

The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament

I. Howard Marshall

[p.213]

Christian hope is manifestly based on the promises and actions of God, and therefore it is not surprising that a discussion of the Kingdom of God (henceforward abbreviated in this essay as KG) should figure in a symposium on 'The Spirit and the New Age'. Although the phrase 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. Our aim in this essay will be to harvest and assess some of the recent scholarly discussion with a view to showing how an understanding of the KG can give fresh vigour to our Christian hope in God.

Introduction

Discussion of the KG was particularly spirited up to about 1965, and by that date a certain consensus appeared to be developing about the meaning and significance of the KG, especially as the phrase appears in the Synoptic Gospels.¹ Some of the main points that emerged can be summed up as follows:

1. The writers of the Gospels regarded the KG as being the central theme of the teaching of Jesus. This can be seen from the frequency with which the phrase appears on the lips of Jesus as compared with other theological concepts,² as well as from the way in which the Evangelists themselves iden-

¹ W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London, 1957); G. E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (London, 1966); N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, 1963); R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (London, 1963). For summaries of the discussion, see O. E. Evans in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), 11, pp. 17-26; B. Klappert in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter, 1976), 11, pp. 372-90; G. Mein, 'The Biblical Understanding of the Kingdom of God', *Interpretation*, 26, 1972, pp. 387-418; I. H. Marshall in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1975), III, pp. 801-9. For more recent studies, see H. Merklein, *Jesu Botschaft von der Gottesherrschaft* (Stuttgart, 1983), and G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Coming of God* (Exeter, 1983); *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, 1986).

² The following comparison may be instructive:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Kingdom of God	50	15	39
Believe, faith	24	20	26

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[p.214]

tify it as the burden of Jesus' message.³ Consequently, scholars tended to regard the KG as being in fact the principal concept in the actual teaching of Jesus.⁴

2. Among scholars who approached the Gospel records with a rigorously critical methodology for separating off what they regarded as the authentic teaching of Jesus from later elements wrongly ascribed to him, it was agreed that some of the texts about the KG must belong to any critically established 'irreducible minimum' of the teaching of Jesus.⁵

3. According to the Evangelists, Jesus announced both that the KG would come in the near future as the consummation of God's purpose and that it was already present in some way during his ministry as the fulfilment of God's promises. One is tempted to say that there was an increasing consensus on how this evidence ought to be interpreted, namely that both of these elements were to be taken at their face value as authentic aspects of the teaching of Jesus; the only problem that then remained was to explain how these two elements could be integrated with each other, one important suggestion being that the promise of the KG was fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and would be *consummated* in the future.⁶ Nevertheless, there was a continuing powerful body of opinion that accepted that the KG was an entirely future entity in the proclamation of Jesus and that it was regarded as present only in the sense that an event that is known to be impending can have decisive effects on how people see the time just before its arrival.⁷

Father (used of God)	44	4	17
Love	12	8	16
Parable	17	13	18
Son of man	26	14	24
Spirit, Holy	12	6	17

³ See Matthew 4.23; 9.35; cf. 13.19; 24.14; Mark 1.15; Luke 4.43; 8.1; 9.2, 11, 60.

⁴ A significant non-conformist on this point is E. Bammel, 'Erwägungen zur Eschatologie Jesu', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica* III (TU 88, Berlin, 1964), pp. 3-32.

⁵ N. Perrin's book *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967) is more ruthless than the author's earlier work listed above and may be regarded as fixing the low-water mark for English-speaking scholars; yet even he insists that there are strong arguments for the authenticity of Matthew 12.28/Luke 11.29 Q; Luke 17.20ff.; Matthew 11.12/Luke 16.16 Q and for other, parabolic sayings. The Continental low-water mark is fixed by H. Schürmann, *Gottes Reich—Jesu Geschick* (Freiburg, 1983), p. 135, who feels reasonably secure in holding only to Luke 11.2-4; 6-20; 11.20; 12.31 and 13.18ff (with parallels as appropriate).

⁶ See especially the works of G. E. Ladd and R Schnackenburg cited above; L. Goppelt, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1981), I, pp. 51-67.

⁷ J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London, 1971), I, p. 102: '(Jesus') meaning is that the eschatological hour of God, the victory of God, the consummation of the world, is near. Indeed it is very near.' Similarly, H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1969), pp. 106-15; R H. Hiers, *The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition* (Gainesville, 1970).

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4. The term 'KG' refers primarily to the sovereign activity of God as ruler or king and only secondarily to the realm over which he rules.⁸ Its content is the saving and judging action of God.

5. In so far as the KG could be regarded as being present, it was so in and through the proclamation and activity of Jesus, and its presence (or, for upholders of the alternative view, its imminence) was evidenced in his parables and mighty works.⁹

Some twenty years later the mood of scholarship on these points has not undergone any substantial changes. However, there remain a number of questions where further precision is desirable, and some progress in answering them has been made. Some of these questions are:

1. Can we be more precise about the actual ways in which Jesus used the term 'KG'? For example, did he use it simply in ways familiar to his audience, or did he implicitly transform its content, just as he appears to have done with other theological concepts?

2. How is the KG related to other concepts that appear in the teaching of Jesus?

3. How did Jesus see his own role in relation to the KG? This question

[p.215]

needs to be asked quite specifically with reference to Jesus' self-understanding of his identity and role as well as with reference to his premonition of his own death.

4. What did Jesus envisage as the results of his proclamation of the KG? To what extent did his message have a communal or corporate dimension so far as his own lifetime was concerned?

5. In what ways did Jesus envisage the future dimension of the KG? Had he any place in his thinking for what we know as the Church?

6. Granted that the early Church stood in some kind of continuity with Jesus and his teaching, what happened to the KG in its proclamation and its theology? This is a question that can be raised in two contexts. First, there is the theology of the Church reflected in the New Testament epistles which is not overtly based on the sayings of Jesus. Second, there is the tradition of the teaching of Jesus which was handed down at first by word of mouth and then incorporated in the written Gospels. What did the early Church make of the KG?

⁸ The need to think again about this point was shown by S. Aalen, "Reign" and "House" in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels', *NTS*, 8, 1961-62, pp. 215-40.

⁹ The basic study of the present sayings is Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*. He argues that, 'Jesus saw the Kingdom of God to be present before the parousia, which he thought to be imminent, only in his own person and his works; he knew no other realization of the eschatological consummation' (p. 140).

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These points constitute a formidable agenda, and it will not be possible to treat any of them in an adequate way in a brief essay, still less to deal with all of them. It will, however, be clear that the answers to some of them are very relevant to the topic of Christian hope in that the questions force us to explore different aspects of the nature of the hope held by Jesus. Further, if we can see how the early church appropriated and made use of the teaching of Jesus, this may help us in turn as we seek to understand and apply the teaching of Jesus and his followers for today.

The meaning of 'Kingdom of God'

As has been indicated already, there is a growing agreement that the phrase 'KG' should be taken to refer primarily to God's sovereignty rather than to the realm over which he is sovereign. It will then refer to God's sovereignty in contrast to that of Satan (Luke 11.18), who is the ruler of 'this world' (John 12.31; 14.30). Those who adopt this view tend on the whole to assume that the reference must be to a specific act of divine rule, so that one can ask, when is the Kingdom of God coming? (cf. Luke 17.20). It is this assumption that causes problems when the teaching of Jesus that the KG is both present and future is examined, and it is understandable that some scholars should want to explain away either the present or the future dimension.

