

# CHURCH AND KINGDOM: ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF ESCHATOLOGY

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THE FATHER of Roman Catholic ecclesiology, Johann Adam Möhler, suggested the same two mistakes can be made in developing an ecclesiology as were made in Christology's difficult history. On the one hand, Christ's human and divine natures were so fused or united that a monophysitism resulted. Christ was neither human nor divine in such a conception. On the other hand, the two natures were conceived to be so loosely joined that a Nestorian dualism resulted, and the person of Christ ceased to be one.

The same two errors can be made in developing a theology of the Church. The Church can be considered so perfect, so suffused with divinity, that it would cease to be human and unfulfilled and in need, a community of hope and faith. Or the Church could be considered so imperfect, its existence so precarious, that it could boast only a promise of fulfilment: a pilgrim, it lives only in the hope of the Lord's coming.

Does the Church, therefore, live *in re* or *in spe*? Is the Church the kingdom which Christ preached about or is the kingdom what the Church awaits? Just as the distinction between nature and person provided the key to the problem which vexed Christology, so too a growing number of theologians feel that the distinction between kingdom and Church might provide ecclesiology with a deeper insight into, and formulation of, the elusive scriptural data about the nature of the Christian community. Another way of saying the same thing is that ecclesiology might be well advised to examine itself anew in the light of eschatology.

## MAGISTERIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

Magisterial pronouncements prior to Vatican II resolved the problem of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church by treating them as if they were identical. Examples of this identification are not difficult to find in Pius IX, Pius XI, and Pius XII.

Pius IX, in the Encyclical *Amantissimus* to the Bishops of the Eastern Churches, states that Christ "instituted and established the

Catholic Church. . . as the one kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> An Encyclical to the Bishops in Austria, *Vix dum a Nobis*, speaks of “the Church as His visible kingdom on earth. . . .” It goes on to say that its Founder has given the Church “the full power to exercise a salutary coercive power in all matters connected with the true end of the kingdom of God upon earth,” and that “the kingdom of God upon earth is the kingdom of a perfect society.”<sup>2</sup>

Pius XI, in his Encyclical *Mortalium animos*, speaks of the Church as a “perfect society, by its very nature external and perceptible to the senses.” This is why Christ “compared it to a kingdom, a household, a sheepfold, a flock.”<sup>3</sup> Pius XII spoke as follows to the Lenten preachers in 1953: “Holy Scripture, when it speaks of the Church, uses images. . . . Thus, it is a kingdom whose keys are in the hands of him who received from Jesus, the Eternal King, the power of binding and loosing on earth and in heaven.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in *Mystici corporis*: “The Eternal Father willed that the Church should be the kingdom of the Son of His love. . . a kingdom in which all believers would pay perfect homage of their intellect and their will.”<sup>5</sup>

Leo XIII expressed his understanding of the Church most clearly in his 1895 Encyclical *Satis cognitum*. He sees the Church primarily as a society. The main concern of the Encyclical is the authority structure which the Church has in this society. The scriptural descriptions which indicate that the Church is a perfect society are: the household of God, a city placed on a mountain, a fold presided over by one Shepherd, and “a kingdom which God has raised up and which will stand forever.”<sup>6</sup>

The reduction of the kingdom to one of many scriptural images which can describe the Church, a characteristic of magisterial statements for the past century, precluded an ecclesiology measured by what was to come. An ecclesiology forged in the crucible of eschatology gives a somewhat different picture of the Church.

In general, magisterial statements have tended to develop an “ecclesiology of glory,” because of a failure to differentiate kingdom and church. Triumphalism would be the inevitable mood of those who

<sup>1</sup> Translation from *Papal Teachings: The Church*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, tr. E. O’Gorman (Boston, 1962) p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 686. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 557. <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318–19.

feel they already possess what others feel they await. The favorite way of describing the Church in such a case is as the prolongation of the Incarnation or the Mystical Body of Christ. These formulations, valid though they undoubtedly are, are fastened on to heighten the static, the ontological, the already-possessed qualities of holiness, unity, etc. The eschatology which left this kind of ecclesiology unannoyed was that of the "realized eschatology" school.

