



The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus

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Modern scholars have agreed with the synoptic evangelists that the center of Jesus' message was his proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Hebrew: *malkuth Yahweh*; Greek: *he basileia tou theou*) or Kingdom of Heaven. They have not, however, always agreed on what the language of the Kingdom meant—or means. The historical question today is one that emerged about the turn of the century: to what extent did Jesus of Nazareth proclaim an apocalyptic eschatological Kingdom of God? This simple question, however, can be divided into a number of more complex and interlocking questions about the relation of Jesus to the Judaism out of which he came and to the early Christianity which perpetuated his message. Moreover, even if such questions can be answered, there is still the hermeneutical problem as to whether democratically-minded, technocratic Christians working for a “better world” can interpret language about kings and kingdoms spoken by a figure who lived long ago and far away. This problem takes on heightened significance if one is convinced that Jesus expected this “better world” to end!

It is impossible to address all of these questions in a short article. Therefore, I propose to sketch only the contours of the attempt to interpret the Kingdom of God, especially in the modern period. Such a sketch runs the risk of oversimplification; at the same time, I engage in the task hoping to clarify the major issues in any interpretation of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus.

I. THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

The dominant position maintained by the orthodox church in the West was that the Kingdom could be to a certain extent coordinated with the church.¹ Though Augustine believed that the heavenly “city of God,” in contrast to the earthly

¹Peter Hünermann, “Reign of God,” *Sacramentum Mundi* (6 vols., ed. Karl Rahner; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70) 5.233-40. For further treatment of many of the views which follow, see Dennis Duling, *Jesus Christ Through History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), chapters 5 through 10. Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 60-65, discusses Augustine's view of the Kingdom.

city, would reach its fulfillment only in the millennium (*City of God*, 15.20; 20.9), his view was eventually linked to the belief that the divine Christ, while still in the flesh, had given the keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter and his successors (Matt 16:18; cf. Gregory the Great, *Patrologia latina*, ed. J. Migne, 76, col. 32). This tendency to coordinate the Kingdom with the church, however provisionally, was carried forward by medieval Christian princes who sought to foster

an imperial-political view of the Kingdom under their control; similarly, when the church itself claimed that the now Christian state should be subservient to it, the church was not far from the imperial-political view it sought to check. There were more spiritual conceptions of the Kingdom among the monks and mystics, but perhaps the most creative and interesting view was the doctrine of “two kingdoms” in which Martin Luther reinterpreted Augustine’s idea of the two cities in less ascetic and more individualistic terms.² Luther sought to purify the church and at the same time to lay foundations for, and set limits to, the state. He often stressed that the individual Christian was ultimately a citizen not of the secular kingdom, but of the spiritual Kingdom of God; yet, just as often he suggested that the Christian individual lives in both the secular kingdom (subject to the secular law and obligated to protect one’s neighbor with the instruments of the secular state) and the Kingdom of God (subject to the demands of the Sermon on the Mount). Though the church was not totally severed from the Kingdom, neither was the state, for the Christian was responsible to both.

II. THE KINGDOM PRESENT IN THE INDIVIDUAL AND IN THE PROGRESSIVELY REDEEMED SOCIETY

In the early nineteenth century the more individual and spiritual interpretation of the Kingdom of God began to be set adrift from its ecclesiastical moorings, at least in the thought of some of its formative thinkers. As an alternative to Supernaturalism and in response to Rationalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher drew on his Pietistic schooling and early absorption in Romanticism to defend Christianity from its “cultured despisers” on the basis of *feeling*.³ Correspondingly, Schleiermacher proposed that when Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom (cf. Mark 1:15), he drew his hearers into the power of his immediate feeling of being absolutely dependent on God. For Schleiermacher this Kingdom continues to exist as the present corporate fellowship which emulates the feeling of God-consciousness that was perfectly expressed in the inner experience of Jesus of Nazareth.

Whatever the Christians in the churches believed, Schleiermacher’s voice—along with Kant’s—echoed through the valleys of nineteenth century Protestant historical and theological writing. F. C. Baur, while critical of Hegel, Kant, and Schleiermacher for being too subjective and not grounding their views in the historical Jesus, believed that Jesus went beyond his Jewish apocalyptic environment precisely in centering his message on an individual ethic of intention (Kant)

²Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), chapters 5 and 6.

³Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (2nd German ed., 1830; New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 39-44 (para. 9), 87-90, 106, 113, 164.

and a Kingdom already present in an inward spiritual relationship to God (Schleiermacher). As Peter Hodgson describes Baur’s view, “[Jesus’]...teaching might be summarized as the spiritualizing, inwardizing, universalizing, and radicalizing of the idea of the kingdom of heaven.”⁴ Similarly, the French scholar E. Renan, who came out of Roman Catholicism, argued that though the historical Jesus accepted the “vain” apocalyptic view of “fringe Judaism” toward the end of his life, he was “no longer a Jew” in his rejection of external forms and in his stress on

a spiritual religion of the heart.⁵ For Renan, Jesus sought moral, social, and religious revolution by proclaiming, “The Kingdom of God is *within* you” (Luke 17:21, interpreting *entos* as “within”).⁶

When Protestant liberal-historical theology left the orbit of metaphysics and institutionalism and entered the space of the Divine Spirit immanent in the world (Hegel), subjective human experience (Schleiermacher), and the moral imperative (Kant), it was boosted in the late nineteenth century by cultural optimism and evolutionism, and refueled by the historical-critical conviction that not far behind the Gospel of Mark lay the historical Jesus. Both individual and social interpretations of the Kingdom of God appeared.

Following in the path of W. Herrmann,⁷ A. Harnack was characteristic of the more individualistic point of view.⁸ Harnack accepted the Two Source Theory and stressed that Jesus, like every great historical figure, should be understood *not* on the basis of what he shared with his Jewish contemporaries (the time-bound, apocalyptic-eschatological “husk”), but on the basis of what was distinctive (the eternal “kernel”). On the basis of this method, Harnack concluded that the essence of Jesus’ religion consisted of three things: 1) the infinite value of the human soul and its intimate relationship to God the Father (Mark 8:36; Matt 6:9 and Luke 11:2; Matt 10:30; Luke 10:20); 2) one’s internal attitude or disposition as centered on the ethic of love of God and neighbor; and 3) the central teaching about the Kingdom of God as “the rule of God in the hearts of individuals; *it is God himself in his power.*”⁹ This interpretation ruled out any stress on the nation, the institution, ritual, doctrine, the apocalyptic Kingdom, and judgment in the future. For Harnack, the best way to understand the Kingdom is to “read and study the parables.” Its meaning for the present can be summarized by Jesus’ response to the disciples of the imprisoned John the Baptist: “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Matt 11:5).¹⁰ Like Renan, Harnack laid great weight on Luke 17:21: “The Kingdom of God is *within* you.”¹¹

⁴Peter Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 224.

⁵Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (New York: Modern Library, 1955) 149, 225.

⁶*Ibid.*, 126-32.

⁷Wilhelm Herrmann, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 46. See also his *The Communion of the Christian with God* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1906).

⁸Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (German ed., 1900; New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 16, 31, 53-54.

⁹*Ibid.*, 56; cf. pp. 51-74.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 56, 59.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 61.

The acknowledged leader of the social interpretation of the Kingdom of God in late nineteenth century German theology was A. Ritschl, who considered it to be “the moral organization of humanity through action inspired by love.”¹² An excellent example from the United States in the following generation was the foremost representative of the “social gospel,” Walter Rauschenbusch.¹³ Rauschenbusch had studied in Germany and had absorbed the writings of Schleiermacher, Harnack, and Ritschl. He concluded that Jesus meant the Kingdom of God to be the social gospel, the highest good.¹⁴ Though Jesus never specifically defined the Kingdom,

said Rauschenbusch, it is clear that he rejected popular apocalyptic and nationalistic conceptions and emphasized its organic growth and development (cf. Mark 4; Matt 13). Jesus' meaning was that it is both present and future: "It is for us to see the Kingdom of God as always coming, always pressing in on the present, always big with possibility, and always inviting immediate action."¹⁵ But Jesus not only foretold it; he inaugurated it by establishing a righteous social life on earth. The life of Jesus was thus the highest expression of the Old Testament prophetic condemnation of injustice and oppression. Moreover, the Kingdom was to lead to social redemption, the progressive rule of love in the social order, the willingness to give up one's life, property, and rights, the freedom of individuals, and the independence of nations within the developing unity of humankind. Rauschenbusch affirmed, "The Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God."¹⁶ He believed that though the Kingdom idea was virtually displaced in Christian history by the idea of "the church"—with its tradition, dogma, worship, sacraments, wealth, power, priests, theologians, ascetic practices, and otherworldliness—it has been recovered by historical study of the Bible and the social gospel movement. Thus Rauschenbusch wrote:

"Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!" This is the conscious evolutionary program of Jesus. It combines religion, social science, and ethical action in a perfect synthesis.¹⁷

III. THE FUTURE APOCALYPTIC KINGDOM OF GOD

In 1892, before the heyday of the social gospel movement in the United States, the German Johannes Weiss not only questioned any attempt to coordinate the Kingdom with the church; he opposed the views of Ritschl and thereby placed a question mark on the liberal interpretation of the Kingdom as religious experience and

¹²Based on Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (3rd German ed., 1888; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1900) 9, as stated in Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 15. For a brief discussion of the German social movement in connection with Ritschl, see Gösta Lindström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963) 18-23.

