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EDITORIAL.

The Endeavour Magazine has reached its 50th issue. This event invites us to look back to its origins and forward to its future.

The concept was that of the late James White, who felt the need, above all, for the realisation of the presence of Jesus in our world today and as a consequence the need for practical Christianity in our relationship with each other and indeed all with whom we come in contact.

The first editorial is entitled "DEDICATION" and as a practical reminder of these earlier magazines which contained many excellent articles we are publishing an index of the first 20 issues. Joan White, James' wife, spent many hours preparing this and we are sure our readers will find it useful. Those of you who have not got the early copies may obtain most of them from the Endeavour Magazine address.

Returning to the first edition, all the articles were on Christianity in practice, with perhaps the exception of the review of the "New English Bible". Alas, this present issue is almost entirely theological. Have we any excuse? Well, the theme is "The Kingdom of God" and our excuse is that if we can only get a little nearer to a true understanding of Christ's Good News we should in consequence be moved to better practical service of the Master.

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The Kingdom of God

by

RALPH LOVELOCK

When John Mark commenced his narrative, "Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God", he followed with the quotation from Isaiah which Peter (see Eus.Eccl.His. 2:15;1-2) considered basic to that Gospel, "Prepare a road for Yahweh through the wilderness; clear a highway across the desert for our Elohim.... Thus shall the glory of Yahweh be revealed, and all mankind shall see it; for Yahweh himself has spoken." The Greek phrase, 'Kingdom of God' with which we are so familiar through the New Testament was based on firmly established Old Testament promises, and was in principle 'the Kingdom of Yahweh', for when Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven", he was surely thinking of the Divine promise which stood behind the Exodus from Egypt. (Num. 14;20-21) "Yahweh said.... as I live, in very truth the glory of Yahweh shall fill the earth." Thus it was, that Matthew, whose 'sayings of Jesus' were first written in Aramaic (see Eus. Eccl.His. 3:24;5-7) observed the Jewish avoidance of the Covenant Name, and uses the phrase 'the Kingdom of the Heavens'.

There have been 19th. century expositors who have analysed the English word Kingdom and postulated that it must involve a king, a country, a people, and a law; this extension of its human embodiment in English democratic politics to the Kingdom of God is quite unjustified, and in the light of our current experience downright insulting to God. The Hebrew term 'mamlakah' comes from a root meaning 'to possess; own exclusively' and this derived noun means basically 'sovereignty; dominion; reign' (see Brown-Driver-Briggs lex.) the basic Biblical idea behind it being excellently defined by David (1.Chron.29;11-12) - "Thine, O Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, the majesty, for everything in heaven and on earth is thine; thine, O Yahweh, is the sovereignty (Kingdom), and thou art exalted over all as head. Wealth and honour come from thee; thou rulest over all; might and power are of thy disposing; thine it is to give power and strength to all."

In one sense, as David implied, God has always been in complete control of his creation, and all things occur with his allowance. This is not to say, however, that all things occur with his

agreement; Jesus could say to Pilate, "You would have no authority over me if it had not been granted you from above." We know from the prayer in Gethsemane that it was God's will that Jesus should suffer, but Paul's words (Rom.8;32) that God also suffered in the sacrifice indicate that God was prepared to do so for the sake of our salvation (see Heb. ch.2). God desires that men should not submit to him under duress, but willingly, exercising a free choice to do that which God, in his wisdom, sees to be best for them; he pleaded of old with Israel (Ez.18;31-32) "Turn, turn from your offences, or your iniquity will be your downfall. Throw off the load of your past misdeeds; get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, you men of Israel? I have no desire for any man's death. This is the very word of the Lord God."

In the incident of the 'burning bush' (Ex.ch.3) Moses asked God for a name which should express the purpose which He had in sending Moses, and the Covenant name was given. God had previously said what that name implied; the purpose which he proposed to execute with His people - "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that country into a fine broad land." Human failings, however, presented a far more difficult problem than the breaking down of Egyptian resistance (see 1.Cor.ch. 10) and from the beginning the purpose implicit in the name, Yahweh, was destined to invoke Divine sufferings - "He said, 'Surely they are my people, my sons who will not play me false'; and he became their deliverer in all their troubles. It was no envoy, no angel, but he himself that delivered them; he himself ransomed them by his love and pity, lifted them up and carried them through all the years gone by. Yet they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit;" (Is.63;8-10).

