth distinctly in that word from His lips which is definitely connected with the prophecy in Daniel, when He solemnly declared before the Jewish Sanhedrim: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26, 64).

to Himself. It is quite generally agreed that the root of this expression is to be found in Daniel 7,13. The connection in which it appears there refers to the spiritual character of the Kingdom of God, as contrasted with the violence and the brutality of the kingdoms represented by the four beasts.

The use of this unique title; the sinless life of Jesus; His mighty miracles - all these made a deep impression on the disciples. It wrought in them the firm conviction that He was in very truth the Son of God. At Caesarea Philippi, knowing that the hour was near, when He must "give His life a ransom for many", Jesus asked His disciples: "Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?" And Simon Peter, as spokesman for the group, answered and said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt.16,15-16.

However, not only the words of Jesus, and particularly His use of the title "Son of Man", but also His actions bear witness to the fact that He came to establish the gracious rule of God through His saving work. He mingled with all sorts and classes of people, even with the publicans and sinners. When the Pharisees criticized Him for it, He said simply: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk.5,32). On His last journey to Jerusalem, He resolutely put aside all thoughts of what lay before Him, in order that He might bring salvation to the house of Zacchaeus,

saying: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost!" (Lk.19,10).

In the early years of His ministry Jesus spoke only in veiled language of His sufferings and death. On one occasion He exclaimed: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk.12,50). It was only after Caesarea Philippi, and the glorious confession made there, that "Jesus began to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Mt.16,21). Still later He said to His disciples: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk.10,45). Some time later, with the experience of the cross immediately before Him, He said at the institution of the Lord's Supper: "This is my body which is given for you. This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Lk.22,19-20). Even there His thoughts centered upon the Kingdom which He came to establish. He said: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt.26,29). This is no contradiction of His previous statement that with Him the Kingdom had already come; rather He declares that by His sufferings and death that day, the Kingdom would be fully

established. In those things which Jesus was to do and suffer within the next few hours, the gracious activity of God for the salvation of mankind found its highest expression. - Of course, the disciples "understood none of these things" (Lk.18,34). And even after His resurrection He found it necessary to say to them in a spirit of sadness and reproof: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Lk.24,26).

Thus it is there at the Cross of Christ that we are at the very heart of the Kingdom of God, the gracious activity of God for man's salvation. Bennett said: "The Kingdom of God rises in men's souls at the cross of Christ".<sup>29</sup> The superscription on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", which seemed to mock and refute all His claims, only served to point the way to the establishment of His Kingdom and to confirm all His claims. His Kingdom was established and maintained among men, not by force of arms, but rather by the vicarious sufferings, death and resurrection of the heavenly King Himself. It was through the cross that He ascended to glory and to the crown, as He had said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me!" (John 12,32). While the kings of the earth often waded through the blood of their fellow-men in order to occupy their thrones and maintain themselves in power, Jesus ascended His throne through His own blood of the cross, shed for the remission of sin. While earthly kings lose their kingship at death, Jesus

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<sup>29</sup> L. E. Bennett, Op. cit., p.107.

established and entered upon His Kingdom through His death and resurrection. Thus the Kingdom of God centers in the person of Christ, and rests upon His work of redemption.

This position is in full harmony with the Confessions of our Church. In the Large Catechism, Luther writes: "The Kingdom of God is nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, how God sent His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to Himself, and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life and salvation against sin, death and an evil conscience, for which end He has also bestowed His Holy Ghost, who is to bring these things home to us by His Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power".<sup>30</sup>

In one of his sermons Luther said: "The Kingdom of God, by which He rules over all believers and as a faithful king shields, rebukes, rewards, leads them, etc., and they on their part put their entire trust in Him, willingly receive His fatherly discipline and rebuke and in all things give Him obedience, is not worldly or temporal, but spiritual, is not eating and drinking, Rom.14,17, or any external thing, but only righteousness, satisfaction, and consolation of the human heart and conscience. Therefore it is nothing other than forgiveness or putting away of sins, by which the con-

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<sup>30</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Concordia Triglotta, p.711.

sciences are contaminated, distressed, and troubled. For just as a worldly, temporal kingdom consists in this, that people live quietly and can peacefully obtain their sustenance together, even so the kingdom of God grants such things in the spiritual field; it destroys the kingdom of sin and is really nothing but a cancellation and forgiveness of sins. God rules in the hearts by bringing peace, quiet, comfort through His Word, just as sin produces the opposite, namely, disturbance, anxiety, and trouble. Herein God gives evidence of His glory and grace in this life, in that He takes away and forgives the sins of men: that is the kingdom of grace." <sup>31</sup>