¹³A selection of Rauschenbusch's statements on the Kingdom of God is found in *A Gospel for the Social Awakening. Selections from the Writings of Walter Rauschenbusch*, compiled by Benjamin E. Mays; introduced by C. Howard Hopkins (New York: Association Press, 1950), chapter 2.

¹⁴Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York: Association Press, 1919) 59.

¹⁵Taken from Mays and Hopkins, *Selections*, pp. 45-46, from his classic, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917) 140-41.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 47, from *Social Gospel*, 142.

¹⁷*Social Principles*, 76.

ethical action. Indeed, he challenged virtually every conclusion of the liberals in their quest for the historical Jesus!¹⁸ As a New Testament scholar, Weiss accepted a modified Two Source Theory, but he argued that the few synoptic sayings of Jesus about the Kingdom as present—those held most dear by the liberal interpreters—could be best understood in line with the more prevalent apocalyptic eschatological sayings. Thus, the Kingdom "in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21, for Renan and Harnack, "within you") was an expression of "prophetic

enthusiasm”; being “in the Kingdom” (Matthew 11:11) was Jesus’ hypothetical way of speaking about the reversal of rank in the future Kingdom; “entering the Kingdom” (Matt 21:31) merely meant that the tax collectors and prostitutes had a head start over the leaders of the people; and the only real possibility for thinking of the Kingdom as already present, “the Kingdom of God has come upon [*ephthasen*] you [plural]” (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20), was said in the context of the exorcist’s eschatological battle with Satan; that is, it was an apocalyptic saying. Indeed, Weiss argued that *ephthasen* should be interpreted like *engiken* (“has drawn near” or “is at hand”) in Luke 10:9 (“The Kingdom of God has come near to you”), and Luke 10:9 (cf. Matt 10:7) is one of a group of sayings most like Jesus’ most typical utterance, “Repent; for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (the original form of Mark 1:15; cf. Luke 10:11).¹⁹ Thus, Weiss argued, the role of Jesus in establishing the Kingdom was merely preparatory, and the precise time of its future coming was unknown. He opposed any attempt to establish the Kingdom, especially by revolutionary “men of violence” who “take it by force” (Matt 11:12). Weiss stressed that Jesus in no way left behind a Kingdom with a group of disciples; rather, he prayed for its coming to earth in the future (Matt 6:10) when he would again drink the fruit of the vine (Luke 22:18). Likewise, Weiss argued that in Jesus’ view judgment would not conclude the progressively developing Kingdom, but precede the apocalyptic one, typified by cosmic catastrophes (Mark 13:24-25). Moreover, Jesus believed that he would judge as the exalted Son of man. Salvation, then, is future, unwordly, spiritual; it includes the joys of a messianic banquet, and glory. Ethics are not ethics of the Kingdom, but the ethics of preparation, said Weiss, and righteousness is the condition for entrance.

For Johannes Weiss, Jewish apocalyptic eschatology was neither a subsidiary part of Jesus’ thinking nor a dispensable inheritance from his environment; it formed the very basis for his teaching about the Kingdom of God. The major focus of Weiss was on Jesus’ Kingdom *teaching*. Albert Schweitzer took this a step further in his claim that everything Jesus said and did—his whole *life*—was dominated by apocalyptic eschatology.²⁰ Whereas for Weiss Jesus simply *waited* for God to act to bring in the Kingdom, Schweitzer believed that when Jesus’ expectation of the Kingdom (Matt 10) did not materialize, Jesus sought to embody the messianic woes which would precede the End with his own passion, thus hoping to *bring about* the Kingdom and his own establishment as Son of man, judge, and

¹⁸Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard H. Hiers and D. Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 67-74.