A large portion of Protestant Christianity, on the other hand, has a predilection for another way of impoverishing ecclesiology, i.e., by separating the kingdom of God from the Church. The ordinary way of doing this is by glorifying the former and denigrating the latter. "Consequent or futurist eschatology" was fastened on to leave this form of ecclesiology placid. The undue separation of the kingdom from the Church results in an *ecclesia crucis* ecclesiology. Close comparison to Israel learning through its sinfulness is frequent in such analyses. The historical is always the framework of such ecclesiology. The judgment of the Christ who is to come receives a major share of attention. Karl Barth is an example of this Nestorian-like separation of the kingdom, which is God's and is future, from the Church, which is of men and is present. The Church is then the *creatura verbi*, as Luther called it, the human counterpart of the kingdom. The most attractive scriptural descriptions for Nestorian-tending ecclesiologies are the Church as People of God, Pilgrim, *ecclesia militans et pressa*.

Although both emphases can be given scriptural warrant, this is not to say that in either case the deficiency is in Scripture. The defect in conception is not remedied by biblical citations but only made inveterate by their seeming confirmation. The only corrective for an ecclesiology which makes too much of the human and too little of the divine is a deeper look at the nexus between kingdom and the Church in Scripture. The complexity of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church does not appear to be sufficiently appreciated prior to the Second Vatican Council. The density of conception began to be differentiated by Vatican II. The differentiation was facilitated by the impressive theological effort in this area, largely non-Catholic, which preceded the Council. In turn, the Vatican II statements on the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church are causing much theological effort. It would be instructive to put into a synthetic

order some of this pre-Vatican II scholarship and draw out some of the significance of this scholarship for future ecclesiology.

#### SCRIPTURE ON CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The question of the New Testament's eschatology is a genus question with many species. The one that concerns us in this paper is the relationship between the kingdom which is to come and the Church which already is. The most enlightening approach to this specific question would seem to be a brief sampling of the New Testament data. It will show us two important lessons: the distinction between the kingdom and the Church and their inseparability.

A hint of this distinguishability as well as an indication of neglect of the proper perspective is clear when one considers the frequency of the word *basileia* in the Synoptics and the infrequency of the term *ekklēsia*. To be exact, the former is used (in its different phrases) 104 times: 51 times in Matthew, 39 in Luke, and 14 in Mark. On the other hand, "church" is used twice, both times in Matthew. The term "church," however, is used 19 times in Acts and 67 times in the Epistles. We can see, therefore, that Loisy's cynical remark about men awaiting a kingdom and being handed a church has some merit.

The relationship between kingdom and Church in Scripture can be better understood if we take a few concrete questions. Are the members of the Church to be the members of the kingdom? Not necessarily. There are those who perform the key ecclesial functions—prophesying, casting out devils, performing many works in His name—whom He never knew and who, even though they cried "Lord, Lord," will never enter the kingdom of heaven, because they failed to do the Father's will (Mt 7:21-22). On the other hand, there are those who do not appear to belong to the community that knows and confesses Jesus and yet will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34 ff.). Therefore, election to and rejection from this kingdom does not comfortably follow the lines of those who are members of the Church and those who are not.

Again, at present, in the wheat field sown by the Spirit, tares have been sown by the devil. Wheat and tares coexist until the harvest: "... at the end of time the Son of Man will send out His angels, who will gather out of His kingdom everything which causes offence, and all

whose deeds are evil, and these will be thrown into the furnace. . .and then the righteous will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:41-43). In the Church, therefore, are those who will be excluded from the kingdom. On the other hand, to persevere in the Church gives one an assurance about one's entrance into the kingdom: to persevere is a guarantee that we will share His reign (Mt 19:28). And yet one can be called to the wedding feast in the kingdom, be included in the community of the invited, but be excluded from the feast itself (Mt 7:1-4).

In brief, then, members of the Church are those who wait for the kingdom and have reason to hope for their inclusion in it. In their expectation their prayer is to be "Thy kingdom come" as well as "Forgive us our trespasses." The Christian is both *justus et peccator*.

To counterpose the previous data, which proves the distinguishability between Church and kingdom, one would propose data that indicate the homogeneity and inseparability of the two realities.

During His earthly ministry Christ sends forth disciples in His own name to perform functions that imitate His. The effect of their actions parallels the effect He had: the rule of Satan is broken, the blind see, the possessed are exorcised, the lame walk, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. At His departure He commits this same power permanently to the community of believers. He conforms Himself to their instrumentality: "He who receives you receives me" (Mt 10:40). He promises to remain in their midst. He also empowers Peter with the keys, not to the door of the Church but to the future kingdom. Peter's decisions and the apostles' will determine entrance into the kingdom. The apostles are empowered to bind and loose, i.e., teach, judge, and forgive those who would gain access to the kingdom.