To the same effect is a definition of the concept "Kingdom of God" in the book Toward Lutheran Union. "The expression 'Kingdom of God' is used in Scripture not primarily with regard to persons in their own status and in their relationship to one another, but of the rule of the Savior by the Gospel in the hearts of the believers and with reference to the purpose of His kingdom, the emphasis being on His gracious power rather than upon the obedience of His subjects. The kingdom of God in its relation to the believers is the rule of the Savior in the hearts of the Christians effected through the forgiveness of their sins, the consummation of this rule to take place in the kingdom of glory. This kingdom in its very nature is invisible, because both faith and the working of

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<sup>31</sup> Luther, St. Louis Ed. XI:1928f; quoted in Toward Lutheran Union, pp. 85-86.

the Spirit in the hearts of men are spiritual and hence in themselves invisible".<sup>32</sup> "The person who, by faith enters into possession of the righteousness wrought for him by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ and of the peace with God brought to him by the death of the Savior on Calvary, has the kingdom, enjoys the kingdom, and is in the kingdom..... The efficacy which is inherent in the Word brings the blessings of the kingdom to the hearts of men".<sup>33</sup>

This concept of the Kingdom, taught in the Synoptic Gospels, as the gracious rule of God established by the death and resurrection of Christ, plainly refutes the position of the Roman Catholic Church, which holds that the Kingdom is to be identified with itself, the Roman Catholic Church. They hold, that "the Kingdom of God as established by Christ is at once a visible Church in the world, and an invisible spiritual Kingdom of grace within the soul. External adherence to the visible Kingdom demands also that Christ reign by grace within the soul. But this interior grace does not dispense a man from accepting the will of Christ once he is aware of it, nor from the obligation to join the visible Kingdom established by Him in this world." <sup>34</sup>

What this visible Kingdom is they explain by saying: "The only Church which has been all the days in the world since

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<sup>32</sup> Toward Lutheran Union, p.86.

<sup>33</sup> Toward Lutheran Union, p.84.

<sup>34</sup> Radio Replies, Vol. I., p.53.

Christ is the Catholic Church, and if He did not establish that Church, He established none. Modernists do not admit that Christ actually founded a visible and definite Church. If they did, they would have no excuse for not submitting to the Catholic Church..... (The conclusion that) the community of faith is not necessarily identifiable with any present-day Church, is based on the false premise that Christ gave only some nice beliefs and moral teachings, and did not establish a definite Church. The Kingdom of Christ was not anarchy..... The Kingdom of Christ is necessarily identifiable with the Catholic Church today".<sup>35</sup>

This identification of the Kingdom of God with the Catholic Church on the part of the Romanists has no foundation whatever in Scripture. It is extremely doubtful whether it can be shown from New Testament usage that the terms Kingdom - basileia, and Church - ecclesia are synonymous. The passage (Mt.13,41) "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity", although frequently used as speaking of the visible Church, does not have that meaning. In this instance also the "kingdom of the Son of man" is His gracious activity through the Gospel. For those who are designated as "the tares" the time will eventually come, when He will no longer seek to influence and rule them through the Gospel. When that time comes, they will be removed from His

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<sup>35</sup> Radio Replies, Vol. II., p.79.

Kingdom; their period of grace will have ended.<sup>36</sup> "That the word basileia denotes God's continuous activity holds true in all the parables of Matt.13. When the Savior compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, vv.31 and 38, which grows rapidly, He has in mind not so much the numerical growth of the Holy Christian Church, but first of all the increasing spread and influence of God's rule in the hearts of men. When the kingdom is compared to a net, v.47, the emphasis is on God's activity rather than on people. A careful study of the many passages in which the word kingdom occurs will show that the best definition of this word is "royal activity", the "rule of a king".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> J. Schaller, Op. cit., p.155.

