

The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Principle of Action in the World

By John Fuellenbach, SVD

Presented to SEDOS, Rome, December 2005

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When approached to present this topic to this audience I asked myself: "This message is not new to SEDOS people. What can I possibly say to them that they have not yet heard a hundred times over". Some friends of mine like to tease me by remarking: "John, are you still at it, preaching the Kingdom of God? Don't you have anything else to talk about after so many years of being occupied with the Kingdom theme?". My response is usually: "Well, there is no other topic Jesus was concerned with and it is always overwhelmingly new when you find the treasure of the Kingdom hidden in your own self once again". If I could just blow or stir into flame the fire of the Kingdom which Jesus said he was sent to kindle in the world and that he wanted to see the whole world burning with (Lk 12:49), then it would have been worth while presenting to you once again what you already knew for so long.

The return to the central message of Jesus: The Kingdom of God

What was Jesus all about? What did he want to bring? What was his mission? He expressed his message and his mission with the words: Kingdom of God. A multifaceted concept but in it he enshrined what he wanted to communicate. He called disciples and he chose them to carry on his mission, the message of the Kingdom. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). Since Jesus' message was the Kingdom because "he was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43) our message has to be the same, be it individually or communally. The Second Vatican Council defined the Church on the same lines: the Church must see itself in the service of the Kingdom of God meant for the transformation of the whole world.

The phrase Kingdom of God, the centre of Jesus' message, appears 162 times in the New Testament, 92 times on the lips of Jesus. Yet it disappeared into the background in the post-Easter preaching and gave way to an almost exclusive concentration on the person of Jesus rather than on his message. This is not a distortion of his message yet it certainly obscured the thrust with which Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom as the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant with his people. The Kingdom message receded so much into the background that for centuries it became almost irrelevant in both Catholic as well as Protestant theology. It was obviously not regarded as the centre of Jesus' preaching and teaching anymore. Only in recent time has it been rediscovered in both Churches. As an example of its neglect and rediscovery, it might suffice to remind you that in Vatican I (1870) the phrase did not appear at all, while in Vatican II it can be found at least 75 times.

The main effect of the rediscovery of the Kingdom message of Jesus consists in the realization that the Gospel as preached by Jesus was first and foremost meant for this world and not just for the world to come. To view the message of Jesus from this perspective demands a change in the way salvation is to be envisioned. Since salvation is the most generic term in theology, the change in understanding salvation would affect the whole of theology accordingly.

The change from rescue operation to transformation of creation

Salvation is not to be understood in the first place as a rescue operation through which those who are to be saved will be taken out of this world which has no future as it is doomed to disappear at the end. Salvation is envisioned in terms of transformation. To be saved means we are not taken out of this world but that God himself comes into this world to save the world by transforming it into the fullness of his image. This is the goal of creation: to become the Icon of the Trinity, and in becoming so to express God's very being externally in his creation.

It is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of human beings; it is the cosmos purified of all evil and full of the reality of God. The Kingdom is not to be in another world but is the old world transformed into a new one (L. Boff).

The Kingdom is not some kind of extra-terrestrial entity that will be superimposed on this world. Nor is it a process of spiritual or internal change that leaves the outer realities looking much the same. It is the liberation of the world we live in, know, touch, smell, suffer, from all that corrupts and destroys it (Elliot, Praying the Kingdom).

The six tension points of the Kingdom:

A closer examination of Jesus' Kingdom message will reveal a series of tension points or polarities which are essential. The different view of salvation, of the Church and her mission, ultimately depends on how one accepts or rejects these presuppositions. It is of paramount importance to recognize these polarities as biblical. Any theology of the Kingdom that dissolves these tensions, by opting only for one side or the other, is to that degree unbiblical. A true Kingdom theology will have to maintain and live with these tensions. They are the following:

1. Future versus present (already — not yet); the Kingdom of God as belonging to this world as well as to the world to come;
2. Individual versus social; means individual salvation but in the context of a community (we are created in the image of a "Triune God" and therefore community-beings by nature);
3. Spirit versus matter (religious — political); the Kingdom is a transcendental and a spiritual reality but concretely present in the midst of this world in order to transform this world into its final design.
4. Apocalyptic versus eschatological; the world is sin-permeated and has no future or the world is good and the object of God's transforming power.
5. Divine action versus human action (gift and task); the Kingdom as a gift from God and a task to be accomplished through human cooperation.
6. The Church's relationship to the Kingdom; the tension seeing the Church and the Kingdom as identical and/or seeing the Kingdom as broader than the Church, and present outside the confines of the Church as well.