It is worth noting here that the powers conferred on Peter, the apostles, and the Church are capable of influencing the "shape" of the kingdom, but the extent of their determination is not indicated. Nor does the reigning Christ limit His reign to those possessing these powers. He says: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given me." But He does not indicate that He confers that power in its entirety. The community is an instrument of His reign, but it has no assurance of its uniqueness in this regard.

Another aspect of the New Testament message which shows the distinguishable but interlocking realities of the kingdom and the Church is the Eucharist. Three texts reveal a profound connection between the community of believers and the kingdom. First, Paul tells the Corinthians that their regularly repeated Eucharistic meal should both anticipate His coming and recall His death. It should be celebrated in the present community by those who await the King's return and His kingdom's coming. "Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The Eucharist became the anticipation of that final coming as well as a real coming. The Lord became their eschatological joy as well as their hope. The Eucharist was both promise and fulfilment. The focus on the Eucharist in the early Church had two interesting effects: it relieved the antinomy between the "already" and the "not yet," and it linked Church and kingdom.

A more intimately conceived nexus in Luke's account of the Last Supper reveals that there will be a future table-companionship and a future sharing in the reign for those who have just received the body and blood of Christ from His own hands: "Now I vest in you the kingship which my Father vested in me; you shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22:29-30). His kingship was both shared and promised. The disciples were both part of the kingdom and pledged the kingdom.

Moreover, Christ was to make Himself part of the anticipation by abstaining from the cup until the community of believers were His table-companions again in the kingdom: "I tell you, never again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father" (Mt 26:29).

The problem of reconciling the scriptural data on the relationship between kingdom and Church can be seen in the volatility evident in the patristic age. In Pseudo-Barnabas, for example, the kingdom is purely eschatological and therefore not the Church. In Hermas and Augustine, on the other hand, the kingdom and the Church are almost synonymous. In Clement of Rome, the coming of the kingdom and the Church is between a now and a then: "Be mindful, O Lord, of the Church: rescue her from all evil and perfect her in thy love, and bring

her together from the four winds, her whom thou hast made holy, into thy kingdom, which thou hast prepared for her.”<sup>7</sup>

#### THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

The ambiguity of Scripture and the confusion of the patristic era have been merely the prelude to a history of widely divergent interpretation of the concepts of kingdom of God and Church. After centuries of neglect, in the latter part of the nineteenth century Ritschl caused the idea of the kingdom of God to be given major attention, even though his own understanding of it came more from Kant than from the Gospels. Essentially a kingdom of this world, uneschatological, and pervaded by ethical purpose, the Church, as Ritschl saw it, was bequeathed the task of extending this ethical and worldly dominion of God initiated by Jesus. In 1892 Johannes Weiss took a totally opposite view: the kingdom was a purely future reality, religious rather than ethical. He dismissed any human activity as effective for the establishment of the kingdom and consequently would not concede a function to the Church in its realization.

These two nineteenth-century positions were forerunners of the two extremes we find today in kingdom theology. On the one hand, we have the school best characterized by Albert Schweitzer as “consequent eschatology.” At this extreme, the kingdom is purely future. While we await the kingdom, what is expected of us is service to the point of humiliation, death, and obedience to those moral demands which prepare one for the kingdom. These are the conditions disposing for future entrance. Although many would nuance these conditions, there is unanimity in this school on the purely future nature of the kingdom.

At the other extreme are a number of modern exegetes who conceive the kingdom as primarily a present entity. The most reputable of these is C. H. Dodd. His formulation, “realized eschatology,” conveys his understanding. The kingdom has entered history in Jesus and through His ministry. It is a timeless entity. Crucial to this position is Dodd’s interpretation of the parables. In these, the sowing preceded the historical coming of Jesus and the harvesting describes His ministry. The sacraments of the Church are Christ’s continuation of this same kingdom’s eschatological harvesting.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Basileia* in *Bible Key Words* (London, 1957) pp. 56-57.

The large majority of exegetes, however, assume positions somewhere between the two extremes, between a purely future and a present kingdom. Consensus in this intermediate group is hard to come by. But they are unanimous in seeing the kingdom as neither wholly future nor wholly present. In turn, they are unanimous in their refusal to identify the Church and the kingdom. At least Protestant ecclesiology can be said to have achieved such a consensus;<sup>8</sup> Catholic ecclesiology has no such consensus at present.<sup>9</sup>

This middle group sees the categories between present and future eschatology as inaccurate. Rather, present promise and future fulfilment or present pledge and future possession would be used. Promise or pledge connotes a homogeneity with fulfilment and possession which present and future do not. Then, too, promise-fulfilment and pledge-possession come closer to describing the complex biblical data than does present-future terminology.