<sup>37</sup> F. E. Mayer, Op. cit., p.19. - The same author calls attention to the underlying difference between the two concepts basileia and ecclesia: "Prior to Pentecost the writers of the New Testament direct our attention especially to the preaching of the Gospel, to the activity of God. But when the Church was founded at Pentecost and the Apostles began their tremendous mission activity and gathered congregations, it was only natural that the Christians thought primarily of the believers. Thus in the Apostolic times the emphasis is directed to the Church. In other words, while the two terms, kingdom and church, have much in common, the word kingdom focuses our attention upon God's gracious activity, and the word church directs our thought to the people whom God's activity has brought into the kingdom. The relation between the two terms is similar to the relation between cause and effect. The term kingdom directs our attention to the work which God does, whereas the term church centers our attention upon the people who have come under God's gracious rule". Op. cit., p.18.

The misunderstanding of the basic meaning of basileia as the gracious activity of God, has lead many modern theologians to the view that "the Kingdom of God is nothing more than an economic and social utopia".<sup>38</sup> Frederick Grant, an Episcopalian minister and professor at Union Seminary, gives the views of such theologians in the words:

The American dream of a new way of life for man upon this earth, in a world at peace, where justice is achieved and maintained between nations, groups, and individuals, with liberty for all and a fair chance for every child of man to realize to the full his God-given talents and capacities - surely that dream, though too often denied in actual practice, is 'not far from the Kingdom of God'. Under the conditions and circumstances of our modern world, something like that is the only possible expression of the hope of the Kingdom, that is of the actual Reign of God over his world".<sup>39</sup>

The 'kingdom' of which Jesus spoke was no purely transcendental, other-worldly realm but a true Regnum Dei in terra! It envisages the complete and perfect realization of the divine sovereignty here upon earth. As the evangelist Matthew interprets it (for all his high 'apocalyptic' eschatology), "Thy kingdom come" means "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".<sup>40</sup>

Certainly, such views are far from expressing the basic meaning of basileia in the New Testament.

38 F. E. Mayer, Op. cit., p.36.

39 F. C. Grant, The Gospel of the Kingdom, p.181.

40 F. C. Grant, Op. cit., pp.13 and 15.

The danger of giving expression to such Calvinistic views with promises of a new social order is pointed out by Prof. Charles R. Erdman, in a paper The Church and Socialism, in which he writes:

There are many who, in the name of Christianity, have been promising a new social order, a kingdom of God, which they declare the Church will introduce. The long continued failure to realize these promises has led to criticisms of the Church, and has done not a little to increase the bitterness of socialistic attacks upon her. The Church is now being held responsible for social sins and injustice, for the wrongs and grievances of the age; and for this unfortunate position she must largely blame herself. She has arrogated functions which are not her own; she has made promises for which there is no written word of Scripture. It should be remembered, for instance, that the state is quite as purely a divine institution as is the Church. It is for the state to secure social reconstruction when necessary; it is for the state to punish offenders, and to secure by legal enactments and legislative processes the abolition of abuses, and the establishment of justice. When the Church assumes functions belonging to the state, she involves herself in needless difficulties and places herself in a false position before the world.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Charles R. Erdman, The Church and Socialism, appearing in The Fundamentals, Vol. IV., pp.107-8.

Before the reign of God can begin in the soul, the forgiveness of God must remove the barrier of sin and evil. This work of grace can be accomplished only through the Word of God. Jesus, therefore, began His public ministry by offering the Gospel of the Kingdom freely to all, saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mk.1,15; Lk.4,43; 8,1.).

Not only did Christ preach this message Himself, but He also sent others to preach it. "And He sent them to preach the kingdom of God" (Lk.9,2). "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt.16,19). "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end be" (Mt.24,14). "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mt.28,19). "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not, shall be damned" (Mk.16,15-16).

Our Lord's idea of the basileia, the rule of God, was that it came down "upon men" from above, powerfully, by an act of God (Lk.11,20). He declares that the "Kingdom of God comes with power" (Mk.9,1). The Kingdom of God comes with a power from on high, the power of divine grace, exerted through the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone

that believeth" (Rom.1,16). "The Kingdom of God comes without our prayer, of itself", and builds itself by its own inherent power. It is the saving power of the Kingdom itself that transforms men and makes them partakers of the Kingdom.

The stated mission of Jesus "to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God" (Lk.4,43), is itself significant. The mission of Jesus, then, was this work of drawing men by the preaching of the Gospel into God's rule of grace, which is His Kingdom. "To preach the Gospel of the Kingdom" means to bring the rule of God's grace in Christ to those who are made to hear this Gospel, and through it to turn them in repentance and faith to this blessed rule and to its King and Ruler, Christ. This rule of God's grace in Christ through the Gospel constitutes the Kingdom in its specific sense.