A possible way out of the impasse has been suggested by N. Perrin. His contribution is to show that KG may be a 'symbol' for 'God acting in sovereign power' (i.e., God acting with might and imposing his authority so that people obey him). If KG functions in this way as a symbol, then it need not

[p.216]

refer simply to a promised future realm or to a single mighty act by God. Rather, by the use of the words 'Jesus is deliberately evoking the myth of the activity of God on behalf of his people the exorcisms are a manifestation of that activity in the experience of his hearers.... KG is here a symbol, and it is used in this saying because of its evocative power. The saying is a challenge to the hearers to take the ancient myth with renewed seriousness, and to begin to anticipate the manifestation of the reality of which it speaks in the concrete actuality of their experience.' Again, 'the symbol of the kingly activity of God on behalf of his people confronts the hearers of Jesus as a true tensive symbol with its evocation of a whole set of meanings, and ... the myth is, in the message of Jesus, true myth with its power to mediate the experience of existential reality'.¹⁰

Perrin is here making use of a distinction between symbols that have a one-to-one relationship to what they signify (as, for example, the mathematical symbol *pi* signifies a precise, unique quantity) and symbols that 'can have a set of meanings that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by any one referent',¹¹ and he is claiming that KG falls into the latter

¹⁰ N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 43, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

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category. When Jesus uses the term 'KG' he is pointing beyond the phrase to that which it signifies, namely the powerful action of God that can be expressed in a whole range of situations.

In a similar way, B. D. Chilton has argued that KG is an expression for 'the saving revelation of God himself or 'God in strength', and that it refers to 'a personal God revealed'. This means that the KG need not be tied down in time; it can refer 'in the first place to God's self-revelation and derivatively to the joy of men in his presence', and hence it can further be used to refer to 'the reward held ready' in Luke 12.32.¹² Chilton's view is based on an exhaustive discussion of a set of texts in the Gospels that he examines in the light of their Jewish background, especially in the diction of the Targums.

The approach of Perrin and Chilton is a very attractive one in that it offers a way out of the present/future dilemma that has shaped discussion of the KG for so long. It suggests that the dilemma is a false one, since a reference to 'God acting in power' is clearly not to be tied down to any one particular manifestation of the power of God.

Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of it leads to some critical comments and some doubts as to its viability. First, it must be noted that Perrin does not seem to be too sure of the ontological status of what is represented by the symbol. He speaks of the 'myth' that is evoked by the symbol. Now it is certainly not the case that the use of the word 'myth' should automatically arouse suspicion in the minds of evangelical Christians, for the category of 'myth' can have a valid and proper use in Christian theology just like any

[p.217]

other literary genre that is in itself neutral. Admittedly Perrin may be adopting a position near to that of R Bultmann, whose influence on his thinking is freely admitted, but it should be observed that in this particular book he is critical of some aspects of Bultmann's position. Rather one may appropriate Perrin's insights by saying that the 'story' of God acting in power is the correct interpretation of, say, the exorcisms performed by Jesus, events that, might be understood otherwise but that are in fact pointers to a correct understanding of the activity of Jesus as a manifestation of God's saving power. The position of Perrin is thus somewhat ambiguous. However, this observation does not apply to the work of Chilton, who interprets the Gospels in the context of an orthodox understanding of the Christian faith.

Much more to the point is our second critical comment. In both cases the interpreters gain their understanding of the meaning of KG from the examination of a limited group of texts that they believe can be shown to be authentic sayings of Jesus.¹³ One is tempted to say that any saying of Jesus that Perrin accepts as authentic *must* be authentic, for he belongs to a particularly sceptical

¹² B. D. Chilton, *God in Strength* (Freistadt, 1979), pp. 285ff; 'Regnum Dei Deus Est', *SJT*, 31, 1978, pp. 261-70.

¹³ Thus H. Merklein, *Jesu Botschaft von der Gottesherrschaft*, p. 38, argues that sayings in which KG is a spatial term all come from a stratum in the gospel tradition that is later than Jesus, and that he used the term only in a dynamic sense.

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group of scholars. Consequently, our understanding of KG must do justice to the texts that Perrin invokes. However, this leaves us with two problems. On the one hand, Perrin has to admit that for the most part the Jews to whom Jesus spoke saw KG as a symbol with a single reference; we must ask, then, whether Jesus would have been speaking meaningfully to them if he had shifted the force of the term significantly. On the other hand, we have to face the problem of the remaining KG texts in the Gospels. If a wider group of texts than those examined by Perrin and Chilton proves to be authentic, then we must ask whether they burst open the definition that has been offered and lead us to a different one. Even, however, if the other usages in the Gospels are to be attributed to the followers of Jesus rather than to himself, it may still be the case that this is a pointer to the fact that they understood Jesus differently from Perrin and Chilton, and we shall have to ask whether this makes the view of the modern scholars doubtful. In short, we have to ask whether Perrin and Chilton's view still holds when a wider body of relevant evidence is taken into account.

Consequently, in understanding such an examination we must begin by asking how Jesus' audience would have understood him. Now Perrin himself has shown that the background of the teaching of Jesus lies in the apocalyptic understanding of the KG as God's action rather than in the Rabbinic concept of the KG as the expression of God's demands upon his people enshrined in the Torah, or Law.¹⁴ KG was not all that common a term in Judaism but it appears to have been used for that future state of affairs when God's rule would be established and would bring peace and happiness for his people.

[p.218]

Sometimes the idea is close to that of the 'age to come' that will succeed this age and that will be ushered in by the resurrection of the dead.¹⁵ The important point is that God brings about this new era by his own mighty action. Although the Jews spoke of 'the age to come', they did not regard it as being 'beyond history' but rather as being the next stage in history, brought into being by God's action in history, bringing the rule of Satan to an end and commencing his own rule. Thus the KG is the full and powerful manifestation of the sovereignty that God already exercises over the world.

Various texts in the Gospels speak of the KG as this future state of affairs to be established by God. The KG as the future state of the righteous is contrasted with Gehenna, the abode of the unrighteous dead (Mark 9.47). The righteous will enter the Kingdom prepared for them while the unrighteous are cast into outer darkness (Matt. 25.34). It will be a time of surprises for Jesus' contemporaries when they see the patriarchs admitted while they themselves are excluded (Matt. 8.11/Luke 13.29 Q. Jesus talks in the future tense about entry into this realm (Matt. 7.21), and he

¹⁴ Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, pp. 56ff.

¹⁵ See Ps. Sol. 17; Ass. Moses 10.1-10; Sib. Orac. 3.46-56, 652-4, 767-89; Qaddish; Tg. Gn. 49.10ff. Other references in the apocalyptic literature are to the present sovereignty of God over Israel and the nations (Ps. Sol. 5.21; Jub. 12.19; 1 En. 84.2f; T. Reub. 6; T. Jud. 21; 1QM 6.6; Shemoneh Esreh 14).