²⁰Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (German ed., 1901; New York: Schocken, 1964); *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (German ed., 1906; New York: Macmillan, 1968); *The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity* (German ed., 1967; New York: Seabury, 1968).

redeemer. This was all part of Jesus’ “messianic secret,” and connected with it was an ethical teaching centering on suffering and repentance before the End, that is, “interim ethics.” But Jesus’ suffering and death did not bring about the Kingdom; thus, the early church interpreted his resurrection as God’s vindication, his life as messianic, and his hope for the future in terms of his return as the apocalyptic Son of man at the (still) future *eschaton*. This was what Schweitzer called “consistent (or thoroughgoing) eschatology.”²¹

IV. RESPONSES TO THE APOCALYPTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Among both Protestant and Catholic scholars the apocalyptic revolution ignited by Weiss and Schweitzer was met with mixed responses. In Germany the views of Weiss gained a great deal of power because they were supported by strong allies: the form critics who believed that Schweitzer's orientation to Jesus' life and messianic consciousness were still rooted in the old liberal-historical regime;²² and the post-World War I representatives of Dialectic Theology (Barth, Gogarten) who found an apocalyptic Kingdom of God congenial to their critique of liberal theology and their existential experience during the crumbling Weimar Republic.²³ Rudolf Bultmann was a major figure in both arenas. By contrast, the voice of Weiss was scarcely heard in Britain and the United States.²⁴ Schweitzer's controversial theory found both supporters and critics in Britain, one of the latter being C. H. Dodd.²⁵ Neither figure seemed to make a major impact in the United States where fundamentalists and evangelicals were doing battle with the liberals, especially in the churches.²⁶ It is one of the interesting ironies in the history of biblical interpretation that the French Roman Catholic A. Loisy, who attempted to counter the individualistic liberalism of Harnack with a future apocalyptic, objective, but nonetheless collective view of the Kingdom (Luke 17:21 interpreted as "in the midst of you [plural]") and therefore bound up with the emergence of the church (as Jesus himself was bound up with his Jewish apocalyptic environment), was condemned as a Modernist and excommunicated.²⁷

The major difficulty for interpreters, at least theologically, was clear: the apocalyptic view of the Kingdom meant that the center of Jesus' teaching was irrelevant to the modern condition. But was this his real orientation? If it was not, what was it? If it was, can it be interpreted in any other sense than a first century

²¹A. Schweitzer, *Quest*, chapter 19.

²²D. Duling, *History*, chapter 9. Cf. Schweitzer's own view of W. Wrede in *Quest*, chapter 19. Wrede's classic is *The Messianic Secret* (German ed., 1901; Greenwood: Attic, 1971). A recent description of form criticism is found in Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

²³James Smart, *The Divided Mind of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967); James M. Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology* (Richmond: John Knox, 1968).

²⁴Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, chapter 3; Hiers and Holland in Weiss, *Kingdom*, 34-37.

²⁵N. Perrin, *Teaching*, chapter 4.

²⁶D. Duling, *History*, 246-52.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 236-41.

Jewish mythology that was patently inaccurate? Two important interpreters will illustrate the difficulty: C. H. Dodd and R. Bultmann.

C. H. Dodd was widely known for his view of "realized eschatology." According to this, Jesus taught that the coming Kingdom was already present, and that it was already realized in his own ministry.²⁸ Dodd agreed with the German semitist, G. Dalman, that the meaning of the Hebrew term "kingdom" (*malkuth*) was not a territorial term, but meant "reign" or "sovereignty," and thus the Reign of God was the activity of God's ruling as King.²⁹ Moreover, Dalman stressed that the background for Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom was both prophetic-apocalyptic and Rabbinic literature, and that the latter contains the idea that though God's reign does not yet

extend to the whole world (it is future), it does extend over the people of Israel who are to respond in obedience to the divine will as revealed in the Law (it is present).³⁰ With this as a background, Dodd argued the reverse of Weiss, that “the Kingdom of God has come upon [epthasen] you” (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20) meant that the sovereign power of God was *already* in operation, and that *engiken* in Mark 1:15 should be interpreted like *epthasen*, that is, “The time has reached fulfillment and the Kingdom of God *has come upon* you.” Indeed both terms in the LXX were normally used to translate Hebrew and Aramaic terms which mean “to reach,” “to arrive” (*naga'*; *m'ta*). Dodd then took up a number of passages which appeared to predict a future, apocalyptic Kingdom (e.g., Mark 9:1; Matt 8:11; Mark 14:25). A saying like Mark 9:1, “Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power,” should be viewed as a reference to a transcendent Kingdom (“with power”) which will overtake the present one, but does not destroy the idea of a present Kingdom. Other future sayings reflect Jesus’ prophetic understanding of the crisis of his times and the expectation that disaster would befall his people and the Temple. Finally, Dodd focused on the parables of the Kingdom, one of his most notable contributions.

