

CHAPTER VI

THE KINGDOM HORIZON

We have considered the importance of recognising the activity of God in the whole of history and have seen mission as the involvement of the church in the fulfilment of God's plans. Having underlined the reality of the ultimate horizon of God's dealings with people we now discuss the controversial theme of the kingdom of God. Rather than a defensive approach, we draw out some elements crucial to a better understanding of our mission. As we study the implications of the future kingdom we begin to see God's ultimate plans giving meaning to the present, in relation to the past revelation. The three horizons hold together in one interrelated whole to bring to us one total kingdom horizon.

However we recognise some cautions. In the hangover of kingdom of God theologies that humanised the Gospel, and because of Marxist slanted programmes of the recent liberation theologies, evangelicals have hesitated to study the kingdom of God. When we give adequate attention to this central theme for the Church and its mission, we are ready to develop the kind of missiology that will actualise the Gospel in our context.

Rather than retreating once again into an individualised Gospel, we need to fully explore the biblical insights to reclaim the lost territory of God's reign. This will help recapture God's widest concern for his people and his creation. A proper assessment of the kingdom and its relation to mission will assist in concretising the gospel to reflect this wide concern. In his kingdom concern, the Lord Jesus embraced every area of life—spiritual, social, economic, ecological and others—and there should be no doubt about the extent of the influence of the Gospel of God's kingdom.

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God and provoked his hearers, the Jews, to stretch their idea of God's kingdom much further than their nationalistic view. In a similar way, reminders of the kingdom of God challenge us to break from narrow limits we have set for the reign of God. We have confined God's kingdom concern to spiritual salvation. The kingdom horizon for mission shatters our limitations, compelling us to see God's desires for total life.

If the Gospel of the kingdom is more than spiritual it must have material manifestations. It is said that the major factor that saved England from a revolution similar to the devastating French Revolution was the revival God brought about through John Wesley. The concrete dimensions of the Gospel have always been there for us to appropriate. In the religious environment of Asia, where there is very little link between the spiritual and the material, the Gospel must be demonstrated as the truly viable alternative to the traditional religions.

The kingdom of God in Jesus' Message

The kingdom of God was of prime concern to Jesus. Mark records the commencement of his ministry with the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom (Mk. 1:14f). Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry is talking about a *reign* rather than a *realm*. Although the horizon of the future is underlined, God's future reign has implications in the present.

We have often restricted this reign within the Church, even though we continue to affirm God's total lordship. If God is Lord of all, his lordship must be actualised in all of the world today. Newbigin reminds us that:

we are not talking about one sector of human affairs, one aspect of human life, one strand out of the whole fabric of world history, we are talking about the reign and about the sovereignty of God over all that is, and therefore we are talking about the origin, meaning, and end of the universe and of all man's history within the history of the Universe.¹

He concludes—"The reign of God is his reign over all things."²

The disciples misunderstood the kingdom. Jesus clears their minds rebuking them, as in Acts 1:7—"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has fixed for His own authority". A rebuke was necessary. All the intensive teaching over their three year internship had not impressed upon them the complexities of the kingdom. There are some inferences to assist us in our discussion.³

First, the kingdom of God is opposed to the kingdom of this world. It is miraculous, depending on God, and hence we cannot hasten it by any of our efforts. Knowing with confidence that God will work out his plans, we are to await the coming of God's kingdom with patience. The parables of the mustard seed (Mt. 13:31 ff; Mk. 4:30ff), the leaven (Mt. 13:33) and the seed growing secretly bring out this truth. This encourages some to stay away from social action, claiming that we are *not* to be involved in the kingdom of this world. However, before taking any particular position, we ought to hold this teaching alongside the rest of the teaching on the kingdom.

Second, this kingdom is coming in the form of a cosmic catastrophe (Lk. 17:26; Mk.13:26; 14:62), ushered in by the appearance of the Son of Man. Jesus thus aligned himself, not with the concept of an earthly, nationalistic messiah, but with the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism. At the same time he avoided describing events in detail, although he clearly used apocalyptic imagery (e.g. the heavenly feast in the kingdom of God. Mk. 14.:5; Mt. 8:11). Jesus' rejected all attempts to discern signs of the end, teaching that—"The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed" (Lk.17:20). The warning is to those who will strain texts to work out precise details on the Second Coming. And yet, Jesus himself gives us some intelligent signs for our own discernment.