The Gospel itself is "the good news of the grace of God in Christ Jesus", and sets forth "all that God has done and still does for our salvation". "To preach the Gospel", then, means "to preach the Kingdom of God" (Lk.4,43). Whenever the Scriptures speak of the power and effectiveness of the Gospel, they are at the same time speaking of the Kingdom, since the Gospel is the means of His grace, and His gracious rule. The same fact applies, whenever the Scriptures speak of Christ, His person or His redeeming work, since the Kingdom, i.e., God's gracious rule, centers in Christ and His redemption.

Christ Himself is not the Kingdom, but it comes to men in and with Christ, "for all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Cor.1,20).

Thus when Jesus committed to Peter and to the other disciples "the keys of the Kingdom" (Mt.16,19), He gave to them the power and the duty to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of heaven. The term "keys of the Kingdom" denotes the administration of the means of grace, Word and Sacraments. Through the administration of these means sinners are to be brought under the gracious rule of God, i. e., into the Kingdom. Jesus states the ultimate effect of such Gospel preaching, when, continuing the figure of the "keys", He said: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt.16,19). To those, who through the Gospel come under the gracious rule of God, heaven is opened; to those, who reject the Gospel, heaven is closed.

For this reason the Scriptures also declare that the Kingdom "comes" to men (Lk.11,20), or that it is "taken from" men (Mt.21,43). The Kingdom of God comes to men through the Gospel, for it is through the Gospel that He performs His saving work and establishes His gracious rule. Those that in wilful unbelief reject the Gospel, therewith also reject the "Kingdom", and it is "taken from" them.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J. Schaller, Op. cit., pp.94-5.

Now, the keys words, used by Jesus and John, in setting before men the claims of the Kingdom and urging them to enter in, were: "Repent and believe" (Mk.1,15; Mt.3,2). For the one and only way to enter into the Kingdom is through repentance and faith; to turn away in sincere contrition from sin (Mt.3,6), self-righteousness (Mt.5,20), and worldly security (Mt.19,24); and to trust in Christ, the Savior and King, with His pardon, peace and righteousness, by the power of God's grace in the Word and Sacrament. Jesus said: "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mk.1,15). "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.18,3). This knowledge of God's grace in Christ Jesus comes to man from God Himself - flesh and blood do not reveal it (Mt.16,17); but "unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"(Mt.13,11).

The Kingdom, then, is not received by heredity, as some of the Jews had mistakenly believed (Mt.3,9), but is received solely and alone through repentance and faith. Christ promised it to Peter who had just then made confession of his faith, (Mt.16,19). It would be taken from the unbelieving Jews, and instead given to those that believe (Mt.21,43). Christ appoints unto the believers the Kingdom, even as the Father had appointed unto Him (Lk.22,29). It is by faith that we enter this Kingdom, i.e., become partakers of it, and let the full blessedness of this Rule fill our hearts and lives.

Whenever any man, then, hears the preaching of the Word, he is confronted with the Kingdom and its claims. And when he, by God's grace and Spirit, follows the call of the Kingdom in true repentance, i.e., contrition and faith, then he is in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is "within him" (Lk.17,21).

A remarkable feature of the Kingdom is the manner of its growth. The Kingdom is expansive; it has extensive and intensive growth. Silently and unseen it grows, like the seed in the ground, which swells, bursts, and becomes a tree, large enough to lodge the birds of the air. And its intensive growth is as silent as its expansive action. Like leaven, it penetrates and transforms every man who enters it. Its entrance into him is at the same time his entrance into it, his "being born again" (John 3,3-5). Jesus illustrates the many-sided growth of the Kingdom, mainly through three of His parables: "The Sower"; the "Mustard Seed"; and "The Leaven".

The parable of the "Sower who went forth to sow" (Mt.13,3), shows that the means through which the Kingdom is spread is "the Word of the Kingdom" (Mt.13,19). The Word of the Kingdom is the blessed Gospel, by which the Kingdom comes to a man's heart. The Kingdom is spread through the preaching and the teaching of the Word.

