

Jesus And The Kingdom Of God

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Whoever becomes involved with Jesus, becomes involved with the *Kingdom of God*. It is inescapably so, because the *concern of Jesus* was and is the "*Kingdom of God*."

Whoever looks for *God* and asks about the *Kingdom* in which "righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psa. 85:11) is to look to *Jesus* and immerse himself into the stories which occurred in his presence and still occur today in his Spirit. This is obvious and almost in our hands because: *Who is Jesus?* He is nothing other than the *Kingdom of God in person*.

Both belong inseparably together: *Jesus* and the *Kingdom of God*, the *Kingdom of God* and *Jesus*. *Jesus* brings the *Kingdom of God* to us in this unique way and leads us into the extent and beauty of the *Kingdom*. And the *Kingdom of God* makes *Jesus* the *Christ*, the *Savior*, and the *liberator* for us. If, therefore, one wants to learn what the mysterious "*Kingdom of God*" actually is, then one must look to *Jesus*. And if one wants to understand who *Jesus* actually is, then one must experience the *Kingdom of God*.

"KINGDOM OF GOD"—WHAT IS IT ?

Much harm already begins with the translation when one chooses terms which remind one of something other than what the text really means. "*Basileia tou Theou*" says the Greek. How should it be translated? If one said "*Kingdom of*

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God," then some thought of the "Roman Empire," of the "Empire," in any case of the "Holy Empire."

During the last 100 years, "Kingdom of God" has come to be replaced with the translation "rulership of God." It sounds more dynamic: God is the Lord because God rules, and everything that God rules is God's kingdom. So far, but not so good. We have personally, professionally, and politically suffered so many forms of seizure of power and domination that we have become careful in the longing for a "rulership."

That God should be "the Lord" might perhaps please *men*; but *women*, who have become sensitive, find this attribute to be unreasonable, and their longing for another domination is understandably limited. If one increases the "rulership of God" even more through the translation "royal rulership of God," then one must search for a long time, even in confirmation class, in order to find a meaningful comparison, at least in countries without a monarchy.

If we open up the New Testament, we find no definition of "Kingdom of God." Jesus did not explicitly explain this "term" anywhere. "Jesus presumed that it was known what the term means," says a new church statement (*Votum der EKV*, 1986, 66). One could think so, but it is not true. Jesus produced no old or new "notion" of the Kingdom of God—he brought the Kingdom of God itself. This represents a big difference: it is one thing to define the right terms of life, another to live the right way. It is one thing to learn a notion of happiness, another to be happy. And so it is one thing "to define" the Kingdom of God and another thing to experience it, to feel it, to see it, and to taste it. The notion may not determine the experience, but rather the experience the notion, otherwise we could not have new experiences at all, because of our prejudices.

We will therefore leave the notions for the "concern of Jesus" standing where we have just placed them and turn to the concern itself. How did Jesus present his "concern" that he could say: "It has come near. It is in the middle of us"? What did the people experience with him who rejoiced: "We have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, the word of life" (1 John 1:2).

FOUR BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Kingdom of God in the Parables

In the fourth chapter of Mark, we find a group of parables which are taken from human contact with nature: the parable of the Sower, of the seed, and of the mustard seed. They all are images of beginning, life-processes of hope. The one who "goes out to sow..." spreads the seeds onto the earth, because that person hopes that they will grow and bring fruit. So it is with the Kingdom of God: the seeds are spread in our lives, so that they grow and bring fruit in us. The beginnings are small, but if they are beginnings "from God," then the effects will be big and wonderful. There are infinite possibilities in small beginnings if God is in them. The buds of the Kingdom are like the mustard seeds, "the smallest of all the seeds," but when they grow, trees come from them so big that the birds

under Heaven find space in them. The seed grows by itself, day and night, while humans sleep or get up, the seed's inner power develops itself into the stem and into the ear of corn and into the wheat field. If one not only glances at the figurative meaning, but also at the original meaning, then one sees the "Kingdom of God" as the revitalization of nature. Mark 13:28-29 compares it with "the summer time." Nature itself becomes a parable: as in spring, the trees become green, the flowers sprout forth and the seeds on the field grow; so is the Kingdom of God the final eternal spring of the creation. New life begins, all creatures become alive and fertile. It strikes one that the parables are taken from spring and summer, but not from fall and winter. From nature's cycle of "becoming and dying" only the becoming is taken for the parables of the Kingdom of God. Why? Because the Kingdom of God is nothing other than the new creation of all things to eternal life.