Third, although Jesus shared the apocalyptic witness of a cosmic universal eschatology rather than the political and nationalistic kind, he underlines the primary purpose of God's plan to reach the world through Israel. He came, not to conflict in any way with the Old Testament teaching.

However, he affirmed that Israel had no special claim to God's grace; it was to be the vehicle of God's purposes for the world. Their unfaithfulness would be severely judged, and Israel will be put to shame by the heathen on the day of Judgment (Mt. 12:42; Lk. 11:31). The kingdom will be taken away from them and given to the Gentiles (Mt. 21:43).

Fourth, our decision to enter into this kingdom is through our obedience to Jesus (Mt. 7:24-27), and sacrifice to the point of being hated by one's family (Mt. 10:17 ff, 37). There is no automatic entry into the kingdom on the basis of God's all embracing desires for everyone, regardless of their commitment. We enter, joyful accepting the greatness of God's gift, and willing to surrender everything (Mt. 13:44-46). Although entry into the kingdom is fully actualised only in the future (Mt. 25:34; Mk. 9:43 ff), the presence of the kingdom is already available in the person of Jesus. A commitment to Jesus is in effect an experience of his kingdom.

Finally, the kingdom of God is a transcendent and supernatural realm which God brings to us from above. In Jesus, through whom the future kingdom becomes present, the kingdom has already appeared. This is the distinctive in Jesus' teaching of the kingdom, making the kingdom of God inseparable from his own person. Thus, the evangelistic message becomes an offer of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus himself. It is not a feeling or an event but a very real relationship. The message we preach in Asia must emphasize that God in Jesus Christ embraces the believer in a relationship that brings the future reality of the kingdom right into the present.

The kingdom of God in Jesus' person

We have considered the inseparability of Jesus' person from the kingdom, and this needs further explanation. For instance, Jesus' claim—"If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk. 11:20). Significantly, Jesus' power over Satan is a

demonstration of the power of the kingdom of God which is now being actualised.

The benefits of the authority of the kingdom are available to believers right now through the presence of our Lord Jesus. The kingdom mission in Asia and Africa is still a manifestation of Jesus' authority over satanic forces. Perhaps in our attempts to accommodate the Gospel into the Western academic framework or our modern technological environment, we have been guilty of our own "demythologisation." Some, particularly influenced by the West, dismiss the reality of the demon world as being merely superstitious. Yet, demonic manifestations are a powerful reality in our world. The confrontation is a kingdom confrontation.

Further, Jesus refers to his presence as the presence of the kingdom. We note Jesus' reply to the Pharisee's question about the coming of the kingdom of God—"The kingdom of God is among [in the midst of] you" (Lk. 17:20 ff). In some versions, this is translated rather misleadingly, as "within you". Although it suits the personalised Christianity that we evangelicals have fashioned for ourselves, we note that God and the kingdom of the Bible cannot be tailored to fit our personal thinking.

The God that will appeal to Asia has to be big enough for people to *enter into* rather than the other way round. A kingdom vision will dispel any powerlessness we impose on Jesus Christ and his demands. "Jesus speaks of men entering the kingdom and not the kingdom entering men."⁴ Hence, in the context of Jesus' presence *as* the presence of the kingdom, we correctly see Lk. 17:20 meaning—to be within your reach or even within your grasp. Rather than looking ahead to the kingdom of God, Jesus points out that the kingdom of God is present where Jesus himself is present and exercising his influence.

That is why Jesus assures those who acknowledge him before men in this world that he will acknowledge them before the Father in heaven (Mt. 10:32). Not everyone who

says “Lord, Lord” will enter this kingdom, but those who in obedience do the “will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 7:21). To those who respond to Jesus’ words and put them into practice, the future rule of God becomes real here and now, in the words and deeds of the person of Jesus and his followers. Since Jesus himself represents the kingdom, the kingdom of God has to be the reign and authority demonstrated through his followers. It is a kingdom of people committed to God’s reign, an authority working towards its being actualised now in anticipation of its ultimate realisation. Every aspect of this world, whether overt demonic encounters or material and secularistic ideologies, will need to be confronted by the claims of the kingdom through the mission of kingdom citizens here and now.

