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THY KINGDOM COME*

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NEW Testament scholarship has been much exercised of late over the problem of demythologizing the gospel. In OT scholarship the situation is somewhat different. There the great effort is to make two myths grow where none grew before. NT scholars, however, seem to have more mythology on their hands than they know what to do with.

The idea of translating the gospel from the language of a pre-scientific, mythological understanding of the universe into terms more congenial and intelligible to the modern man is of course not new. Forty-three years ago Professor Ernest F. Scott, whose death during the past year we mourn today, said at the end of what seems to me his most substantial book, *The Kingdom and the Messiah*, "We cannot but conclude that the message of Jesus, closely as it was related to the apocalyptic beliefs of His time, was in the last resort independent of them. They provided the categories in which it was first delivered . . . but the conceptions themselves are separable from the forms that moulded them."

If the Bible has something to say to our generation, it must be converted into terms of modern thought to be intelligible to our contemporaries. Rudolf Bultmann's *Entmythologisierung* is the most thoroughgoing effort yet made to do that.¹ All such efforts are laudable. It should be recognized, however, that what is being done is not actually demythologizing but re-mythologizing. In converting the gospel into terms of existentialism, for example, we simply substitute one myth for another. The general world-view of contemporary physical science is also a mythology, more critical and relatively more accurate than the old mythologies, no doubt, but still a mythology. Re-mythologizing must be done not once but over and over again, as our mythologies change. But it must be done.

The whole effort is futile, however, unless what is expressed in new terms is what was really meant by the original forms of expression. In other words, de- or re-mythologizing must rest on accurate exegesis. If

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¹ Bultmann's undertaking differs from earlier efforts, of course, in that he seeks not to eliminate the mythology but to preserve it by reinterpretation; he is concerned, moreover, not primarily with the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus but with the apostolic proclamation of God's act in Christ, including incarnation, death, and resurrection.

it is to be regarded as in any sense biblical, it cannot dispense with the preliminary labor of critical, historical, disinterested exegesis.

The proponents of demythologizing recognize this. Certainly it cannot be charged that Bultmann is remiss at this point. There is another type of interpretation, however, which has the same laudable motive but seems to me more dangerous, because it does not so realistically recognize the mythological element in the NT. As compared with the existentialist German school of *Entmythologisierung*, this movement is predominantly British, and its philosophical background is something akin to Platonism.² I do not complain of its philosophy, or of its effort to reformulate the gospel in terms of that philosophy; I do deplore the fact that it reads its own presuppositions back into the NT itself, and by so doing precludes an accurate exegesis.

This is evident particularly in the treatment of a crucial point of interpretation, the future aspect of the kingdom of God in the gospel of Jesus. That subject has been so often and so fully discussed in this society and elsewhere that one might think the question had been settled long ago. It was settled, as a matter of fact, but it does not stay settled. It keeps coming unsettled just because scholars still insist upon reading later theological ideas back into the words of Jesus.

To point up the issue more sharply, let me consider just one recent book, *The Fulness of Time* by John Marsh (1952). I choose this because it is a clear, effective, and to me very provocative presentation of what I may call for convenience a quasi-Platonist British interpretation of eschatology. Marsh speaks of rejecting "Platonic notions," to be sure (p. 181), but he never quite succeeds in making clear the distinction between such notions and his own position.

What interests me particularly in this book is that the author thinks of his work as an attempt to interpret the NT by the OT (p. 12), and thus leads one to expect historical exegesis. He distinguishes three tasks: the lexicographical, the critical, and the doctrinal. Instead of making his doctrinal interpretation follow and depend upon the critical inquiry, however, he reverses this procedure. The critical task, he says, must be undertaken only in the light of the doctrinal studies (p. 14).