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himself looks forward to sharing in eating and drinking in the new situation after the KG has come (Mark 14.25; Luke 22.16, 18). In all this Jesus reflects Jewish expectations (Luke 14.25).

Jesus' audience would have understood and accepted this basic expectation. He was operating with the same framework of ideas as they did, and if he had not done so, his teaching would have been unintelligible to them. One area of surprise would have been in his statements about who would be present in the KG; he shattered the easy assumption that any members of the people of Israel would qualify for entrance simply on the basis of their scrupulous observance of the Pharisaic legislation.

More significant is the question of time. According to Luke, the nature of Jesus' activity must have been such as to lead people to think that the KG would appear 'immediately' (Luke 19.11) and to cause some Pharisees to ask when the KG was coming (Luke 17.20).¹⁶ The interpretation of the crucial statements in Matthew 10.7/Luke 10.9 Q and Mark 1.15 is disputed;¹⁷ they can be taken to mean either that the KG has already arrived or that its coming is imminent; were these sayings perhaps genuinely ambiguous? In Mark 9.1 Jesus refers to people who would not die before they saw that the KG had come; the authenticity of the saying is disputed, as is its interpretation.¹⁸ In Luke 21.31 Jesus refers to a future point at which people will know that the KG is near.¹⁹ In addition, there are various texts that suggest that the day of judgement or the coming of the Son of man is imminent.²⁰ The thought of the imminence of the end is firmly embedded in the gospel tradition, but direct references to the imminence of the KG are not very frequent, and it

[p.219]

is difficult to say that the distinctive teaching of Jesus lies here.

What is much more strongly attested is Jesus' teaching that the KG was already in some sense present in his ministry. The evidence for this has often been discussed and need not be rehearsed here in detail; the key texts are Matthew 11.12/Luke 16.16 Q; Matthew 12.28/Luke 11.20 Q; and Luke 17.21 together with Matthew 10.7/Luke 10.9 (11) Q and Mark 1.15, which, in my opinion belong here rather than with the futurist texts.²¹ These verses indicate that the action of God in bringing in the KG has already begun, so that Jesus can declare quite simply and plainly that the KG has arrived. So strong is this impression that C. H. Dodd could see no room for any teaching about a future coming in the outlook of Jesus; while he undoubtedly did not do justice to the

¹⁶ Even if Luke himself created the situation in Luke 17.20, the question attributed to the Pharisees is entirely credible. See I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter, 1978), pp. 653 ff.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 422 ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-9.

¹⁹ Only Luke has supplied 'the Kingdom of God' as the subject of the verb 'is near' (cf. Mark 13.9); Mark may have thought that the reference was to the coming of the Son of man, but there is no essential difference.

²⁰ Mark 13.32; Matthew 24.42, 50/Luke 12.46 Q; Matthew 25.13; 10.23; 24.44; Luke 18.8; 21.36. Some of these formulations may belong to the Evangelists.

²¹ See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 628-30, 475ff, 655ff. and 422ff.

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future elements in the teaching of Jesus, the point to be stressed here is that he established the fundamental importance of the texts that testify to the presence of the KG.²² It is these texts that convey the distinctive element in the teaching of Jesus about the KG. To say that the End was near was not unprecedented. To say that the future KG was already present was unparalleled.

The crucial question in interpretation is now whether this remarkable strand of teaching stands in genuine continuity with that about the future reign of God. Essentially the options reduce to two. The one is to say that the link lies in the concept of imminence or 'nearness': for Jesus the KG was so close in time that the whole of present life was coloured by its imminence. Whether he spoke of the KG as being virtually present and saw his mighty works as the precursors of its coming, or whether he could say that there was a sense in which the near Kingdom was already operative, the point is that his ministry derived its impetus and validity from the belief that the KG was very near, and with it the coming of the Son of man and the end of the present age. This view, which is that of scholars such as E. Grässer, who is its most consistent and able advocate, faces insurmountable difficulties. Those who hold this view have to admit that Jesus was mistaken in regard to the specific form of this hope that he held. The KG did not come in the way he prophesied, and consequently the validity of his whole message, inasmuch as it was based on this hope, is completely taken away. Scholars who interpret the teaching of Jesus in this way agree that this is so, and they then have to show how the early Church had to modify the tradition of the teaching of Jesus to take account of the 'delay of the parousia' and so produce an alternative theology in which the hope of the future coming of the KG is given little or no place and is replaced by an emphasis on the present working of God by the Spirit in the Church.²³ But this is highly unsatisfactory. Some people may be prepared to allow that Jesus was a mistaken

[p.220]

prophet, but, if so, it is not clear that attempts to revamp his teaching can carry much conviction, and it looks rather as though one mistaken mythology is simply being replaced by another dubious mythology of the Spirit. The basic problem remains as to how the teaching of Jesus can in any way be valid when it rests on a set of mistaken assumptions. Nor were these assumptions peripheral ones; they were concerned with the central theme of his message.

The second type of option is to recognize that the essential or distinctive element in the teaching of Jesus was his proclamation that the KG which his hearers expected to come in the future was already present in his ministry. God's purpose, prophesied in the Old Testament, was being brought to fulfilment in an unexpected manner. The best way to express this is probably in terms of concealment or veiled manifestation.²⁴ What this means is that the popular expectation of the KG was of an open, public, and final act of sovereignty by God that would establish his rule in

²² C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, 1961).

²³ E. Grässer, *Das Problem der Parusieverzögerung in den synoptischen Evangelien and in der Apostelgeschichte* (Berlin, 1977).

²⁴ See especially C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 638; H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, 1962).

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the world and bring its benefits to his people, but Jesus believed and taught that God was already acting in his ministry powerfully but secretly to establish that realm and to initiate a chain of events that would lead up to and include the End of popular expectation. There was thus a real and genuine manifestation of God's power, but it was in a sense veiled and secret.

If this view is sound, then it means that the basis of the proclamation of Jesus was a valid one, the belief that God was already fulfilling the prophecy of the coming of the KG. Or rather, the validity of Jesus' proclamation depends not on whether he was correct or mistaken about the nearness of the KG in the future, but on whether he was correct or mistaken about the reality of God's action in the present.

Further, the problem of continuity between the present and the future aspects of Jesus' teaching is solved. What Jesus taught was that the KG which the Jews expected in the future was already a reality. God was acting in power and consequently his realm was already in existence. Thus Jesus retained the traditional understanding of the KG as God's future realm initiated by his powerful action, but he transformed it 1. by declaring that the point in time at which it was to appear had already arrived, and 2. by indicating that the way in which it was appearing was different from what was traditionally expected.

By understanding the teaching of Jesus in this way we can give a satisfactory and coherent account of a larger corpus of sayings than Perrin and Chilton and place the teaching of Jesus within the structures of Jewish thinking-structures that he transformed in an intelligible way. Such an understanding, it should be emphasized, is not an arbitrary one imposed on the evidence at the cost of straining some texts to make them fit into the

[p.221]

pattern. Rather, starting from texts that in our opinion have strong claims to being authentic, we have been able to achieve a consistent and coherent understanding of the teaching of Jesus into which other texts whose authenticity might otherwise perhaps be suspect can be fitted by the so-called criterion of coherence.