The parable also shows the effect "when any one heareth the word of the kingdom" (Mt.13,19). "The Word does not return

void" (Is.55,11), but accomplishes the gracious purpose for which it is given. Although some hearers never let the Word into their hearts; others never let it take root; and others smother its growth with "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13,23); yet in the hearts of others the seed of the Word, by the grace and Spirit of God, produces a rich harvest, running from thirty to an hundred-fold (Mt.13,23).

The extensive growth of the Kingdom is set forth in the parable of "a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Mt.13,31-32).<sup>43</sup> The "mustard seed" is a figure of Christ Himself, for the Kingdom grows from Him as the King. The "tree" represents the Kingdom itself, for all who are rooted in Christ by faith and draw their spiritual life from Him belong to the Kingdom and are part of this tree.

In this parable we have a picture of the seeming feebleness of the beginning of the Kingdom. We recall that scene in the

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<sup>43</sup> On this parable Lenski makes the comment: "The power of this kingdom is divine. It is a living organism, and its life and power are undying - all other growths of earth have the germs of decay and death in them. The growth continues all through time (Mt.24,14). While God's kingdom was present in God's Old Testament believers, it was confined to them; the parable describes the Kingdom in the New Testament, unconfined spreading over the whole world". Lenski, The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel, p.514.

Upper Room. With the shadow of the cross slowly closing in on Him, Jesus said to that small group of disciples about Him: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto Me" (Lk. 22, 29). Poor and despised in the sight of men, those disciples were nevertheless destined in the end to overcome the world by the simple message of the Gospel.

Beginning their work "at Jerusalem, and Judaea and in Samaria" (Acts 1,8), the Apostles soon planted the seed of the Gospel in distant Gentile cities.<sup>44</sup> We see, in the Acts of the Apostles, how, from one center of influence to another, Paul went on and up, until at length he made his way to Rome and planted the standard of the Gospel there. Within a few centuries, it overspread Europe. Although during the "Middle Ages" it seemed to be standing still, it again put forth new energy at the era of the Reformation. Since that date it has gone on advancing. And today the Bible has been translated into more than a thousand tongues, and missionaries have gone to the East and to the West, to the North and to the South, and the Lord continues "to prosper the work of their hands". Surely, the "Kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which became a great tree!"

The growth of the Kingdom, however, is not only extensive, it is also intensive, for "the kingdom of heaven is like unto

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<sup>44</sup> The congregations, gathered together by the saving activity of God through the Gospel as its natural effect and result, were called ecclesia, the group that is called out, the total number of believers, the Church.- F. E. Mayer, Op. cit., p. 27.

leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Mt.13,33).<sup>45</sup> This brief parable describes the silent, wholesome, sanctifying influence of the Gospel in the individual human heart and in the world. The Gospel is to be proclaimed in the world, and by it the leavening takes place.

This parable of the leaven is, as Dr. Wm. Dallmann puts it, "a telling picture of the blessed influence of Christ's kingdom. It is Christ's kingdom, for it is Christ, and Christ alone, that puts the leaven into man's heart. The leaven turns a mass of insipid dough into tasty and wholesome bread; the leaven of Christ's kingdom turns a sinner into a saint; it enters the heart and works through the whole man".<sup>46</sup>

Looking at the significance of this parable from another angle, Luther makes the interesting comment: "With this parable Christ would comfort us, that if the Gospel as a new leaven is once mixed with the human race, it will not end till the end of the world, but will leaven the whole mass of all that shall be saved, even against the gates of hell. When once mixed with the dough, it is impossible to separate the leaven,

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<sup>45</sup> On the grammatical side of this parable, Lenski points out that "the aorist 'was leavened' is prophecy. What shall be, Jesus states as already accomplished. Yet the verb must not be pressed to mean that all men in the whole world will eventually be converted and saved. This would confound the woman and the flour. Chiliasm is not supported by the parable".  
 Lenski, Op. cit., p.516.

<sup>46</sup> Wm. Dallmann, God's Gift of the Kingdom, p.30.

for it has changed the nature of the dough; so it is also impossible to destroy the power of the Gospel out of mankind. The devil may boil or fry, roast or broil them, still the leaven Christ will remain in them till the Judgment Day that everything may be leavened. And that serves for our comfort, that we may mock Satan and say: 'Rage, Satan, the leaven is in the dough, you've missed your chance!' <sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Luther, quoted by Dallmann, Op. cit., p.31.