In the letter to Corinth cited above, Paul says that we can know the type of God we serve from the narratives of his work with Israel; the early Church regarded the release from Egyptian bondage as an example of God's love which reached its climax in the release of mankind from the bondage of sin through Jesus. On the mount of transfiguration Luke records that Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus the 'exodus' which he should

accomplish at Jerusalem, and Paul could say "As Christians..... our Passover has begun; the sacrifice is offered - Christ himself." (1. Cor.5:7) Isaiah had said that the child of promise who should be a sign (see Jn.12;32) should be called by the battle cry of confidence as Israel charged the enemy, "with us is God" (Is.7;14), and Paul took up this idea when he said, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." (2 Cor. 5;19). So, in the fulness of time, the promise of deliverance from bondage came to complete fulfilment in Jesus, and Paul could say (Phil.ch.2) that resulting from that 'exodus' which was accomplished on Golgotha, "the name above all names", at which "every knee should bow - in heaven, on earth, and in the depths", which the Jews avoided by using the term 'THE LORD', became that of the risen Christ. Another writer (Heb.2;14-15) describes this victory of God over evil in words which cannot be bettered, "The children of a family share the same flesh and blood; and so he too shared ours, so that through death he might break the power of him who had death at his command, that is, the devil; and might liberate those who, through fear of death, had all their lifetime been in servitude."

The fact that 'the Kingdom of God' is 'the Kingdom of Yahweh', and that the covenant name found its final fulfilment in Christ, means that the Kingdom of God is Christ's Kingdom. The Jews looked for a political kingdom to be inaugurated by the Messiah (the Christ), and trumped up a false charge against Jesus of plotting to overthrow the emperor in Rome, but Jesus denied their false expectations when he told Pilate, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it did, my followers would be fighting to save me from arrest by the Jews." When Pilate, puzzled, asked what kind of 'king' Jesus was, he denied that the political implications of 'king' applied to his function, saying, 'king' is your word. My task is to bear witness to the truth. For this was I born; for this I came into the world, and all who are not deaf to truth listen to my voice." The voice crying in the wilderness, announcing the coming of Yahweh, phrased his message, "the Kingdom of God is upon you." Jesus saw John as one who had opened that Kingdom for men to enter, for he said (Lk.16;16) "Until John, it was the Law and the Prophets; since then, there is the good news of the kingdom of God, and everyone forces his way in." When the Jews accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, he denied the charge, but said (Lk. 11;20) "If it is by the finger of God that I drive out the devils then be sure

that the kingdom of God has already come upon you." When they asked him when the political kingdom which they expected would come (Lk.17;20-21) he replied, "You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. There will be no saying, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' for in fact the kingdom of God is within your grasp."

The Sermon on the Mount opens with two statements that the Kingdom of God is with men now - "How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs" and "How blest are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of right; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs." We are told that Jesus taught in the synagogues, "announcing the good news (gospel) of the Kingdom", and that when he sent out his disciples to spread this good news, they were to say, "the kingdom of Heaven is upon you" (Matt.9;35 & 10;8). One of the most serious charges against the Pharisees was that they were holding men back from entering into the Kingdom which Jesus had opened - "You shut the door of the kingdom of Heaven in men's faces; you do not enter yourselves, and when others are entering, you stop them." (Matt.23;13) Paul speaks of the present Kingdom in revealing words - "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but justice, peace, and joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit" (Rom.14;17) and this he said about the conduct of Church members in that present life - they were then and there members of an existing kingdom of God. So he can say of members of the Church, that in union with Christ Jesus they had been raised up and enthroned with him in the heavenly realms (Eph.2;6).