Moreover, we have established a vital point for our understanding of Christian hope that will be developed as we proceed further. Christian hope is often thought of as being somehow based on the future. Such hope is in danger of remaining precisely that and nothing more—hope. For hope to have substance it must be rooted in and related to something else—a conviction about the character of God, such as, for example, that he keeps his promises or that he has done certain things in the past. The teaching of Jesus about the KG enshrines the conviction that God has already begun to act in the world and will complete what he has begun. Thus the validity of the hope depends upon the validity of the conviction that God is already at work in the world.

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What Jesus taught about the Kingdom

In the discussion of a concept such as the KG it is important to distinguish between the meaning of the phrase itself and what is said about it. The distinction is not always easy to observe in practice, and in the previous section we have had to transgress it. There we were concerned primarily with the meaning of the phrase in itself, but it was impossible to establish this without paying attention to the way in which it was used and to the contexts in which it appeared. The result of our investigation so far has been to show that KG did not simply function as a symbol for 'God acting in sovereign power' but rather that it referred to that realm that the Jews expected to be set up by the sovereign power of God in fulfilment of prophecy. Starting from this point we can give a coherent account of the use of the term by Jesus, and we can see that he began to use the term in a new way by claiming that the KG had already come and that it was present in an unexpected manner. We must now explore further what Jesus said about the KG. How did he use the term?

The way in which Jesus used the term 'KG' in a new way has been helpfully explored by J. Riches in *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism*.²⁵ He tries to show how Jesus could take over a term like KG and retain its core meaning, while ridding it of some of its conventional associations and substituting others. Essentially his argument is that Jesus referred to the KG in the context of actions by himself that related it to his belief in a forgiving and merciful God who willed that people should love one another. Thus the

[p.222]

concept was purged of its nationalist and martial associations and was linked to ideas of mercy and forgiveness extended to people of all kinds. The essential point that is being made here is a sound one that had of course been recognized by earlier scholars. The merit of Riches's presentation is that he is able to link what Jesus was doing in the case of the KG with his transformation of the ideas of purity and of God himself and thus to give a coherent account of the teaching of Jesus.

In this way the KG clearly becomes a symbol of hope for the downtrodden in society. It expresses the attitude of God to such people and declares that his concern is for them. Jesus' teaching is that God is at work to establish a new community. The bliss that is associated with the age to come is already being experienced, and this bliss is not just for the people who think they are entitled to it by virtue of their religious orthodoxy and adherence to the Jewish law.

At the same time, however, Jesus purged the concept of its nationalistic associations. We should be clear about what was actually happening here. It is commonly thought that the Jewish concept of the KG was a nationalistic and military one, and that Jesus replaced this image with a spiritual one. In fact, however, the Jewish concept was both nationalistic and spiritual. The description of the KG in Psalms of Solomon 17 combines both elements:

²⁵ J. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London, 1980), pp 87-111.

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Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time in which you see, O God, that he may reign over Israel your servant. Gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction. Wisely, righteously, he shall thrust out sinners from the inheritance. He shall destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter's vessel. With a rod of iron he shall break in pieces all their substance. He shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. At his rebuke nations shall flee before him, and he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart. He shall gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness, and he shall judge the tribes of the people that has been sanctified by the Lord his God. He shall not suffer unrighteousness to lodge any more in their midst, nor shall there dwell with them any man that knows wickedness. For he shall know them, that they are all sons of their God.²⁶

Here vengeance on the godless nations and holiness among the people of Israel are closely linked together. Jesus, therefore, has to purge away the nationalist elements in the Jewish concept of the KG and to lay stress on the spiritual elements.

Now this approach is not without its problems as soon as we try to apply

[p.223]

it to the situation of the downtrodden. On the one hand, the plight of the downtrodden is often due to the violent and ungodly in the nation itself and, on the other hand, it may be due to the violent and ungodly people of other nations. In first-century Palestine both types of oppression existed, just as they do today in many parts of the world. In what ways did Jesus envisage the KG as the solution to the needs of the people?

There is no programme of social action in the teaching of Jesus about the KG. He is concerned with the relationships of individuals to God, and the behaviour that will result from that. On the one side, he offered to the needy forgiveness, integration into the community of God's people, and physical healing. On the other side, he called those who followed him to a life in which their total attitude must be one of love to God and their neighbour and of commitment to himself as Teacher and Master. His teaching about non-violence did not, in my opinion, forbid the use of restrained force (as opposed to violence) to preserve law and order, but it certainly forbade the excesses of armed conflict and insurrection. Nevertheless, in his preaching Jesus certainly condemned verbally the hypocrisy and greed of those who oppressed the poor and the outcasts of society, and he attacked the people of Israel as a whole for their failure to live as the people of God.

But how effective are words, even if accompanied by a few beneficial miracles? People might well have concluded that nothing much was happening. Jesus took care of this point in his teaching. The so-called parables of growth depicted the secret, quiet beginnings of the KG and gave the assurance that what was scarcely visible in its beginnings would grow, like a plant from a seed, until its effects were manifest and great (Mark 4.26-29, 30-32). Consequently, Jesus could

²⁶ Ps. Sol. 17.23-30.

speak about the 'mystery' of the KG (Mark 4.11; 'mysteries' in Matt. 13.11 and Luke 8.10). A 'mystery' is a divine secret that God reveals to the people who are able to understand it, such as his prophets in Old Testament times. Jesus told his followers that it was they who were privileged to be the recipients of his revelation concerning the KG. The mystery or secret was that the KG had come in the person, deeds, and words of Jesus. For those with the eyes to see, things were happening, but others could easily persuade themselves that nothing of significance was happening. Within the community formed by Jesus, new relationships did exist in which the needy could find a love that expressed itself both in material provision and in loving acceptance. This was something that was visible—'See how these Christians love one another' presumably reflects what some pagans actually said, even if the wording stems from a Christian apologist. At the same time there is no doubting that the early Christian groups were on occasion characterized by a lack of love and by material greed (see 1 Cor.),

[p.224]

so that outsiders might also be tempted to think that there was nothing distinctive about them.

We can now move on to suggest some additional features that arise out of the teaching of Jesus on the KG when it is put in the total context of his teaching.

The Kingdom of God and the Father

The first is that with the concept of the KG there is closely associated Jesus' understanding of God. The KG is specifically linked with the thought of God as Father in Luke 12.32; 22.29ff. (contrast Matt. 19.28); Matthew 13.43; 25.34. In the references in Luke it is God as the Father who bestows the KG on the disciples and Jesus respectively. The two references in Matthew also occur in material addressed to disciples. This is congruent with the fact established by T. W. Manson that Jesus did not preach about God as Father to all and sundry but revealed him to his disciples.²⁷ Of crucial significance in this connection is the fact that the Lord's Prayer begins with the words, 'Father, may your name be hallowed, may your kingdom come', thus linking closely the name of 'Father' and the KG. Jesus starts from the situation of Jewish piety in which people were accustomed to pray to God, and he directs his disciples into his understanding of God as Father. We observe, first, that the prayer is one for God to act to establish his rule. It was common ground between Jesus and his audience that the coming of the KG is the act of God and not of persons, even though God would use persons in the fulfilment of his purpose. Jewish literature of the time shows that here Jesus was saying nothing new.²⁸

Second, the God who establishes his rule is the God whom Jesus addresses as 'Father'. The fact that Jesus used an intimate form of address that appears to be unparalleled in contemporary

²⁷ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 89-115.