Several important studies done by theologians in this middle group prior to Vatican II give the first signs of a synthesis of the problem. The Lutheran theologian K. E. Skydsgaard addressed himself to the question of the relationship between the kingdom and the Church in an important article in 1950, "Reich Gottes und Kirche."<sup>10</sup> In it he established the distinguishability between the Church and the kingdom of God. It is from the kingdom of God that the Church receives her power and substance. The Church, by means of her own order and sacraments, is the sign of the coming kingdom. In the Church the kingdom is already manifest, and through the Church, in word and sacrament, it comes to us. The Church exists for the sake of the kingdom, is the instrument of the kingdom, and is subordinate to the kingdom. The Church is not the kingdom, for the same reason that the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*. It already participates in the new age of the kingdom and yet exists in the old age, *in via* to the new aeon. The Church must always be oriented to the kingdom and never be an end in itself. The kingdom gives the Church the summons to battle both for the Church and against a Church which would attempt

<sup>8</sup> Cf. F. M. Braun, *Aspects nouveaux du problème de l'église* (Fribourg, 1941) p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. McBrien, *The Church in the Thought of Bishop John Robinson* (Philadelphia, 1966) p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> K. E. Skydsgaard, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951) 383-97.



to establish the kingdom of God here on earth. When the kingdom comes, then the age of the Church, which is the age of signs and is itself under the sign "till He come," will have passed. Then we shall be in the age of direct sight.

Another voice, from whom much could be expected but nothing has been heard in this connection, is W. G. Kümmel. Although his work in the area of eschatology has been monumental, he feels that "Jesus nowhere said or intimated that the presence of the coming Kingdom of God would show itself during the interval between His death and the parousia in the fellowship of His disciples."<sup>11</sup> Jesus saw the kingdom of God to be present in His own person and acts; "He knew of no other realization of the eschatological consummation."<sup>12</sup> Kümmel feels that scholars have assumed without evidence that Jesus expected a community to come into existence after His death in which the eschatological consummation was either present or anticipated. Even during His lifetime, Kümmel believes, Jesus did not see the Church and the kingdom as related. "The sources do not yield sufficient facts on which to base the theory that...in this congregation which gathered round Him, He knew that the Kingdom of God had begun...there can be no question of the presence of the Kingdom of God in the congregation during His lifetime."<sup>13</sup> Kümmel's contribution to eschatology is valuable for Christology, but for the most part is useless for ecclesiology.

The monumental work on the question by a Catholic theologian and exegete was done by Rudolf Schnackenburg in 1959, *Gottes Herrschaft und Reich*.<sup>14</sup> He recommends three distinctions. First, he suggests that we speak of the reign rather than the kingdom, since the latter connotes a realization, an organism which can grow, a structure which can be gradually built. This only obfuscates the issue. Therefore, *basileia* in its present form should be called a reign or a rule, not the kingdom. Secondly, he suggests that we apply the expression "reign of Christ" to the present age, the age between Resurrection and Parousia. He would mean this in an affirmative sense; he does not suggest that this reign of Christ is not also a reign of God, since it is

<sup>11</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* (London, 1957) p. 140.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Translated into English, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York, 1963).

with and through Christ that God is reigning in the present age. In this reign Christ is exercising His sovereignty over the powers which He is putting under subjection, the last being death. This done, He will hand over the result of His dominion to the Father, and God will be all in all, i.e., the reign will be complete, the kingdom of God will be a reality. Thirdly, Schnackenburg suggests that we distinguish the Church from the reign of God and Christ. Christ's reign embraces the Church, but it extends to the entire cosmos also. We cannot speak of the Church as the present form of Christ's reign nor of God's kingdom on earth. His reign does not admit of such organization or process as we find in the Church. His reign does not embrace the just end of sinners, but the Church does. His reign cannot be built up by men, but the Church can. His reign is in no sense dependent upon earthly and human factors, but the Church is.

Christ's reign is realized in a special way in the Church. Further, it is primarily in and through the Church that the cosmos comes under the sovereignty of Christ: "...that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places through the Church" (Eph 3:10). The Church, therefore, is the key instrument of His reign, sign of that reign and present locus of that reign's more perfect realization.