The chief gift of the Kingdom is the Kingdom itself, the assurance of a merciful God in Christ Jesus. It was for this gift that Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Thy Kingdom come!" (Mt.6,10a). Luther writes in his explanation of this petition, that "we pray that it (the Kingdom) may come unto us also; (this is done) when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity". To have the assurance of the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus by faith through the Gospel - that is the substance of the gift of the Kingdom.

Jesus Himself spoke of the gift of the Kingdom as being a present possession. Thus Jesus speaks of the "poor in spirit" as being already blessed, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", they already possessed it (Mt.5,3). Even those that "are persecuted for righteousness' sake" are called "blessed", "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.5,10), i.e., persecution would not be able to rob them of the assurance of the heavenly Father's grace and mercy. The little children, believing in Him, were blessed in the possession of the Kingdom, "and He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mk.10,16).

The joy of those who have come under the gracious rule of God through the Gospel, and their eagerness to possess and

enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom to the full, is set forth in the parables of the "Hidden Treasure" and the "Pearl of Great Price". "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Mt.13,44-46).

Since the Kingdom of God comes to men through the Gospel, it follows that the specific gifts of the Kingdom are not material, but spiritual, gifts and blessings. These are the righteousness of the Kingdom, the virtues of the Kingdom, the holiness of the Kingdom, and the graces of the Kingdom. These are not limited to this life only, but reach on out to the world to come (Lk.18,29).

The Kingdom of God, the gracious rule of God through the Gospel, is closely associated with righteousness, in fact, it creates and issues in righteousness. We are to seek it first, as Jesus says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt.6,33). Man's first concern must be to remain under the gracious influence of the Gospel, through which God offers and bestows the gift of righteousness which Christ has earned and procured, and effects man's salvation.

What is the nature of this Kingdom righteousness? It is more than legalism, for Jesus says: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.5,20). Of these two groups of religious leaders among the Jews, it has been said: "The scribes were the professors of theology; they earnestly studied the Bible and diligently explained it. The Pharisees were the strictest church members who tried zealously to keep each and every detail of the rules and regulations laid down by the scribes. What the scribes preached, that the Pharisees practiced. However, Christ rejects the scribes' teaching of righteousness in Mt.5,21-48; He also rejects the Pharisees' practice of righteousness in Matt.6. That was only outward and formal. But the Law is spiritual, and must be kept with the mind and heart".<sup>48</sup>

In speaking of the "righteousness which exceeds" such outward and formal righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, Christ is evidently referring to His own perfect righteousness, for in the verse immediately preceding (Mt.5,17) He speaks of the purpose of His coming, saying: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil". Christ fulfilled the Law by His active obedience, by His perfect, holy life. He fulfilled

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<sup>48</sup> Dallmann, Op. cit., p.7.

the Prophets by His passive obedience, by His innocent sufferings and death, as foretold by the Prophets. And God gives this perfect righteousness of Christ to faith through the Gospel.

The righteousness, then, which the Kingdom requires and creates, is primarily an imputed righteousness. Christ Himself, by His own innocent sufferings and death, has made atonement for sin and sanctifies all, "who come unto God by Him". All sins have been forgiven for the sake of Christ's atoning death. This perfect righteousness of the Kingdom, bestowed in the act of justification, is shared equally by all believers. This cleansing from sin and the destruction of the power of the devil is effected by the Spirit of God, as Jesus says: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Mt.12,28). It is of the righteousness that the Savior speaks in the words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Mt.6,33). The whole being of a man is to long and thirst for it (Mt.5,6), and is to be willing to suffer persecution for its sake (Mt.5,10).

This inner righteousness, which is received by faith in Christ, also creates a righteousness of life. This righteousness, being not outward and formal, but a passion of the soul, flowing from faith, also "exceeds the righteousness of the

scribes and Pharisees" (Mt.5,20). Luther points out the vital relation between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of life, when, in his explanation of the Second Petition, he writes: "When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity". In his explanation of the second Article, Luther writes: "Who has redeemed me, . . . . that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness".

