The Kingdom *of* God

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Contents

Series Preface

As the series name, *Theology in Community*, indicates, *theology* in community aims to promote clear thinking on and godly responses to historic and contemporary theological issues. The series examines issues central to the Christian faith, including traditional topics such as sin, the atonement, the church, and heaven, but also some which are more focused or contemporary, such as suffering and the goodness of God, the glory of God, the deity of Christ, and the kingdom of God. The series strives not only to follow a sound theological method but also to display it.

Chapters addressing the Old and New Testaments on the book's subject form the heart of each volume. Subsequent chapters synthesize the biblical teaching and link it to historical, philosophical, systematic, and pastoral concerns. Far from being mere collections of essays, the volumes are carefully crafted so that the voices of the various experts combine to proclaim a unified message.

Again, as the name suggests, theology *in community* also seeks to demonstrate that theology should be done in teams. The teachings of the Bible were forged in real-life situations by leaders in God's covenant communities. The biblical teachings addressed concerns of real people who needed the truth to guide their lives. Theology was formulated by the church and for the church. This series seeks to recapture that biblical reality. The volumes are written by scholars, from a variety of denominational backgrounds and life experiences with academic credentials and significant expertise across the spectrum of theological disciplines, who collaborate with each other. They write from a high view of Scripture with robust evangelical conviction and in a gracious manner. They are not detached academics but are personally involved in ministry, serving as teachers, pastors, and missionaries. The contributors to these volumes stand in continuity with the historic church, care about the global church, share life together with other believers in local churches, and aim to write for the good of the church to strengthen its leaders, particularly pastors, teachers, missionaries, lay leaders, students, and professors.

For the glory of God and the good of the church,

Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson

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Introduction

> It is clear that no view of Christ's person and work which is separated from the context of the Kingdom [of God] can claim to reflect a biblical mode of thought.[1]

David Wells is right. A good grasp of the kingdom of God is indispensable for a proper understanding of Christ and the redemption that he accomplished. The kingdom of God is a very large biblical category indeed. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of the kingdom would illuminate many aspects of theology. But to obtain such an understanding is not so easy! In fact, to attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of the kingdom of God is to invite many problems. We begin by considering one of those problems.

Jesus' Statements about the Kingdom Appear to Be Contradictory

At first glance Christ's statements concerning the kingdom appear contradictory.

> *Is the kingdom present or future?*
> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matt. 12:28)
>
> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (Matt. 26:29)
>
> *Does the kingdom concern salvation or judgment?*
> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34)
>
> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and sepa-

[1]David F. Wells, The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 23.

> rate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:47–50)
>
> *Does the kingdom mean that God rules, or is it the place where he rules?* And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:31–33)
>
> You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28–30)

Of course, these questions provide false choices, and a deeper look at Jesus' words reveals that he views the kingdom as multifaceted. He speaks of the kingdom as both present and future, as including both salvation and judgment, as encompassing both rule and locus. In addition, the kingdom pertains to human beings, angels, and the heavens and earth.

Jesus Emphasizes the Kingdom

From first to last, Jesus' message underscores the kingdom of God. Matthew summarizes Jesus' early Galilean ministry: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Matt. 4:23). Toward the middle of his ministry, Jesus defends himself against the wicked accusation that he casts out demons by Satan: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). And in the presence of Pilate before Jesus' crucifixion, he declares, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (John 18:36).

Widely Divergent Views of the Kingdom

When Jesus speaks of the kingdom, he emphasizes God's action. R. S. Barbour correctly states, "Because this theme of God's action was so central to Jesus, the Kingdom of God has tended to become a cover-phrase

for varied understandings of that action in the world."[2] This is an understatement, as quotations from representatives of five kingdom perspectives show: classic liberalism, the "social gospel," liberation theology, Christian reconstructionism, and postmodern evangelicalism.

First, the classic liberal theologian, Adolf von Harnack:

> The kingdom of God comes by coming to the individual, by entering into his soul and laying hold of it. True, the kingdom of God is the rule of God; but it is the rule of the holy God in the hearts of individuals; *it is God himself in his power*. From this point of view everything that is dramatic in the external and historical sense has vanished; and gone, too, are all the external hopes for the future. Take whatever parable you will, the parable of the sower, the pearl of great price, of the treasure buried in the field—the word of God, God himself, is the kingdom. It is not a question of angels and devils, thrones and principalities, but of God and the soul, the soul and its God.[3]

Second, the "father of the social gospel," Walter Rauschenbusch:

> The social gospel . . . plainly concentrates religious interest on the great ethical problems of social life. It scorns the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, at which the Pharisees are still busy, and insists on getting down to the weightier matters of God's law, to justice and mercy. . . . The non-ethical practices and beliefs in historical Christianity nearly all centre on the winning of heaven and immortality. On the other hand, the Kingdom of God can be established by nothing except righteous life and action. There is nothing in social Christianity which is likely to breed or reinforce superstition. The more the social gospel engages and inspires theological thought, the more will religion be concentrated on ethical righteousness.[4]

Third, the most famous liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez:

> If we believe that the Kingdom of God is a gift which is received in history, and if we believe, as the eschatological promises—so charged with human and historical content—indicate to us, that the Kingdom of God necessarily implies the reestablishment of justice in this world, then we must believe that Christ says the poor are blessed *because* the Kingdom of God has begun: "The time has come; the Kingdom of

[2]The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought, ed. Adrian Hastings et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 370.
[3]What Is Christianity? (New York: Harper, 1956), 56, italics original.
[4]Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 15.

> God is upon you" (Mark 1:15). In other words, the elimination of the exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human has begun; a Kingdom of justice which goes even beyond what they could have hoped for has begun. They are blessed because the coming of the Kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of fellowship.[5]

Fourth, the original Christian reconstructionist, R. J. Rushdoony:

> To ensure the continuity of Christ's kingdom on earth, the church was established to extend over all the earth the crown rights of the Lord of Glory, and to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). So great is the supernatural power of Christ's true and faithful church that the very gates of hell cannot prevail or hold out against it (Matt. 16:18). . . . The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is this Lord of Glory. It is thus the duty of the modern state to let Him in and to submit to Him, not to control Him. . . . In Scripture, the state has a specific ministry, the ministry of justice (Rom. 13:1). Its place in the plan of God is a real if limited one. The state must be the servant of the Messiah.[6]

Fifth, an influential evangelical postmodernist, Brian McClaren:

> According to him, the good news of the kingdom is a story of heaven invading earth and transforming it, saving it, healing it. . . . An ecclesia [a church] is a gathering of people who identify themselves as citizens of the kingdom of God, living by a higher calling—the way of Jesus and his message of the kingdom. . . . The kingdom of God, Jesus said, was "good news for the poor." There is a personal dimension to the kingdom of God, to be sure, in which we have a personal relationship with the King. But there is also a social dimension to the kingdom of God, a dimension that challenges normal human (and religious) assumptions about peace, war, prosperity, poverty, privilege, responsibility, religion, and God.[7]

Our Goal

Here are five very different conceptions of the kingdom of God—each containing at least elements of truth. But each also fails to capture the full biblical message of the kingdom. It seems that doing so is a difficult task, as Howard Marshall explains:

[5]Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 170–71, italics original.
[6]R. J. Rushdoony, Christianity and the State (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1986), 33, 72, 74.
[7]Brian McClaren, http://pomomusings.com/2008/01/14/brian-mclaren-on-the-kingdom-of-god/.