The parables from nature make the Kingdom of God very sensual. I smell a rose and I smell the Kingdom of God. I taste bread and wine and I taste the Kingdom of God. I walk through a blooming, colorful meadow and I feel the Kingdom in which everything can grow and develop; the world in which there is enough for everyone.

In Luke, chapter 15, we have another group of parables—the lost and found parables: the lost sheep, lost coin, lost son. There is more joy in heaven over the "one sinner who repents" (Luke 5:17) than over the 99 righteous ones, just as the shepherd is happy when he finds the lost sheep and leaves his 99 sheep alone. It is good that a feminine parable follows: the parable of the woman who searches for and finds her lost silver coin. Again it says: "There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Then the parable of the lost son follows. Here the joy of the father is so great that it says by way of interpretation: "for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24). Also in the summaries of Jesus' message it repeatedly says: "The Kingdom of God is near—repent."

The meaning of the word "repentance" has changed so much in the course of our language history that it has become rather useless for translation of that which Jesus is concerned about, because under "repentance" we understand a punishment or a compensation. The old Jewish word for what is meant is "sub-reversal," turning away from injustice and turning to justice. In our language, "reversal" is too close to the word "conversion" and sometimes has a moralizing tone. Here, as well, we do not make progress with the term and explanation of the term.

What is the point of these parables? A lost sheep is found and the finder is happy that the search was not in vain. The lost coin could do nothing about its being lost or about its discovery; the joy lies totally and solely with the woman. The lost son was, finally, not "lost and found" but rather "dead and alive again." What then does "Kingdom of God" mean according to these parables? It is nothing other than the joy of God over the rediscovery of the lost creature. And what is the "repentance which the sinner does"? It is nothing other than the "being found" and "coming home" from the alienation, as "becoming alive again" and harmonizing in God's joy.

The Kingdom of God is experienced where something like this happens to us, where we blossom and become green like the flowers and trees in spring and become alive once again because we feel the great, inexhaustible love out of which all life comes forth. Where we experience the exhilaration of God in God's joy over us and our spirits of life wake up again, the "Kingdom of God" is no alien rulership from above, but rather the source of life amidst us. Here the Kingdom of God is the *open vast space* in which we can develop because there are no more limitations in it. If we experience the Kingdom of God in this way, then we once again perceive the fullness of our life possibilities.

It is true that the Kingdom of God, therefore, compares to the hidden treasure in the field and the precious pearl (Matt. 13:44ff) for which one gives up and leaves everything else. Then what can there be which is greater and more beautiful?! And the parable of the feast (Matt. 22:1-10) makes it entirely clear: the Kingdom of God does not compare to a barracks in which one learns obedience, but rather a wedding at which one finds the joy of God and laughs and sings joyfully.

Perspective: The Kingdom of God in the Healings of the Sick

According to the Gospels, the first thing that people experienced about Jesus was the *healing* power of the divine Spirit. Therefore, according to the Gospels, people in the nearness of Jesus are not revealed as "sinners" (as with Paul) but rather as *sick*. The sick came out of the corners and shadows into which they had been forced, and looked for the nearness of Jesus.

"That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and drove out many demons" (Mark 1:32ff). What are "demons"? They are personal images for powers of disorder and of destruction. The pleasure in torturing is particular to them. When the Messiah comes, says the old Jewish hope, then these spirits of torture will vanish from the earth and humans will be able again to live healthily and reasonably. There were miraculous healings of the sick in ancient times. No doubt they also take place in our modern world of scientific medicine. But with Jesus, they stand in a special horizon: they belong to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. When the living God comes to God's creation, the powers of torture must give way, and the tortured creatures become healthy. The Kingdom of the living God expels the germs of death and spreads the seeds of life. It not only brings salvation in a religious sense but also health in the physical experience. In the healing of the sick the Kingdom becomes concrete. Even when many of us today have no personal access to these stories of Jesus' healings of the sick, because we ourselves have not experienced anything comparable, we will, however, be able to understand with others' help that the life power of God wants to permeate our bodies, and we will grasp the material side of the Kingdom of God.