It appears that while Jesus employed the traditional symbolism of apocalypse to indicate the “other-worldly” or absolute character of the Kingdom of God, He used parables to enforce and illustrate the idea that the Kingdom of God had come upon men there and then. The inconceivable had happened: history had become the vehicle of the eternal; the absolute was clothed with flesh and blood.³¹

Thus, Dodd concluded that the history of this particular Jesus was the vehicle of the eternal, and that the history which involved the future Kingdom was symbolic. Such was Dodd’s response to apocalypticism!

Bultmann dealt with the apocalyptic Kingdom teaching somewhat differently. As a pioneer of form criticism, Bultmann accepted W. Wrede’s view that

²⁸C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner’s, 1961), chapter 2, esp. p. 35.

²⁹See the discussion of G. Dalman’s views in Perrin, *Teaching*, 23-28.

³⁰Ibid. Dalman drew on passages such as the Onkelos Targum on Exod 15:18, “[God’s]... kingly sovereignty (*malkutheh*) endures forever and ever,” and the synagogue Kaddish prayer, “May [God] establish his sovereignty in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel even speedily and at a new time.”

³¹C. H. Dodd, *Parables*, 159.

Mark could not be used to write a life of Jesus (liberal or apocalyptic),³² adding that *narratives* about Jesus (e.g., miracles and “legends”) were least valuable for historical knowledge about him, while the *discourses* (e.g., pronouncement stories, “words of Jesus,” “I-sayings,” and parables) did contain at least a close approximation of his teaching (which Bultmann was willing to call “Jesus”). Like his teacher Johannes Weiss, and with a firm grounding in history-of-religions parallels, Bultmann accepted those sayings which stressed a future, apocalyptic, other-worldly Kingdom of God which was “at hand,” yet in some sense it was already being inaugurated in his anticipatory meals with disciples (Luke 22:15-18), in his exorcisms (Luke 11:20), and in his offer of hope to the poor, hungry, and weeping (Luke 6:20-21). Thus he

proclaimed that the Kingdom was “among you” (Luke 17:21). Jesus was an apocalypticist insofar as he expected the final eschatological drama, that is, the coming of a heavenly Messianic Son of man (other than himself), the resurrection of the dead, judgment, and salvation. But he refused to describe the coming Kingdom in detail and chided those who demanded signs (Luke 17:23-24). Bultmann called this a “reduced apocalyptic” and thought of Jesus as an eschatological prophet. Jesus was both like and unlike apocalyptic Judaism. But he was also like and unlike Rabbinic Judaism. He gathered disciples, debated the Law, and taught in parables; yet, he associated with sinners and outcasts, rejected conventional piety and purity, and laid his stress on the intention, not the letter, of the Law. The Kingdom teaching was the basis for his love “ethic,” not a formalized ethic, but “radical obedience” in each new situation. Bultmann stated that the crisis of the imminent, future Kingdom demanded a decision in the present, and with this language he was interpreting Jesus’ Kingdom teaching not in mere cosmic-chronological—he would have said “mythological”—terms, but in personal, existential terms and using the analysis of the existentialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger.

...the Kingdom of God is a power *which, although it is entirely future, wholly determines the present*. It determines the present because it now compels man to decision; he is determined thereby either in this direction or in that, as chosen or as rejected, in his entire present existence...

The coming of the Kingdom of God is therefore not really an event in the course of time, which is due to occur sometime and toward which man can either take a definite attitude or hold himself neutral. Before he takes any attitude he is already constrained to make his choice, and therefore he must understand that just this necessity of decision constitutes the essential part of his human nature. Because Jesus sees man thus in a crisis of decision before God, it is understandable that in his thought the Jewish Messianic hope becomes the absolute certainty that in this hour the Kingdom of God is coming. If men are standing in the crisis of decision, and if precisely this crisis is the essential characteristic of their humanity, then every hour is the last hour, and we can understand that for Jesus the whole contemporary mythology is pressed into the service of this conception of human existence. Thus he understood and proclaimed his hour as the last hour.³³

Whereas for Dodd the eternal came into time in the present through the Jesus who proclaimed that the Kingdom had already come, for Bultmann the apocalyp-

³²See above, note 22; Duling, *History*, 262-81.