Paul could say to the members of a Church in a Roman colony that they, although living among those whose minds were "set on earthly things", were, "by contrast, citizens of heaven." (Phil.3;17-21) The experiences of Paul demonstrated that citizenship of a great city such as Rome carried more than the responsibilities residing in that relation, it carried also the protection of Roman power which more than once enabled him to avoid the machinations of his enemies; so also Jesus promised the Jews that he brought to them the membership of a greater power (household) which should do the same for them - "If you dwell within the revelation I have brought, you are indeed my disciples; you shall know the truth, and

the truth will set you free." They replied, "We are Abraham's descendants; we have never been in slavery to any man. What do you mean by saying, 'You will become free men'?" "In very truth I tell you", said Jesus, "that everyone who commits sin is a slave. The slave has no permanent standing in the household, but the son belongs to it for ever. If then the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free." (Jn.8;31-35) Remembering his words to Pilate, that his type of 'kingship' involved "bearing witness to the truth", we see in this confrontation with the Jews in what way that witness was the setting up of a 'kingdom', but a kingdom which was also describable in earthly terms as a 'household' with citizenship also being equivalent to 'sonship'.

The Kingdom of God is centred in God; is one of the fundamental aspects of the 'personality' of God, and is in basis as eternal as God himself. Throughout human history, it has had many phases of manifestation as a relationship between God and those who sought membership of His household. An unknown writer can say of individuals living under the Old Testament dispensation that "All these persons died in faith. They were not yet in possession of the things promised, but had seen them far ahead and hailed them, and confessed themselves no more than strangers or passing travellers on earth. Those who use such language show plainly that they are looking for a country of their own. If their hearts had been in the country they had left, they could have found opportunity to return. Instead, we find them longing for a better country - I mean the heavenly one. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has a city ready for them." (Heb.11;13-16) He continues (11;39-40) "These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith; and yet they did not enter upon the promised inheritance, because, with us in mind, God made a better plan, that only in company with us should they reach their perfection." Thus, the coming of Jesus is seen as the opening of the Kingdom to those in the past, as well as to those then living; it illustrates the saying of Jesus, "Before Abraham was, I am", and his assurance "You shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom, but you yourselves cast out." This writer can compare the symbolic promises of the Kingdom under the old dispensation with the reality upon which the Church had now entered "Remember where you stand; not before the palpable, blazing fire of Sinai, with the darkness, gloom, and whirlwind; the trumpet

blast and the oracular voice..... No, you stand before Mount Zion and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, before myriads of angels; the full concourse and assembly of the first-born citizens of heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of good men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.....See that you do not refuse to hear the voice that speaks. Those who refused to hear the oracle speaking on earth found no escape, still less shall we escape if we refuse to hear the one who speaks from heaven." (Heb.12;18-29). This implies the present possession by the Church of that Kingdom; the fulfilment of the promise of the Sermon on the Mount, for the passage concludes, "The Kingdom we are given is unshakable." The eternity of God assures the eternity of that Kingdom - it has other aspects, which to us are 'future', although being eternal, it is in fact 'out of time', and which can only be spoken of in typical language.

The Kingdom of God and the Apocalypse

by

DAVID PITT FRANCIS

1. Kingdom and Dominion.

The Greek word 'basileia', generally translated 'kingdom' is an elusive word. Sometimes, as in its first occurrence in the Septuagint Greek Old Testament (1) it simply means 'dominion' or 'kingship'. At other times it means 'kingdom' in the political sense in which it is most often understood. The Apocalypse presents one of the best illustrations of the former meaning of the word 'kingdom' for on every occasion where the term 'kingdom' occurs, it means sovereignty, and the terms 'kingdom' and 'Kingdom of God' do not occur in the two final chapters where the vision of the ultimate 'political' kingdom is presented.

This paper discusses the use of the term 'kingdom' throughout the Apocalypse, and the final picture of the City of God.

Of the nine occurrences of 'basileia' in the Apocalypse, four concern the beast (2) and its heads (3), and need no comment except that their meaning is consistent with the other five. In

the case of the beast (2) its dominion is darkened, and in the following chapter (3) the kings give their dominion to the beast. The first of the remaining occasions is the Prologue where the words 'in the kingdom and patience' cannot (4) be understood literally to mean the future kingdom, but tell us us concisely that Christ's dominion over us and our patience are inseparably associated. Subjection to Christ is essential if we are to rule with him in the future. (5).

