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The Kingdom of God and Evil

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The affirmation of the reign or the Kingdom of God continues to raise questions about the problem of evil in the world.

I. GOD REIGNS BUT EVIL CONTINUES

Already the absolute reign, the domination implied by even the whole idea of God, creates a glaring enigma of the reality of evil. The Scriptures proclaim this reign. Several psalms celebrate the majesty of Yahweh and the glory of his eternal throne; Yahweh is King by virtue of his creation of the world and by the universality of his rule: 'his kingdom is over all' ([Ps. 103:19](#), cf. [Ps. 24, 29, 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 115](#) and even the ancient oracle of Balaam, [Num. 23:21](#)). The New Testament does not ignore the theme. The book of Revelation repeats the title of 'Pantocrator.' Paul takes up the theme 'King of ages (centurien)' ([1 Tim. 1:17](#), cf. [Jer. 10:10](#)) and develops it in the phrase 'God who in eternal felicity alone holds sway, King of Kings and Lord of lords' ([1 Tim. 6:15](#)) as in the proposition: 'he governs everything according to the purpose of his will' ([Eph. 1:11](#)); Jesus, who frequently pictures God as King or as master in his parables, stressed that the smallest event depends on his will ([Mt. 10:29](#)). In this certainty no one can avoid the problem of theology: how is it that God, whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil, can let injustice be manifest and even bring it into his empire? Does he treat human beings as the fisherman treats the small fry of the sea? Habakkuk asks the question with all its difficulties ([1:13-14](#)) and our own day seems more sensitive than any other to this difficulty. As expressed by Camus in *The Plague* or by the Dostoevsky of *The Brothers Karamazov* in connection with the suffering of children, this question has provided for modern man more than enough arguments against belief. It has been called 'the rock of atheism': if this problem does not always lead to an atheistic position, it keeps a large number away from the God of 'onto-theology' and **P. 436** 'moral monotheism' to use Heidegger's and Ricoeur's phrases—from the God of traditional and, to be sure, biblical Christianity.¹

But, for the reign or Kingdom which the gospel announces right at the centre of the Christian proclamation (cf. [Acts 20:25](#)) and with which our studies are concerned, the connection with the problem of evil is even closer: the reference to evil belongs to its very definition. How does one distinguish the reign which *is coming* from the reign which *is* (and always has been)? The latter includes evil in a mysterious way, while the former abolishes it. The rule of the Creator as Creator, of God as God, consists in the fulfilment of his decretive will; the rule promised and announced as good news brings with it the total fulfilment of his perceptive will 'on earth as it is in heaven.' The gospel of the Kingdom which is our concern is presented as an answer to the problem of evil that has arisen under the universal rule of God; no theoretical answer but one that liberates in this life, in

¹ Let me mention three excellent books among those examining this question philosophically: *C. Werner ...* (excellent in the resumé and classification of solutions proposed in the course of history, less good in his conclusions); *Lucian Jerphagnon ...* which is chiefly concerned with suffering; *Etienne Borne ...* the best writer and thought, but which tends towards Christianity that is both Kantian and ardent. As a reply to the atheist use of the problem of evil, I recommend ELMAJCALL.

the here and now; an answer that is not concerned with the *origin* (vide malum? Where does evil come from?) but with the *end* of evil.

That that is the content of the biblical teaching scarcely seems to us to be in question. Let us remember that Zechariah associates the great day when Yahweh will be King of all the earth ([14:6, 9](#)) with the end of all cursing (v. [11](#)), then with even the holiness of the most humble objects, working pots, horse bells (v. [20](#)). Isaiah contemplates the same reign in its beauty ([33:17](#) ff.); for Yahweh's being King and Saviour coincides with the healing of all sicknesses and the forgiveness of all sins (vv. [22, 24](#)). The connection of these prophecies with other passages shows that this reign of God will be identical to the reign of the Messiah. According to Zechariah, Yahweh will cause living water to spring forth for purification and will achieve his ends ([13:1, 9](#)) due to the suffering of a partner who is so much one with him that Yahweh himself is said to be pierced in the person of the coming Shepherd ([12:10, 13:7](#), cf. already [11:4ff.](#)); this Shepherd must be identified with the new Solomon previously announced ([9:9ff.](#)); we cannot think of two different reigns. In the same way Isaiah certainly considers the messianic reign as the reign of God, and that is why the promised child, davidic prince of peace, will have the divine name of 'wonderful p. 437 counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of eternity' ([9:5](#)).² The promise given for the hope and universal harmony, 'they shall not hurt nor destroy any more,' and 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea' ([Is. 11:6-9](#)). It is the time of the Lord's banquet when he 'will cause death to vanish forever ... when he will wipe away the tears from all faces' and will kill Leviathan, the writhing, crooked serpent, with his great sword ([Is. 25:6-8; 27:1](#)). Preaching the Kingdom of God, John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles proclaimed clearly the victory over evil, over falsehood and war, over sin and hatred, over sickness and death.