Such a procedure is a violation of the integrity of scholarship. Theological interpretation must follow, not precede, objective exegesis. It is

² Not all British scholars, of course, belong to this school of thought. Since completing this paper I have received Reginald H. Fuller's *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* ("Studies in Biblical Theology," No. 12 [1954]). The same basic position with regard to the future coming of the kingdom of God that I here maintain is defended by Fuller, though he is more confident than I am as to the authenticity and meaning of some of the sayings. On many important matters I cannot agree with him, but I applaud his rejection of the "wholly unbiblical, Platonic conception" of an eternal order beyond time and space (pp. 20, 33).

fashionable now, I know, to say that exegesis cannot be disinterested and objective, that it cannot attempt to be so without excluding itself from any real understanding of the Bible. There are dangers in the quest of objectivity, of course, but the dangers incurred by renouncing that quest are much worse. When Karl Barth says in the preface to his commentary on Romans that to understand Paul one must first commit himself to the faith of Paul, it is not surprising that what comes out of his exposition is not the faith of Paul but the faith of Karl Barth. We cannot tell whether or not we *can* commit ourselves to the faith of Paul — or to the faith of Plato, or Moses, or Mohammed, or Karl Marx, or Karl Barth — until we know what it is.

Of course there must be sympathetic imagination. There must be, if you like the word, “empathy.” That is a very different matter. It requires not previous self-commitment but self-denial, self-forgetfulness, a willingness and a disciplined ability to dissociate oneself and one’s own feelings and convictions from the effort to understand another person. Self-commitment means inevitably the injection of self into the object, so that what we see is not the other man’s face but the reflection of our own. Objectivity does not mean treating another person like a laboratory specimen, to be dissected and described; it means respecting his dignity and freedom, allowing him to be himself and to say what he wants to say.

Without that kind of self-denying objectivity genuine exegesis is impossible. The exegete must treat Paul or Isaiah with respect and allow him to be himself. We must let Jesus be himself — I say that as a Christian, with all reverence and earnestness. We must let him say what he wants to say. One who approaches the gospels with the determination to believe what he finds there will find what he believes. To take the most obvious example, a modern man who does not believe in demons and demon-possession will be compelled to rationalize and modernize the presupposition of the gospels that demons exist and cause disease. It is one thing for a theologian to say that demonology is for him a mythological expression of the reality of suffering and evil in the world; it is something else for an exegete to say that Jesus himself did not believe in demons. You cannot have accurate, realistic exegesis if you are not prepared and willing to find ideas that you cannot accept. Appropriation and application must come after unbiased, uncommitted investigation.

The repudiation of that basic principle vitiates the argument of John Marsh at many points. A considerable part of his book is devoted to the meaning of time, and here he strays far from the simplicity of the gospel. Like others before him, he distinguishes between “time as chronological” (defined as “something that can be measured by a chronometer or clock”), and “time as opportunity” or “realistic time” (p. 19). The relative unimportance of “chronological time” is said to be shown by the

fact that "the Bible makes practically no contribution to our ability to measure time" (p. 20). Well, the Bible makes no contribution to our ability to measure height or breadth or depth, but that does not mean that it has a non-spatial conception of space. The Bible uses the units of measurement prevalent in its cultural environment. There is even a reference to a sundial in the OT (II Kings 20 11; Isa 38 8).

Marsh says that the OT "has no word for chronological time: it cannot translate '*chronos*'" (p. 20). If this means that the idea expressed by *chronos* was unknown to the OT, the makers of the LXX were unaware of the fact. They used the word *chronos* rather freely for a baker's dozen of Hebrew expressions.³ There is a difference between *chronos* and *kairos*, but *kairos* has chronological implications. The very idea of opportunity presupposes a succession of more and less favorable times for particular kinds of action. He who fails to keep an eye on the calendar and the clock will miss the boat. He who does not watch the *chronos* will miss the *kairos*. If one must be always ready, it is only because the day and hour are not known (Matt 24 36, 42, 44, etc.).

