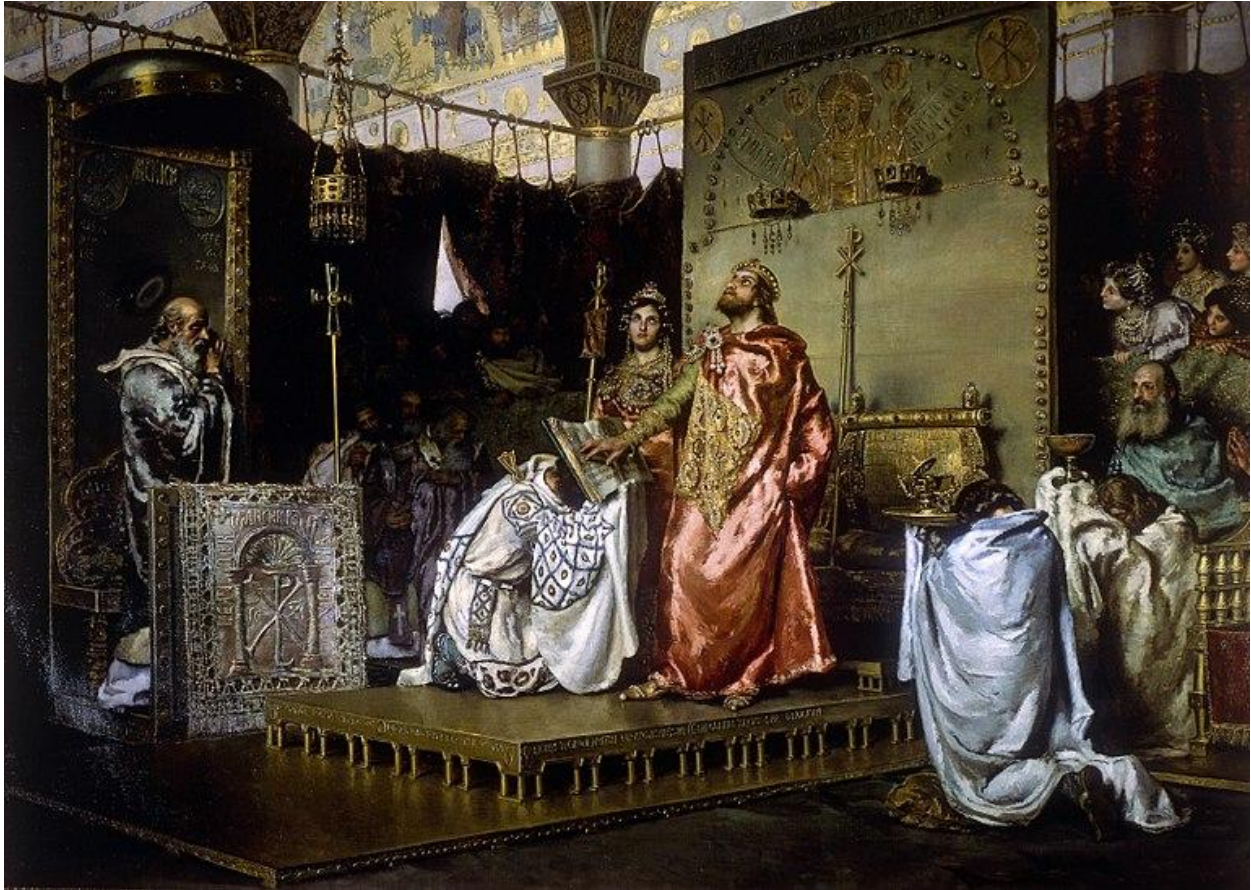


The Kingdom of God



Part 1

The Kingdom of God is a concept that has tremendous transformative power, but unfortunately it is often misrepresented, ignored, or deliberately neglected. It is a concept that speaks of God's love for the individual, for marriage, for the family, and for the Church, as well as for society as a whole. *This makes it somewhat problematic. Why is it problematic?* Because it reveals God's preferences and the ways He chooses to determine what is right and just for humanity. In other words, it specifies what Love is. To see this in a more striking light, we might say that if the Resurrection of Christ has the power to express the ultimate meaning of history, as it does, then the Kingdom of God has the power to show us how to live in history in order to fully benefit from the good news of the Resurrection. In

this series of articles we will try to explore what the Kingdom of God really is and how we are called to cooperate with it.

Pope Pius IX teaches in his encyclical ***Quas Primas (1925)*** that *"God the Father has given all power of judgment to His Son Jesus, the Christ (John 5:22). This power includes the right of rewarding and punishing all men living"*. It follows from this right that no one can escape the judgment of Jesus or the sanctions He imposes. Therefore, all must obey His commandments in order to receive eternal reward from the Father (God). These commandments shape the way we behave, the actions we take in our lives, the commitments we make, what we say to others, and basically provide an understanding of how things ought to be. As such, they have an undeniable public impact in civil society and the public square. *"It would be a grave error, on the other hand, to say that Christ has no authority whatsoever in civil affairs, since by virtue of the absolute legal right over all creatures committed to him by the Father, all things are in His power [...] Thus the dominion of our Redeemer embraces all men"*. Pope Leo XIII teaches that *"His empire includes not only Catholic nations, not only baptized persons [...] but also all those who are outside the Christian faith, so that truly the whole of mankind is subject to the power of Jesus Christ"* (***Annum Sacrum, 1899***).

These authoritative Church teachings reveal several clues about the nature and end of the Kingdom of God: That it is meant to embrace all men, that Jesus has established the rules for it, and that in doing so He pleases God the Father. Now two questions arise: How does Jesus present this "Kingdom of God" and how does He articulate it?

