

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

## Introduction

Baptism and confirmation are both sacraments whereby a person is initiated into a special community, namely the Church. Appreciating the concept of Church, however, involves several layers of understanding, including all of the following legitimate sub-concepts:

- The People of God
- The Kingdom of God
- The Mystical Body of Christ.

It has been fashionable since Vatican II to speak of the Church primarily as the People of God, suggesting a connection not only to the ancient Israelites of the Old Testament, but also in many people's minds, to the democratic and egalitarian principles which are considered essential to a just society by the modern world. The other two concepts, however, are just as valid descriptions of the Church, so it is essential to understand what they precisely mean.

In this article, we examine the idea of the Kingdom of God. What is it? Who is qualified to enter into it? What must be done to gain access to it and to remain there? The Christian's identity is intimately bound up with his definition of the kingdom to which he claims to belong. After defining the real nature of the Kingdom of God, we can then more easily appreciate the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ.

## Exercise

The point of the following exercise is to help the reader to understand the essential elements behind the Kingdom of God, and to compare and contrast these elements with his own conception and that of the world.

*On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate the following definition of the Kingdom of God (0=opposite of Christianity, 10=perfectly Christian)? On another scale of 0 to 10, how intently would you wish to join a kingdom answering to that description (0=don't wish to join at all, 10=urgently wish to join)? What elements would you change in the definition?*

"The Kingdom of God is an era which mankind will inevitably usher in by using his own intelligence, strength, courage, and innate goodness to bring about a human society which provides each individual with a fair share of the earth's goods. Human institutions such as government, education, industry, and commerce will be engineered to provide the perfect means for all to reach their unlimited human potential, thus eradicating the root of sin, namely unjust social structures. Each person will be allowed to define his own happiness and to realize his own dreams, provided he respects others' right to do the same. All political boundaries will disappear and the human race will be united under a single government which will prevent war and promote the satisfaction of human needs and desires. The environment will be respected and all will realize that we are truly one with the earth and the universe. The Christ will then be truly

incarnated in the form of a world that is self-realized in its unity, sufficiency, and peace. We as individuals can also become the Christ by striving to be as perfect as we can be, our willingness to do so being all that is necessary. Those who reach this goal by their own efforts can then become lights and guides to the rest of humanity, just as the man Jesus, the Way Shower, was two thousand years ago.”

### **Basic Elements of the Kingdom**

The definition of the Kingdom of God given in the previous exercise probably appeals to a great many people today. It is nonetheless radically different from historic Christianity's understanding of the concept. The real Kingdom of God is a scandal to human sensibilities, and a mystery not of this world. The Jews themselves, mistook the Kingdom for a politico-religious institution little different from the established powers that ruled the world then, except perhaps for a veneer of supernatural prodigy. The Kingdom, however, cannot be reduced to merely human terms or fit to worldly categories or purposes. It is firstly, a spiritual kingdom, but with concrete and practical consequences for the world at large.

How is the Kingdom of God to be distinguished from the kingdom of the world, which in reality belongs to Satan? The following elements help to spell out this difference explicitly:

#### *1) The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit (Mt 5:3).*

A careful examination of the Beatitudes reveals that they consist of two kinds. The first four bless those who apparently have a lack of some sort, whereas it is only the second four which bless those who do something for God. Put another way, we must be empty before we can be filled. Before God, human ingenuity and initiative count for nothing apart from His grace, that is His generous and unmerited gift of Himself to man.

A theology that glorifies man's ability to reach perfection on his own strength and merits has its roots in the Garden of Eden, where Satan tempted Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so she could become like God and live a perfect life without His help (Gen 3:1-5). It was this surrender to the serpent's temptation that was the Original Sin, which thereafter destroyed the God-given perfection of human nature. For the world, however, sin is a result of "unjust social structures" that can be engineered away by human ingenuity. According to this view, it is merely the fact that we are not yet clever enough, or educated enough, or politicized enough, or otherwise subject to adverse environmental conditions, that explains why man falls. From Christianity's vantagepoint, however, sin occurs because man **is** fallen and needs someone other than himself to pick him up out of the mire.

#### *2) The Kingdom of God belongs to those begotten by Him.*

Only those that can call God "Our Father" can say to Him, "Your kingdom come." Because of original sin, man lost his divine sonship. Yet only a son of God can do God's will as it is done in heaven. Man must therefore be regenerated and reacquire a supernatural character in order to be capable of pleasing God. This new life is obtained by being "born from above" (In 3:3) in Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.