How does faith, which accepts the Word today face the reality of present day evil? First we will show the acuteness of the problem and we will resist the attraction of some speculative solutions. We will try to bring to light the temporal structure of the forwarding of the reign or Kingdom, then interpret the phenomenon of evil in our day. Finally, we will attempt to enter, if we can, the depths of divine wisdom that controls our history, since we believe that 'it is given to us to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven' ([Mt. 13:11](#) and parallels).

In the coming of the reign of God, with the victory that it implies over evil, was for us only a future event, nothing more than something to wait for, the continual existence of evil would not be surprising. But the gospel of the kingdom certainly says something quite different. The preaching formula of John the Baptist and of Jesus (at the beginning): 'the reign of God "eggiken" '—has a certain ambiguity about it, but it indicates at least the imminence of the coming and suggests that the inauguration of the Kingdom takes place during the time of the New Testament (the same form of words is used twice in [Mt. 26:45, 46](#) for an immediate event). Moreover, Jesus said once that the Kingdom has *come upon* his hearers ([Mt. 12:28](#)) and he carries out exorcisms in this connection; these are signs of his victory over the evil one, this powerful enemy that must be bound to set his captives free. He says to the Pharisees: 'The Kingdom of God is "entos humon" ' ([Lk. 17:21](#)). The idea of imminence does not seem to us to be sufficient to do justice to the force of the expression. The much discussed 'logion' on the era inaugurated by the ministry of John the Baptist is best understood as dealing with the introductory phase of the Kingdom, the transition between the old and new economies; the Kingdom is clearing the way with violence ('biazetan'—middle voice), the violence shown by exorcisms, and the people who

² We could certainly quote many other texts: Ezk. 34 (the shepherd-king is Yahweh but also the new David), Dan. 7 (the eternal, heavenly Kingdom of the Son of Man).

share in the violence are those who are [p. 438](#) taking possession of the Kingdom. At the beginning of the same chapter (vv. 4ff.) Jesus pointed out that the signs of the messianic Kingdom, according to the prophets, are being fulfilled in his ministry. The accounts of the passion put the emphasis on the majesty of the crucified, and the promise made to the penitent thief suggests that the entry of Jesus into his Kingdom is the very same day of his answer ([Lk. 23:42-43](#); the paradox is perhaps already present, hidden, in the dialogue of [Mk. 10:37-38](#)). The fourth gospel makes use of the simile 'lifting up' in the same way and Jesus announces the defeat of the Prince of this world or the cross ([Jn. 12:31](#)). The first coming of Christ, John explains, had as its object the taking away of sin, the defeat of the works of the devil ([I John 3:5, 8](#)). Paul underlines that sin has been condemned in an effective way, which was impossible for the law ([Rom. 8:3](#)) and that Christ has triumphed over the powers of evil ([Col. 2:15](#)). As a result, when the Holy Spirit communicates the benefits of the work of Christ, it is the substance of the Kingdom of God that Christians receive ([Rom. 14:17](#)). The reign or Kingdom was inaugurated, the victory over evil has been won.

II. RESISTING SPECULATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

The author outlines his biblical reasons for rejecting the dispensational theory of the postponement of the Kingdom to the post-church age. With clarity and sharp analysis he then shows that the speculative response to the problem of continuing evil in the world of Karl Barth, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Paul Ricoeur are inadequate or false. In different ways each of these scholars minimises the presence and power of evil, the finality of Christ and looks for metaphysical solutions. Barth reduces faith to an ontological necessity, Teilhard deifies the universe and Ricoeur mythologises Christ as a symbol of sacrificial love.
Editor