The Kingdom meant for the transformation of this world:

By putting the whole stress on the first aspects of our six polarities of the Kingdom (future, individual, spiritual, apocalyptic, total gift and identical with the Church) the Kingdom message of Jesus turns into a totally transcendent reality, purely spiritual, beyond this world and totally

invisible to the human eye.

The second aspects of the polarities (present, social, earthly, task and, broader than the Church) stress the Kingdom as belonging first to this world and its destiny. Of course, it is equally a distortion of the Kingdom if one only defines it from these polarities. Surprisingly, however, it can be observed: whenever the basic Kingdom message of Jesus is pushed into the background, there salvation brought by Christ is foremostly seen as an unearthly reality that has nothing or little to say about this earth and its relationship to the Kingdom.

This second set of polarities however (too long neglected) show us clearly that Jesus did not envision the Kingdom that he preached as something that belongs totally and exclusively to the world to come. His Kingdom-vision leaves room for, interpreting it as belonging to this world as well as, proclaiming a future that cannot be deduced from the circumstances of present history. The future, as the Bible understands it, is something qualitatively new. It lies beyond human planning and capability, something we can only allow to be given to us. While this symbol takes the world and human effort in history seriously, it does not surrender openness to a transcendent future in the fullness of God. Only God can ultimately guarantee the fulfillment of humankind's deepest aspirations.

Our engagement in this struggle (to make the Kingdom hope come true) can be without illusions because we know by faith that no human programme by itself will bring in the eschaton. Our engagement can also be without ultimate despair, because we believe that, no matter how great our self-created horror becomes, God is faithful to his promise and he will bring the Kingdom which has already drawn near to us in his Son (Viviano, *The Kingdom of God*).

We must conclude from this: The Kingdom of God is incarnated in history, in human society and in the world. Although it is not purely and simply identical with the world, it is "identifiable" in the world. We could also say that the Kingdom shows itself in society and is encountered in society, but this society is not the Kingdom.

To discover the theme of the Reign of God is to discover the full dimension of the inevitable historical character of Christianity. Our God is a god of history, has entered into history, has a purpose and a plan for history, and has shown these to us in Jesus. God's plan is the Reign of God. The Reign is the dream, the utopia God cherishes for history, God's overall design for the world, the arcane mystery hidden for centuries and now revealed fully in Jesus (Casaldáliga, Political Holiness).

The Kingdom is present and future:

If one thing is obvious in the Kingdom message of Jesus, it is his constant insistence that the Kingdom is present now. There are 21 passages (which are regarded as authentic words of Jesus) in the Gospel which with an insistence and an astonishing firmness stress that God's Kingdom has finally come and has become a matter of experience now. These passages indicate that something is happening now. God is entering the present age in a totally new way to bring to fulfillment the promises made to the prophets. The most obvious are the following:

Now is the time of rejoicing no time of fasting (Mk 2:19)

The mustard seed is growing (Mk 4:30-32), (Mt 13:31)

To the poor the Kingdom belongs now, not in the future (Mt 5:3; Lk 6:10)

From now on the Kingdom will exercise its force (Lk 16:16)

Satan has fallen from heaven, his power is broken (Lk 10:18)

The yeast is penetrating the dough (Mt 13:33)

The banquet is ready (Mt 22:1-9)
The treasure is ready to be taken (Mt 13:44,45)
The Kingdom is in your very reach (Lk 17-21)

A particular and unique way to experience the presence of the Kingdom already now is Jesus' common practice of table fellowship. Jesus understood this festive "eating and drinking" as an already present celebration of the banquet of the Kingdom understood as an "active anticipation of banqueting in the fully consummated Kingdom of God". Jesus saw the actualization of this historically present Kingdom in the coming of the Gentiles who will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*cf.* Mt 8:11).