²⁸ See Ps. Sol. (cited in n. 26); Ass. Moses 10.1; Sib. Orac. 3.47f, 767f; Qaddish Prayer ('May he set up his kingdom'). Jesus need not be referring exclusively to the future, imminent Kingdom; his words can refer to God's action now.

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Palestinian Judaism and that he taught his followers to know God in the same intimate manner as he himself enjoyed needs no further elaboration here.²⁹ This has an important consequence for the understanding of the KG. As A. M. Hunter put it, 'The King in the Kingdom is a Father.'³⁰ This fact indicates that the KG is primarily concerned with the creation of a family; the character of the King is the model for the character of the members (Matt. 5.48/Luke 6.36 Q).

Third, in this context it is God the Father who is at the centre of Jesus' teaching. The petition for the KG to come is preceded by the petition that God will cause his name to be hallowed. This is important because it shows that the coming of the KG and the hallowing of God's name are parallel concepts and indeed that they are very closely associated.³¹ It is by concentrating attention on the Lord's Prayer as the critically assured minimum of

[p.225]

Jesus' teaching that H Schürmann is able to insist that Jesus' message was primarily about God and puts him at the centre.³² The suggestion here is that God himself rather than the KG was primary for Jesus. I am rather doubtful whether this is a helpful distinction; it would be more cogent if it could be shown that teaching about God himself characterized the message of Jesus, but this is scarcely the case. Nevertheless, the significant fact emerges that the character of the KG is determined by the character and activity of God the Father.

The Kingdom of God and the Spirit

The second important element that must be brought into the picture is the Holy Spirit. The Evangelists were conscious that Jesus carried out his ministry in the power of the Spirit who was bestowed upon him at his baptism. That Jesus himself was aware of the source of his power is to be seen in the extremely significant text Matthew 12.28/Luke 11.20 Q where he comments that it is by the Spirit/finger of God that he does his mighty works and the KG has arrived. Whether we take 'Spirit' or 'finger' to be the original word used by Jesus and paraphrased by the use of the alternative word in one of the Gospels,³³ the text testifies to the realization of divine power active in the ministry of Jesus to enable him to carry out his exorcisms. In another saying Jesus attributes his mighty works to the power of the Spirit and warns unbelievers against the danger of blaspheming or speaking against the Spirit (Mark 3.29/Matt. 12.21b; Matt. 12.32b/ Luke 12.10 Q). Again, there is some doubt about the precise wording used by Jesus, but the basic point is not in any doubt, namely that Jesus recognized that his mighty works were performed in the power of the Spirit.

²⁹ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* 1, pp. 61-8. See now J. Barr (above, p. 169, n. 64).

³⁰ A. M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (London, 1957), p. 31.

³¹ For a profound discussion of the similarities and differences between the two petitions see E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer* (London, 1965), pp. 100-10.

³² H. Schürmann, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Dusseldorf, 1968), pp. 13-35; *Das Gebet des Herrn* (Leipzig, 1981), n. 222.

³³ See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 475ff.

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The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that for Jesus the coming of the KG and the activity of the Spirit were tightly connected, so much so that we may suggest that it was the working of the Spirit in and through Jesus that constituted the actual coming of the KG.³⁴ It is interesting that this connection is maintained outside the Synoptic Gospels, especially when we remember that references to the KG are less common. Birth by the Spirit and entry to the KG are linked together in John 3.3, 5, and Paul links the Spirit with the KG in Romans 14.17 and Galatians 5.21ff.; we may compare 1 Corinthians 4.20 where the KG is linked with power.

Three points emerge here. The first is that the KG is brought directly into conflict with the evil rule of Satan whose power is placed over against that of the Spirit. The Evangelists recognize that this motif was a dominant one in the ministry of Jesus when they relate at the outset of the story how Jesus, immediately after he had received the Spirit, was straightway sent into the

[p.226]

desert to face Satan. Luke and John note how the events leading up to the passion and death of Jesus were instigated by the action of Satan through Judas (Luke 22.3; John 13.2, 27). It has sometimes been suggested that for Luke at least the period of Jesus' ministry between the temptation in the desert and the passion was free from temptation by Satan, but this hypothesis will not stand up to examination, especially in the light of Luke 22.28.

The second point is that the KG is associated with power. It is brought into being by the exercise of divine might, the 'finger' of God (cf. Exod. 8.16-19). As Paul says, the KG is not (simply) a matter of talking but of power (1 Cor. 4.20). A divine reality is at work in the world, and an important saying suggests that this power would become all the more evident after the ministry of Jesus (Mark 9.1).

A third point to be noted is that the Spirit was promised in the Old Testament as a gift for the last days in the same way as the KG (Joel 2.28ff.). The KG and the Spirit are thus both signs of the eschatological activity of God now realized in the ministry of Jesus.

The effect of these considerations is to underline the element of power in the KG as God's activity in Jesus which extends beyond mere prophetic inspiration expressed in words.

The Kingdom of God and Jesus

The fact that God's power is revealed in the KG in and through Jesus inevitably leads us to consider more closely his relation to the KG. It is the weakness of several treatments of the KG that they do not adequately consider the concept of messiahship. This is regrettable. For the word 'messiah' retained the sense of 'anointed' and was used to refer to a person endowed with the *Spirit* for a particular purpose authorized by *God*. We can leave aside the view that the

³⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London, 1975), pt 1.

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background to the use of the term in the Gospels is anointing to priesthood,³⁵ and take it for granted that the reference is to an anointed ruler or *king*. Thus the term 'messiah' is implicitly associated with the three terms that we have already considered: *God* sets up his rule (the KG) through a *king* anointed by the *Spirit*.

The question whether Jesus thought of himself as the Messiah is one that arouses much controversy. Since the early Church believed without question that he was the Messiah, the tendency to read back this title into his earthly ministry was obviously strong and therefore the texts must be examined with care. Yet the surprising fact is that, according to the Gospels, Jesus rarely used the word 'messiah' and rarely spoke in a way that suggests that he thought of himself as the Messiah. This fact, which helped to lead to the theory that Jesus did not think of himself as the Messiah and that such