III. THE ALREADY AND NOT YET

A truth that is widely acknowledged supplies a first answer. We have only called to mind a half of the scriptural teaching in stressing that the reign or the Kingdom is *already* inaugurated; we must add that it is *not yet* manifest. The duality of the present and future aspects, of the inauguration by the first coming and the consummation by the second, [P. 439](#) is a benefit that we consider to have been acquired ever since the work of the salvation-history school, and of evangelical scholars, of men like O. Cullmann and H. Ridderbus. The supporters of realised eschatology cannot do justice to the indications in the parables of the Kingdom which announce a development over a period of time, with a beginning as scarcely credible as a mustard seed, and a glorious end. Jesus foresaw a history that has to unfold before the end, before the coming of the Son of Man.³ The expectation of the Kingdom by the earthly church which prayed: 'thy Kingdom come!' was not the misunderstanding of mythologist-disciples but the sound grasp of the words of the Lord. Moltmann and Pannenberg, in making of the resurrection of Jesus the ratification of the promise and the anticipation of the end, have at least brought to light that the 'already' of the gospel cannot nullify the expected 'not yet.'

Many authors, however, leave in the shade the feature which makes this teaching clear and precise in the New Testament: namely that the presence of the Kingdom is only experienced in the Spirit, the Spirit who quickens the inner man, while the Kingdom has

³ Among texts to consider are Mt. 8:29; 11:6, 13 (the parables of the seed, of leaven, of the treasure, all hidden at first); 24:5, 14, 49; 25:5; Mk. 4:27; Lk. 17: 20ff; 19:11ff.

not yet come for the outer order of the world, with which we are at one in the body. Without this being made plain, the 'already' and the 'not yet' are mixed and are contrary to one another. One tends to swing from one to the other without any clear-cut conclusion. Certainly, the scholars we have mentioned recognise that the Kingdom has been inaugurated in a veiled manner, perceived by faith and not by sight, but they do not draw the conclusion; we believe that they have fallen under the influence of an anthropological monism which dominates the modern mentality and which some, happily, are beginning to dispute in biblical studies.⁴ Without being platonic, we must distinguish between two levels: the New Testament never says that the regeneration of the *world* is already accomplished, nor the deliverance of the *body* (the miraculous healings are only 'signs' of a Kingdom not yet seen), the New Testament never says to the believer that he must wait for the resurrection of the inner man, his participation in eternal life, in the life of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is justice, peace and joy *in the* p. 440 *Spirit*, of which the gift is the earnest or first fruits; the Spirit quickens the inner man, while the body is still awaiting its redemption, with all creation groaning in all its parts, and is decaying day by day as the frame of this world is passing away (cf. Rom., [8:10](#), [20-23](#); [14:17](#); [I Cor. 7:31](#); [II Cor. 4:16ff.](#))

If the Kingdom or reign which means victory over evil is present only '*in spiritu sancto*' the continued existence of evil after the inauguration of the Kingdom is no longer the same stumbling block, for all do not have the Spirit, and the old world, rotten with sin, is still in existence. Death, conquered in him who is the pioneer of life and in the spiritual resurrection of his people, is not yet 'put under his feet' ([I Cor. 15:20-28](#)). The Adversary, thrown out, and bound so that he cannot hinder the evangelisation of the world, still creates havoc on earth in the little time remaining to him ([Rev. 12:12](#)).

But if the delaying of the manifestation, of the event explains the continued existence of evil, what should we say of its *virulence*, of its growing virulence?

IV. THE ENEMY'S COUNTER-ATTACK

The vision of the book of Revelation that we have just quoted suggests an intensification of satanic activity, despite its defeat and its limitation—as a counter-attack to defeat and limitation ([Rev. 12:12](#)). In the same way Jesus presents the sowing of tares, which must *grow* with the wheat in the world, as the enemy's counter-attack to the good seed of the Son of Man ([Mt. 13:28](#)). This thought can help us in interpreting the increase of iniquity and suffering in our century *after* Jesus Christ (while at the same time admitting this sometimes debatable increase: pure paganism was not so beautiful!).