The conception of time determines the interpretation of eschatology. Marsh recognizes, for example, the doctrine of the coming age in the NT, but he repeatedly affirms that "the two ages were not consecutive" (pp. 32, 140); they were related not by succession but by fulfillment (p. 141). Now surely any conception of fulfillment which divorces it from temporal succession is far from being biblical. Aside from the fulfillment of prophecy, fulfillment in the Bible, OT and NT alike, means filling up an appointed measure of time. Biblical Hebrew does not speak of fulfilling time, but of fulfilling days or years.⁴ The Hebrew words for "time" indicate ordinarily a point rather than an extended period of time. The Aramaic of Daniel, however, speaks of "seven times" (4 16, 25, 32) and of "a time, two times, and half a time" (7 25); this last expression, in fact, occurs in Dan 12 5 in Hebrew.⁵ When Marsh contrasts succession and fulfillment, he introduces a decidedly unbiblical distinction.

³ The men of the OT thought of time just as they experienced it, an unceasing succession of "seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Gen 8 22). Their idea of time was far too "realistic" not to be "chronological." To speak of "chronological time," as though there were any such thing as time which is not chronological, seems to me only an unfortunate misuse of words.

⁴ Where the LXX reads ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀναπληροῦσθαι τὸν χρόνον Ἔσθηρ, the Hebrew is וּבְהִינֵעַ הַרְאִסְתָּר, "when Esther's turn came" (Esther 2 15). Rebekah bore Esau and Jacob when "her days to be delivered were fulfilled" (Gen 25 24). Hannah bore Samuel "at the coming round of the days" (לְבִקְשׁוֹת הַיָּמִים, I Sam 1 20, where the LXX, curiously enough, renders τῷ καιρῷ τῶν ἡμερῶν). Elizabeth bore John when "the time for her to give birth was fulfilled" (ἐπλήσθη, Luke 1 57). Mary bore Jesus when "the days for her to give birth were fulfilled" (ἐπλήσθησαν, Luke 2 6). The meaning is exactly the same.

⁵ In Neh 2 6 also וְכַן answers the question "how long" as well as "when." It is

My particular bone of contention with him, however, is that he carries back his non-temporal eschatology into the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus. "Jesus had often made it plain, from the start of his ministry," he says, "that the kingdom of God, like the Son of man, had already come. Therefore it cannot now come for the first time, nor is it ever said that the kingdom will come again" (p. 131).

If that is so, I submit, it is passing strange that Jesus told his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Those who maintain that for Jesus himself the kingdom of God had already come in his own person and ministry inevitably treat this second petition of the Lord's prayer in a rather cavalier fashion. It must be interpreted, they say, in line with other sayings of Jesus. Why? And what other sayings? When all the evidence in the sayings of Jesus for "realized eschatology" is thoroughly tested, it boils down to the *ἐφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς* of Matt 12 28 and Luke 11 20.⁶ Why should that determine the interpretation of Matt 6 10 and Luke 11 2? Why should a difficult, obscure saying establish the meaning of one that is clear and unambiguous? Why not interpret the *ἐφθασεν* by the *ἐλθάτω*; or rather, since neither can be eliminated on valid critical grounds, why not seek an interpretation that does equal justice to both?

John Marsh does not ignore this second petition of the Lord's Prayer, but he reads into it a meaning which excludes its plain, natural implication. He says that it "was not a superfluity after the kingly rule had been wholly present in Christ's own life, for our prayer must always be that the same obedience that our Lord manifested might be found also in us and in every child of man" (p. 165). In effect this identifies the coming of the kingdom with the individual's taking upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven; it is no longer God's act but man's. Marsh recognizes a future phase, so to speak, of the kingdom, but he insists that the kingdom of God is "not the end-term of an historical series, nor yet the 'absolutely other' realm that will supervene upon the destruction of the present order," for "since the kingdom of God was fulfilled in Christ, then none other than that same kingdom can come at the end of history" (pp. 165 f.). However sound that may or may not be as theology, or as an interpretation of NT theology in general, it cannot be derived from the recorded sayings of Jesus.

The collocation of the idea of the kingdom of God and the idea of

therefore no great departure from OT usage when Mark 1 14 says, "The time is fulfilled," and Luke 21 24 speaks of "the times of Gentiles" as a period to be "fulfilled."