> Although the phrase [the Kingdom of God] has been the subject of much biblical research in recent years, and although it is banded about with great frequency in discussions of Christian social action, it is unfortunately often the case that it is used in a very vague manner and that there is a lack of clear biblical exposition in the churches on the meaning of the term.[8]

The purpose of this book is to remedy this situation. It seeks to capture a fuller understanding of the kingdom of God than any one of the five conceptions above. How? By adopting historical, biblical, theological, and ethical perspectives, it attempts to move closer to a comprehensive exposition of the kingdom.

A Roadmap

A roadmap will guide readers. Steven J. Nichols leads off with "The Kingdoms of God: The Kingdom in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," in which he demonstrates the differences and similarities of varying ideas of the kingdom throughout history and their implications for theology and life today. Four chapters on the kingdom in Scripture anchor this volume. Bruce K. Waltke lays underpinnings by treating "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: Definitions and Story" and "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: The Covenants." Robert W. Yarbrough builds upon them in chapters that continue the biblical story in "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: "Matthew and Revelation" and "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Mark through the Epistles."

A biblical foundation is essential, but to construct a theological building we need a superstructure. The next four chapters are just that. Clinton E. Arnold deals with "The Kingdom, Miracles, Satan, and Demons" in the "already" and the "not yet." Gregg R. Allison explores the complex relationship of "The Kingdom and the Church" and its ramifications for the church's mission. Gerald Bray considers the present and the future, and time and eternity, in "The Kingdom and Eschatology." And Anthony B. Bradley concludes by applying the theology of the kingdom to eight principles of orthopraxis and justice in "The Kingdom Today."

Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson

[8] I. Howard Marshall, Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 213.

1

The Kingdoms of God

The Kingdom in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.—Matthew 24:14

For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain the kingdom of which there is no end?—Augustine, *The City of God*

Leo Tolstoy, author of such classic novels as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, also tried his hand at nonfiction. In 1894 he penned one such piece, entitled *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. The novelist went looking for a solution to the socio-political challenges his native Russia faced as the new century loomed. In most parts of the globe, optimism reigned as the new millennium approached. Such optimism especially ran high throughout most of Europe and in North America. But Tolstoy saw the roadblocks and hurdles in the path when it came to his homeland. He saw the hindrances that lay between his fellow countrymen and the safe and sound arrival of what many were hailing as "The Christian Century." Tolstoy went looking for a way into the utopian "Christian Century." He found what he believed to be the answer in Christ's words from Luke 17:21 (KJV), the words that he used to title his book. Tolstoy found the

kingdom of God. Or, more accurately, he found what he thought was the kingdom of God.

The phrase, "The kingdom of God," not only captivated this Russian novelist; it has also captivated theologians, biblical scholars, churchmen, and laity through the centuries. Some have claimed the kingdom to be the central message of Jesus' teachings. In fact many have. And there are about as many interpretations of the kingdom as there are theologians addressing it. This essay lays out the history, the long and curious history, of interpreting the phrase the "kingdom of God," and its variants such as the "kingdom of heaven," throughout the Christian tradition. Looking deeply at this phrase reveals a number of things, chiefly the differences within the Christian tradition regarding understanding the kingdom and, more importantly, the far-reaching implications of understanding the kingdom for the rest of one's theology. Like the tentacles of an octopus, how one understands the kingdom of God reaches and stretches out to all other areas of doctrine.

The church can little afford to neglect theological consideration of the kingdom of God. As perplexing as it might be, and as much of a source of disagreement the kingdom and eschatology might be, the church must grapple with it. Such an understanding of the kingdom is first and foremost informed by the pages of Scripture. But we will also be aided by the work of those who have gone on before. In the pages of church history we will see wisdom, perhaps also a share of folly. Even such folly, however, can be good for us for it can alert us to our own folly—or at the very least our own limitation—in interpretation. To set the stage for this journey into the Christian tradition, consider the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, from the 1880s through the 1920s, the time period in which Tolstoy wrote his book, a time period in which the kingdom received a great deal of attention.

The Coming of the Twentieth Century and the Coming of the Kingdom of God: Setting the Stage for a History of the Kingdom

Returning to Tolstoy, what the Russian novelist found in this deceptively simple little phrase—"The kingdom of God is within you"—set him off articulating a strange, but not so foreign, concept in the modern age, that of pitting the Jesus of history against the Jesus of faith or the Jesus of Christianity. The Jesus of some parts of the four Gospels, the "historical Jesus," was a far cry, Tolstoy and a long train of others argued, from the Jesus of Christianity, the Jesus of the creeds. In his book, Tolstoy

seems to have particularly the Nicene Creed in his sights. And, to Tolstoy, understanding what Jesus meant by the seven words of this Luke 17:21 phrase held the key to opening the door to understanding Jesus properly. In Tolstoy's hands, capable writer that he was, the phrase "The kingdom of God is within you," meant that Jesus was all about human life, human flourishing, in the here and now. He was not some God-Man who died on the cross as a substitute, rose again bodily from the grave, and will come again visibly to bring swift justice and sweep all of humanity and creation into the long-awaited eschaton—all the dogma of the creeds. No, Tolstoy thunders on in his prose. Such theological platitudes had precious little to do with improving the plight of the peasant. The kingdom that Jesus spoke of, as Tolstoy understood it, is here and now:

> The Sermon on the Mount, or the Creed. One cannot believe in both. And Churchmen have chosen the latter. . . . People who believe in a wicked and senseless God—who has cursed the human race and devoted his own Son to sacrifice, and a part of mankind to eternal torment—cannot believe in the God of love. The man who believes in a God, in a Christ coming again in glory to judge and to punish the quick and the dead, cannot believe in the Christ who bade us turn the left cheek, judge not, forgive these that wrong us, and love our enemies. . . . The man who believes in the Church's doctrine of the compatibility of warfare and capital punishment with Christianity cannot believe in the brotherhood of all men.
>
> And what is most important of all—the man who believes in salvation through faith in the redemption or the sacraments, cannot devote all his powers to realizing Christ's moral teaching in his life.[1]

Tolstoy ironically becomes like one of the false prophets Jesus warned about. Jesus told his disciples that there would be those to come who would point and say, "There's the kingdom." Jesus told his disciples not to believe in such a message and not to follow such a messenger. When Tolstoy says, in effect, "Look here, at this ethical system, this is the kingdom of God," he could not be more off target.