However, while emphasising God’s reign, we must not exclude the idea of a territory. There need not be a territorial claim here and now. But if we totally ignore God’s rule over the earth in the present, we will have problems accepting his rule over all of heaven and earth in the future. God’s creation, which we have already discussed in relation to the environment groaning for redemption, will once again be totally under God’s authority as originally intended.

The kingdom—Present and Future

A complex aspect of the kingdom teaching in Jesus’ preaching is his reference to the kingdom as *present* as well as *future*. He spoke of these distinct aspects separately, but frequently blended them together. For instance, in his parables in Matthew 13, his hearers find it hard to accept the dual aspect of present and future. As insignificant and small as the seeds of the kingdom appear now, so all embracing and powerful will its influence be when it grows into its fullest potential.

While there is no doubt that Jesus speaks of a present reality, the problem arises in reconciling this present reality with the future kingdom. In the discourse on the last days in Mt. 24:25; Mt. 13, and Lk. 21, Jesus points to events to follow in the future. There are several other

references to the future. Matthew speaks of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom with glory (Mt. 16:27, 28). Mark speaks of the kingdom coming with power (Mk. 9:1). In the Last Supper passage in Mt. 26:29 Jesus says he will not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drinks it in the kingdom along with his disciples.

Problems arise when commentators interpret each aspect of the kingdom independently of the other. For instance, liberal theologians of the nineteenth century took a purely present kingdom approach. This resulted in the “Social Gospel”, which sought to establish the kingdom in the present world. In contrast, there are those who overemphasise the future to the point where there is no present relevance. It is important to accept that if Jesus taught both *a present* and *a future*, we must seek an understanding that would reconcile these seemingly conflicting viewpoints.

The kingdom of God motif, interpreted as present, determined the nineteenth century theology with its ethical, here-and-now kingdom concern. With men and women working out these values within our world *today*, any reference to the future was eliminated. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, this was challenged by a thoroughly eschatological understanding. Johannes Weiss pointed to the New Testament underlining that the kingdom of God will be established by God himself. The future was God’s prerogative, not our doing, nor even the natural sequence of historic events that led ultimately to this kingdom.

The extensive treatment of this subject by Wolfhart Pannenberg assists us in seeing that the biblical emphasis on the wholeness of history is placed firmly in the future. In Jesus we already have the presence of the future.⁵ Rather than retreating to a purely futuristic understanding with no reference to the present, we are challenged to reconcile the two creatively. In doing so, we underline both the immanence of the kingdom as well as the mystery to be fully revealed in the future. Jesus’ message was no other-

worldly, idealistic vision nor a totally present preoccupation. The two are interlinked integrally. And, in this interdependence of present and future that we see the fullest meaning of the kingdom.

In other words, the Church and its mission today must accept its future orientation in order to draw out its true significance. The horizon of the future kingdom influences the horizon of the present to make the Church the kingdom community. Building a missiology with the kingdom of God in the centre urges us to positively accept the future. This future does not just remain a distant dream but becomes a concrete influence in the present. We are familiar with the way our personal dreams for the future have a very real influence on the present. Hence, a theology built on the kingdom hope should not be looked upon as a nebulous philosophy.

This means that the influence of the church today is not merely spiritual. It must be a demonstration of concrete concerns. Unfortunately, a negative understanding of spirituality has kept some well meaning Christians away from any practical involvement in the world. Taking for granted the kingdom was in the future, and writing off any who were involved in present action as "liberals" attempting to build the kingdom here and now, we have retreated into non-concern and non-involvement. This misunderstanding could be dispelled by holding both these aspects of the kingdom together. As the Church lives out its life in the kingdom horizon, it will truly bring together these horizons so clearly depicted in the Bible.