In the next two occurrences (6) the word is rendered 'kings' in the Common Version on poorer authority. In both Rev.1:6 and 5:10, the correct translation is 'kingdom and priests'. Although the latter text has often been used to prove that the elect will reign on earth, it was not originally written for that purpose, but to show a parallel between the New Israel and the Old. In Exodus 19, the Old Israel had been delivered from Egypt by means of the Passover incidents; they were called 'a kingdom and priests' (7) and were shortly to be given the Old Covenant, then proved in the wilderness and reign over the land of Canaan. Now the Lamb has prevailed to open the Book of Life (the greater, New Covenant) - counterpart to both the tables of stone and book of the covenant of Exodus 20ff., so it is logical that the term 'kingdom and priests' should occur at this exact place in the vision, as used by Peter (8) in exactly the same kind of context, but this new covenant people do not simply inherit the land (tes gēs) of Canaan, but will reign over the whole earth.

Thus, we are now a kingdom and priests in a non-political way. We have Christ as our head, having received all authority and power (8) but we shall reign over the earth.

The fourth occurrence is correctly translated 'the dominion of the world has become that of our Lord and of His Christ'. The word (9) 'basileia' is singular and, as there are more than one kingdom on earth, its meaning is evidently 'dominion' or sovereignty. It states that when the seventh, final and perfect proclamation of the Gospel is made, and the whole world becomes accountable to God, its judgment can commence and its sovereignty will pass to God and His Christ. The final (10) occasion steps backward in time, for it alludes to the end of the prince of this world, and to the anticipatory conquest we made at Calvary (11); the salvation which was made available

and the authority given to Christ, after which the Church passes through a wilderness journey until it enters the land, and the 'remnant of her seed' are produced.

2. The Future Kingdom

Despite its plain and uniform use of the word 'kingdom' the Apocalypse is not without its pictures of the ultimate 'political' kingdom in its promises to the Seven Churches; in occasional glimpses of the future and in the final vision of the City of God; yet it must be stressed that the picture of the City is a spiritual one. The contrast between the City and the 'four corners of the earth' (12) is not a spatial one, but between the future redeemed community and the rest of (13) the world. Questions of whether the vision is 'millennial' or 'post-millennial' are irrelevant. The City is a redeemed community, married to the Lamb at the beginning of the 'millennium' which grows until it contains all the inhabitants of the world.

A detailed treatment of the final vision is impossible but readers are referred to The City of God; the final chapter of Meditations on the (14) Last Message of Jesus. The First eight versions are an advance summary of the remainder of the vision. First, there is a description of the Holy City itself, as the tabernacle of God with men, then there is a picture of the waters which heal all nations, and finally there are promises of Divine sonship, and warnings to those who may not be able to enter the gates of the City.

The vision of new heavens and a new earth is primarily an extension of Isaiah's prophecy (15) of Jerusalem's restoration, but blended with that of the earlier Isaiah (16) where the picture of the fertile wilderness follows that (17) of desolation on Edom. As in the Apocalypse of Ezra, the figures of Edom and Israel are transmuted to mean the two ages, pre-Messianic and Messianic. The old heavens and earth were both Adamic and Edomic. The new heavens and earth are those which Jesus will bring with him.

No longer will there be the sea of ignorant nations, for the City succeeds where the Church failed, and carries on the process of evangelising until all who have never had the opportunity of knowing God are made accountable to Him. It is a matter of Divine discretion whether this community will comprise only the survivors of Armageddon or whether it will contain the innocently ignorant of all previous ages of mankind, who failed to receive the knowledge of God either because of Israel's or the Church's failure to communicate with them.

The community is taught throughout the Millennium. If its members 'wash their robes' (18) they can gain entrance to the City, just as the repentant from all previous ages of mankind have done. If they remain abominable etc. (18) or belong to any of the other prohibiting categories, they will remain outside the City and perish in the final conflagration at the end of the Millennium (19). The end of the Millennium is thus an incidental in the vision, when none will be left outside the City, for many outside it will be deemed worthy of entry by washing their robes, and all who obstinately remain outside it will have perished in the ultimate insurrection of mankind.