The fact that the Kingdom of God is a present reality has never been denied in theological writings. But most of the time this "being present" has been so qualified that the future and not the present of the Kingdom seem to be the primary concern, as G. Lohfink puts it:

In order to be fair to Jesus' message and praxis, one must, more than anything else, hammer out the PRESENCE of the BASILEIA that Jesus himself maintained. That God would establish his kingly rule in the future was believed by everyone in Israel during Jesus' time. Generally speaking, people lived in the end-time hope. Jesus' unmistakable uniqueness lay in the fact that with frightening awareness he could speak of fulfillment: The Kingdom of God is here and now. And he not only said it, but fulfilled it in messianic praxis ("The Exegetical Predicament").

The real issue as Lohfink sees it: **Are we able to notice the Kingdom's presence?** God does not need us so much to bring about the Kingdom as to notice its presence in our midst. If we are touched by the Kingdom, we will be able to discern its presence in our daily experiences, we will be able to see its presence and to point it out and to witness to its presence in the midst of people's lives.

The Kingdom as a Gift and Task

There is no difficulty in seeing the Kingdom as a gracious gift from a God who comes with unconditional love to seek out humankind and to offer salvation to all. God is coming towards us with unconditional love. He seeks communion and intimacy. Its final coming is totally up to God; it will come as and when he sees fit. It cannot be foretold nor calculated. No human initiative can bring about the coming of the Kingdom. It is God's own powerful and sovereign act.

Yet the Kingdom, once accepted, becomes one's task and demands all of one's abilities. We must avoid the danger of viewing the Kingdom as coming completely without human assistance. This is a perennial temptation in many treatises on the Kingdom of God. Lohfink astutely identifies the pitfall in this way:

There is one sentence in modern exegesis that is constantly repeated: The basileia is solely and exclusively God's act. This sentence is then frequently followed by something like this: Human beings must pray for the coming of the basileia, they must prepare and be ready for it, orient themselves towards it and asymptotically draw near to it, but they can do absolutely nothing to cause or hasten its coming, nor can they do anything to stop or hinder it.... Now obviously we do not deny that the basileia is God's act. However, does that say all that needs saying? (The Exegetical Predicament).

The gratuitousness of the Kingdom should not lead us to regard ourselves as merely passive objects. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God is a personal relationship between God and human beings. Any personal relationship is always mutual; it goes two ways. We are challenged to

respond, and through this response the Kingdom becomes a reality in our midst. Jon Sobrino offers a unique way of looking at the Kingdom as gift and task. He sees the Kingdom as establishing first and foremost a filial relationship with God. We are oriented vertically to God and thus we are his children. From this vertical orientation follows the horizontal relationship which makes us brothers and sisters. Both are essential and of equal and primary importance.

Seen from such a perspective, history reveals two aspects. First it is a call to divine filiation by which human persons become God's children. Our vertical vocation, the deepest aspiration of all persons, is complete union with God. Secondly, history is a call to human fellowship by which persons become each other's sisters and brothers. This is our horizontal vocation, the call to attain complete union among ourselves.

These two aspects make it possible to speak of the Kingdom as a GIFT as well as a TASK. In the call to divine filiation, the Kingdom of God is fundamentally God's true gift. But it is a gift that entails by necessity the task of creating an authentic community of brothers and sisters. It is the gift aspect of the Kingdom that demands of us the task in response. The achievement of true human fellowship in history becomes an historical realization of the promise of total communion with God. But, as an historical verification of such a promise, it immediately reveals the partial and incomplete character of the Kingdom now and opens history to the complete and total communion of human persons with God.

The Kingdom of God as a call to action in Paul: Rom 14:17

Jesus never defined the Kingdom of God. He described the Kingdom in parables, in similes (see Mt 13; Mk 4) and in concepts like life, glory, joy and light. Among theologians we still find a naive helplessness when it comes to defining the Kingdom of God. The best biblical description we can find is given in Paul:

After all, the Kingdom of God is not a matter of whether you get what you like to eat or drink, but the Kingdom of God is a matter of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

Some authors regard this text as the only definition of the Kingdom ever attempted in the entire New Testament. Albert Schweitzer called Paul's definition "a Creed for all times". The constant danger has been to interpret these words exclusively in a spiritual sense and overlook the fact that its basic concepts like "justice, peace and joy" are equally meant to refer to the life of the Christian in the here and now.