[p.227]

references as there are in the Gospels do not represent his teaching, ought rather to be evaluated as indicating the historical verisimilitude of the Evangelists and should encourage us to view the actual texts in the Gospels where the term occurs with greater respect. Alongside these texts must be placed three other pieces of evidence. First, there is the way in which Jesus was addressed as 'Son of David', an appellation that is firmly present in the tradition (Mark 10.47ff.), although Jesus himself taught that it was an inadequate way of thinking of the Messiah (Mark 12.35-7). 'Son of David' was a synonym for 'Messiah'.³⁶ Second, there is the use of the term 'Son of man' by Jesus. This term was not taken up by the early Church to any appreciable extent and is characteristic of the diction ascribed to Jesus. Within the scope of the present essay it is not possible to bring together the evidence for the writer's view that Jesus used this term as a messianic self designation that draws its meaning from Daniel 7 where a figure like a man is given rule and authority by God.³⁷ Third, there is the fact that Jesus acted as an agent of God's rule and did not merely announce it as a prophet might have done. Various of his actions could be regarded as messianic in the strict sense of the term.³⁸ The cumulative effect of these three considerations is to show that Jesus did act messianically and that he must have been conscious that in doing so he was fulfilling the role of the Messiah. That is to say, the precise form that the KG took in the mind of Jesus was a messianic form as opposed to the kind of conception of the KG where a Messiah is not specifically present.³⁹

If so, we face the question as to why Jesus did not publicly use the actual term 'messiah' of himself. The reason usually advanced is that he wished to avoid the misleading implications of a

³⁵ The view of G. Friedrich, 'Beobachtungen zur messianischen Hoherpriesterwartung in den Synoptikern', *ZTK*, 53, 1956, pp. 265-311, has been refuted by F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel* (Göttingen, 1964), pp. 231-41.

³⁶ See C. Burger, *Jesus als Davidsson* (Göttingen, 1970); he does not regard the tradition as historical. On Mark 12.35-37 see Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 743-9.

³⁷ I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (London, 1976), ch. 4.

³⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, 'The Messianic Secret in Mark', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 21, 1970, pp. 92-117.

³⁹ Jewish messianic expectations in the time of Jesus are extremely difficult to unravel. In some of the literature future expectations are expressed without mention of a messianic figure (e.g., Ass. Moses 10).

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term that would lead people to expect a war—like leader. It has often been thought that this danger lurked behind the wish of the people to make Jesus king in John 6.15. This cannot be the whole story, however. Even if Jesus was reticent about using the term 'messiah', he was prepared to use the term 'KG' which, as we saw, contained a blend of political, military, and more spiritual associations for his contemporaries. It is, therefore, uncertain whether Jesus was simply trying to avoid political misunderstanding. Two other reasons may be suggested. If we are correct in assuming that Jesus used the term 'Son of man' by preference, then it can be argued, first, that this phrase expressed better the divine origin of the bearer of the title. For the Jews, 'messiah' seems to have connoted a purely human figure on the whole, but 'Son of man' in Daniel 7 connoted a heavenly figure 'like a man', and therefore it was better suited to express the true nature of Jesus. There is a case that 'Son of man' was tantamount to 'Son of God', and, if this suggestion can be upheld, it will explain why

[p.228]

Jesus preferred this term. But here our second consideration comes in: Son of man was also an idiomatic term in Aramaic that may possibly have meant much the same as 'I' in certain contexts, and there is much to be said for the view that Jesus used a deliberately ambiguous term as part of his 'veiled manifestation' of himself.⁴⁰ Now, if this is a correct suggestion, then we have a phenomenon similar to that which we found in the proclamation of the KG by Jesus. Jesus is concerned with authority and rule that will be revealed openly in the future, but at present it is hidden and partly secret. The fact that we can detect this same pattern in the use of both concepts, KG and 'Son of man', is surely significant. It would appear to support the authenticity of Jesus' teaching in both areas, since it is highly unlikely that the early Church would deliberately create the same motif in both areas.

Our discussion has shown that KG and 'Messiah' are correlative concepts, each belonging to the other and implying the other. Jesus thus appears as the divine agent to whom God has entrusted dominion and power, and it is thus in Jesus that the KG becomes a reality. As T. W. Manson put it, the KG is the messianic ministry; it is in the activity of Jesus that we see the activity of God that brings about his rule.⁴¹

The Kingdom of God and Israel

We must next ask what Jesus envisaged as the result of the establishment of the KG. The traditional hope was, as we have seen, for the setting up of a new kingdom in the presence of God at the end of the age in a cosmic setting; it would be composed of people who loved and served God and who lived together in righteousness and peace under the rule of God and his agent the Messiah. The Jews believed that they themselves would compose this people. The KG is thus a corporate entity and consists of people. Hence the mission of Jesus involved the creation of a

⁴⁰ See S. Kim, *The "Son of Man" as the Son of God* (Tübingen, 1983), pp. 35ff.

⁴¹ T. W. Manson, 'Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret', in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospel Essays in Memory of R H. Lightfoot* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 209-22; *The Servant-Messiah* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 63.

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people who would be the objects of God's rule and who would receive the benefits of his rule. Since Jesus warned the people of Israel that as a nation they were in danger of being rejected by God, he must have envisaged the creation of a new people, incorporating elements of the old people but also open more widely and constituted by a new allegiance. Along with his proclamation of the KG, he also called people to personal allegiance to himself as disciples and taught them that they must obey his words. The conclusion is irresistible that response to the message of the KG was identical with acceptance of Jesus as Master. The new Israel is constituted by its allegiance to the Messiah. The recognition that Jesus was concerned with the creation of a new Israel is not new. Again we owe to A. M. Hunter the lapidary statement that 'the Kingdom of God implies a new Israel',⁴² but it is Ben F. Meyer who has given

[p.229]

the most concentrated expression to this thought in recent writing. He asks: 'Why indeed should the reign of God have been the object of a proclamation to Israel as such unless it bore on the destiny of Israel as such?'⁴³ Here two key texts must be mentioned. The first is the enigmatic saying recorded in differing forms by Matthew and Luke (Matt. 19.28/Luke 22.29f. Q:

Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Common to both forms of the saying is the idea of rule by Jesus which will be shared in the world to come by the twelve disciples as they sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel. There must be an element of symbolism in the saying, recorded as it is by Luke in the context of the prophecy of the betrayal by Judas (though Luke later records the appointment of a replacement for Judas). But a literal understanding of the saying is unlikely since it takes no account of the place of the Gentiles (whether in the eyes of Jesus or of the Evangelists). The thought is of privilege for the faithful followers of Jesus who have shared in his earthly ministry to Israel, and the privilege appears to be that of sharing in the judgement on the unbelieving people of Israel rather than of ruling over a reconstituted Israel. Is the saying, then, anything more than a symbolical way of stating that the disciples will share in the KG but unbelieving Israel will be condemned, or, rather, that a division will be carried through among the Jews on the basis of belief and unbelief? It is not likely, then, that this text speaks of a 'new' physical Israel ruled by the twelve, but it certainly prophesies the end of the old Israel.⁴⁴

The other crucial text is Matthew 16.18 where Jesus prophesies that he will build his Church on 'this rock' and that it will not be overcome by the powers of death. The authenticity of this saying

⁴² Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology*, p. 34.

⁴³ B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London, 1979), p. 133.

⁴⁴ So A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to Saint Luke* (Edinburgh, 1901), pp. 502f; J. Dupont, 'Le logion des douze trônes (Mt. 19, 28; Lc 22, 28-30)', *Biblica*, 45, 1964, pp. 355-92. Here I alter the opinion expressed in *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 818.