At about the same time Tolstoy was writing in Russia, theologians and biblical scholars in Germany were striking similar keys on their typewriters, promulgating what has come to be called "Realized

[1]Leo Tolstoy, The Kingdom of God Is Within You (Watchmaker Publishing: Seaside, OR, 2010), 43. One critic has hailed this work as the best of Tolstoy's many forays into nonfiction. Perhaps Tolstoy should have stayed with fiction.

Eschatology." Tolstoy was not alone. In 1892 Johannes Weiss published *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*. This book marks a watershed in the so-called "quest for the historical Jesus" movement that occupied so much of German theologizing in the nineteenth century (and would continue into the twentieth century as well). As Benedict Viviano explains, "[Weiss's] book was so offensive because liberal theology had a bad conscience about its suppression of Jesus' eschatology. It was not ignorant of it. It simply hoped to keep it a dirty little secret. Thanks to Weiss, the liberal emperor was seen to have no clothes."[2] Weiss put eschatology and Jesus' message of the kingdom at the center of the quest. The twentieth century would be the century of the kingdom, as far as theological discussions were concerned.

Though Weiss himself held to a future realization of Jesus' kingdom message and eschatology, other theologians followed the trajectory he set out and left the future behind. In the hands of such English theologians in the Anglican tradition as Charles Dodd, J. A. T. Robertson, and G. B. Caird, the kingdom of God was understood to be entirely for the present and not for the future. There would be no physical, visible second coming. There would be no apocalyptic kingdom. Eschatology consequently became not a matter of the sweet by and by, but entirely a matter of the gritty here and now. Just as some of Jesus' early disciples missed the point, thinking he was speaking of a kingdom to come, so also centuries worth of theologians had done the same as they speculated and theorized about some cataclysmic future event that would set in motion the end times. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as being in the midst of his contemporary audiences, Dodd and his fellow adherents of realized eschatology argued, Jesus meant it.[3]

In this teaching of "realized eschatology," the kingdom is entirely here and now. Eschatology—and all that this subject of theology concerns, including the meaning of the kingdom, the second coming, the events of the end times, the future judgments, even heaven and hell—is fully *realized* now. All that is bound up in eschatology is made real and experienced in this life, in this world.

[2]Benedict T. Viviano, "Eschatology and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," in The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79. See also Wendell Willis, "The Discovery of the Eschatological Kingdom: Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer," in The Kingdom of God in Twentieth Century Interpretation, ed. Wendell Willis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 1–14.

[3]Viviano, "Eschatology and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," 81. While Dodd initially held to both a present and future kingdom, he moved to see the "futuristic passages" as fully understandable within a framework of realized eschatology. See C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet, 1935).

And concurrent with Tolstoy and Weiss and the Germans, American theologians were also getting in on the act. Among the more liberal strands of American theology, realized eschatology appeared to win the day. In the hands of Baptist German-American Walter Rauschenbusch, realized eschatology would result in the Social Gospel movement. The gospel, Rauschenbusch argued in the early years of the 1900s, has nothing to do with sinners in need of salvation, but instead has everything to do with the socially oppressed and marginalized realizing justice.[4] Realized eschatology became the central driving force in his theology. For Rauschenbusch, the idea that the kingdom is now means that salvation is now, that judgment is now, that heaven and hell are now. Of course, for such things to be now requires that one take the New Testament teaching on these subjects as mere poetry, myth, and metaphor. And, from its proponents Tolstoy, Weiss, and Dodd, this realized eschatology also requires an uneasiness—if not flat out rejection—of the Jesus of the creeds. There is an unbroken, almost necessary, linkage between how one defines the kingdom message of Jesus, how one understands the overall thrust of the ministry and message of Jesus, and what one believes about his person. If the definition of the kingdom is off, so is the rest. Once that false move is made, all the central and defining tenets of Christianity fall like dominoes.

But the social gospel liberals were not the only American theologians transfixed with deciphering the meaning of the kingdom of God. The dispensationalists, also getting started in this same time frame of the 1880s to the early 1900s, stand at the opposite end from the realized eschatology movement. This movement began with the writings of the churchman John Nelson Darby. Born in London, Darby went on to study at Trinity College, Dublin. Upon completing his degree, he became ordained in the Anglican Church of Ireland. Darby soon found his own thinking at odds with Anglicanism, from which he departed and began, along with others, the Plymouth Brethren movement. Through his writings, and his focus on biblical prophecy, Darby gave expression to dispensationalism, a view that holds a deep and wide distinction between Israel and the church and emphasizes a literal interpretation of biblical prophecy. Dispensationalism was nurtured in North American soil at prophecy conferences in such places as Niagara Falls; Winona Lake, Indiana; and

[4]Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis (New York: MacMillan, 1907), and A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: MacMillan, 1927).

Philadelphia. And it was brought to fruition with the 1917 publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* (named after C. I. Scofield).

Dispensationalism stresses the *future* and apocalyptic piece to eschatology. Christ will come again. Actually, his second coming will have two parts. The first part will be the rapture, a secret coming in which Christ takes the church to heaven to be with him. Christ will then come again physically at the conclusion of the literal, seven-year tribulation. This will be followed by the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth (the millennium), which will be followed by the final judgment, the damned to an eternity in hell, and the righteous to an eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. In the meantime, the kingdom of God has been put on hold. Instead of seeing the kingdom (or even seeing any part of the kingdom) as present, these early dispensationalists saw the church as a "parenthesis" in God's program, interrupting God's direct dealing with Israel. Someday in the future, God would return to deal with Israel, and the kingdom in all of its literal manifestation would come. For now, however, God is working through and in the church, and the kingdom is postponed. Contrary to the "realized eschatology" of the liberal theologians, dispensationalists proclaimed a wholly future eschatology.[5]

And so from Russian novelists to German theologians to American prophecy conference speakers, the kingdom of God received a boatload of attention. Four things can be gleaned from this brief foray into the eschatological conversation of the 1880s through the 1920s. First, consider the overwhelming emphasis on eschatology in the theologizing of this time period. The sheer volume of books published on the subject nearly outweighs books on eschatology from all previous centuries of the church's life combined. Further, this was not just an emphasis among academic theologians. Such masses of conference goers flocked to Winona Lake in the summertime that the Chicago Railroad built a designated line running from the city to the middle of the farm plains of Indiana. Prophecy and the kingdom of God were topics that had captivated the hearts and minds of the public as well.

The rest of the twentieth century evidences similar fascination. Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* dominated the *New York Times* best-seller's lists in the 1970s. And its sales but shadow the *Left Behind* novels from the pens of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. In 1996, while at the

[5]This scheme follows the pattern of Revelation, as dispensationalists interpret the book, seeing chapters 6–18 as referring to the seven-year tribulation, chapter 19 referring to the second coming, chapter 20 referring to the literal millennial reign of Christ, and chapters 21–22 referring to the final judgments and eternity future.

Christian Booksellers' Convention in Anaheim, California, I could not even make my way through the lines to get into the auditorium for that evening's main event, a prophecy conference. In the end I gave my prized ticket to a most grateful student of prophecy—the telltale sign being the particular study Bible firmly clutched in his hands—waiting with all the fervor of eschatological hope in the standby line. The meaning of the kingdom was crucial in this 1880s–1920s time period, and it remains crucial, if not central, to many to the present day.