This verse is usually misunderstood to refer exclusively to private, individual, interior, purely spiritual blessings such as a righteous standing of the individual before God, peace of mind and heart due to forgiveness of sins, the joy of the redeemed child. But, while those blessings are not to be excluded, they do not exhaust or even do full justice to the message of these words. After all, peace means primarily the opposite of war, the tranquility of order, social order; justice means justice, the virtue proper to social relations; and joy, although it has an individual dimension to it, can mean a rejoicing precisely in the blessings brought by peace and justice (Viviano, The Kingdom of God in History, p.18).

Justice as the basic Demand of the Covenant means life-giving relationship

The Kingdom, defined in this brief formula, is therefore nothing other than justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are not just feelings or sentiments but realities to be implemented in this world. We might rightly call these three characteristics the fundamental values of the Kingdom.

Justice as a biblical concept could best be translated as RIGHT RELATIONS or even better as LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIPS. According to Christian anthropology, to be a human being means essentially to be in the world (meaning having a body) and to be in relationship.

These essential relations extend in four directions: to God, to oneself, to neighbor both as an individual and as part of society, and to creation as a whole. To be just means to live in life-giving relationships with one's fellow human beings, oneself, with nature and ultimately with God. Human identity and authenticity are only achieved when these essentially human relations are "right". Salvation from this point of view means entering into relationships that are God-willed for the fulfillment and happiness of one's very being. Eternal life means living in relationships with God, oneself, one's neighbor and nature that are life-giving and life-receiving. God is a "lover of life" (Wis 11:23ff.) means that, wherever God enters into relationship with human beings, there life is fully given. Those whom God has thus enlivened he expects in turn to enter into life-giving relationships with their fellow human beings and with all of creation as well. Therefore it is correct to say:

In biblical faith, the doing of justice is the primary expectation of God. Everything else by way of ethical norm and Covenantal requirement derives from this, for God is indeed a "lover of justice" (Ps 99 [98]:4). Israel is here commanded to attend to the very thing which God most values, namely, justice (Brueggemann, *To Act Justly*, p. 5).

Jesus' mission was to fulfill the Covenant promises and to restore the broken relationship by calling the whole of Israel back into a justice that had always been the basic norm of Israel since Israel had been called out of an unjust situation in Egypt. His call for basic human solidarity and compassion for those whose lives were marked by the effects of injustice and his demand to restore such relationships which justice demanded, was one of his most urgent pleas. One could call it Jesus' allergy in the sense that he reacted allergically against discrimination of any kind since it was one of the basic requirements of the Kingdom he was sent to bring into the world. If justice was a basic requirement of the Old Testament Jesus insisted even more adamantly on this being the basic norm for any one who would follow him.

What the Old Testament means by 'shalom' is best expressed in a text found twice in the Old Testament, in *Micah* and *Isaiah*. The passage envisions what will happen when God comes to bring his Kingdom into this world and when people are willing to let this reality enter their lives:

And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken (Mi 4:3-4; see Is 2:4).

Here, Micah presents a vision of what will be when the nations submit to God's Kingdom. In a nutshell there are two fundamental changes that will take place in the individual and in the nations at large: (1) no war anymore and even no training for war and no war industry; and, (2) the return to a simple and peaceful life-style, concerned not with accumulating more and more, but rather with fostering interpersonal relationships. According to the prophet, when this submission takes

place, the whole war machine will be dismantled and a new social order will emerge. He envisions a transformed human consciousness and a new public policy. It is the age-old dream of every Israelite: to settle for a simple standard of living, content with vines and fig trees. The peace envisioned here demands a shift in priorities wherein greed will end, exploitation will cease and an entirely new social order will take over. Brueggemann comments on the radicalness of its vision:

It anticipates nothing less than the dismantling of the presently-known world for the sake of an alternative world not yet embodied (To Act Justly, p. 11).

I should like to insert here an observation that I have made over the years in talking to people about justice and peace in the Bible. What is asked for is first a justice and peace mentality. Are justice and peace fundamental values or even the ultimate values for me that determine whether or not I am really a disciple of Jesus? Do these values determine and direct all my behaviour and actions? How far am I concerned with life-giving and life-affirming relationships which the Kingdom demands? The same could be said about peace. How much do I want to get rid of my war-mentality and am I a reconciling person?

The relationship between Kingdom and Church

Vatican II starts off by describing the Church as the mystery of Christ. In her the “eternal plan of the Father is realized and manifested in Jesus Christ: to bring humanity to its eternal glory”. Here the Church is seen in connection with “bringing about the secret hidden for ages in God” (Col 1:16; see Eph 3:3-9; I Cor 2:6-10). Therefore, the Church has to be seen in this broad perspective of God’s plan of salvation, which includes all human beings and creation as a whole (see I Tim 2:4; Rom 8:22 ff).