First, Jesus presents the Kingdom of God as salvation, something good that is at hand (**Matthew 4:17**). This salvation is articulated through the communication of God's love for us. Receiving the love of God is revealed as the meaning of life, for it is only in this love of God that man finds true fulfillment (**Matthew 11:28-30**). The reception of this love presupposes man's previous openness to it. And it is this openness, this willingness to be transformed by the love of God, that carries the power to proclaim the Kingdom of God throughout history until final salvation. *"If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed"* said the hemorrhaging woman (**Matthew 9:21**).

Second, the praxis of Jesus in announcing this kingdom provides an excellent opportunity to verify the salvific nature of the kingdom. The actions Jesus took when referring explicitly or implicitly to the Kingdom of God confirm this (**Matthew 4:23-25**).

Jesus went into their synagogues, preaching the good news and expelling demons throughout Galilee (**Mark 1:39**). Jesus healed many people suffering from various diseases and cast out many demons (**Mark 1:34**). In short, Jesus went about doing good works and healing all who were in the grip of the devil (**Acts 10:38**). In fact, Jesus' miracles to support the advent of the Kingdom of God are a constant theme throughout the Synoptics. He did not wait passively for the kingdom to come. *He actually acted upon it.* He wanted His miracles to be understood as signs that the kingdom was approaching with power. They brought liberation from oppressive realities: He cast out demons, fed the hungry, healed the sick, and welcomed sinners. The miracles that Jesus performed during His public years were signs that confirmed the fact that the Kingdom of God was concrete, local, but also plural and collective, and that His actions were destined to bring liberation from oppression.

But a question arises: What moved Jesus to perform these miracles? Throughout the New Testament, the answer is "Mercy". Jesus was moved by pity (**Matthew 14:14**), He felt compassion for the leper (**Mark 1:41**), for the blind (**Matthew 20:34**), for those who had nothing to eat (**Mark 8:2**), for those who were like sheep without a shepherd (**Mark 6:34**), for a widow who had just lost her son (**Luke 7:13**), etc. It is mercy that explains Jesus' miracles. Jesus is deeply moved by the hurts and sufferings of others, by the pain of the weak. He reacts to these agonies in the most radical and determined way. *He cured, He healed, He fed.* Jesus' miracles were a reaction to a situation of pain and suffering. Jesus' miracles were signs of mercy and of the imminence of the Kingdom of God. An imminence demonstrated to the weak and suffering. Jesus' miracles and other signs made clear what the Kingdom of God meant to Jesus: Liberation from pressing concrete needs, whether material or spiritual. Needs that in many instances were produced by elements of sinful oppression, both material and/or spiritual.

In contrast, if the signs and miracles that Jesus performed were actions in the service of the Kingdom, Jesus' condemnations, accusations, and charges revealed the nature of the opposition to His reign. This opposition took the form of a conspiracy of various characters, groups and sects who saw in Jesus a real threat to their "meaning of life"; the structures of their society and the system that permeated their religious, political and social views. This gives us the impression that the Kingdom of God, as a totality for the salvation of mankind, was confronted with another totality, that of the opposite of the

Kingdom of God, the kingdom of the anti-God, which in itself brought condemnation to mankind. Jesus was clear about the fact that the world and the society in which He lived were not totalities in accordance with the will of the Father (God) (**Matthew 23:37-39**). He denounced them for the purpose of exposing the causes of this anti-reign and transforming it into the Kingdom. This is where the concept of "conversion " reaches its full meaning. Jesus called all to conversion so that we can understand what the Will of God really is and therefore be in a position to act upon it. The controversy over the heads of grain plucked on the Sabbath from a stranger's field (**Matthew 12:1-8**) provides an immediate understanding of Jesus' prioritization of life over worship and property, giving a social indication of how things should be according to God's plan, as opposed to how they were. It is almost as if Jesus tells them: God is not what you think He is. God is a God of life, and therefore society should be organized in the service of life in His name. The wealthy, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the doctors of the law, the priests and the civil rulers are denounced and anathematized. They are labeled "hypocrites," their existence is vain and empty, and they will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. Jesus lumped these groups together as those who cause the anti-reign to exist. They function as oppressors who produce victims through various levels of power and whose father is the Devil.

Pope Pius XI again teaches in ***Quas Primas*** that: *"This kingdom (of God) is opposed to none other than that of Satan and the power of darkness. It demands of its subjects a spirit of detachment from riches and earthly things, and a spirit of gentleness. They must hunger and thirst for justice, and more than that, they must deny themselves and carry the cross."* The perversity of this anti-reign is that it does so while masquerading as being faithful to God. Jesus exposed the masquerade of this anti-reign and its human traditions, which in fact nullified the will of God and oppressed the masses in "His name". In short, we can say without a doubt that Jesus rejected these particular social groups and the society they shaped. Consequently, the Kingdom of God must be something radically opposed to this. A reality where there is no oppression of some by others. Therefore, reality needs transformation. **It needs conversion.** A moment in history when we realize that *"all human life is sacred. From its very inception, it reveals the hand of God in its creation. Those who violate His laws not only offend the Divine Majesty and degrade themselves and humanity, they also sap the vitality of the political community of which they are members"* (**Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII, 1963**).

In summary, Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God, His Father, as the Good News for those suffering and struggling with oppressive realities. A kingdom where human life takes priority over everything else. He does this by healing their infirmities while openly denouncing and cursing those who not only inflict pain, but do so in the name of God, enforcing their human traditions and helping to consolidate the anti-kingdom. In our next article, we will examine God's preference for those who partake of His Kingdom, what advances it, and what contributes to its regression.

To be continued.

by **Tomasino de Larrasoña**
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