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is much disputed, and we owe to Ben F. Meyer a spirited defence of it.⁴⁵ In the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls the language has been shown to be definitely Palestinian, and there are no conceptual reasons for denying it to Jesus. In effect, the sole remaining reason for not accepting it is its absence from the other Gospels, especially from Mark and Q; but it is curious reasoning that would reject a saying simply because it is not attested in the other Gospels or their sources.⁴⁶ If the saying is genuine, it expresses the purpose of Jesus to establish a people whom he describes as 'my people'. Coming immediately after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, this must mean 'the people of myself as Messiah'. Here, therefore, we have an express statement of the intention of Jesus

[p.230]

to form a people to whom is given a name used of Israel as the people of God; compare how Stephen could refer to 'the church in the wilderness' (Acts 7.38). Moreover, the statement has a cosmic dimension with its reference to 'the powers of death', and Jesus goes on to speak of the keys of the Kingdom of heaven entrusted to Peter, which suggests that in some way the people and the KG are closely related. After the disastrous effect of the medieval equation of the KG with the Church, seen in the increasingly secular and unchristian expression of authority claimed by church leaders and in the refusal to recognize the saving rule of God outside the Catholic Church, there has been a strong reaction against the identification of the KG as the Church. Indeed, the current understanding of the KG as God's activity of ruling rather than as the area or people over whom he rules has strengthened the case. But we have seen that this modern understanding of the phrase 'KG' is one-sided and inadequate. The KG is not just the sovereign activity of God; it is also the set-up created by the activity of God, and that set-up consists of people. Hence the people created by Jesus is a manifestation of the KG: ideally they are the people who accept the rule of God through Jesus and on whom he bestows the blessings of his rule. The Church as the people of God is the object of his rule and is therefore his Kingdom, or at least an expression of it, imperfect and sinful though it is. We should not be afraid of recognizing this fact, despite the misuse of it in the past. Although the Church has the promise of sitting in judgement on the world (1 Cor. 6.2), which may be in effect a reinterpretation of the saying about the Twelve sitting in judgement on the tribes of Israel, this is a purely future role, and there is no justification for exercising it here and now. Indeed, the danger is already guarded against by the sayings of Jesus which insist that leadership is a matter of humble service and which warn the disciples categorically against desiring position and privilege. It is true, of course, that there will be leaders in the Church, but they have been given the pattern of humility and service that they must follow by Jesus.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, pp. 185-97; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 167-70.

⁴⁶ If we did this, we would have to reject large areas of teaching found only in any one Gospel which would be patently absurd.

⁴⁷ The practical problem lies in how to combine force and love (1 Cor. 4.21).

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The Kingdom and the new age

After our rapid survey of some of the salient features in the teaching of Jesus, it is now time for us to try to assess their significance for today.

The first point to be noted is that the early Church did two things with the teaching of Jesus. On the one hand, it retained a record of it in the traditions that eventually received definitive form in the Gospels. This indicates that the teaching of Jesus continued to be influential in the Church, and, as we noted, the Evangelists appear to have recognized that the main theme of Jesus was the KG. On the other hand, the uses of the term KG

[p.231]

outside the Gospels are much more thin on the ground. This suggests that while the early Church faithfully preserved the account of what Jesus actually said, it also moved on beyond his teaching and interpreted it for its new situation in the post-resurrection period in the Hellenistic world. Thus, although the mode of expression was varied, the central importance of the message expressed by Jesus in terms of the KG remained constant. Elsewhere I have tried to show how the emphasis shifted from the Kingdom to the King himself in his functions as Lord and Saviour and how the experience of the blessings of the Kingdom found apt expression as eternal life.⁴⁸ This does not mean that we should completely abandon the term KG and express the concept in other ways: rather, just as the early Church retained the term and used other forms of expression, so too we should retain and explain the biblical terms as well as look for new ways of expression that will be meaningful in our contemporary society.

Perhaps the most fundamental fact that we discovered in Jesus' teaching about the KG was the way in which he looked forward to the future full manifestation of God's rule but at the same time proclaimed and brought into being that same rule during his ministry. For Jesus the future had already commenced in the present time. The Old Testament had prophesied the hope of God's future action as king, and it expressed its hope on the basis of the mighty acts of God that had already been experienced, especially at the Exodus. The early Church was conscious of living in the era of fulfilment. Its hope for the future was based on what it already knew of the present working of God. This is an observation of the utmost importance. Christianity is not built upon a hope of what God may do in the future; on the contrary, the hope is built on the experience of what he has already done and is doing in the present time. And this hope is that God will bring to completion what he has already begun. He will continue to work in character with his past and present work.

Consequently, when we talk about the KG we are talking about something that is actually happening here and now, inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus, and now 'come in power' since his death and resurrection (Mark 9.1).⁴⁹ The KG is now 'incarnated' in Jesus himself. Through his death and resurrection he has been shown to be both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2.38). The hope

⁴⁸ I. H. Marshall, 'Preaching the Kingdom of God', *Exp. T.*, 89, 1977-78, pp. 13-16.

⁴⁹ On this saying, see the discussion of the various interpretations in Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 377-9.

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of a new age is thus a hope that has been coming true ever since Jesus first began to proclaim, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1.15). The hope is no longer hope but present reality. To be sure, it is incomplete; we live 'between the times', but our assurance, based on our present experience, is that in the future we shall know in fuller measure the experience of divine power.

[p.232]

The terminology makes this clear. Jesus used one and the same term, 'the Kingdom of God', for the present and the future of God's rule. The Holy Spirit is described by Paul as the 'first instalment' of what God intends to give his people (2 Cor. 1.22; Eph. 1.14). The power that makes for newness is already making things new. In Johannine terminology, eternal life is a present experience stretching into the future. All this demonstrates that the message of the KG is that the age to come has already dawned. God is now at work in the world. This point needs some emphasis, for too often people talk as though the activity of the KG ceased with the termination of the earthly ministry of Jesus, or as though it is something purely heavenly or spiritual. Those who have spoken of the KG as present in the world today have often thought of it either in a purely humanistic manner as the realization of a moral state of society through human effort or in terms of the establishment of some kind of ecclesiastical organization. But the language of the KG stresses that it is God who is presently exercising his powerful lordship in the world in which we live.

There might seem to be one decisive difference between the coming of the KG in the ministry of Jesus and its presence now. We saw that the manifestation in his ministry was veiled in certain respects, although Jesus could accuse his contemporaries of blindness when they failed to perceive the significance of the signs of the times. But now the situation appears to be different in that God has raised Jesus from the dead and thus declared him to be the Judge and Saviour of humankind. Does this not mean that the presence of the KG should now be manifest and open to everybody? On the whole, the New Testament suggests that the situation in fact is no different. The God of this world has blinded the eyes of those who do not believe. Christians walk by faith and not by sight. The fact of the resurrection—and the interpretation to be placed upon it—are not matters that can be proved in a way that will be universally compelling. Hence the presence and progress of the KG is still a matter for faith. The signs pointing to it are, however, stronger than they were before; the person who does not believe has to reject a stronger body of evidence.