The second thing to be learned from this eschatological discussion concerns how eschatology touches other areas of theology. One's view of eschatology has implications for how one views the person of Christ, the gospel, and the nature and mission of the church. One's view of eschatology informs and is also informed by—this is a theological version of the chicken and the egg conundrum—one's hermeneutics, one's understanding of the Old Testament, the Gospels, prophetic books, apocalyptic literature, and the relationship between the Testaments. Simply consider understanding the Gospel of Matthew. How you define the kingdom will govern how you read and interpret the first Gospel. In other words, how we view the kingdom of God is not an isolated piece of theology. The same is true of the rest of the biblical teaching on the kingdom. Our view of the kingdom of God stretches out to nearly every part of our hermeneutic, biblical understanding, and theology.

Third, we learn from this eschatological discussion of the 1880s–1920s of the broad and vast differences within the Christian tradition. This period reveals what will become the wide terrain of the Christian tradition on eschatology. There are myriad interpretations of the kingdom of God. Tony Campolo, in his inimitable way, once even defined the kingdom of God as, yes, a party.[6] It is far more accurate to speak of kingdoms (plural) of God. To put the matter another way: of the making of eschatologies there seems to be no end. What are we to make of all of these differences? This is a significant piece of the discussion, to which we will return in the conclusion of this essay.

Fourth and finally, this eschatological conversation of the 1880s–1920s reveals a center-point to the discussion. Eschatology is vast, touching on all matters of biblical interpretation and views of the end times. When facing such broad horizons a center-point can help bring focus, which in

[6]Tony Campolo, The Kingdom of God Is a Party: God's Radical Plan for His Family (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992).

turn can promote understanding. To switch metaphors, we need a handle on the far-reaching subject of eschatology. And we find that handle in the center-point of the discussion—the phrase "the kingdom of God."

In the pages to follow of this essay, we will explore the route this phrase has taken through the history of the Christian tradition in order to shed some light on what the phrase and its implications mean for the church today. We will look at the historical perspectives on this phrase in these successive eras: the early church, the medieval age, the Reformation and Puritan eras, and the modern age. To get a handle on the contemporary perspectives on this phrase we will look at both the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. As with all surveys, what follows is more a summary of the high points than a comprehensive treatment. Nevertheless, we stand to be informed significantly by the distant and immediate past as we seek our own understanding of the kingdom of God.

"The Days Shall Come in Which Vines Shall Grow": The Kingdom of God in the Early Church

Papias, as tradition has it, was taught by the very elders who themselves had been taught by the apostle John. Sadly, though, our connection to Papias is mostly indirect, coming to us through the writings of Irenaeus—himself, as tradition holds, taught by the aged apostle John as well. Papias envisioned a future time of blessing, a future entrance into the fullness of God's promise. He writes with a fervor not unlike John the apostle:

> The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine.[7]

If you do the math—Papias's calculations have each grape yielding about 260 gallons—that's a lot of wine. He follows with a discussion of an equally impressive amount of grain. Though Papias uses earthly language to describe the bounties of this future, he, like his fellow church fathers, stressed that this was a future kingdom not contiguous with the present world. The present world, overrun by wickedness and under the spell of

[7]Papias, Fragments, IV, Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 314–15; see also Irenaeus, Against Heresies, bk. 5, chap. 33; A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr–Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 562–63.

Rome, will come to an end. The present world will literally crash and burn. And then God's kingdom, not of this world and filled to the brim and beyond with wine, shall come.

Justin Martyr argued from this very position in his apologetics. As Charles Hill explains, "[Justin Martyr] castigates the Romans for assuming, when they hear that the Christians look for a kingdom, that this kingdom is a human one."[8] On the contrary, Justin argued that the kingdom of God was a kingdom not of this world. But Papias, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr all saw this future kingdom of God as a physical kingdom, with material blessings. When they spoke of grapes and wine and grain and bread, they were talking about grapes and wine and grain and bread.

Tertullian follows suit, even adding a sharpness to an idea present in his fellow pre-Nicene church fathers, that of chiliasm or millennialism. This view, which later theologians would call "historic premillennialism," holds to a two-stage future, consisting first of a literal thousand-year reign of God on earth and then, second, of the eternal state. Here we begin to see the linking of the kingdom of God with a future cataclysmic event and the end times, opening the door to the millennium (viewed as a literal thousand-year time period; see Rev. 20:1–6), which then leads to the eternal state. The connection of the kingdom of God to millennial or chiliastic thinking was a crucial step in the historical development of the theology of the kingdom. Equally important to the discussion of the kingdom in the early church were the resurrection of the dead and the intermediate state. To pursue this, however, lies beyond the scope of this essay.[9]

The idea of chiliasm or millennialism merits attention. Previous studies have argued for a consensus view of these pre-Nicene early church fathers, claiming they were nearly all of the historic premillennial persuasion and singling out Origen as the proverbial exception proving the rule. Charles Hill has documented, however, that this was not the only view of the early church fathers up until 325 and that Origen did not stand alone. Against Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and a cast of others, Charles Hill lines up Clement, Polycarp, Hippolytus, and another cast of others, not to mention Origen, who do not share this premillennialism. Some figures on this other side of the millennial fence even explicitly reject it.[10]

[8]Charles E. Hill, Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 23.
[9]See ibid. for a full discussion of early church views on the relationship between the intermediate state and the kingdom of God.
[10]Ibid., 1–20, 75–76.

The standout figure here is Origen with his spiritual view of the kingdom. No doubt (overly) influenced by Neoplatonic thought, Origen was quite troubled by the physicality—like that of Papias's wildly fruitful grape clusters—and literalness—like that of Tertullian's hermeneutic—afoot. In his *Hexapla*, he lays forth the threefold sense of his hermeneutic, comprised of the literal, the moral, and the allegorical. He was captivated by the latter, applying his allegorical method with abandon to the biblical teaching of the kingdom, especially to the earthy descriptions of the kingdom in the scrolls of the Old Testament Prophets. When these prophets talk about grapes and wine and grain and bread, Origen argued, they were *certainly not* talking about grapes and wine and grain and bread. They were using the physical to point to the true, deeper, spiritual meaning. The kingdom of God is, according to Origen, spiritual. All of those prophesied blessings speak of the glories of the soul's union with God.[11] Benedict T. Viviano speaks of Origen's "interiorization" of the kingdom, citing as evidence his repeated reference to the kingdom of God "in us."[12]

Hill sets forth a nuanced view of the kingdom of God in the first few centuries of the church's life, seeing both millennialist views (historic premillennialism) and non-millennialist views. The upshot of this means that, when it comes to thinking on the kingdom of God from 100 through the 300s, there is one line of interpretation that stresses the future, literal, and physical kingdom of God to come and another line of interpretation that sees the kingdom of God as spiritual, realized in the soul's union with God now, and to be consummated in the future.