⁶ Marsh accepts by implication (p. 131) C. H. Dodd's interpretation of the perfect participle *ἐληλυθυῖαν* in Mark 9 1 as meaning that the kingdom of God had already come when Jesus spoke and some of his hearers would realize the fact before they died. Dodd himself recognizes that this cannot be pressed (*Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 53 f.). The perfect participle indicates only that the persons in question will live to see the kingdom not merely in the process of coming but in the state of having come.

coming is in itself remarkable. The Lord's Prayer is a thoroughly and characteristically Jewish prayer. Its language and ideas from beginning to end are typically Jewish. Only at this one point is there anything at all surprising in a Jewish prayer. Two characteristically Jewish ideas, which, so far as I am aware, nowhere else appear together, are combined in the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

The idea of the kingdom of God permeates the whole OT and the literature of post-biblical Judaism. In both it means God's sovereign rule of the universe, his kingship, which is not coming but has always been present.⁷ Men may or may not see it. The prayer book says of the Israelites at the Red Sea, מלכותך ראו בניך, "Thy sons saw thy kingdom."⁸ The Wisd of Sol 10 10, speaking of Jacob, says that Wisdom ἐδειξε αὐτῷ βασιλείαν θεοῦ, "showed him God's kingdom." Men may or may not accept the sovereignty of God; they may or may not "take the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." But it is there and has always been there.

The expectation of a future manifestation of God's sovereignty is familiar also in the OT and later Jewish sources. ליהוה המלוכה, "the kingdom is the LORD's" (Ps 22 29); yes, but it is said also, והיתה ליהוה המלוכה, "and the kingdom shall be the LORD's" (Obad 21). Where the sovereign rule of God is expressed by the verb מלך in the imperfect (Exod 15 18; Ps 146 10), the meaning is simply that God's present rule will endure for ever; but in Mic 4 7 יהוה עליהם בהר ציון, "and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion," the reference is clearly to a new demonstration of God's royal power in the future.

The book of Daniel stresses both the present, eternal sovereignty of God and the future establishment of his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar confesses, "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (3 33 [4 3]; 4 29 [34]; 6 27 [26]); and in chaps. 4 and 5 he tells how he has learned by bitter experience "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men." Chap. 2, however, presents the conception of a succession of world empires, after which "the God of heaven will set up (יקים) a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

In the post-biblical literature other forms of expression are used with reference to the future aspect of the kingdom of God. One of them is the verb "appear" or "be seen." Just as Luke 19 11 says that the disciples of Jesus thought the kingdom of God was about to appear (ἀναφανισθαι), so the Assumption of Moses 10 1 says, "Then will appear (parebit) his kingdom in his whole creation"; and the worshipper in the

⁷ However the "Enthronement Psalms" are to be interpreted, their יהוה מלך certainly means that Yahweh now reigns supreme in the universe (Pss 93 1; 96 10; 97 1; 99 1; cf. I Chron 16 31).

⁸ The response to this is a quotation of Exod 15 18. A few lines earlier appears the parallel expression וברוח בני ובני ישראל, and after it קבלו עליהם משה ובני ישראל.

synagogue prays, ותגלה ותראה מלכותו עלינו בזמן קרוב, “And may his kingship over us be revealed and be seen at a near time.” God is besought also “to establish the world in the kingdom of the Almighty” (לתקן עולם) (במלכות שדי), or, in the words of the Qaddish, to “make his kingdom rule” (וימליך מלכותה).

As the idea of the kingdom, both present and future, is familiar, so also is the idea of coming. The end is coming;⁹ the day of Yahweh is coming;¹⁰ Yahweh himself is coming in judgment;¹¹ the promised king is coming;¹² Yahweh’s messenger of the covenant is coming.¹³ Later sources speak of the coming of the Messiah and of a prophet who is to come. In the rabbinic literature much is said of the world to come, or the coming age, העולם הבא. The conception of Paradise as coming down from heaven to earth appears also.