Just like all serious illnesses are *premonitions of death*, we must also understand Jesus' healings of the sick as premonitions: they are *premonitions of the resurrection*. Only with the rebirth of this mortal life to eternal life will that which Jesus did to

the sick be completed. We wrestle with death in every serious illness. We experience something of the resurrection in every healing: we feel like "having been born anew" and like "having been given life again." It will be so when that will happen which we cannot imagine because we have not yet experienced it: the resurrection of the dead and the life of the future world. In that resurrection world the Kingdom of God will be completed whose seeds Jesus has planted in our ears through his words and in our bodies through his healings. In respect to illness, "Kingdom of God" means *healing*, in respect to death, it means *resurrection*.

Jesus made the Kingdom of God his concern in that he healed the sick. This is true; but it is only half of the truth. In that the sick came to him, Jesus also experienced, on his part, what the Kingdom of God is. He did not have the healing power of God at his own disposal. In certain relationships healings occurred, in others nothing happened. In his hometown of Nazareth "he could do no mighty work," says Mark 6:5. Under which conditions did Jesus' healing power work and under which conditions did it not?

As one brought a lunatic, a *possessed boy* to him, he implored the father: "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." The boy's father answered with tears: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24). This small amount faith sufficed. Jesus "took him up by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."

The stories of the sick women speak even more strongly—There was the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:22ff). She sneaked through the crowd to Jesus and touched his garment: "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well," she said to herself. She made Jesus "impure" through this physical contact, as one thought at that time, but she took her own healing from him. Jesus perceived "in himself that power had gone forth from him." He looked at her and said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." He experienced the healing power which stemmed from him without his will and came to know this healing power through the faith of the sick. He grew on the expectations of the sick and in this atmosphere learned what the Kingdom of God was in their reality.

"Kingdom of God," we could say, is that which happens between Jesus and the sick, between his power and the faith of the people: both must come together. The presence of Kingdom is *experience of the Spirit*. The future of our experience of the Spirit is the *Kingdom of God*. So we also experience the coming Kingdom in the present Spirit of God which makes us alive.

Perspective: The Kingdom of God in the Community of Jesus

As Jesus promised the Kingdom of God to the poor, as he bestowed the power of God upon the sick, so he brought the right of God to those without rights and to the unjust ones—those in the Bible called "sinners and tax collectors." He publically demonstrated this through his community with them. "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2), said the good society with annoyance. But in the horizon of the closeby Kingdom of God, Jesus anticipated the eating and drinking of the just ones in the Kingdom of God through this table fellowship with the unjust ones.

The “meal of the just ones” with these unjust ones? Yes, because he exercised God’s right of grace on them through his compassion and “justified” them, as Paul would later express it. It already is contained in the word “accepted.” Those who are excluded and are refused are deeply hurt in their self-respect. They feel like a “piece of dirt.” And whoever then makes this judgement into their own begins to despise and hate themselves. Whoever finds someone in such a situation and unconditionally accepts him, feels lifted up and likewise redeemed. The acceptance of the despised is the healing which Jesus brings to the “sinners and tax collectors.” In this way the “Kingdom of God” comes into the world of the humiliated and the insulted and opens the psychological prison of self-contempt.

However, where there are excluded ones, like these “sinners and tax collectors” on one side, there are on the other side, the just and good ones who determine what is “just” and what is “good” and who is “evil.” Like the possession of wealth makes the poor ones “poor,” the “possession of goodness” (Leonhard Ragaz) makes the evil ones evil. When Jesus “accepts the sinners and eats with them,” he is, for the good ones, either himself a sinner or he is a revolutionary who upsets the order of values of their society. But in that he “justifies” the sinners, he also potentially saves the good ones and the just ones from their self-righteousness. Whoever accepts the sinner is also prepared to accept the just one. It is the same right of grace that saves the one and judges the other so that all come to God’s peace together.

Perspective: The Kingdom of the Poor and of the Children

The “Constitution” of the Kingdom of God in this world is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and its climax is the Beatitudes of the poor: because “theirs is the Kingdom.” What is called the “justification of the sinners” in Paul and in the Reformation is the *Beatitudes of the poor* with Jesus. The gospel is first preached to “the poor”—to those who in this world are nothing and have nothing. The collective term “the poor” encompasses those who are hungry, unemployed, enslaved, discouraged and mourning. It is the oppressed people themselves (“*ochlos*” in Greek, “*minjung*” in Korean). The “poor”—the social “non-persons,” the “workforce,” the “human material,” and the “poorest of the poor”—were and are mostly old women of whom one says that they “are no longer good for anything.”