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As we move out of the 300s and into the 400s we encounter one of the most significant stages of the historical development of the theology of the kingdom of God—that of Augustine and his work. He seems to follow in the train of Origen, and there are indeed similarities. But Augustine's view, in the end, is all his own. His view is worth understanding because it almost exclusively dominated the field for centuries and continues to be deeply felt.

Though Augustine discusses quite a few subjects in his monumental *City of God* (written on and off from 413–427), the kingdom of God takes center stage. Augustine prefers the term city, from Psalm 87:3, though

[11]Origen, again following his philosophical commitments, puts exclusive stress on the soul.
[12]Benedict T. Viviano, The Kingdom of God in History (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 42.

he does not mean a geographical place. He writes, "These we also mystically call the two cities, or the two communities of men, of which one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil."[13]

Though Augustine was an ardent opponent of Neoplatonism, platonic ideas nevertheless do influence his thoughts on the kingdom. The physical descriptions of blessings, which Papias took literally, point Augustine past the shadow, the real, and on to the substance, the ideal. The abundance of physical blessings, in other words, served as the vehicle the biblical authors used to deliver their message of the real essence of the kingdom of God, which is the unadulterated union with the Triune God and the future absolute reign of God over all things. Augustine declares, "How great shall be that felicity, which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all."[14] Augustine's view of the kingdom, as that of Papias and Tertullian and the other literalists, involves a future kingdom, one that came once this life passed. So he writes with a faraway look in his eye of the kingdom to come, "whilst on our pilgrimage we sigh for its beauty."[15]

Augustine then stresses a figurative kingdom, derived from an allegorical or figurative hermeneutic, which will be consummated in the future. And in Augustine's philosophy of history, the kingdom is not only the end chronologically, it is also the end teleologically. So he writes, "For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain the kingdom of which there is no end?"[16] The *civitas terrena* (City of Man) will pass away and only the *civitas Dei* (City of God) will remain.

Two things emerge from this brief look into the early church's perspective on the kingdom of God. One concerns the variegated nature of the perspectives. It is an oversimplification to speak of the early church's understanding of the kingdom as monolithic. We should recognize that there are differences.

The second thing that emerges concerns the influence of the sociological or cultural situation on theologizing. That is to say, the various views of the kingdom of God put forth by the church fathers were influenced by their respective contexts. Martyrs and those facing persecution (including mostly, but not exclusively, figures from the pre-Nicene era)

[13]Augustine, The City of God, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 473 (bk. 15, chap. 1).
[14]Ibid., 864 (bk. 22, chap. 30).
[15]Ibid., 166 (bk. 5, chap. 16).
[16]Ibid., 867 (bk. 22, chap. 30).

looked for a time when the tables would be reversed. The kingdom was to be a time of rich blessing for the poor, the outcast, those we would call today the socially marginalized. In another vein, Augustine developed a hermeneutic and a theology, specifically a theology of the kingdom, both impacted by his platonic tendencies and by the immediate circumstances of the fall of Rome. The earthly cities, no matter how glorious, have their limits and their final ends. What may be said of this dynamic of the cultural influence on theologizing about the kingdom of God applies equally to theologians and biblical scholars working in the centuries since and right up to the twenty-first century.

The End of the World: The Kingdom of God in the Medieval Church

As mentioned, Augustine's understanding of the kingdom of God and, consequently, his eschatology, dominated the medieval period. One notable exception, however, was the thinking of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202). Joachim's work sparked an apocalyptic frenzy among followers on the one hand and received an anathema from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1213 on the other hand.

Joachim, taking his cue from certain verses of the book of Revelation and texts elsewhere in Scripture, uncovered a secret code outlining the three successive *status*, or states, of God's dealings with humanity. The third *status* was the time in which he lived and, as he saw things, which would come to an end at 1260, at which time the Antichrist would be revealed in a time of conflict, ushering in the end times.[17] Joachim reintroduced millennial thinking and linked such thinking to the political moves of the day, mixing temporal causes with the eternal cause of the reign of righteousness. This was the era of the Crusades. His followers, the Joachimites, ranged the spectrum from the tame to the fanatic. And his views, once they trickled down, were quite popular among the masses, and even among kings, like the famed Richard the Lionhearted. Joachim placed a focus on Revelation, a book sometimes obscured due to its complexity. The careful study of the last book of the New Testament, he argued, revealed hidden clues to understanding the climax of God's dealing with humanity. The pages of Revelation held the key to understanding all things.

[17]See Bernard McGinn, Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Tradition in the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 126–41; Viviano, The Kingdom of God in History, 57–76. For the interested, see the technical discussion of Joachim's manuscripts by Stephen Wessley, "A New Writing of Joachim of Fiore: Preliminary Observations," in Prophecy and Eschatology, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 15–27.

Joachimism was met theologically by Thomas Aquinas, who preferred more of an Augustinian hermeneutic and, consequently, understanding of the kingdom of God. Aquinas lacked any such millennialist approach in his understanding of the kingdom, seeing it instead as meaning both "Christ himself dwelling in us through grace" and the future realization of the kingdom in heaven.[18]

The vision-filled Joachamite tradition, though, proved to be a formidable match for the theological sophistication of the Thomist tradition. This can be seen in no less a person than Christopher Columbus and in no less an event than the fabled "discovery of the New World" in 1492. In addition to making four voyages across the untamed Atlantic, Columbus also wrote a book, *The Book of Prophecies*, offered to his beloved patrons, Ferdinand and Isabella, king and queen of Spain. It is a book of quotations that Columbus garnered from the pages of Scripture, the patristic period, and the medieval era, including, of course, Joachim himself. This work, as well as his "The Account of the Fourth Voyage," leads Bernard McGinn to hang Columbus out on the same line as apocalyptic-obsessed medieval theologians. McGinn admits, "To those accustomed to see the discovery of America as the work of a hard-headed practical seaman flouting the traditions of the past, the picture of Columbus as a religious visionary strongly influenced by centuries of apocalyptic hopes may seem strange." Then McGinn adds, "But the existence of this element in the great explorer's complex personality is undeniable, and its force became stronger as he neared the end of his adventurous life."[19] A few lines from Columbus's "The Account of the Fourth Voyage," show McGinn's estimation not to be wide of the mark:

> Jerusalem and Mount Sion are to be rebuilt by the hands of Christians, as God has declared by the mouths of his prophet in the fourteenth Psalm (vv. 7Ex.8). The Abbott Joachim said that he who should do this was to come from Spain. . . . Who will offer himself for this work? Should anyone do so, I pledge myself, in the name of God, to convey him safely hither, provided the Lord permits me.[20]

Leaving the medieval era, we see two main strands of thinking on the kingdom of God. The first, following Augustine, stresses the allegori-

[18]As cited in Viviano, The Kingdom of God in History, 62.
[19]McGinn, Visions of the End, 284.
[20]Cited in ibid., 285. For the original text, see C. de Lollis, ed., Scritti di Cristoforo Colombo: Raccolta di Documenti e Studi, part 1, vol. 2 (Rome: Forzani, 1984), 202.

cal understanding of the kingdom, closely identifying the kingdom with the soul's union with God individually and collectively. The elect being in union with the triune God is the end, both teleologically and chronologically. The kingdom, in Aquinas's thought for example, is the beatification of the saints with God in heaven. Here he echoes the work of Augustine. The other strand of thinking on the kingdom of God in the medieval era is in the apocalyptic tradition. This view links global evangelism (understood in terms of baptism and membership in the Roman Catholic Church) of the heathen with the coming kingdom, stresses cataclysmic events as inaugurating the kingdom, and reads current events through the lens of biblical prophecies. This strand is marked by visionaries, chief among them Joachim of Fiore, who both interpret the times and lend their own predictions concerning the times.