The church has engaged itself in social service, giving education and health to the needy. But we hesitate to go further to see our involvement in the world as an involvement of kingdom people on a kingdom mission. The integral link between the present and the future will issue in more tangible demonstrations. Is it wrong to desire a little bit of the future even now? If our answer is negative, we must manifest the fact of the presence of the future kingdom in a more tangible Christian witness. Jesus Christ must

make an impact even now, or else we are entertaining empty concepts.

The Dynamic Nature of the kingdom

Rather than being problematic, exploring the tension between the present and the future will reveal the dynamic character of the kingdom. The study of the parables of the kingdom show that the present seeds of the kingdom will grow into full realisation in the future. The "mustard seed" and "leaven" (Mt. 18) demonstrate that what is now microcosmically small will one day exercise an influence beyond comprehension. Did not even Jesus' disciples wonder how such insignificant beginnings could eventually culminate in triumph and glory for the kingdom of God?

G. E. Ladd reminds us of the fact that

the kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The kingdom of God involves two great moments of fulfilment within history, and consummation at the end of history.⁶

This tension between the present fulfilment and the future consummation is crucial. Marxist analysis demands a totally social, economic and political kind of involvement coloured by its materialistic conception of history. At the other extreme, some get mesmerised by a totally futuristic interpretation resulting in non-involvement with the material and social dimensions of this world. This makes Christianity totally irrelevant. The dynamism of the biblical faith needs to be expressed in actual terms by the Church in the world, even though living in anticipation of the future.

This kind of dynamism appears clearly in the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven when we interpret it from within the historical situation of Jesus as well as its future fulfilment. The insignificantly small at present will

grow to astounding proportions to penetrate the whole in the future. The Jews awaited the coming of the kingdom only in terms of power and glory, and hence wondered why Jesus was not making any mighty impact on their society or their oppressive rulers. How could such a man possibly bring about the inauguration of this kingdom?

Through parables, Jesus reminds his hearers that the inauguration of this kingdom is like planting seeds and introducing leaven which in due time would produce fruit. In our over enthusiasm to see the future influencing the present we could fall into the error of making the kingdom purely our own effort. The mystery of the future will ultimately be revealed, but till then, the seeds of the present will continue to grow. Amid the pessimism of the world the kingdom message must bring seeds of hope. Even though Satan rules at present, the hidden microcosmic seed and leaven will grow into phenomenal proportions to bring about the future kingdom in all its power and glory.

We have recognised power only in quantitative terms. We measure our witness in terms of the size of our programmes, the numbers of people, or even the money invested. Success is spelled out in material terms. We publish statistics of our achievements to make believe we are being faithful to God's mission. But the smallness of the seed reminds us that qualitative efforts of the church will matter most. The recognition of the *localness* of the mission of each church, no matter how small, will add more power to the demonstration of God's kingdom today.

In emphasising the seed and the leaven, however, we do not refer to a naturalness of growth as a gradual unfolding in stages of the kingdom of God. Social gospel activists can interpret the parables and emphasise human effort within a materialistic concept of history to bring about the future. This would be totally contrary to the mysterious character of the kingdom which according to biblical teaching breaks into this world supernaturally. Yet, there is a definite continuity of the kingdom from this world into the future,

provided we accept God's new age breaking into the old. Jesus himself reminded Pontius Pilate—"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews, but my kingdom is not of this world." The truth lies in the fact that what is available now in Jesus is in essence what will be available in the future in the consummation of his reign.

The Lord's Supper and Sacraments

Towards the end of his time on earth, the Lord made a very penetrating statement at the table with his disciples—"I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). This important linking of the kingdom in its eschatological dimension with our present proclamation provides further discussion on the theme.

What happened at the table clearly anticipated the fulfillment in the kingdom. The celebration of eating and drinking is not just symbolic of something spiritual in the kingdom. The Old Testament understanding of the bliss and joy in the future is clearly depicted in the New Testament. We read several times of Jesus enjoying a meal (Mt. 8:11; 22:1ff; 25:1ff; Lk. 13:28; 22:30 etc). The communion which is to be part of the Church's future, is being expressed in an essential part of the life of the kingdom in the present.