The Church, the people of God, is imperfectly assembled (the flock is still scattered), incompletely under the reign of Christ, and still awaiting that reign's completion and its King's coming. To say all this is to say also that the Church is not the kingdom of God. It is not the perfect eschatological society. This people will one day become the kingdom of God, but only after the Judgment, when some will be made members of His perfect reign who were not members of the community on earth and vice versa. Until that time, the community as such is guaranteed His continuing presence and a share in His present and future reign. Insofar as it opens itself to this reign in time, the Church becomes the eschatological community. When that reign is perfect, the Church will be the kingdom of God.

The relationship between Jesus and the kingdom of God Schnackenburg describes somewhat less well. Jesus' coming, for Schnackenburg, "coincides with the provisional advent of the *basileia*";<sup>15</sup> "the reign of

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

God present in Jesus and His actions is provisional";<sup>16</sup> to this reign everything Jesus says and does is subordinated. This reign or kingdom which Christ preached is purely eschatological and wholly supernatural. Human beings and their "resources can do absolutely nothing to bring it into existence or to hasten it or to delay and hinder it. The seed grows of itself (Mk 4:26-29) and so the Kingdom of God comes from divine power and grace."<sup>17</sup>

Another important contribution on the relationship between kingdom and Church was made in 1952 by the Norwegian exegete Nils A. Dahl.<sup>18</sup> For Dahl, the Christ-event was the seed-sowing time. In this he would intentionally differ with C. H. Dodd, who sees Christ's coming as the harvest time and the Old Testament era as the time of seed-sowing. For Dahl, the parables of growth were meant to show the organic unity between the seeding, i.e., the ministry of Jesus, and the harvesting, i.e., the future, glorious kingdom. The parables were meant to alleviate the scandal of the seeming insignificance of Jesus by likening Him to leaven or seed, which must become hidden to produce the desired effect. What men were taught to expect by the parables was a period of secret presence during which the kingdom would be only proleptically and initially realized.

Before the final, glorious kingdom is revealed, a number of events will take place, authored by the divine initiative. One of these events is the calling and gathering together of men who are to enter that kingdom. Jesus had in mind, Dahl feels, "a secret, proleptic presence of the eschatological assembly."<sup>19</sup> So much of what He did is intelligible only if He foresaw such an assembly or a Church. But, Dahl warns, "the subject of the parables is the Kingdom, not the Church."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, "where eschatology is in process of realization, the Church is in process of formation or, rather, the eschatological assembly is in the state of being gathered in."<sup>21</sup> Like the kingdom, the Church "properly belongs to the eschatological future."<sup>22</sup> What now corresponds to the ministry of Jesus is the presence of the risen Christ in word, sacrament, and Spirit.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.      <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> N. A. Dahl, "The Parables of Growth," *Studia theologica* 5 (1951) 132-66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.      <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.      <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.      <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

## VATICAN II

Vatican II's Constitution on the Church went through many stages of conception. In the first two drafts the concept of the kingdom was given no notice. In the final version it was given some attention. It received some slight attention also in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, as well as in the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

Briefly, what Vatican II says of the relationship between the kingdom and Christ is that in His person, in His words, and in His presence He made it visible. He inaugurated the kingdom by His miracles. He confirmed its arrival; the good news He preached was that the kingdom had come. Of the kingdom and the Church, the Council says that the Church is the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery; the Church becomes on earth the initial budding forth of that kingdom; her mission is to proclaim and establish the kingdom of Christ and God.

It is noteworthy that the kingdom is not one of the many scriptural images the Constitution on the Church uses to bring some light to the mystery which it calls the Church. Furthermore, when the kingdom is spoken of by the Council, it usually has the same inadequate distinction from the Church as it had from Christ in His historical ministry. To put it another way, what the kingdom was vis-à-vis Christ, the Church is vis-à-vis the kingdom.

Just as Christ "preached the Good News, that is, the coming of God's kingdom," and established it by His word ("those who hear the word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ [Lk 12:32] have received the kingdom itself"), so also the Church "receives the mission to proclaim and establish among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, we can no more identify Christ and the kingdom than we can identify the Church and the kingdom. In both cases they were the source of the proclamation of a reality other than themselves. Further, they were the instruments for establishing that reality, the kingdom.