Did the Council identify the Kingdom of God in history with the pilgrim Church? or did it consider the Kingdom of God in history to be a reality that is broader than the Church?

The majority of theologians (although not all) today hold that the Catholic Church in Vatican II did distance herself from any identification with the Kingdom in history now. The theological basis for doing so is seen in the Council’s definition of the Church as a “Sacrament of the Kingdom” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 9). Since God’s saving grace can never be bound exclusively to a sacrament, one has to accept that the Kingdom is still broader than the Church. Such a separation is indirectly expressed in article 5 of *Lumen Gentium* and in article 45 of *Gaudium et Spes*. While one can still argue as to whether or not Vatican II really made this distinction, it is clear that in *Redemptoris Missio* (*RM*) and in the Document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (*DP*), a joint statement of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, this distinction is clearly made. Both documents confess that the Kingdom of God is a broader reality than the Church.

RM and *DP* appear to be the first two documents of the recent central doctrinal authority to distinguish the pilgrim Church from the reality of the Reign of God in history; both documents profess that the Reign of God is a broader reality than the Church which is present and operative beyond her boundaries among the members of other religious traditions” (Dupuis “*Dialogue and Proclamation*”, p. 150).

Equally significant is the fact that these documents not only clearly distinguish Church and Kingdom, recognizing that the one larger reality of the Kingdom cannot be encompassed by and contained within the Church, but the documents also unambiguously subordinate the Church to

the Kingdom by affirming that the Church is meant to be a servant of the broader and more important Kingdom of God.

“It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument” (RM, n. 18).

“The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom” (ibid., n. 20).

The Church’s mission is to foster the “Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rv 11:15) at whose service she is placed (DP, n. 35; see also n. 59).

The threefold mission of the Church

Once the Church is no longer seen as the sole holder of the Kingdom, the Church does not have to define herself anymore as “the Kingdom of God under siege” by the powers of this world. Since Vatican II she sees herself more as leaven of the Kingdom or in the service of the Kingdom that is broader than herself. In other words, a theology of transcendence gives way to a theology of transformation. Out of such a view of Church and Kingdom the mission of the Church has been outlined as follows:

1. To proclaim in Word and Sacrament that the Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In celebrating the presence of the Kingdom the Church brings people effectively into communion with the Kingdom.

The Church is not the Kingdom of God, but bears symbolic witness to the Kingdom through word and sacrament, and her praxis effectively anticipates that Kingdom. She does so by doing for men and women here and now, in new situations (different from those in Jesus’ time), what Jesus did in his time: raising them up for the coming Kingdom of God; opening up communication between them; caring for the poor and outcast; establishing communal ties within the household of faith and serving all men and women in solidarity (cf. *Church: The Human Face of God*, p. 157).

2. To create Church communities everywhere and to offer its own life as a test-case which demonstrates that the Kingdom is present and operative in the world today. By concretizing, in the Church’s own life justice, peace, freedom and respect for human rights. The Church should offer herself as a “contrast” or a countersign to society at large.

3. To challenge society as a whole to transform itself along the basic principles of the Kingdom now present: justice, peace, brotherhood/sisterhood and human rights. Interreligious dialogue, as the second element of evangelization, must be added to this. These are “constitutive elements of proclaiming the Gospel” since the ultimate goal of the Kingdom is the transformation of the whole of creation. The Church must, therefore, understand her mission in the service of the imminent Kingdom.

This threefold mission found its expression in the document *Redemptoris Missio*.

The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom. This is seen especially in her preaching, which is a call to conversion. Preaching constitutes the Church’s first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the Kingdom in individuals and in human society....

The Church, then, serves the Kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular

Churches and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness towards others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions.

“The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the ‘Gospel values’ which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘Gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit, who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8)” (RM, n. 20).

RM regards interreligious dialogue as a constitutive element of the Church’s evangelizing task as well. It is “part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” (*ibid.*, n. 55); it is one of its expressions and, moreover, “dialogue is a path toward the Kingdom” (*ibid.*, n. 57). The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* adds:

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are related but not interchangeable (DP, n. 77).