Jesus' words point to something more than eating and drinking in the kingdom. Paul writes clearly, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". (Ro. 14:17). Obviously Paul is not saying there will be no eating and drinking in the kingdom. He rebukes the disregard for one another, the lack of true communion, and the absence of kingdom fellowship within the community of believers. The eating and the drinking in the kingdom will be without greed and gluttony; instead it will be participation in

common fellowship characterised by righteousness, peace and joy. The kingdom community awaits this harmony in the future but makes every effort to demonstrate it in the present.

Consequently, the Lord's supper is itself a celebration and not a repetition of the sacrifice. It is a celebration of the fulfilment of this sacrifice. The redeemed people of God are commanded to eat and drink in celebration and proclamation of the sacrifice that has brought about their redemption at present and blessings in the future. There is no repetition of the sacrificial event.

Here, the salvation of the kingdom of heaven proclaimed by Jesus' preaching is once again revealed in its messianic foundation and made visible and tangible to his disciples while at the same time being apportioned to them. In one supreme concentration as it were, in one turn of the hand, the Lord's supper focuses the whole of the preaching of the gospel upon Christ's sacrifice and sets the table with it. The disciples are permitted to partake of the bread and wine of this sacrificial offering, and derive from it life and joy as the permanent fruits for the time now to come.⁷

The proclamation of the good news of the things to come proceeds from the celebration of the firstfruits of which we are already tasting. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (Mk. 14:25). We must therefore link celebration with the proclamation of the good news of Jesus' redemptive work for the world.

Because we confidently celebrate the coming of kingdom and the presence of the King here and now, we rejoice in God's reign that has already commenced. Thus, the Lord's supper becomes a powerful reminder of the presence of the future kingdom, the anticipation of the glorious future to come. Our three horizons tangibly merge together. The covenant community gathered around this meal in intimate fellowship in the presence of their master becomes all that the Church should really be. It is the community awaiting the coming of their King. Meanwhile they live the kingdom life in righteousness, peace and joy as they demonstrate the very presence of their King.

Without any eschatological significance we eliminate the dynamic nature of the presence of the kingdom. Around the Lord's table, the future becomes the present. This reality is so overwhelming that the people of God are sustained and motivated into proclaiming the Gospel till the coming of the Lord. The Church has unfortunately got caught up in an institutional framework that has fossilised it into inaction. The Lord's supper binds the redeemed people of God in a common chorus crying out in anticipation of the kingdom to come—*Maranatha*". But rather than rest in joy, it is propelled into the mission of the kingdom.

The Church and the Kingdom

Strong reminders have come regarding the confusion over the identities of the Church and the kingdom. While the ethical understanding of the kingdom stripped this central theme of Jesus of its historical significance, the ecclesiological interpretation has further damaged its reality. The link was confused by none other than Augustine who developed the idea of the Church as being synonymous with the kingdom. We need to avoid such a restrictive view and clearly draw out the meaning of the Church within the wider context of the kingdom of God.

The priority of Jesus Christ as proclamation of the good news of the kingdom is crucial for the recovery of the real essence of the biblical Church. The true church must demonstrate the totality of God's concern. This challenges both the other worldly ideas of the people of God who stand aloof from the world in spiritual exclusivism, and the total preoccupation with the agenda of this world. The Church that stands as a witness to the immanence of the kingdom as well as its transcendence must demonstrate the tension between the presence of the kingdom as well as its future.

The Church is not the Kingdom

As a witness of this kingdom tension, the Church is not the kingdom. It is the people of God who witness to the reality of the kingdom.

If the dynamic concept of the kingdom is correct, it is never to be identified with the Church. The kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In Biblical idiom, the kingdom is not identified with the subjects. They are the people of God's rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The kingdom is the rule of God, the church is a society of men.⁸

The Church becomes the demonstration of a people who in submission to God experience and live out the essence of the kingdom. It is not merely, as Ladd suggests, a "society of men," as against the kingdom being "the rule of God." This could be misunderstood to mean that the Church has no relationship to the kingdom. We must distinguish the identity of the kingdom from that of the Church, as this will underline the kingdom's distinctives as well as help us define the Church.