³³Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (German ed., 1926; New York: Scribner’s, 1958) 51-52.

tic Kingdom was already being inaugurated in such a way that it determines the present and demands an existential. decision now. Thus the apocalyptic Kingdom mythology is “demythologized” and interpreted for the present.

V. SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

With the exception of S. G. F. Brandon's view that the Kingdom of God "...signified...the overthrow of the existing political and social order"³⁴ and thereby encouraged the political-revolutionary Zealot movement,³⁵ the recent developments have continued to focus on the relative importance of a more other-worldly apocalyptic eschatology. A decade ago G. Klein suggested that three models of the Kingdom were current: other-worldly and future, this-worldly and present, and this-worldly but future.³⁶ Recently R. Hiers has defended a view which he believes approximates that of Weiss and Schweitzer:

The synoptic gospels give us little reason to suppose that the historical Jesus was significantly different from the Jesus whom these gospels portray. In this connection, we are particularly disinclined to credit the common wisdom which insists that Jesus' perspective was necessarily distinct from that of either the early Christian community or apocalyptic Judaism.³⁷

This disinclination to sort out the historical Jesus from the strong apocalypticism found in Judaism and the synoptic records is also found in the recent social-historical view of J. Gager who sees in them the image of a millenarian prophet proclaiming a coming Kingdom which in fact did not come, causing the apocalyptic community to relieve its "cognitive dissonance" by sayings like Mark 9:1 ("...there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power") and 13:10 ("And the gospel must first be preached to all nations"), thus solidifying itself and engaging itself in intensified proselytizing and eventual de-eschatologizing.³⁸

Nevertheless, N. Perrin has followed the lead of the post-Bultmannian E. Käsemann and others in suggesting that the early church re-apocalypticized the teaching of Jesus' message,³⁹ and in his last writing on the subject he discussed only three Kingdom sayings, along with parables, proverbial sayings, and the Lord's Prayer. The three sayings view the Kingdom as a present reality (Luke

³⁴S. G. F. Brandon, *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968) 143.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 145.

³⁶Günther Klein, "The Biblical Understanding of 'The Kingdom of God'," *Interpretation* 26 (1972) 393. Klein had in mind Orthodoxy, the post-Bultmannian Herbert Braun, and the "new eschatology" represented by Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, the "God-is-dead" theology, and various political and revolutionary theologies, for example, that of the German Catholic J. B. Metz.

³⁷Richard H. Hiers, *Jesus and the Future: Unresolved Questions for Understanding and Faith* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) xiv.

³⁸John Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), chapter 2.

³⁹Ernst Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology" and "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," in Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), chapters 4 and 5; cf. also *Journal for Theology and the Church* 6: *Apocalypticism*, ed. Robert Funk (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 17-133, which includes the articles and discussions of them by Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs.

“present” and “future” as inadequate; rather, he attempted to see the Kingdom of God as a “tensive symbol” (P. Wheelwright), that is, a symbol which cannot be exhausted or adequately expressed by any single referent. This was to be contrasted with a “steno-symbol” which has a one-to-one relationship to that which it signifies. Perrin *tended* to see apocalyptic symbols as steno-symbols, though he was willing to concede that such was not always true. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was a “tensive symbol” which evoked “the myth of the activity of God on behalf of his people.”⁴⁰ Thus, for example, “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come [*ephthasen*] upon you” (Luke 11:20) is interpreted:

Kingdom of God is here a symbol, and it is used in this saying because of its evocative power. The saying is a challenge to the hearers to take the ancient myth with renewed seriousness, and to begin to anticipate the manifestation of the reality of which it speaks in the concrete actuality of their experience.⁴¹

There are others undertaking the task of interpretation⁴² and with similar conclusions.⁴³ Certainly if Perrin is correct, the interpretations will continue!

⁴⁰N. Perrin, *Language*, 29-56.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 43.

⁴²Rudolf Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963); George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (SBT 23; London: SCM, 1956). More recently Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and A New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), studies the Kingdom in Mark redactionally.

⁴³Bruce D. Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (SNTU B/1; Freistadt, Austria: F. Plöchl, 1979) combines redaction criticism with other methods, including a study of the Targum Jonathan to Isaiah, concluding that Jesus' message of the Kingdom is the self-revelation of God “inaugurated by the strength with which He manifests Himself” (p. 284), but moving irresistibly toward a future climax. He is occasionally critical of Perrin's methodological orientation, but his rigorous examination of a few sayings leads to a non-apocalyptic conclusion.