"Christ Is the King": The Kingdom of God in the Reformation

Martin Luther's thoughts on the kingdom of God look, like the rest of his theology, quite different from that of the medieval churchmen and theologians. Bernard Lohse argues that Luther links his understanding of the kingdom of God—the two kingdoms, actually, that of God and that of the world—to his understanding of the difference between law and gospel, which amounts to, in Lohse's estimation, "help[ing] secure gospel purity and faith."[21] Simplifying these connections would not suffice because, for Luther, the stakes could not be higher when it came to rightly understanding the kingdom of God. Luther preferred to speak of two *kingdoms* rather than Augustine's two *cities*, seeing all of humanity as citizens of either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the world. As for the former, Luther declares, "Those who belong to the kingdom of God are all the true believers who are in Christ and under Christ, for Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God, as Psalm 2 and all of Scripture says."[22] But then Luther, striking a different chord on the kingdom from Augustine's, adds, "For this reason [Christ] came into this world, that he might begin God's kingdom and establish it in this world."[23]

Lohse sees significant differences in Luther's thinking from that of Augustine.[24] Whereas Augustine preferred more of a dialectical relation-

[21]Bernard Lohse, Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 315.
[22]Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent Should It Be Obeyed?" (1523), Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 662.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Lohse, Martin Luther's Theology, 314–24.

ship between this world and the next, between the spiritual (the *civitas Dei*, City of God) and the temporal (the *civitas terrena*, City of Man), Luther had a larger place for God to be at work in the world and, consequently, for the church to be at work in the world. This dynamic drives Luther's ethics, not to mention his politics.[25] Lohse further notes how Luther's and Augustine's differences stop when it comes to the eschatological perspective on the kingdom. Concerning the future consummation of the kingdom of God, the two were agreed. According to both, the ultimate realization of the kingdom would not be of this world.

Luther's more radical colleagues, who would soon break off from him altogether, dissented from his perspective on the kingdom of God. Chief among them is Thomas Muntzer, the Reformation's own version of Joachim of Fiore. By 1520, Muntzer had become rather fanatical. By the mid-1520s he took to interpreting dreams. For him, the kingdom of God would come to earth, rather violently, as God's people took to the battlefield in the name of righteousness. Muntzer attached apocalyptic significance to the Peasant's War, assuring the peasants that God was on their side against the godless nobles. It all ended rather badly for the peasants. Muntzer fared no better, eventually being captured and beheaded.[26]

Muntzer was associated with the Anabaptist movement, the majority of which renounced such violence. In fact, the Anabaptists came to be marked by a significant disinterest in the political affairs of the *civitas terrena*. The perspective of the Anabaptists may be summarized in the letter that Michael Saddler, an early Anabaptist leader and primary author of the Schleitheim Confession, wrote just before his martyrdom. "Flee the shadow of this world," he exhorted his congregation.[27] Far from taking up arms, the Anabaptist view of the kingdom that emerged consisted of championing the cause of the oppressed. John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) and Donald B. Kraybill's *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (1978) reflect this Anabaptist understanding of the meaning of the kingdom of God to the present day.

Returning to the magisterial Reformers, John Calvin argued that the kingdom of God, as Christ proclaimed it, is the gospel and all that it conveys to believers. Calvin writes, "By the kingdom of God, which [Christ] taught was at hand, he meant the forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and

[25]See Stephen J. Nichols, Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 131–46.
[26]See Michael J. St. Clair, Millenarian Movements in Historical Context (New York: Garland, 1992), 153–90.
[27]Cited in Thieleman J. van Braght, Martyrs Mirror (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, n.d.), 420.

utterly everything that we obtain in Christ."[28] Elsewhere, Calvin says, "God reigns where men, both by denial of themselves and by contempt of the world and of earthly life, pledge themselves to his righteousness in order to aspire to a heavenly life."[29]

It is notable that neither Luther nor Calvin made interpreting the book of Revelation a priority. As Benedict Viviano points out, Calvin did not "worry much about apocalyptic eschatology."[30] The same may be said of Luther. Both Reformers were far more interested in connecting their understanding of the kingdom to the gospel, both to proclaiming and living it. They had a future eschatology, but certainly not a detailed one.

Interlude

"Look! Here's the Kingdom": The Kingdom of God in the Modern Age

It might be helpful to set the stage for the twentieth century by looking outside of theology and for a brief moment look at the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's ideas significantly shaped the modern world, introducing his idea of progress. Progress comes through the dialectic, which Hegel used to explain the history of ideas. The dialectic starts with the thesis (the accepted idea), which is then met by the antithesis (an opposing idea), which then eventually emerges into a synthesis (a composite idea), which then becomes the new thesis. And so ideas march on, and humanity and history always progress to the newer, the better, and the higher. What is noteworthy here is how Hegel baptized this idea in an attempt to give it religious significance. God himself, the *Zeitgeist* (Time Spirit), is that which progresses, that which is newer, better, higher. The trickle-down effect of Hegel's thinking is enormous, especially on more liberal theologies. This philosophical perspective underlies realized eschatology, which comes to dominate liberal theology from the end of the nineteenth through the twentieth century. This philosophical perspective also underlies the politicization of the kingdom that also marks the modern age. The kingdom of God becomes politicized when it gets identified with or attached to an ideological agenda.

[28]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:613 [1.3.19].
[29]Ibid., 2:905 [3.20.42].
[30]Viviano, The Kingdom of God in History, 97.

Lesslie Newbigin offers a healthy corrective to this modernist tendency to politicize the kingdom and co-opt God's agenda for one's own. He writes of the necessity:

> To insist that the fulfillment of Christ's commission must include the call to a total allegiance to Jesus, and to commitment to the company of His people, the company that bears his name, the church. Without this, talk about the Kingdom is too easily co-opted into a utopianism which owes more to the nineteenth-century doctrine of progress than to the essentially apocalyptic teaching of the New Testament about the kingdom.[31]

And so we are back to trying to understand both proclamations of Christ, that the kingdom of God is at hand, that it is near, and that the kingdom of God is not of this world. Very few theological discussions in the contemporary age will play as prominent a role as that of the kingdom of God. And it is to those discussions that we now turn.