Just as Christ made the kingdom visibly present ("the kingdom is clearly visible in the very person of Christ"), so also the Church "be-

<sup>23</sup> Constitution on the Church, no. 5 (tr. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott [New York, 1966] p. 17).

comes on earth the initial budding forth of that kingdom.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the kingdom is, to say the least, a present phenomenon, actual and growing. The closest the Vatican II documents come to identifying kingdom and Church is the statement “The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly. . . .”<sup>25</sup>

On the question of the future as opposed to the present kingdom, a disappointment awaits the scholar. The only time the kingdom is referred to as coming, it could be referring to either a present or a future realization. The whole concept of what is to come is not mentioned in kingdom terms but in Church terms. In the seventh chapter of *Lumen gentium*, the title itself gives an indication of this focus: “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church.” The first sentence reads: “The Church...will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven.”<sup>26</sup> Further, “The promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit, and through Him continues in the Church.”<sup>27</sup> We can see, then, that the problematic is not eschatological but ecclesiological. The Church in heaven, the Church comprising those who “have finished with this life and are being purified,” and the pilgrim Church, “the exiles on earth,” and the relationship between these three different “ways and degrees [by which] we all partake in the same love for God” are set forth in detail.<sup>28</sup> Despite the chapter’s title, this is communion-of-saints ecclesiology, not community-of-pilgrims ecclesiology.

The verbs used to describe what is within the power of the Church and its human instruments with regard to the kingdom are instructive. Men in Christ are described as being able to proclaim, establish, root, spread, intensify, and strengthen the kingdom. This shows the kingdom as present, organic, immanent, and to some degree dependent on the Church.

Although Vatican II ecclesiology lays a greater emphasis on eschatology than *Mystici corporis* and previous magisterial statements, nevertheless the question is: How much of the scriptural data do these

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (Documents, p. 18).      <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 3 (Documents, p. 16).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 48 (Documents, p. 78).      <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* (Documents, p. 79).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 49 (Documents, p. 80).

statements satisfy? There would appear to be no extension of the kingdom on earth except that which is established by the Church. There would appear to be an organic progression from what the kingdom presently is to what the kingdom will become. There is no hint of discontinuity or of a transcendent mode of fulfilment. The implications of the concept of the pilgrim Church are only lightly touched upon. The eschatological nature of the Church is still securely conceived within traditional ecclesiology. There is no hint that in the final consummation the Church will, in a real sense, cease to be, as Scripture would seem to say.

In brief, as was observed by one of the Protestant theologians present at the Council, "The kingdom of God idea is harmoniously incorporated into preconceived ideas about the Church."<sup>29</sup>

#### SOME FINAL OBSERVATIONS

The difficult question of the relationship between the kingdom and the Church has still to be satisfactorily determined, both in theology and by the magisterium. The price we pay for failing to examine the relationship more profoundly is very great. The world needs a serving Church, not a reigning one. But the Church is saddled with an ecclesiology of glory which makes reigning more inevitable than serving. Triumphalism is an infectious and elusive malady. It cannot be eradicated by superficial changes in forms and practices. A kind of presumption, it is in fact a spiritual sickness which has its remedy in a more accurate diagnosis of what is promised and what is possessed, of what is already realized and what is still to come.

If the price Roman Catholicism pays for neglecting the relationship between kingdom and Church is triumphalism, much of Protestant Christianity suffers from the opposite. We find a disparagement of the Church, belittling of the structures and institutions of the Church, because of an ecclesiology built on pessimism. Too great a cleavage between what is and what is to come can dishonor the community in which Christ is present and through which He has His kingdom come. If the former malady is a kind of presumption, this is a kind

<sup>29</sup> K. E. Skydsgaard, in *Dialogue on the Way*, ed. George L. Lindbeck (Minneapolis, 1965) p. 172.

of despair—or at least a way of acting as if Pentecost were an event we still await.

The closer we come to understanding what is wrong with these two emphases, the sooner the divisions within Christianity will be healed. A balanced eschatological perspective is difficult to achieve. The classical antipathy between the ontological and the historical mentalities must be harmonized if the eschatological perspective is to be achieved.

A second observation has to do with the Church's understanding of herself. It is clear from the New Testament that the descriptions of the coming of the Owner, Bridegroom, etc., were always a surprise to those to whom they came, not only as regards timing but also with respect to attitudes. It follows that any ecclesiology or self-understanding must be open to the future coming of the kingdom and its Lord. The Church and its teachings must be as provisional as its pilgrim status requires. It must not act as if it contained the transcendent, but must remain open to it. This is not to say that the Church's self-understanding and her teachings lack certainty or authority; rather, that their expressions must take on less of an air of finality and irreformability, since she enjoys only a "beginning in fulness," as Möhler has put it.

The Church's pilgrim status must have deeper implications for her self-understanding, her governing, and her teaching than has hitherto been admitted. The Council's formulation *ecclesia semper reformanda* should be more than a moral axiom; it is a theological imperative.