The book of Revelation reveals the secret of this counter-attack. It is to be found in a diabolical aping: a false trinity gets itself worshipped on earth, Dragon, Beast and False Prophet. They take Babylon as their associated, the Harlot, detestable caricature of Jerusalem, the Bride. The Beast, synthesis of the beasts of Daniel, apes the Christ. It inaugurates its reign by being slain and by a pseudo-resurrection ([Rev. 13:3](#)), it receives an imitation of the divine name (it 'once was alive, and is alive no longer, but has yet to ascend' [Rev. 17:8](#)) that implies 'parousia' (*parentai*). This Beast, the Messiah of Satan, is doubtless to be identified with the Antichrist of which John speaks (we have difficulty in not pressing the substitutional meaning of the preposition 'anti'); the paradox of the Beast

⁴ cf. James Barr 'Old and New in Interpretation' (SCM Press, London 1966) pp. 52ff: monism is linked with the opposition between the Greek and Hebrew mentality, itself called into question.

who 'is' the eighth of these heads, and [p. 441](#) yet is also one of the seven ([Rev. 17:11](#))⁵ is parallel to that of the Antichrist that the apostate teachers of the time of the apostle represent and which nevertheless resembles a figure that is coming.⁶ This is a pattern that is found in the present activity of the mystery of iniquity and then its release, which will be the *parousia* ([2 Thess. 2:9](#)) of the man of *anomia*, (lawlessness). This man who raises to the highest pitch the adamic pretension to be equal to God does so in mimicking the Christ. He is the man who makes himself into a god in order to ape God made man: not only a sinner but apostate, not only heathen but Antichrist.

The virus of Satan's virulence is hidden in the subtlety of his counterattack. We should not be surprised if evil is yet more evil in the 'post-Christian' world: *corruptio optimi pessima*! The devil is incapable of creating: he needs the finest model in order to produce the most hideous imitation.

This understanding helps us to perceive the evil of our time. We are certainly present at the *return of Dionysos*,⁷ as Jean Brun so brilliantly demonstrates: because the eighth King is already the sixth, the Beast of paganism who will arise at the end, and the Antichrist is bringing about the purpose of original sin. But the specific characteristic of contemporary evil is that it is post-christian. Humanism secularises men's biblical privilege, historicism secularises the biblical stress on history, political ideology secularises the message of the Kingdom of God. Secularisation itself imitates the de-divinisation of the world by Christianity. The arrogance of man who makes himself God and destroys the earth (cf. [Rev. 11:18](#)) would not have been possible without the rise of modern science and science would not have been possible without the biblical vision of the world. Paul Schütz demonstrates this with passionate eloquence when he insists on two types of man: the scholar and the politician. He develops the paradox [p. 442](#) formulated by C. F. von Weizacker from several points of view: 'Christus ermöglicht den Antichrist' (Christ makes Antichrist possible).⁸ He explains how the subject-object pattern is rooted in the awareness of sin that Christianity has introduced and how the theme of the new creation has been secularised in revolutionary thought; he even sees how the theology of the Wholly Other, which offers itself as a super-Christianity, is already anti-Christianity.⁹

The last remark expresses, in connection with a particular theology, what is brought out by the interpretation of post-christian evil as *apostasy*. The evilness of evil, after Jesus Christ, is false Christianity, which begins with the adulteration of Christian truth in the

⁵ Whether the Beast is Rome, more or less literally, is not in doubt. But we Jean on the primacy of the biblical symbolism in Revelation and the influence of Daniel 7 to take into account that the heads are not successive emperors. Can one consider that they represent the seven world empires? The five that have fallen (v. 10): Egypt, Assyria, and the three first of Daniel; the sixth that reigns: Rome (the fourth in Daniel); the eighth, figure of Christ, is the same (666), resurrected, after an indistinct seventh (Christianity?). Paganism, given its death wound by Christ at the time of Rome, will have a remarkable resurrection before being destroyed.

⁶ We are following completely J. R. W. Stott, *Epistles of John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary 1964) pp. 103–109.

⁷ *The Return of Dionysos* (Paris: les Bergers et les Mages 1976, 2nd. ed. revised) 252 pp.

⁸ *Parousia: Hoftnung und Prophetic* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider 1960) p. 601: it is the entire section in pp. 587–617 which concerns our studies and even beyond that section at p. 624: 'Fleishinerding ... etc.' ('the becoming flesh of the eternal Word is the unleashing ... of flesh').