"What Shall Be the Sign of Thy Coming?": The Kingdom of God in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

As mentioned in the earlier look at the period from the 1880s through the 1920s, the kingdom of God was a widely discussed and hotly debated topic. The newer views of realized eschatology and dispensational premillennialism joined alongside historic premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism to offer a virtual smorgasbord of eschatological choices. For most of the twentieth century, adherents of these various views drew sharp boundary lines. The views were not so much points along a continuum as distinct camps with deeply and passionately held differences. And, as to be expected, these different views resulted in a variety of perspectives on the kingdom of God. In the twentieth century especially, it is best to speak of the various and many kingdom*s* of God.

Consider dispensational premillennialism. This view, as discussed earlier, sees a sharp distinction between Israel and the church, seeing the promised kingdom only for Israel and as having a distinct and separate future from that of the church. In dispensationalism, the kingdom of God is for and of the future. The extent to which this is true can be seen in the way most dispensationalists of the Scofield-Chafer era handled

[31]Lesslie Newbigin, Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 103. Originally given as the Henry Martyn lectures at Cambridge University, 1986.

the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.[32] Christ, this view argues, puts forth a kingdom ethic in these chapters. That is to say, the ethical demands of these chapters apply only during the millennial kingdom when Christ is reigning on his throne. Charles Ryrie writes that this is "clearly the view of the original *Scofield Bible* and of Chafer."[33] Ryrie himself argues that while the Sermon on the Mount, "relates to life in the millennial kingdom," it is also "applicable and profitable to believers in this age."[34] Ryrie, however, like Scofield and Chafer, sees this current age as the church age, leaving talk of the kingdom for the age to come and not for this age.

Diametrically opposed to the dispensationalists, amillennialists tended to, in Russell Moore's vivid description, espouse a "crypto-Platonic" vision of eschatological hope.[35] In other words, when the Bible talks about grapes and wine and grain and bread it is *not* talking about grapes and wine and grain and bread, according to traditional amillennialists.

Then along came George Eldon Ladd. Immersed in the German wrangling over the kingdom of God during his doctoral studies at Harvard, Ladd found that the already/not yet construct could add a great deal of light to the heat generated by the debate. He had already seen how viewing the kingdom as both present (already) and future (not yet) had brought some equilibrium in Germany. Once he took up his post at Fuller Theological Seminary, Ladd thought the already/not yet concept could do the same for America.[36] He not only advocated for the already/not yet view of the kingdom, he argued it served well as the center, the guiding light, for all of New Testament theology.[37]

One further contribution from the Germans concerns the two words *Reich* and *Herrschaft*. *Reich* speaks of realm, the place where the kingdom is manifest. *Herrschaft* speaks of ruling, the act of reigning. Ladd used both of these to speak of the full-orbed nature of the kingdom of God. The

[32]Though it may be inappropriate to overdraw the differences within classical dispensationalism, there are some stages to its development. I would argue for three such stages of classical dispensationalism: (1) the Darby-prophecy conference era from 1880 to1910s; (2) the Scofield-Chafer era from 1910s to 1950s; (3) the Walvoord-Ryrie era from the 1960s through the present day. The arrival of the progressive dispensationalists in the 1990s marked not so much a development as a change, and I would argue a substantive change. See Russell D. Moore, The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 39–43.
[33]Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 99.
[34]Ibid., 100.
[35]Moore, The Kingdom of Christ, 51.
[36]See George Eldon Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 3–38.
[37]George Eldon Ladd, New Testament Theology, rev. ed., ed. Donald Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993). I have spoken here of Ladd seeing the kingdom as the center of New Testament theology chiefly because that was Ladd's specialty. In reality, for Ladd the kingdom serves as the center of a theology of both Testaments, indeed, of theology itself.

kingdom, then, is a discrete place, a realm, and an activity. The kingdom, therefore, is both now, as God reigns, and in the future at the consummation of God's reign.[38]

These developments were not, however, merely owing to Ladd and the Germans. For as Ladd mediated German positions on the kingdom, so too Richard Gaffin mediated Dutch positions for Americans. The collective work of Geerhardus Vos (a Dutch theologian who taught biblical theology at Princeton) and Herman Ridderbos (a Dutch theologian who taught biblical theology in the Netherlands) stresses redemptive history, all from the center-point of Christ's proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom understood as *inaugurated eschatology*. Inaugurated eschatology simply means that the kingdom, and eschatological promise, is in the beginning stages of fulfillment already, and will be fully consummated in the future. Inaugurated eschatology or the already/not yet view, in Gaffin's estimation, keeps the church from the danger of a too-realized eschatology on the one hand and a too-future eschatology on the other. This both/and construct has more merit, he argues, than either/or constructs. Gaffin further argues that to limit eschatology to a discussion of last things is a grave misstep, arguing instead that eschatology and one's discussion of the kingdom relate to "the present identity and experience of the Christian, and so too in the present life and mission of the church."[39] He, if pressed, would claim that eschatology is best understood from the perspective of christology. If pressed further, Gaffin would claim eschatology began and stems from Christ's resurrection.

In his work on the history of interpreting the kingdom, Russell Moore notes how this already/not yet construct has influenced the thinking of amillennialists like Gaffin and Anthony Hoekema on the one hand, and the progressive dispensationalists like Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock on the other hand. Moore further speaks of this inaugurated eschatology model as leading to a "consensus on the nature of the kingdom."[40] Moore is not alone in his assessment, because he is joined by Vern Poythress. Poythress sees the already/not yet effects on both sides of what had been a sharp dividing line between dispensationalists and amillennialists over the status of the kingdom. Would it be material and physical? Or would it be spiritual? Poythress sees both sides consenting to each other and giving

[38]See Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom.
[39]Richard B. Gaffin, "The Usefulness of the Cross," Westminster Theological Journal 41 (1979): 229.
[40]Moore, The Kingdom of Christ, 53. Incidentally, Moore's book offers not only the most helpful survey on the kingdom in the twentieth century but also the best bibliography on the subject.

up formerly tightly held ground. He speaks of these "traditional millennial positions" being brought "closer to one another." And he speaks of this movement as a "salutary advance."[41] Instead of the model of distinct camps with high walls of separation between them, a newer model would be more of a continuum sans the sharp divisions.