With all this it seems strange that verbs meaning “come” are not used with nouns meaning “kingdom” or the like as subject. Esther comes to the kingdom (4 14, הגעת למלכות), but it is not said that the kingdom or kingship has come to her. That it could have been said is shown by Mic 4 8, the only place in the OT, so far as I have found, where any verb meaning “come” is used with a noun meaning “kingdom” as its subject. Here, following the statement of vs. 7 already quoted, we have the familiar prophecy:

And you, O tower of the flock,
hill of the daughter of Zion,
to you it shall come (תאתה),
the former dominion shall come (ובאה),
the kingdom, to the daughter of Jerusalem.

The Targum of this passage reads instead of “and the LORD will reign over them” in vs. 7, “and the kingdom of the LORD will be revealed over them.”¹⁴ In the first half of vs. 8 it makes the Messiah instead of the daughter of Zion the one to whom the kingdom is coming,¹⁵ but in the second half of the verse the “former dominion” is said to be coming “to the kingdom of the congregation of Jerusalem.”¹⁶ This Targum is cited by Strack-Billerbeck as an exceptional example of the use of the verb “come” in connection with the kingdom of God. Actually it is not a case in point at all: it does not say that the kingdom of God is coming, but

⁹ Amos 8 2; Ezek 7 2, 3, 6.

¹⁰ Joel 2 1; Zech 14 1; Mal 3 19, 23 [4 1, 5].

¹¹ Pss 96 13; 98 1; Mal 3 2.

¹² Zech 9 9; cf. Mic 5 1 [2].

¹³ Mal 3 1.

¹⁴ ותגלי מלכותא דיי עליהן.

¹⁵ ואת משיחא דישראל . . . לך עתידא מלכותא למיחי.

¹⁶ למלכות כנשתא דירושלם.

that kingship is coming to the Messiah. So far as I have ever discovered, the combination of the idea of the kingdom of God and the idea of "coming" occurs nowhere in the OT or in post-biblical Jewish literature.

What does this mean? It can only mean one thing. Jesus' conception of God's kingdom is not simply that of the universal sovereignty of God, which may or may not be accepted by men but is always there. That is the basis of his conception, but he combines with it the eschatological idea of the kingdom which is still to come. In other words, what Jesus means by the kingdom of God includes what the rabbinic literature calls the coming age.

It includes also the more apocalyptic, Iranian idea of the cosmic struggle between the forces of light and darkness. Over against the kingdom of God stands the kingdom of Satan, still active and strong. For Jesus, as for the covenanters of Qumran, the present age is under the *ממשלה בליעל*, the dominion of Belial.¹⁷ Satan's kingdom is doomed; it is already breaking up; the strong man is bound;¹⁸ Jesus has seen Satan fallen from heaven.¹⁹ The kingdom of God has come near;²⁰ it has "come upon" the present generation;²¹ it will "come with power" within the lifetime of some of Jesus' hearers.²² But it has not yet come. At the very end Jesus tells his disciples that he will not again drink of the fruit of the vine until he drinks it new in the kingdom of God,²³ or as Luke has it, "until the kingdom of God comes."²⁴ The disciples must still pray, "Thy kingdom come."

What this means for our time I will not attempt to say. This is not the place or the *kairos* for that. I may say this: I do not want my eschatology de-eschatologized. Having said that, I may be accused of rejecting an interpretation of the gospel merely because I do not like the philosophy underlying it. I admit that I am not an existentialist, and I am far indeed from being a Platonist. But that is beside the point. I do not want to read other philosophies out of the gospel in order to read my own into it. I do not want to read anything into it. I want to understand it. Only so can I tell what it may mean for me.

¹⁷ DSD i.18, 23 f.; DSW xii.8. The name Belial actually appears in the NT only in II Cor 6 15; in sayings of Jesus he is called Satan, Beelzebub, or the devil. For the idea of Satan as the ruler of this world cf. John 12 31; 14 30; 16 11; II Cor 4 4; Eph 6 12.

¹⁸ Mark 3 23-28.

¹⁹ Luke 10 18.

²⁰ Mark 1 15.

²¹ Matt 12 28; Luke 11 20.

²² Mark 9 1.

²³ Mark 14 25.

²⁴ Luke 22 18.