The picture of continuous salvation throughout the Millennium conflicts with the usual concept of a post-Millennial resurrection and judgement, but the latter view arose through mistakenly reading Rev 20:11ff. as a post-Millennial picture rather than one of a series of visions about the Millennium. The City is the immortal company; the tabernacle of God with men has the cubic shape of the Most Holy, not of the sanctuary. Teaching, probation and judgement are for all mankind (20) at the gates of the City, through which mankind may come from all directions and find acceptance. Early Old Testament judgement was conducted at the gates of a city (21). Here the figure is repeated. The 'thrones' on which the elect judge are the gates of entrance (22). As 'gates' the sons of Israel barred access by their exclusiveness. But now they are open, and the proselytes of all nations have to tread the foundations of the gates, the lives of the apostles of Christ, and discipline themselves to their standards, for the lives of Christ and the apostles will be a necessary threshold to all who would enter the City, and the living water of Divine teaching will issue from the throne of God, through the gates to all who would bathe in it.

There is a contrast between the living water (23) and the river of Eden. The Edenic river (24) divided to become four heads, but this river is undivided and has only one direction, for its direction is to give enlightenment and everlasting life to the remainder of mankind.

When this ideal is accomplished, the light of the City will consume all that is inglorious outside it, and death itself will be consumed in the lake of fire which is the second death. For the fire that descends from heaven to destroy all outside the City is the lake of fire, and the unrighteous who remain outside it and rebel against it will be destroyed by their very inability to stand the perfect glory of that perfect City from which they have excluded themselves, and against which they finally revolt. Thus, all who remain will be members of the City. The last millennial mortal to pass through the gates will crown its perfection - and God will be in all. (25).

References.

1. Genesis 1:26-28.
2. Rev. 16:10.
3. Rev. 17:12, 17 & 18.
4. Rev. 1:9.
5. 2 Tim. 2:12.
6. Rev. 1:5 & Rev. 5:10. 'kingdom favoured by Alexandrian & Sinaitic MSS.
7. Exodus 19:6.
8. I Peter 2:9. & Matt. 28:18.
9. Rev. 11:15.
10. Rev. 12:10.
11. John. 12:31.
12. Rev. 20:8.
13. Rev. 21:8 & 22. 15.
14. See - Meditations on the Last Message of Jesus, published by the present writer in 1974, for a fuller treatment of these chapters.
15. Isaiah 65:17-19.

16. Isaiah 35.
17. Isaiah 34. See also II Esdras 6:9, for similar usage of symbols in contemporary Apocalyptic thought.
18. Rev. 22:14-15.
19. Rev. 20: 7-10.
20. Rev. 20:12 & Rev. 21:24.
21. Gen 22:17, Ruth 4:1-2 etc.
22. Compare Rev. 20:4 with Rev. 21:25.
23. Rev. 22:1.
24. Gen 2:10.
25. 1 Cor 15:28.

A Modern View Of The Kingdom of God

by

JOHN WEAVING

That Jesus announced the imminence of the Kingdom of God is without doubt: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mk.1:15 R.S.V)

But apparently the Kingdom did not come; at least in any obvious sense. Numerous have been the explanations to reconcile this apparently unfulfilled proclamation of The Lord. None of these explanations have been entirely satisfactory and any explanation is very dependent on what we believe 'The Kingdom of God' to be in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

We propose to look at a modern explanation which, in the opinion of the author, has a lot to recommend it. This thesis is due largely to Perrin (1) under the influence of Bultmann and Jeremias (2) aided by Dodd's fundamentally important work entitled 'Parables of the Kingdom' (3).

We cannot examine the many concepts of the 'Kingdom of God' which have been put forward over the last century but those who wish to look at some of these in greater detail will find an earlier work of Perrin's very useful. (4) At the other extreme the Kingdom of God is held to be an escatological intervention of God, heralded by the second coming of Jesus. The first view is now discounted by most theologians, while the latter though it satisfies some of the revelation in the gospels it fails to fit all the aspects of the Kingdom preached by Jesus or indeed even those aspects covered by the parables alone.

Before one can give any credence to the propositions of Perrin some introductory explanations are necessary. Primarily it is assumed that some of the difficulties arise due to the shift of emphasis that had occurred by the time the synoptic gospels came to be written (Circa A.D.70). The church was overwhelmed by all that Christ had done for them and the magnitude of the intervention of God in raising his Son from the dead.

In the terms of Paul, they determined to know only "Jesus Christ, and him crucified". For this reason we find that Christ's own teaching takes a second place in the Pauline letters and indeed even in the Gospels. It is the passion narrative that dominates all four records. If therefore we want the original teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom we have to make a new assessment of the evidence.