To His own He came, yet His own did not accept Him.  
Any who did accept Him He empowered to become children of God.  
These are they who were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire,  
*nor by man's willing it, but by God.*

-John 1:11-13

There is only one Christ, and He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (In 14:6), not merely the "Way Shower". The world would rather believe in an evolving "cosmic Christ" rather than in a historical Messiah, but the Scriptures warn us that this idea has its origin in the spirit of Antichrist (1 Jn 2:22).

3) *The Kingdom of God consists of those who do His perfect will.*

The Our Father defines the Kingdom of God as consisting of those who do His will *as it is done in heaven*. Because God is Lord of His creation and exists outside of time, nothing happens in time without His consent, so that it can be truly said that even Judas did God's will, because had God wanted it, it could have been otherwise. That, however, does not excuse Judas, because even though God willed to "make lemonade out of his lemon," Judas could have freely chosen to do God's will, not merely as an instrument, but as a true son. Nothing prohibited him from doing so except his own habitual desire to do his own will. God's foreknowledge of his actions did not deprive him of a real choice.

For the true Christian, everything that happens to him, whether apparently good or apparently bad, is an expression of the Father's will, to which he lovingly submits even at the cost of intense suffering and even his own life. He can afford to submit in this manner, because God is trustworthy and "makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28)". Indeed, God loves him to the point where "neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate [him] from the love of God that comes in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38)."

Jesus was the prime example of a son doing the Father's perfect will. He accepted the will of Pilate in allowing Himself to be put to death, telling Pilate, "You would have no power over me whatever unless it were given you from above (In 19:11)." In doing so, He obtained the regeneration of many other sons of God. The ultimate beatitude says,

"Blessed are those persecuted for holiness' sake;  
the kingdom of God is theirs.  
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you  
and utter every kind of slander against you because of me.  
Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven.

-Mt 5:11-12

4) *The Kingdom of God is within you (Lu 17:21).*

The Kingdom of God does not coincide with humanly conceived utopias. As Christ Himself said, "You cannot tell by careful watching when the Kingdom of God will come. Neither is it a matter of reporting that it is 'here' or 'there' (Lu 17:20)." It is rather independent of exterior circumstances and dependent only on interior decisions made within the heart of man.

The truest manifestations of the Kingdom of God occur in places like Auschwitz, whenever a true saint of God is willing to go to extreme lengths to do the Father's will, as in the case of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest who willingly died in the gas chambers in the place of a Jew. Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a "treasure buried in a field", for which a citizen must be willing to give up everything to obtain it after finding out its existence. The world is completely oblivious to opportunities to do God's will amid challenging circumstances. It would rather wait for Utopia than find the treasure hidden in a Bosnia-Herzegovina or during the most grievous human disasters.

5) *The Kingdom of God is not of this world (John 18:36).*

Thus said Jesus to Pilate. St. John not only recorded this response of Jesus, but later wrote in an epistle the following advice:

Have no love for the world, nor the things that the world affords.  
If anyone loves the world, the Father's love has no place in him.  
The world with its seductions is passing away,  
but the man who does God's will endures forever."

-1 Jn 2:15,17

The world's penchant for seeking solutions to human problems apart from God is best symbolized by the Tower of Babel (Gnll:I-9), which God confounded because it had its origin in human pride rather than in Him. In the future as today, there will be many attempts to unite mankind in the name of building such proud towers. As Christians, we must always be suspicious of the true origins of such undertakings, and cooperate only insofar as the will of God allows us to go in building the true kingdom of the spirit.

Consider that the nature of a citizen of the Kingdom of God is a highly exalted one, far beyond what mere humans can conceive of by referring to their own earth-bound experience. Jesus spoke of the time preceding His announcement of the Kingdom by drawing attention to John the Baptist:

I solemnly assure you, history has not known a man  
*born of woman* greater than John the Baptizer. Yet the least  
*born into the Kingdom of God* is greater than he.

-Mt 11:11

The world can never know the secret of the Kingdom of God because it is completely alien to God Himself. Worldly attempts to "create" the true Kingdom are doomed to failure. Jesus referred to such attempts before His time as follows:

From John the Baptizer's time until now the Kingdom of God  
has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

-Mt 11:12

Only those willing to accept the love of God on His own terms will enter into His  
Kingdom, and it is to these that He says:

To you has been given a knowledge of the mysteries of  
the Kingdom of God, but it has not been given to the others.

-Mt 13:11

**--Eduardo P. Olaguer**