The Church's identity in relation to the kingdom as the community represents this kingdom. It is the Community of the King, or even the Community of the kingdom. We must grasp this relationship. Clearly, the community of the King will bear the responsibility of being witnesses to the coming of his kingdom. In one sense, the present impact of this future kingdom is demonstrated in and through the life and witness of the Church, as a community and not an organization. If Jesus' presence signifies the presence of the kingdom, and if Jesus' presence gives life and being to the Church, this community called the Church must be the present demonstration of the future kingdom. All the longings of Israel, the faithful remnant who awaited fulfilment, are realised in the Church. It is not the kingdom, yet enjoys the presence of the kingdom as it anticipates this future reality. The three horizons—the promises of the past and their fulfilment in the future are in essence actualised in the life and witness of the Church today.

In this sense, the Church constantly lives in the tension of the future and present—of not being the kingdom as well as being called to demonstrate it. These tensions

are resolved in its submission to Jesus Christ, in whom the kingdom is actualised. Building on the historical fact of Jesus himself as the one in whom the kingdom is already being realised, we need to actualise our anticipation of the kingdom in concrete expressions of the Lord's concern. Jesus did not simply announce its arrival but actually inaugurated it. The Church is therefore responsible for the life of the kingdom to be demonstrated, but it is only in anticipation of its arrival in the future.⁹

The message and the meaning of the kingdom is not only realised in the future, it must have its impact on the world today. Our attempt to resolve the tension between *what we are* and *what we are not yet* must not exempt us from being what kingdom people must become. Even if we opt for a totally futuristic understanding, the reality of this belief must impact the present. The certainty of the future kingdom must be tangibly demonstrated in the present with visible expressions of the life and service in obedience to the King.

The Church is a Witness to the Kingdom

The kingdom community then is the anticipation of that perfect community to be realised in the future. Although it is not perfect, we anticipate its promotion to perfection (1 Jn. 3:2). If this understanding of the Church is taken seriously, we will be convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ endows it with a responsibility to demonstrate kingdom values even now. In a world of distorted priorities, it points to the one who empowers it to live and challenge this world's values. This is the Church's witness to the kingdom as the people of God who exalt the King of this community. Jesus never taught the disciples to believe that they were the kingdom. Nevertheless, having shown that he himself represents the kingdom, he now chooses to do so through the community that acknowledges his kingship. His rule over his people holds them together as the kingdom community. This must be proclaimed and demonstrated.

The mission of the people of God in the New Testament lays heavy stress on proclamation as well demonstration of the kingdom. The Church is a complete witness only when it engages in both dimensions. This two fold character of the church gives to it the life and vitality essential to being God's people today. The world must hear the announcement of the kingdom, but will want to see some concrete demonstration of this message. It is this spelling out its kingdom identity in actualising the message of Jesus through its life and witness that the church urgently requires today.

Being the kingdom witness does not make the church a perfect people demonstrating kingdom values perfectly. We are humbled when reminded that it is by the grace of God that we claim to enter into his kingdom fellowship. And in his grace we are called, despite ourselves, to demonstrate to the world the ultimate redemptive purpose of God. God's mission is richly flavoured with his grace. While the Bible declares that creation itself groans for God's redemption, here is a people who can already rejoice in having tasted the initial samplings of this ultimate redemption entirely saved by his grace.

The Church's Mission of the Kingdom

When we accept this essential link between the Church and the kingdom, and heed the reminder that the Church stands as a witness of the kingdom, we will restore the burden of mission to the Church. The institutional and denominational view of the Church has stifled the true understanding of the Church and as well its mission. The Church cannot distance itself from mission, for in essence, it is mission. Mission is not merely an external activity related to the kingdom, but is the demonstration of the essence of the Church as the community of the King. If the Church can discover even a fraction of this truth, it will explode into its kingdom mission.