The most important facets may lie in the smallest detail, rather than in the more overt passages such as the Olivet Prophecy. That John in his gospel made a re-assessment is clear for the Olivet Prophecy has vanished.

It is Perrin's thesis that the Kingdom of God started, albeit in a small way, there and then with Christ's pronouncement "The Kingdom of God is at hand" - God was about to intervene, in the person of Jesus, into the lives of those who would listen to him. Rather differently is an illustration given by Rudolf Bultmann that the Kingdom of God is like an express train coming into a station but not yet at the platform. The Kingdom is imminent but not here but demands an urgent decision by Jesus' hearers. Being an existentialist Bultmann is less concerned

with the event in time as the acceptance of the event by the believer. To him the future determines the present.

But the parables indicate that though Jesus may well have had this concept he put it forward not in Bultmann's 20th Century existential way but in a much more simple manner - in parables both told and enacted.

As Perrin and Jeremias show it is indeed a parable that gives us a very significant insight into the essence of the mission of Jesus. It is a little parable; in fact it is hardly more than a pretty illustration:-

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, 'We piped to you and you did not dance; We wailed and you did not mourn'.

For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." (Matt.11:16-19).

It might even have been made in some market place where the children were playing while the parents were occupied making their purchases. But the children are petulant - quarrelling about their games. In the words of Dodd:-

"It suggests the frivolous capriciousness of a generation who would not see that the movement inaugurated by John and brought to such an unexpected pitch by Jesus was a crisis of the first magnitude."

In the parable Jesus was saying, "Nothing will satisfy you; John the Baptist came - an ascetic - punishing his body with a rigid discipline of fasting and prayer. In contrast I can come a sociable type eating and drinking with the ordinary folk, and you accuse me of being a glutton and a drunkard. Yes. 'They fiddled while Rome was burning'." (5)

Our immediate reaction to the gluttony and drunkenness is to reject this inference and say that the Pharisees are misrepresenting the behaviour of Jesus. But we must be careful not to jump to conclusions too quickly - Jesus is admitting it! Obviously we are not saying that Jesus drank and ate to excess but nevertheless it is clear that Jesus was a happy man who habitually entered with empathy into the company of the common folk including prostitutes and gushing tax collectors and thereby got this reputation among the 'proper' living Jews and in particular Pharisees of a "wine bibber and a gluttonous man".

This gives a start to the proposition of Jeremias and Perrin that Jesus indulged in communal meals with his disciples and potential followers. How much support is there for this idea?

Where did he eat with them? Certainly not in the houses of the Pharisees. Their attitude is well demonstrated by Simon, the pharisee, where the sinner was certainly not a welcome guest. There is no direct evidence of where Jesus lived or lodged. On his journeys we know he had nowhere to lay his head. Nevertheless it seems he did entertain for it was a criticism of the Pharisees - "This man receives sinners and eats with them". (Luke 15:26)

Perhaps however we find that the strongest evidence lies in the subsequent practice of the early church in the celebration of the Last Supper. Whether or not Jesus commanded its celebration (5) there is no doubt that very early in the life of the church it was celebrated weekly (6). There is certainly no record that Jesus suggested a weekly celebration. Why did they then do this? The occasion of his death was the Passover and the infant church would not be slow in recognising God's Passover Lamb. This fact is made clear from John's gospel record. The Jews were used to annual celebrations and fasts - Passover, Feast of Weeks, Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement. So why did the church celebrate each week? The most likely explanation is that they had been used to regular frequent communal meals with their Master. The account of

the journey to Emmaus tells us of Jesus' characteristic mannerism of breaking bread. When he was taken away what was more natural than that they should replace his physical absence by the symbols of his death and resurrection, the wine and bread?

How does this connect with the Kingdom of God? Perrin proposes that Jesus made clear that his invitation to his communal meals was on behalf of God and that invitation to his society now was in earnest of an invitation to the Messianic Banquet in the final Kingdom of God. This may sound plausible but is the evidence sufficient? First, let us look at the occasion of the curing of the Centurion's servant. Jesus made the statement - "Many shall come from the East and the West and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven....." (Matt.8:11). This statement Perrin observes demands a content of a communal meal to which were invited some of his "dispersed" friends. The inference is - "Those that sit with me now will sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom." This idea is strongly supported by the 'parables of Growth' - The Leaven, The Mustard Seed, The Sower and The Patient Husbandman. The Kingdom starts in a small way but there will be a wonderful harvest.