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 602, 605ff, 615ff. and for the last point, p. 609 (p. 608 the dialectic loses the dialogue). The only serious weakness in Schutz's (p. 608 the dialectic loses the dialogue). The only serious weakness in Schutz's theology is the denial that God has predetermined history. Schutz does not consider that there is then no more than a finite God, a god who is not God (p. 622: 'kein Heilsplan'—'no plan of salvation').

church, That is exactly what John makes us understand when he calls the false teachers antichrists. In a stroke, the views of Teilhard on evil as a factor of progress because the evolution which implicates it is the redemptive incarnation, and the para-Hegelian views on the bypassing of ethical monotheism by the incorporation of tragedy into the 'becoming of being,' take on a disturbing colour.

V. THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM

The last question remains: why has God chosen to postpone the manifestation of his reign? Why has he only inaugurated it in a veiled form and in the Spirit? Why has he not removed evil from the world in a stroke? Why has he left to the devil the time for his counter-attack with all the attractions of a false Christianity?

It is said to the martyrs who wanted the time to be shortened that the tally of all their brothers in Christ's service must be complete ([Rev. 6:11](#)): the end has not yet arrived to conclude the opportunity for [p. 443](#) conversion ([2 Peter 3:9](#)); the good news of the Kingdom must first be proclaimed ([Matt. 24:14](#)). We can understand that God does not want any other entry into his Kingdom than that of *faith*: not the automatic incorporation of an 'apokatastase' with metaphysical overtones, but faith which responds to the Word and receives the Spirit. Time is needed for faith therefore, a respite for the old world, during which the Word will be broadcast, the Word which is the power of God, ridiculously feeble in the eyes of the world: 'neither by force of arms, nor by brute strength, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts' ([Zech. 4:6](#)).

This way of faith, this way of love and not of compulsion (cf. [John 14:23](#)) is also the way followed for the inauguration of the Kingdom. The Kingdom comes first, we have said, in a way veiled from the eyes of men, but we know that it is hidden under the cross. It is essential for it to come by the cross. It had to be that it come by the cross, not only to fulfil the scripture, but so that evil should be truly conquered.

This is the mysterious and hidden wisdom which is revealed to us by the Spirit and by the words which the Spirit teaches (1 Cor.). The power of the Evil One over us is the power of accusation (as his name of Satan indicates). He can only be discounted by the shedding of blood that takes away sins. The power of sin is the law ([1 Cor. 15:56](#)) and we can only be delivered by the payment of the debt which made us prisoners of the law, the death of the Just One in the place of the unjust ([Rev. 12:10ff](#); [Col. 2:14ff](#)).

We can comment upon this central wisdom of the gospel of the Kingdom by remarking that only in this way can evil be defeated as evil. If evil had been defeated by a superiority of force, it would have been defeated as a created power: but evil as evil is not a created power but only *corruption*. If evil had been countered by an opposite in behaviour, an example of perfect love, it would not have been defeated but only driven back. In making out of the supreme crime the assassination of the Just One, the voluntary expiation of sins, God triumphs over evil as evil, God turns evil against itself and destroys it as a negative and as a positive factor; God refutes every optimistic theodicy and every tragic philosophy, God inaugurates his victorious reign over evil. The way of the Kingdom has been laid down since then, obliging us to wait in hope until the time when all the elect will have entered the Kingdom of faith and his victory will be manifest.

No other thinking, no other vision can better inspire the *fight* against evil. Those who share in the Kingdom hate the enemy that evil is; they know its reality and can no longer invest in idealism and in utopia; they penetrate to the heart of its strategy and attack the evil of evil (the [p. 444](#) prostitution of Christianity); the certainty of victory already won gives them wings and the power of the Spirit in them renews them. Other studies will show how in different areas of life the fight is progressing. We will recall that the rule of

battle is the way of the Kingdom: according to Calvin: 'we must wage war under the cross'.¹⁰

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Besides the works quoted, all of No. 56 of *Concilium* (especially the articles by W. Korff, N. M. Pohier, W. Post and F. Kerr).

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Journal and Book Information

Christ Supreme over Satan: Spiritual Warfare, Folk Religion and the Occult by Vivienne Stacey

Published by Masihi Isha'at Khana, 36 Ferozepur Road, Lahore 16, Pakistan.

Light on Astrology by Anthony Stone

Published by Gospel Literature Service, Udyog Bhavan, 250D Worli, Bombay 400025.

Missiology: An International Review

Published quarterly by the American Society of Missiology at 616 Walnut Avenue, Scotdale PA 15683-1999 USA. Subscriptions: Individuals \$18 (\$34 for 2 years), Students \$13, Institutions \$25.

¹⁰ *Institutions* II 15, 4.