

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH

The Church – the community of believers in Jesus – continues the mission of Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom, to make known and make present the reality of God’s Kingdom to the world.

The Past – the Kingdom has already come, throughout salvation history and most definitively in Jesus Christ. In its sacraments, the Church celebrates and actively remembers/participates in God’s intervention in our world through Jesus.

The Present – the Church is a living sign of the Kingdom, of the reality that God’s presence continues in the world, a presence for healing, for justice, for reconciliation, for peace, for freedom, etc.

The Church “becomes on earth the initial budding forth of that Kingdom.” [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, #5]

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity.” (L.G., #1)

The Future – The Church is “like an arrow sent out into the world to point to the future” (Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*) – the promised Kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth, where God will “wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)

More than that, the Church is to serve the world, doing all it can to narrow the gap between the Kingdom-as-now-only-partly-begun and the full flowering of that Kingdom. That mission of unfolding the Kingdom includes helping to set the world free of oppression and promoting human development on all levels.

The Church:

- Proclaims the Kingdom already begun
- Reveals the ongoing presence of the Kingdom now
- Serves the continuing unfolding of the Kingdom until its fulfillment

The Church **IS NOT** the Kingdom – the Church **SERVES** the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is larger than the Church. It includes all who do God’s will.

*“Many whom God has, the Church does not have.
And many whom the Church has, God does not have.”*

(St. Augustine, adapted by Karl Rahner.)

Being in the Church is not a guarantee of being in the Kingdom: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (MT 7:21).

“The Church strains toward the consummation of the Kingdom and, with all her strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with her King.”
(*Lumen Gentium*, #5).

The Church, inaugurated by Christ, lasts only until the Kingdom is fulfilled; the Kingdom itself lasts forever.

Since the Church is not the Kingdom:

- As a community and as an institution, the Church is not above criticism and reform.
- The Church’s mission is not to bring people into the Church, but into the Kingdom.
- God also works outside the Church and even in other religions.

Universal Call to Salvation

Everyone is called to the Kingdom, even if not to the Church.

The Church may succeed in bringing some into the Kingdom, where they fulfill God’s will, even if they do not enter the Church, or become Christians. We can rejoice wherever we see God’s grace and power at work.

Transforming the World into the Kingdom

We cannot look only to the future for the Kingdom of God, but must make it a reality in our present world. Liberation from oppression, poverty, disease, or discrimination; the promotion of justice, freedom, peace, human dignity – these are integral to proclaiming and bringing about God’s Kingdom.

The Kingdom is God’s gift to the world, effected with our collaboration. It IS God, present to us as a life-giving power that heals, renews and recreates.