This evidence may seem rather meagre but support is provided by the fact that Jesus spoke with 'authority', which in the gospel writer's view means the authority of God. This authority the author considers was apparent by inference and faith rather than by any direct statement. This is indicated by the fact that Jesus used the enigmatical title 'Son of Man' and left his followers to work out what this meant. (7)

This concept of the Kingdom in its beginning helps us to appreciate the significance of the pronouncement:-

"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mk.8:20)

The fact that Jesus forgave sins demonstrated his authority and earned him the title of 'Blasphemer'!

That Jesus believed in an escatological manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth is also beyond doubt but he says little of its nature. To remind ourselves:-

1. Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
(Matt. 6:10).
2. Blessed are the meek, for they
shall inherit the earth.
(Matt. 5:5) .
3. Blessed are the pure in heart
for they shall see God.
(Matt. 5:8).
4. The Olivet Prophecy.
(Mk.13).

W.H.Dahl (8) makes an important point, namely, that any historical understanding of the ministry and message of Jesus must make sense of the fact that the ministry ended on the cross. On this point Perrin argues that there must be something that Jesus said or did which gave the very greatest offence to his contemporaries. He says :-

"It is difficult to believe that this (the offence) would be an interpretation of the Law, however radical. Rabbis threatened one another with all kinds of things in their disputes.....but this was mostly by hyperbole and to bring the Romans in to settle a dispute about the Law, is really beyond the bounds of reasonable possibility. The cleansing of the Temple itself hardly suffices.... There must have been a factor in this situation which both drove the authorities themselves to desperate measures and also gave them a defence against popular accusation. We suggest a regular

table fellowship, in the name of the Kingdom of God, between Jesus and his followers..... would have been just such a factor". (9)

The author thinks there is a lot of strength in this argument. If Jesus were saying, "These fellowship meals are the beginnings of the Kingdom of God and I, as Son of Man, am inviting you into this Kingdom on behalf of my Father in heaven,"

we can well imagine the hatred the Pharisees developed and these sayings of Jesus gain more emphasis:-

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you neither enter yourself, nor allow those who would enter to go in". (Matt.23:13)

"Truly the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you".
(Matt.21:31b).

These are not only words but virtually actions taking place in their presence. It was very likely that the cleansing of the Temple was the last straw but if it was just that they feared his popularity they would have had him murdered quietly, or even stoned him for breaking the law, in some spot in the safety of Galilee, but they wanted more than this. They wanted a public execution and an overt demonstration that this man had the authority of Beelzebub not God.

Perrin sums up:-

"At all events, we are justified in seeing this table fellowship as the central feature of the ministry of Jesus, an anticipatory setting at the table in the Kingdom of God and a very real celebration of present joy and challenge. Here a great deal of the private teaching of Jesus to his disciples must have taken place especially the Lord's Prayer - and here the disciples must have come to know the special way that Jesus had of 'breaking bread'." (10)

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Fellowship In The Kingdom of God

"If a man says, 'I love God', while hating his brother, he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he hath not seen". (1 John 4:20 N.E.B.)

How can we get to know about God or his Kingdom? Is it only by an intellectual process or do the ingredients of love, faith and true fellowship play a vital part?

To analyse the relevant passages in the New Testament and from these set up a code of life and set of beliefs is valuable, as the New Testament is one of our great sources of knowledge. It is important to remember though that the essence of Christ's teaching is about living, and living with people; therefore much of our learning will come out of our relationships with others, from prayer and quiet reflection. This recognition requires the would-be Christian to be open and constantly attentive to the many aspects of 'truth' about him.

"God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him". (1 John 4:6)

We know that we cannot love in isolation, we must love something or someone. We also know that the object of our love assumes great importance, it is something which occupies a great deal of our attention, to be cherished and protected. Let us beware that our love is not materialistic or superficial, causing 'vanity and vexation of spirit.'

What has this to do with the 'Kingdom' taught by Jesus? We know that Jesus established a fellowship, a society of people that cared. Like Jesus this society cared not just for each other but for all, the despised, the prostitutes, the tax collectors.

