

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO;
THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE
WRITINGS OF THE FATHERS. A
DISSERTATION [PP. 93-205]**

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HENRY MARTYN HERRICK & JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

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Regnum fulgebit in regno, cum regno venerit regnum, quod nunc oramus, et dicimus: Veniat regnum tuum. Haec ergo domus Dei, hoc templum Dei, hoc regnum Dei, regnumque coelorum adhuc aedificatur, adhuc fabricatur, adhuc paratur, adhuc congregatur.

—AUGUSTINE, *Tractate on John*, 68, 2.

PREFACE.

This treatise upon the kingdom of God is based upon the Christian writings of the patristic age, from Clement of Rome to John of Damascus. These writings have been studied exegetically and historically in the standard English translations, with reference, when necessary, to the original text. The editions used are the following:

1. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, in twenty-four volumes, published by T. & T. Clark.
2. Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers, Greek and English*, one volume.
3. The *Supplementary Volume* (Vol. IX) of the reprint of the Clark edition, published by the Christian Literature Co. of New York.
4. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, in twenty-eight volumes; also published by the Christian Literature Co. (now by the Scribners). Series I contains fourteen volumes, of which eight are of Augustine and six of Chrysostom.

These volumes, about fifty in number, contain the most important writings of the patristic age. Of many Fathers all the extant works are given, and of the others, with hardly an exception, sufficient of their writings to afford a reliable estimate of their views of the kingdom.

One supplemental work I have found to be of great value—the *Catena Aurea* of Thomas Aquinas, in the Oxford edition of eight volumes. Of this work the *Encyclopædia Britannica* says that "under the form of a commentary on the gospels, it was really an exhaustive summary of the theological teaching of the greatest Fathers of the church." It not only confirms many patristic references to the kingdom, but apparently gathers in addition all the important references (which are, of course, not numerous) not included in the volumes named above.

A list of the references to the kingdom in these volumes of the Fathers (3,974 in number, including 1,410 scriptural quotations) is given at the end.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

WHAT was understood by the kingdom of God in the early Christian centuries? To what extent was the New Testament usage followed, and wherein was it departed from? Did the Fathers, on the whole, preserve the great idea and hand it down, or did they lose it?

It is a notable fact that in the patristic age there seems to be no separate treatise upon the kingdom of God. The nearest approach to such a treatise is Augustine's great work *De Civitate Dei*, in which he gives a Christian philosophy of history. To him the kingdom of God is the divine government as realized in the church—the church which is ideal and historical, in heaven and on earth, and consists of angels and of men, of Israel first and then of the gentiles. This idea is evidently at a wide remove from the primary views of the New Testament. The doctrine of the kingdom, like the kingdom itself, may be said to work like leaven, rather than to stand forth from the outset as a formal and definite article of the Christian faith. An indication of this appears in Jerome's *Illustrious Men*. In his list of 135 writers he mentions about 240 subjects upon which they have written (omitting many of those best known to his readers), besides many commentaries and letters. Gennadius adds 99 men to the list, and about 220 titles. Of these 460 treatises not one is upon the kingdom of God. But many of the best thoughts of the early centuries cluster around this theme, scattered throughout the whole range of the literature, and possibly no other theme is more suggestive as a key to patristic views of Christianity.

A brief statement of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles concerning the kingdom is a necessary starting-point. Although Jesus made the kingdom the predominant theme of the gospel, he did not define it. He adopted the word from the current Jewish teaching, and gave it a new meaning. "The bond that unites the Old Testament with the New, the religion of Israel

with the gospel, is the idea of the kingdom of God. It is to come, and yet it is a present reality. It is in the souls of men; it is a living force in the bosom of society."¹ The dream of the earlier prophets, that the nation, and then mankind, would become obedient to the will of Jehovah; the individualism of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the sages; the visions of Daniel the seer—are all combined into a splendid ideal in the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom. Speaking in parables whose meaning was often purposely veiled, he emphasized the inner, mysterious nature of the kingdom more than its obvious features. The word "kingdom" is abstract in the sense of reign or dominion—of power in the universe, of grace in the soul;² and concrete in the sense of realm, or the subjects reigned over. The word in the abstract sense occurs but rarely in the New Testament. The kingdom of God usually means the company of believers, the Christian society. Yet its domain is first of all in the individual soul. It is dynamic before it is static, spiritual rather than formal. Before the Christian society is possible, souls must be renewed.

Meyer, throughout his commentaries, maintains that the kingdom of God always signifies nothing else than the Messiah's kingdom, the erection of which begins with the parousia, belonging not to "this world," but to "the world to come" (on Rom. 14:17; cf. on 1 Cor. 4:20). On Luke 17:21 he defends the translation "the kingdom of God is among you," and claims that the kingdom of God as an ethical condition of the soul is a modern idea, not historico-biblical. But an idea is not modern which the Fathers uniformly find in Luke 17:21, translating it correctly "the kingdom of God is within you," and in several instances applying with exceptional force its teaching that the kingdom of God is in the soul.

The idea of the kingdom as involving eternal life seems traceable in Mark 9:45 and 47; probably, also, in Luke 18:18 and 24, and John 3:3 and 15. The kingdom of God (synonymous with the kingdom of heaven) and of Christ is one, Matt. 13:43; John

¹See FISHER, *History of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 23-5; FREMANTLE, *The World as the Subject of Redemption*, p. 38.

²Cf. the Lutheran and Reformed Confessions.

18:36; Eph. 5:5. As to the relation of the kingdom to the church, the only passage in the New Testament bearing directly upon it (Matt. 16:17-19) is indeterminate. This passage is peculiar to Matthew, but is evidently an original utterance of Jesus. The idea of the kingdom is apparently here embodied by Jesus in the church as the form whereby or wherein the kingdom is to reach its goal. The institution which Jesus chooses as the distinctive, visible form of the kingdom, to consist of men of rock-like faith such as Peter's, is to continue unvanquished by the death of its members. The earthly decrees of Peter in regard to the kingdom, as represented by the church, shall be valid in heaven.

The disciples thought that they understood the mysteries of the kingdom (Matt. 13:51), but only after Pentecost did they begin really to grasp them. Answering their inquiries about the kingdom (Acts 1:6 f.) the Lord said: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses." Led by the Spirit, the disciples directed their energies to proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and the kingdom increased visibly in the growth of the churches. Still looking for the speedy return of Jesus, they anticipated with his appearing the consummation of the kingdom.

Besides the emergence of the church in the days of the apostles, which to some extent overshadowed the thought of the kingdom, there was a progress of doctrine which in part transferred the center of their thought and preaching from the kingdom to the king. This is in the Fathers frequently carried to the length of identifying Christ and the kingdom. The new point of view is manifest in comparing the discourses in Acts with the parables of Jesus. Three times in Acts "the things concerning the kingdom" are significantly combined with "the things concerning Jesus" (8:12; 28:23, 31). Only after Pentecost did a definite Christology arise; but from that time it began at once to reveal the dynamic which established the eternal life of the kingdom in men's souls, and thereby in their relations with one another promoted the fraternal life of the church.

But as time went on, and Jesus did not return, while members