

'Thy Kingdom come . . . on earth', we say in the Our Father, but (even in Advent) Christians never seem clearly to make up their minds in what sense we are still looking forward to the Father's Kingdom on earth and in what sense it is already here. Since it is evidently not here in any obvious sense, there is a tendency not only to say that it is here in an invisible interior way but to suppose that when it comes in the future it will still be just a matter of the interior life and will have nothing to do with visible, bodily, social and political structures. It is not a question of *identifying* the Kingdom with any projected social structures, however loving and holy they might be, just as it is not a question of identifying it with an individual style of life, however loving and holy, it is a question of finding analogies through which the divine life as lived by mankind could be understood. A just and loving social order is only a picture of the Kingdom, but it is the only one we have; it is the one we use in our sacramental representations of the Kingdom.

There is an important and dangerous fallacy that Christians should always behave as though the Kingdom were already visibly established, and that if they do this the Kingdom will be brought about. Thus it is rather vaguely thought that if Christians, in spite of the evident fact that they are living in a particularly brutal and murderous phase of the decay of capitalism, resolutely pretend (or have 'faith') that they inhabit the Kingdom of God on earth, then capitalism will melt away and the true reality will be revealed. This fallacy underlies, for example, some forms of Christian pacificism. It is perfectly obvious that whatever we mean by the kingdom it will not involve violence or any form of physical coercion, and that people will respond to each other in and because of love, but it does not follow from this that if we eschew all physical coercion now this will itself lead to a condition of greater justice and peace which will be a step towards the kingdom. Faith is not a matter of accepting untruths but of accepting mysterious and difficult truths; it cannot be a part of Christian faith to think and act as though something were true when it is false, and it is simply false that the Kingdom of justice and peace has arrived. This is perhaps more obvious in the lower Falls or the barrios of Latin America than it is in the European suburbs where so many of these pacifists reside, but it is true anyway.

Pacifism of this kind is only one way of jumping the eschatological gun; another is belief in a non-institutional, non-authoritative and sometimes non-sacramental Church. Of course there will be no temple in the Kingdom (Apoc. 21.22), the Christian looks forward to the withering away of religion as a special sacred department of life, he waits for the day when man will have come of age and outgrown

religion, but that day has not yet come. In the meantime there is the historical reality, which is no less real for being provisional.

Partly simply because it is a journey and partly because it is a journey through hostile territory, the Long March to the Kingdom demands certain kinds of discipline and certain provisional arrangements, certain forms of alienation, which we will be able to discard when we arrive. Some sorts of behaviour, injustice, cruelty and the like, are, of course, ruled out because they amount to marching *away* from the Kingdom, but we are still left with some activities, such as the physical struggle against injustice, which will have no place in the Kingdom itself. Meanwhile we approach the Kingdom by responding to the concrete demands made on us by our own historical epoch, not by wishing like Macbeth to 'trammel up the consequence' so that 'here upon this bank and shoal of time, We'd jump the life to come'. The idea that we can establish the Kingdom by pretending that it is already here has something in common with the belief of utopian idealists that we can establish socialism simply by trying to persuade everybody that it would be a good thing. Socialism will come to us at the hands of history, not by our devising, if we fulfil the tasks that history sets us here and now. In a parallel way, the Kingdom comes to us on earth not by human devising, but at the hands of God as we respond here and now to the demands of love. Christians are, indeed, un sentimentally aware that this response can mean our failure personally to achieve anything that looks like the Kingdom, a failure like that of Christ on the cross.

The parallel must not be overdone: there is, for instance, the important difference that socialism, being in the future, does not yet exist, whereas the Kingdom is in the future and yet does exist. This is what the resurrection of Christ affirms: the future world is real, established in Christ, and intersects with our present. This is the germ of truth in the idea that we should act as though the Kingdom had arrived. So long as we do not pretend that it is established visibly and socially, so long as we do not guide our behaviour by the illusion that the world is already transformed, we *can* recognise that we are 'citizens with the saints' and that our dynamism towards the Kingdom springs not just from this present world but from the life of the future, the Spirit of God, already at work within us.

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