'It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and bear our testimony, we here declare to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. And we write this in order that the joy of us all may be complete.'" (1 John 1-4 N.E.B.)

However it can remain difficult to decide the practical out working of this 'common life' in the complex society of today, which we are told we share together with the Father and Jesus.

The early Christians had a similar problem and tried out a form of true 'communism' where they had all things in common (Acts 4:32). Nothing more is heard of this experiment and presumably this fellowship failed to establish itself. Many so-called 'utopian' Christian societies have been formed since. Two of the more recent ones - the Oneida Community of Perfectionists and the Bruderhof were established at the end of the 19th century. The former has been dissolved, while the Bruderhof struggle on in six small isolated groups in Germany, Britain and Paraguay.

The failure of these sects to establish themselves was often caused by the death of their leader, who was able to hold together a community which is bound to contain some divergent views (1).

Ref (1) Religious Sects - Bryan Wilson - World Univ. Library.

If Christ wanted societies of this nature, then it would appear that his teaching has failed in this respect. However a broad look at the attitude of Jesus reveals that he was not so interested in the institutions as such. For instance he must have found a lot in the synagogue procedure with which he disagreed, but he seems to have said little about it and we know he frequented them. In contrast however he did criticise their leader's behaviour.

He does not appear to have said anything about slavery but he did set the slaves 'free' by convincing them that in the sight of God they were of more value than their rich masters. This indicates that Jesus was more concerned with the individual than the institution, that he wished to encourage individual creativity, particularly in the growth of personality.

This leads us to believe that his 'fellowship' was much more 'informal', (for want of a better word). His 'fellowship' might be the close relationship of a group with a common purpose, which was most certainly the case during his own short ministry. The twelve apostles were such a group. Again we remember he sent out the 'seventy' - a group, bearing the name or at least the banner of the 'Kingdom of God' (Luke 10:9). This was a fellowship with a common purpose, but a diversity of individuals.

The superiority of this type of fellowship is that it does not become 'inbred' but retains contact with all God's creatures, which it seeks to influence, hopefully for good.

Paul was the principle exponent, of the establishment of such groups which were called 'Ecclesias' basically meaning 'those called out' but used previously in the Greek world for groups of gentile citizens regularly convened, such as parish or town councils today. Whatever meaning the name originally conveyed, the ecclesias very soon became exclusive units in the gentile world. This was more or less inevitable because of the worship of different gods - "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" says Paul and of course Christianity was drawn out of an already very exclusive community, the Jews.

There will always be squabbling and strife within any group, and tragically Christians have been no exception, the various denominations each believing that its way of serving God was the more acceptable.

But if we approach God through man in the spirit of John's exhortation with which this article opens, this strife is less likely to occur. If we love our neighbour as ourselves and begin to see God in the reflected light that shines from our fellows, imperfect though we all are, we may move along together in mutual love and fellowship rather than with competitive self-righteousness which springs up so easily in all human society!

W.R.

SUMMER SCHOOL.

SATURDAY JULY 31st - AUGUST 6th 1976.

FIRCROFT COLLEGE, BRISTOL ROAD, SELLY OAK,
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It might be asked - What else is there to be said on this subject after close on 2000 years of debate? However, even a simple reading of any of the gospels without any particular study reveals that there are both present and future aspects of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Christ and the combining of these two aspects has not, in the opinion of most, been properly resolved. The new element in this discussion is the outcome of some 100 years of study that has sought with some considerable success, to place the teaching of the New Testament in its original setting (theologically called by its German name *sitz im leben*. This seems to be at a minimum a fruitful fresh approach to re-assessing what Christ meant by the Kingdom. We may say that he really would not have been that obscure for he preached to common folk. The answer to this is probably twofold. The spiritual aspects have to be appreciated inwardly not just intellectually - or as modern philosophers would say "existentially". This is difficult to express in words, particularly in written words because it can have a different meaning for different people. Secondly, Jesus acted as well as spoke and people would see aspects of the Kingdom in his unique and contrasting behaviour in comparison with the practice of the day.

Well, we hope that these articles in this 50th edition will attract useful discussion and perhaps more of our readers will become writers and help us to return to our original purpose - to stimulate Christian action.

J.H.W.

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