This righteousness shows itself, first of all, in a right relation and attitude toward God and His Word. When Jesus declared: "Verily, I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled" (Mt.5,18), He stated that the Bible is God's inspired Word and valid for all time. Then He goes on to show that our stand toward the Bible determines our stand in the Kingdom (Mt.5,19): "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven". Dallmann points out on the basis of these words, that "God will treat us as we treat His Bible. One that breaks, and teaches others to break, one of the least command-

ments, doing so in ignorance, may by the mercy of God enter into the Kingdom, but he will be the least, - and treated so. But whosoever shall do and teach even the least commandments, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven - and treated as such. Christ bids us 'teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you'. We may not choose what to obey and how to obey.<sup>49</sup>

Another mark of that inner righteousness and fellowship with God is a life of prayer. In addition to the many directions which Jesus gave with regard to prayer, both in word (Mt.6,5-8) and example (Mk.1,35; etc.), He also taught His disciples of all time how to bring their needs before the heavenly King, saying: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven; Hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen" (Mt.6,9-13).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dallmann, Op. cit., p.32.

<sup>50</sup> On this prayer Edersheim makes the comment: "It seems to me that the prayer which the Lord taught His disciples must have had its root in, and taken its start from, His own inner Life. At the same time it is adapted to our wants. Much in that prayer has, of course, no application to Him, but is His application of the doctrine of the Kingdom to our state and wants". Edersheim, Op. cit., Vol.I., p.283, n.1.

Another mark of the Kingdom, the gracious rule of God in the heart, is the desire to serve and please the Lord. The privilege of serving the Lord, being "hired" to work in His vineyard, as well as the duty to do so, is clearly taught in the parable of "The Laborers hired for the Vineyard" (Mt. 20,1-16). The fact that the Lord puts the "First last, and the Last first", shows that the rewards of the Kingdom are not of merit, but of grace. - The parable of "The Talents" (Mt. 25,14-30) emphasizes the duty of faithfulness in the Lord's service. The parable of "The Pounds" (Lk. 19,11-27), while continuing the thought of service, also teaches strict accountability to God for the use of the talents which He has entrusted. In both these last mentioned parables the Lord teaches two things in the most drastic and impressive manner. First, the Lord generously rewards the faithful worker; secondly, that the Lord severely punishes the unfaithful servant.

Service, with humility, is also the true measure of greatness in the Kingdom. In the sight of men, greatness is often measured in terms of power, and may be likened to a pyramid, with the greatest on top, "exercising lordship" (Lk. 22,24-27). In the Kingdom, however, greatness may be likened to a pyramid, turned upside down, where "he that is chief, is as he that doth serve" (Lk. 22,26). In fact, the greatest is not conscious of any sense of greatness at all, but is as a little child (Mt. 18,3).

The Kingdom, the gracious rule of God within the heart, also creates a new relation toward others. In the Sermon on the Mount, which sets forth the ethics of the Kingdom, Jesus emphasizes the spiritual character of the Law over against the outward and formal conception of the scribes and Pharisees. The basic principle of the Kingdom, governing human relations, is love, which reaches out and embraces even one's "enemies" (Mt. 5, 44). It is the pattern of such love that reveals "the children of the Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 5, 45).

The parable of "The Debtor" who was forgiven a large debt, but was unmerciful toward his fellow-servant who owed him a small debt (Mt. 18, 23-35), teaches the duty of forgiveness of the neighbor, without which there can be no forgiveness. - The parable of "The Wise and Foolish Virgins" (Mt. 25, 1 ff), teaches the necessity of watchfulness and prayer for the Lord's coming. "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 25, 13).

The brief parable of "The Householder", "which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13, 52), sets forth the fact that the gracious rule of God within the heart will also move men to testify to their faith, to bear witness to the King and His Kingdom, out of the rich fund of spiritual truth which they have acquired.

The Kingdom of God is an eternal Kingdom. The gracious activity of God for man's salvation, begun in eternity (Eph.1,4), carried out through the redeeming work of Christ and exercised by means of the Gospel, shall be consummated in the Kingdom of Glory. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"(Mt.13,43). Thus Jesus assures His disciples that the gracious rule of God in them shall not end with time, but they shall eternally enjoy the blessings of that rule.

The full glories of the Kingdom shall be revealed at the Lord's return for judgment. "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21,27-28.31). It is evident that Jesus in these words is speaking of His return for judgment, which will mean for His people completed "redemption" (Lk. 21,28). "The revelation of the power, majesty and activity of God in the day of judgment is only a part of His Kingdom, namely the activity which was begun with the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father".<sup>51</sup> The certainty of the Lord's return is the pledge to the believers that they shall remain eternally under the gracious rule of God, and enjoy the eternal

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<sup>51</sup> J. Schaller, Op. cit., p.98.

blessings of His Kingdom.