The Church in its relation to the kingdom must not only be involved in God's mission but must unfold the heart of God for the world through its life and witness. The

community of the King, seeking to faithfully work out their being in God must be expressed in concrete manifestations in a real world, even though the world opposes the purposes of God. All that the Church seeks to be in obedience to its Lord is an expression of the kingdom. We have deprived ourselves of this dynamic by separating our worship within the Church from our witness outside. Once these are intergrated we will discover the interrelatedness of all of life in a powerful demonstration of mission.

But this is not an exclusive privilege of a chosen few. The proclamation implies the availability of the kingdom to all who hear and are willing to commit themselves to its demands. It is not restricted to one particular people who assumed they were the favoured people of God. The Jews heard a stern warning: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing fruits of it" (Mt. 21:43). Israel was no longer going to be the sole people who would belong to the kingdom of God. In God's divine plans many others are now included. Jesus taught that before the end comes the Gospel would be preached to all nations (Mk. 13:10), which is the good news of the kingdom of God (Mt. 24:14). Gentiles from all over God's world would have the privilege of feasting at the messianic banquet in this kingdom (Mt. 8:11,12).

The Jews could hardly comprehend this, as the fact of salvation appearing to all men (Tit. 2:11) was foreign to them. But God addressed this prejudice, breaking down all barriers that restrict the universality of God's kingdom mission. This was the deep struggle of Jonah in his reaction to God's mission revealed to him. The Church can similarly restrict the sphere of influence of the kingdom today. If we are to take the lordship of Christ seriously we must recognise the total scope of mission in God's ultimate purposes. The Church in its mission today must break from its own small narrow horizon and recover the widest implications of God's kingdom horizons. Only then will the reality of the kingdom of God become the very dynamic for mission.

Some Biblical images of the Church

The book of Acts indicates four essential elements for the life and witness of the church—worship, fellowship, teaching and witness. We find references to these in the description of the gathering of the early believers—breaking of bread and prayer, fellowship, the apostles, teaching, ministry and distribution, witness (Ac. 2:42; 4:33, 35; 6:1). All these reduce to two basic aspects: the life within the Church and its activity outside. All that occurs within the church is worship, the people of God submitted to its Lord and Master, and all that occurs outside is witness. The complete Church then is the people of God in worship and in witness.

To help restore the missionary character of the church, its worship and witness must be in tune with God's desires. We look at some biblical images which will weave the witness of the church right into the very fabric of its being.

The People of God

The term the people of God is used frequently and this is a good image to begin our discussion. God has spoken to the people of Israel and assured them—"I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Ex. 6:7; 19:5; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 30:2; Eze. 36:28; Heb. 2:23). This is the covenant relationship that God will continue with the people of the New Covenant, and as Peter writes (1 Pe. 2:9), "Those who were not a people have now become the people of God". Again, we read in Revelation, the very thrilling affirmation—"The dwelling place of God is with men, and he will be with them. They will be His people" (Rev. 21:3).

The Old Testament word *Qahal*, translated *Ekklesia* in the Greek, and the word *Edah* refer to this corporateness of the people of God. In fact, *qahal* refers to the gathering of a people in response to God's call" (Ex. 35:1; Num. 16:26; Dt. 7:6). The early Church which gathered together in response to God's call would certainly have known this background against which they gathered as God's people.

However, God had not called his people to selfishly arrogate all his blessings for themselves. They gathered together to fulfil his purposes. Moses clearly enunciated "Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the people, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say "surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Dt. 4:6). A privilege and an accompanying responsibility are held together.

Peter underlines the same fact when he says "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pe. 2:9f). The people of God are a people called to the privilege of worship as well as to the responsibility of witness. Accordingly, if the Church really stands on the foundation of the Old Testament revelation it has to see itself as a living community called by God to worship as well as to witness to his purposes in the world.

The *ekklesia* is a people in motion, not a static institution. Traditionally the word "ecclesiastical" immediately brings to our minds denominational and institutional matters rather than the vitality of a dynamic people which it essentially represents. This living community enjoys all the privileges that God has prepared for it, but also fulfils its responsibility as it proclaims to the people of this world the blessings available for all who believe in him.