Church - world - other religious traditions

The distinction made by the Council between the Kingdom and the Church bore immediate fruits in the development of a post-conciliar theology, at least in two theological fields: in the theology of Liberation and in the theology of Religions. The Kingdom of God symbol provides the horizon for a solution of two theological problems.

First, in the context of work for justice, liberation and peace, it provides the bridge between the historical achievement of justice and liberation of the oppressed in this world and the eschatological Kingdom still to come in fullness at the end of time. It shows how work for justice and liberation inside and outside the Church is intrinsically linked with the Kingdom present now, since the ultimate goal of the Kingdom of God is the transformation of all reality.

Second, in inter-religious dialogue, the Kingdom symbol furnishes theologians with a broader perspective for entering into dialogue with other religious traditions. If the Kingdom is the ultimate goal of God’s intentionality with all of humanity, then the question no longer is how these other religious traditions are linked to the Church but rather how the Kingdom of God was and is concretely present in these religions.

The distinction between Kingdom and Church can help us relate to this world and its destiny more fruitfully and enter into a more open and creative dialogue with other religious traditions and ideologies.

The Kingdom that Jesus brought has cosmic dimensions that go beyond the confines of the Church. It demands the transformation of all religious and socio-political structures and institutions. Consequently, the Christian community has no other choice than to engage in dialogue with the world and other religious traditions for the sake of the Kingdom present. The teaching office of the Church in *“Dialogue and Proclamation”* takes up this challenge by stating that dialogue constitutes an integral and essential part of the Church’s mission. The Church must dialogue with other religions in order to carry out her mission and realize her identity (*ibid.*, n. 2). Some theologians regard this as another milestone in the Catholic Church’s view of other religious traditions.

Kingdom consciousness

The identity of the Church depends ultimately on her Kingdom consciousness based on Scripture. She is to reveal this through her sensitivity to the priority of the Kingdom. H.A. Snyder describes such Kingdom consciousness as including the following five aspects:

1. *Kingdom consciousness means living and working in the firm hope of the final triumph of God's reign. In the face of contrary evidence, Kingdom Christians hold on to the conviction that God will eventually swallow up all evil, hate, and injustice. It is their firm belief that the leaven of the Kingdom is already at work in the dough of creation, to use Jesus' own parable. This gives Christians an unworldly, audacious confidence that enables them to carry on doing what others say is impossible or futile.*
2. *Understanding God's Kingdom means that the line between "sacred" and "secular" does not exist in concrete reality. God's Kingdom means that all things are in the sphere of God's sovereignty and, therefore, are God's concern. All spheres of life are Kingdom foci.*
3. *Kingdom awareness means that ministry is much broader than Church work. Christians who understand the meaning of God's reign know they are in the Kingdom business, not just Church business. They see all activity as ultimately having Kingdom significance.*
4. *In the Kingdom perspective, concern for justice and concrete commitment to the Word of God are necessarily conjoined. An awareness of God's Kingdom, biblically understood, resolves the tension between these two vital concerns. Those committed to the Kingdom want to win people to personal faith in Jesus Christ, since the Kingdom is the ultimate longing of every human heart. They are also committed to peace, justice, and righteousness at every level of society because the Kingdom includes "all things in heaven and on earth" (Eph 1:10) and the welfare of every person and everything God has made.*
5. *The reality of the Kingdom of God can be experienced now through the Spirit who gives the believer the first fruits of the fullness of the Kingdom in the here and now. Kingdom people, particularly in their liturgy, anticipate the joy of the Kingdom. The different charisms, given by the Holy Spirit witness concretely to the Kingdom present, are appreciated by all as clear manifestations of the powerful presence of the Kingdom in the midst of their daily life (Models of the Kingdom, pp. 154-155).*

Looking at the world of today, we have reason to doubt whether the human species has the requisite capacity to change. Many view the present world situation with despair. Christian faith has been one important way in which people have lived with hope in the midst of apparently hopeless conditions. Those who open themselves to the Kingdom will discover that there is a power at work in us which can transform even our distorted wills. This transformation is not subject to our control but comes as a gift. We call it grace, and we can place no limits on the extent to which grace can make us into new men and new women. The Kingdom remains new, never stale. If it hits us it will always carry a great surprise like the farmer who in his uneventful hard life one day hit on a treasure and then had suddenly only one interest to pursue, to retain this treasure with all he had.

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