The faith and longing of the believers for the consummation of the Kingdom is presented in their prayers, the Creeds and the Sacraments. When we pray: "Thy kingdom come", it is also for the coming of the kingdom of Glory that we pray. In the Creed we confess that Jesus will come again "to judge the quick and the dead". Of the Sacrament Paul says: "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death, till He come" (I Cor. 11, 28). The Christian dead are committed to the grave "in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself". All our worship, all our working and all our prayers look forward to that day when the Kingdom shall be consummated.

Of the fact of the Lord's return there can be no doubt. With great solemnity the Savior Himself declares that He will come again (Mt. 26, 64; Mt. 25, 13; etc.). Thus, if we can be sure of anything at all, then we can be sure that Jesus said that He would come again to this earth, visibly, in glory, accompanied by the holy angels, and at a time of terrible distress and suffering among men and nations. The great parables of "The Talents", "The Pounds", "The Wicked Husbandmen", "The Wise and

"Foolish Virgins", all have for their great central lesson the unexpectedness, the suddenness, the judgments and the blessings of Christ's return.

As to the time of His coming and the ushering in of His Kingdom, Jesus has plainly declared that it is unknown to men or angels: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Mt. 24, 36). And yet, in the face of this clear statement, men have attempted in various ways to determine the time of the Lord's coming.<sup>52</sup>

The attending circumstances of the coming of the Kingdom are clearly set forth in Scripture. It is to be observed, that the Scriptures do not speak of a gradual unfolding of the glories of the Kingdom by a process of evolution, nor do they speak of a Millennium, but rather of increasing iniquity before that great and notable day. There shall be "wars and rumors of wars",

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<sup>52</sup> Speaking of such futile efforts, Dr. Dallmann remarks: "It is harmful, and wicked even, for men to waste time trying to figure out the time of the coming of the Kingdom. It made men fanatical in the time of Paul (2 Thess. 3, 11-12). It made men fanatical since then..... In 1922 William Greenfield of Olympia, Washington, built an ark for himself and his followers to await the coming of Christ with a great flood. Robert Reidt of Long Island awaited the coming in 1925. Hearst's American Weekly of October 18, 1931, tells of Mrs. Martin W. Littleton, wife of the famous New York lawyer, building a special house for the coming Messiah. These fanatics give infidels a welcome opening to scoff at religion". Dallmann, Op. cit., p.73.

"nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Mt. 24, 6-7). Then comes a period of tribulation when the Christians shall be persecuted, when false prophets shall lead many astray, and the love of many shall wax cold (Mt. 24, 9-12). During that time there shall be many false rumors that Christ is come, and false prophets shall work great signs and wonders, and shall say: "Lo, here is Christ, or there" (Mt. 24, 23-24). This fearful period God in His mercy shall shorten (Mt. 24, 22). "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken" (Lk. 21, 25-26). Amid this deepening doom there is one bright ray of light: "The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24, 14). "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Lk. 21, 27).

The coming of the Kingdom is intimately connected with the final Judgment, for "the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a

shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left" (Mt. 25, 31-3).

"The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13, 41-42).

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Mt. 25, 46).  
No millennium here; no Gospel of another chance; but Judgment, complete and final!

However terrifying all these things may be to the ungodly, the coming of the Kingdom is a day of joy and blessedness for all true believers. Jesus tells them: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 12, 32). And even as He revealed to His disciples the fearful events of that last great Day, He bids them "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Lk. 21, 28). It will be their coronation day (Mt. 25, 23). It will be the day of invitation to enjoy forever all the glory and blessedness of the heavenly Kingdom: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25, 34). In this heavenly Kingdom they shall have true life in the presence of God, for "the righteous shall go away into eternal life" (Mt. 25, 46). It is truly a Kingdom of Glory, for "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun

in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mt.13,43).

The consummation of this Kingdom, resting upon the un-failing promises of God, is to the true Christian a source of strength and hope and comfort. It revives drooping spirits, and strengthens faltering hands to go on with the work of the Kingdom, "while it is day". This Kingdom is the goal and the assured hope of every true believer in Christ. And in such triumphant faith and hope he prays:

"For Thine is the Kingdom,  
 And the power,  
 And the glory,  
 Forever. Amen." (Mt.6,13b).

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