The Body of Christ

Moving into the New Testament we consider the familiar image of the body of Christ. This concept powerfully portrays not only the corporate community within, but also the union between the community and its Lord above. Paul uses the concept in a variety of ways. Sometimes he pictures Christ as the whole body with us as members within him, as in Ro. 12:5; 1 Co. 10:16; 12:27. At other

times Christ is pictured as the head with his people constituting the rest of the body, as in Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18 and 2:19. But both cases vividly visualise the lordship of Christ over his people as well as the interdependence of Christ and the community.

Here again the stress is on the dynamic nature of the people of God and not on an inanimate structure or organization. It is a community which has the potential both individually and corporately to grow into the fullness that God has appointed through Christ. But it finds its identity and vitality only in Christ and under his lordship. The power structures of our present day Church, plagued with political and personal problems, need to be constantly reminded of the ultimate authority of Christ.

Paul also depicts this body, in its several parts, as endowed with a variety of gifts. Some are given for edification of the body of Christ, while others for the proclamation and demonstration of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, we see the Church's two fold dynamic—gifts given to function effectively as a people in worship, as well as those given for its effective witness. The two always go together. Wherever only one aspect of this dynamic is being experienced the church is not functioning according to God's intended purposes.

The challenge comes to churches that have become inward looking, only concerned for survival. Some are pre-occupied with their distinctive doctrines and maintaining of the purity of *their* position rather than fulfilling their God-given responsibility towards the world. Other churches are so full of fire and action with not much of concern for their own inner strengthening. The Body of Christ is richly endowed with gifts for both its worship as well as its witness. A truly worshipping church will invariably be an effectively witnessing church. The Church's double dynamic must be fully appreciated and actualized.

The Building of God

The third image we consider is the Building of God. The tabernacle and the temple were central to Israel's worship and offered a tangible expression of God's presence to his people. But it was different in the New Covenant. When the Samaritan woman spoke of the temple, Jesus pointed out that the people in the New Covenant were to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. God dwells in His people and the new temple of God is the redeemed people.

Developing our thesis of the twofold dynamic, we see that God depends on his people to house his presence. This is a humbling reality. His people, although ungrateful, disobedient and sinful, are more valuable to God than the most expensive structures and exquisite edifices we can erect. This temple is being built up with living stones, God's people (1 Pe. 2:5), who are held together in community. Together in their submission to God, they are strengthened to stand firm on Christ himself as the foundation.

However, this building is still in the process of being completed by the Holy Spirit into perfection. This is not a building that exists for itself, but chosen as the building material in order to "declare his wonderful deeds" (1 Pe. 2). The Church is carefully constructed for perfect architectural appearance and harmony inside and outside. The world marvels at its magnificence and in utter amazement exclaims—"Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Dt. 4:6).

The Church must urgently discover its double dynamic for the mission of the kingdom to the world. Unless and until we are able to discover mission as the very essence of the Church, all of the reminders of the missionary mandate will fall on deaf ears. The task ahead is to explore the true Church in its relationship to the kingdom of God and to spell out its responsibility as the people of God in witness. Grounding this integrally within the essence of the church will lead us to discover the reality of a Church in worship and in witness. It is this missionary character of the

Church, in its witness as God's kingdom people, that needs to be restored.

Notes

1. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, SPCK, London, 1979, p. 32.
2. *Ibid*, p. 33.
3. I summarise the useful discussion, "The use of *Basileia* in the NT" from *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, Colin Brown (ed.), Paternoster, Exeter, 1971, pp. 381ff.
4. Howard Marshall. "The Gospel of Luke", in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Paternoster, Exeter, 1978, p. 655.
5. Wolfhart Pannenberg's prolific writings are available in English translations. Some important ones on this theme are: *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vols. I and II, SCM, London; Richard John Neuhaus (Ed.), *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975.
6. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Lutterworth Press, Guildford and London, 1974, p. 91. Ladd's insights have been very useful in my study.
7. Hermann Ridderboss, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962, p. 427. Ridderboss' detailed study has been very helpful in this chapter.
8. Ladd, *op cit*.
9. Read Wolfhart Pannenberg's article, "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future", in R.J. Neuhaus, *op cit*.