The already/not yet approach to the kingdom has also influenced German theologizing, most noticeably in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg has had to recapture the future or "not yet" side of the kingdom, surrounded as he is by those who want to stress its "already" and realized nature. As Pannenberg puts it, "Our starting point then is the Kingdom of God understood as the eschatological future brought about by God himself. Only in the light of this future can we understand man and his history." But then he immediately adds, "God's rule is not simply in the future, leaving men to do nothing but wait quietly for its arrival."[42] The question that Pannenberg took up in much of his work concerned what to do while we wait. He argues that the trick to understanding Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom is to see both future and present as "inextricably interwoven."[43] Pannenberg declares, "Jesus underscored the *present impact* of the imminent future."[44] Pannenberg even sees the impact as extending to the question of addressing social concerns and the church's agenda. He writes:

> We are not called to choose between concern for the Kingdom and concern for society. Rather, in concern for society we are concerned for its end and destiny, namely, for the Kingdom of God. To act for the sake of the Kingdom is to act for the sake of society, and, in so doing, we act to the benefit of the church.
>
> A concern for the church that is not first of all a concern for the Kingdom of God is inevitably inverted and leads, as we have seen, to the church's becoming superfluous.[45]

At the same time, Pannenberg admits that teasing out this interwoven relationship between present and future "is one of the most problematic questions in contemporary study of Jesus' teachings."[46] Perhaps, given the far-reaching implications of one's understanding of the king-

[41]Vern S. Poythress, Understanding Dispensationalists, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 47.
[42]Wolfhart Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 53.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid., italics original.
[45]Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God, 84.
[46]Ibid.

dom of God, we could expand upon Pannenberg to claim that teasing out this interwoven relationship is one of the most problematic questions in contemporary theology. To put it another way, discipleship is learning how to live in between, to live in the "already" in light of and governed by the "not yet."

While there is an emerging consensus on the already/not yet paradigm of the kingdom of God—or, as Pannenberg has it, the inextricable interwoven nature of present and future—there remain significant differences as to what is already and what is not yet. And while there is a growing consensus, there are always holdouts. One further significant development on the current horizon concerns the view of the kingdom in emergent circles. Brian McLaren, for instance, seems at times to lose sight of the not yet in his zeal to see the already of the kingdom.[47] Time will tell where such thinking leads.

Behold, the End Has Come: Conclusions

It would be less than wise to ignore the history, as variegated as that history is, of the Christian tradition on the subject of the kingdom of God. Listening to the history of the tradition may prove wise as the church of today constructs its understanding of this all-encompassing, all-important phrase, the kingdom of God—and the full implications the phrase portends. What are we to make of the vast differences of interpretation of this phrase? Before the differences are addressed, however, we should first consider the similarities.

Two beliefs have remained constant in the orthodox strands of the Christian tradition. First, there is a firm belief in the physical, visible return of Christ. This is the doctrine of the second coming. Second is a firm belief in some form of a future, real kingdom in which the sum of all God's promises and covenants will be fully enjoyed by the righteous, as well as a future judgment visiting God's unmitigated wrath on the unrighteous. As Christ taught of the kingdom, there are sheep and there are goats (Matthew 25). There are those to whom the kingdom of God belongs, while there are those to whom it does not. These two constant beliefs find a home in the creeds of the early church and in the confessions and catechisms of the Protestant traditions.

So what are we to make of the differences on the kingdom of God?

[47]See Brian McLaren, The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

The vast differences over the centuries of the Christian tradition should at the least show the complexity and ambiguity of the subject of eschatology, of the complexity of the deceptively simple phrase, the kingdom of God. The growing consensus, as Russell Moore spoke of it, of the already/not yet view of the kingdom helpfully avoids the negative polarity of the past. At the very least the various traditions and understandings of eschatology should be in dialogue, humbly seeking to learn from each other and exercising caution when it comes to understanding the end times.

Finally, we should consider the kingdom of God and the Christian life. This lodestone of the teachings of Jesus, the kingdom, has occupied the work of theology and biblical scholarship through the centuries, and well it should. But the phrase should also occupy our thinking on and living of the Christian life. Jesus reminded his followers that his kingdom was not of this world. Indeed, the kingdom's differences should startle us. We are far too easily consumed with contemporary agendas that are culturally conditioned and culturally situated. In Christ's day, his fellow Jews fully expected him to overthrow Rome. Even his closest disciples revealed their own susceptibility to being consumed with what was in front of them. Looking to Christ's teaching, we see a place to stand outside of our context, which brings clarity to the church's mission. There will still be debates and differences, to be sure. But sometimes merely asking the right question goes a long way. When the church of any age asks what the kingdom of God is and further asks how the kingdom should drive what we do—and even determine how we pray—the church is asking the right questions.

A sound doctrine of the kingdom of God also brings a great deal of comfort and assurance in times of distress. We saw this in the survey of perspectives on the kingdom in church history. The kingdom of God brought comfort to the martyrs of the patristic period. While the world order collapsed around him and an undetermined order loomed on the horizon, Augustine could rest in the God of the ages, who reigned supreme in the past, present, and future. Luther, in his most famous hymn, speaks of a devil-filled world. He tells of his impending death—"the body they may kill," but then in the last line triumphantly declares, "His kingdom is forever."

Luther's thinking impacted a later Lutheran musician, Johann Sebastian Bach. He put nearly every biblical theme to music, and eschatology and the kingdom were no exceptions. Jan Luth has argued that

Bach's view of the kingdom reflects the complexity, even the ambiguity, in the biblical teaching on the subject. Luth observes that Bach's music sometimes reflects the teaching of Jesus himself, noting "Eschatology in Bach's compositions has many interpretations."[48] Bach could find harmony in the complexity and ambiguity. The mysteries of the kingdom represented for him something not to be excised but to be embraced. He put before the church the biblical teaching of the person of Jesus and his message of the kingdom, and he did so in the language of his vocation, the language of music. One of his hymns will prove the point, "*Herr Gott, Nun Schleuss den Himmel auf*" ("Lord, God, Now Open Wide Thy Heaven"). It is a hymn of hope.

And so Bach reminds the theologian how best to serve the church today in understanding the kingdom of God. There are things of which we are certain, and which we must believe and proclaim. There are things more ambiguous and complex concerning which we, like Jesus' original twelve disciples, will continue to inquire. There are things, maybe even more than we care to admit, which we will likely never fully know until the end has come. And all of these things lead us to worship the One whose kingdom has no end.

Finally, a sound doctrine of the kingdom of God teaches us how to pray, which in turn teaches us how to live. Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." During the Henry Martyn lectures at Cambridge University, Lesslie Newbigin called us all to think of these words from the Lord's Prayer. In fact, he declared, "Every concept of the Kingdom has to be continuously tested in the light of the revelation of the Kingdom given uniquely and once and for all in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus."[49]

As we have seen throughout this essay, theologians and biblical scholars, as much as they would like to be driven solely by the text of Scripture in their work, tend to read Scripture through the lens of their own sociological and cultural circumstances. This seems to be particularly acute when it comes to understanding the kingdom of God and a theology of the end times. From Platonists who spiritualized the kingdom in the patristic period, to medieval visionaries identifying Moslem leaders as the Antichrist, to those today who buy local cable time in the middle of the night to explain how Daniel long ago prophesied current events in the

[48]Jan R. Luth, "Eschatological Expectation in J. S. Bach," in Prophecy and Eschatology, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 223.
[49]Newbigin, Signs Amid the Rubble, 104.

Middle East, there is a long and winding train of defining the kingdom of God from the purview of where one stands and of what one prefers. We must guard against seeking the kingdom as we define it, as we construct it, and as we prefer it. The temptation to do so is all too strong. Instead, may we be reminded, as Jesus taught us, to pray—and to live:

Thy kingdom come.