The relation of the present of the KG to its future requires some consideration. The New Testament teaching about the future KG is cast in apocalyptic terms; it presents the picture of a cataclysmic end to the present world-order followed by a new order characterized by incorruptibility and permanence. Does this mean that there is no continuity between present and future? The tendency in much evangelical teaching has been to emphasize the disjunction between the two ages with the world getting worse and worse until eventually God steps in and makes a totally fresh start by taking his

I. Howard Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," *Jesus the Saviour. Studies in New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity / London: SPCK, 1990. Hbk. ISBN: 0830612733. pp.213-238.

[p.233]

people away from the corrupt earth and raising the dead in Christ to share with them in the new world. Certainly the biblical picture is of a world in which evil gets worse and worse and the godly remnant suffers much persecution. Moreover, the world in which we live presents an equivocal face with the achievements of science and technology on the one hand and the potential for nuclear destruction and other evils on the other. Are there any grounds for hope in the message of the KG?

It is the merit of Ian Murray to have drawn attention to *The Puritan Hope*⁵⁰ that before the end of the age there would be widespread revival and the conversion of unbelievers, a hope based exegetically on Romans 11 and other passages. The significance of this hope has perhaps been missed because it has been entangled with questions about the millennium and its timing. Advocates of the Puritan view have linked it to postmillennialism, the doctrine that the millennium will precede the parousia and prepare the way for it. But postmillennialism is a doubtfully based option, and it would be better to recognize that the hope of revival in the last days is something to be distinguished from the millennium.

Can this hope be taken as something realistic? Does Jesus' preaching of the KG give us any basis for hope for the future? Certainly there is a pattern that must be observed. Scholars have often found it difficult to accommodate the expectation of the cross by Jesus in his proclamation of the KG: how can Jesus have announced the presence of God's rule and yet faced apparent defeat and the need to give his life as a ransom for many? The solution to the problem lies in the resurrection and his triumphant vindication by God. But this means that there was a pattern in the ministry of Jesus in which there was a genuine experience of opposition by the powers of evil that led to his crucifixion; the death of Jesus was real, but it was only apparent defeat, for it was itself part of God's plan and it was followed by a display of divine power and victory. This pattern was repeated in the early Church in its experience of strength in the midst of weakness. May we not then say that on a cosmic scale the KG comes in weakness and grows in weakness but that there will be a triumphant vindication at the parousia of the Lord? The pattern of crucifixion and resurrection enacted in the experience of Jesus will be followed in the case of the Church as it dies now in order to be resurrected with its Lord at the parousia. Thus the Church can proclaim the KG now in the sure hope of its final triumph. And yet at the same time it must be affirmed that the triumph is not merely future. The biblical teaching is not that God's strength is experienced after weakness, but rather that it is known in weakness. The cross itself was the place of glorification of Jesus according to the Fourth Gospel (John 3.31f). The Church rejoices in and

[p.234]

⁵⁰ I. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh, 1971).

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during its sufferings, and, although death may be at work in its messenger who proclaim the good news, there is life for those who respond to the gospel here and now (2 Cor. 4.12). Thus the picture is one of veiled triumph now and open triumph to come.

If the Church possess this sure hope, what can we say about the activity of the KG here and now and the church's relationship to it? Here we may start with the well-known words of Vincent Taylor:

One important feature His teaching does share with Apocalyptic: from first to last the *Basileia* is supernatural; man does not strive for it or bring it into being. Our modern idea of labouring for the coming of the Kingdom is a noble conception, fully baptized into Christ and expressive of His Spirit; but it is not His teaching regarding the *Basileia*.⁵¹

Taylor is of course right in what he says about the teaching of Jesus: the coming of the KG is the act of God; he acts to establish his rule over the community to whom he gives the blessings of his rule. Rightly, therefore, does Taylor go on to emphasize that we are to pray for its coming, and this surely remains a primary obligation. Yet this is surely not the whole story. For we have seen that God acted in Jesus to establish his rule and that the concepts of the Messiah/Son of man and the KG are indivisibly joined together. But the Messiah or Son of man is the leader of a group who are not only subject to God as King but also act in unison to spread the KG. The idea that the KG expands of its own accord independently of the action of God's agents is thoroughly false. Jesus called the Twelve and the Seventy (-two) to share in his work, and he told them to preach that the KG had drawn near and to perform the signs of its presence. The KG extends as it is proclaimed and as the signs of its presence are performed. If Jesus came to bring the KG, we must also conclude that his followers were commissioned by him to carry out the same task. It must be questioned, therefore, whether Taylor is right in saying that 'labouring for the coming of the Kingdom' is not the teaching of Jesus himself. On the contrary, this is precisely what he called his followers to do. To proclaim the Kingship of God is to preach the KG, for it opens up to people the possibility of responding to the message by acknowledging God as their king.

One can understand the position Taylor adopted. It was no doubt a reaction against the nineteenth-century liberals and the social gossellers who thought of a KG that was little more than a glorified human community bound together through action inspired by love. Such a conception is dangerously secular and leaves God out of consideration, to say nothing of Christ. Equally, it is possible and necessary to react against the autocratic claims of a Church that claims that it incarnates the KG and is in danger

[p.235]

of implying that submission to a supreme pontiff is the same thing as accepting the kingship of God. It is good to be able to report that contemporary Roman Catholic scholarship now

⁵¹ V. Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London, 1937), p. 10.

I. Howard Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," *Jesus the Saviour. Studies in New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity / London: SPCK, 1990. Hbk. ISBN: 0830612733. pp.213-238.

repudiates any such ideas.⁵² However, we can learn from these dangers that the KG is not simply an ethical community among humankind or an ecclesiastical institution. But at the same time it must be insisted that the KG is concerned with moral issues; as Taylor again says, the moral renewal of humanity follows from the presence of the KG.⁵³ Nor must we forget that the KG is concerned with the formation of a Christian community and it is not simply a collection of isolated Christian individuals.

The Church consists of people who acknowledge God as king and who are committed to proclaiming his kingship and witnessing to his reality in their own lives as individuals and as a community. Put in other words, this means that a primary task of the Church is evangelism carried out in the power of the Spirit. But such proclamation is not simply aimed at the conversion of individuals. The Church must also spell out the nature of obedience to God both spiritually and morally, just as Jesus did. The proclamation of the KG will include the declaration of God's condemnation of what is evil and hypocritical in the lives of people both as individuals and as members of communal bodies in business and government. To say this obviously raises questions about the extent to which protest in the name of God should be carried out in action as well as in words, but there is no room here to take up the point. We must be guided by the example of Jesus, who forbade his followers to use violence, but who did things, like associating with tax collectors and sinners, that outraged his opponents and made them even plot to kill him.

Thus we conclude that the Church is called to participate in the realization of the KG here and now. To do so will arouse opposition; like its Lord it will experience weakness and crucifixion. But it will bear these things in firm hope because of the victory already achieved by God in Christ and because of his faithful promise to complete what he has begun. The promise of the KG signifies that 'in the Lord your labour is not in vain' (1 Cor. 15.58).⁵⁴

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⁵² Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, p. 233.

⁵³ Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ This essay was originally published in *Themelios*, 11, 1, September 1985, pp. 5-15. [1989] See the detailed discussion of the material outside the Gospels in G. S. Shogren, 'The Pauline Proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ within its New Testament Setting', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen, 1986.