On the other side, one finds not simply “the rich,” but rather the “perpetrators of violence” who make the poor poor, enrich themselves at the cost of the poor, or simply expel them. Again Jesus addresses with his message and his actions the social conflict in a violent society which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. Again the gospel of the Kingdom of God takes sides in this conflict. It sides with the poor in order to also rescue the rich and to deliver them from their atrocity.

What does the gospel bring to the poor? It does not bring them any welfare activities nor does it make them as rich as the others. It brings them a *new dignity*. The poor are no longer the suffering objects of oppression and humiliation but rather are subjects with the dignity of the first children of God. Jesus brings the poor the certainty of their indestructible dignity in the eyes of God. And with

this consciousness the poor, the enslaved, and the women who have been sold can rise out of the dust and help themselves. They cast away the society's value system which makes them believe daily, "You are failures, you have not made it, you are good for nothing!" and begin to live with lifted up heads and to walk upright. The appropriation of such a value system of the strong society is always the most difficult obstacle for the self-liberation of the poor because it produces self-contempt. Faith overcomes this self-hate and lifts up the bent ones. "The Kingdom of heaven is yours"—This is not an empty consolation so that they remain quiet here, but rather an authorization to stand up and to live as children of the Kingdom of God in this violent world. Jesus does not bring the poor onto the way to social ascent so that they also become as rich as the others. He brings them onto the way of community in which the *culture of sharing* counts, as the "Feeding of the 5,000" shows.

Jesus and his disciples, male and female, proclaimed the future in the Kingdom of God to the poor of their time because the Kingdom already belongs to the poor. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Jesus *discovers* the Kingdom of God when with the poor. The poor show him the Kingdom of God. The same is the case with the children, to whom he says that the kingdom of heaven already "belongs" (Matt. 19:14). He discovers that humans must become like children in order to come into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, there is actually a silent invitation to the Kingdom of God which proceeds from the poor; if one calls it the "evangelism through the poor" or the "messiahship of the poor," it does not matter. There is also the one very simple and unspoken invitation to the Kingdom of God through the children. Jesus not only proclaimed but also learned from the sick, from the poor, from the women and children. Whoever hears of the Kingdom in Jesus' message discovers the same Kingdom again in their community with the poor and the children. These last ones are the first ones and these weakest ones the strongest ones. It is good to know on whom one can count. The one who brought the Kingdom of God close to us also brings the poor and the children close to us. They are his family, his people because they also represent God's Kingdom in this violent world.

FIVE THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Based on these biblical insights, we now want to attempt to answer some theological questions which are repeatedly asked in respect to the "Kingdom of God."

Is the Kingdom of God present or future?

Is it the object of experience or the object of expectation? After what has been said, the answer comes without difficulty. It is the object of present experience in the community of Jesus: where sick ones become well and lost ones are found, despised ones are accepted and poor ones discover their dignity, where paralyzed ones become alive and the old, tired life becomes young and fertile again—there begins the Kingdom of God. It begins like a seed. Its sprouts are already lowered into this life and in this way it can be experienced. Therefore it

is also the object of hope, but a hope which is securely grounded in experience and memory; the seed wants to grow, the found one wants to return home, the ones healed from illness want to be resurrected from death, and those freed from constraint want to live in the land of freedom. Exactly because the Kingdom of God is experienced in the present in the community of Jesus, its completion is hoped for in the future. Experience and hope mutually reinforce each other.

The seed of the Kingdom is already sown and the sprouts of the Kingdom already grow, but there are growing pains. Those who feel this begin to suffer from the unredeemed state of this world, to experience anger and powerlessness. Not due to a lack, but rather due to happy experience, they call: "Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus" and pray "your Kingdom come." The more we experience the closeness of the Kingdom, the more urgently we pray for its coming because when the freedom is near, the chains begin to hurt.

Is the Kingdom of God of this world like an earthly kingdom or an otherworldly Kingdom of Heaven?

Those who want to understand it as otherworldly always refer to Jesus' words "my kingship is not from this world" (John 18:36). In doing this they overlook the fact that this is a statement about the *origin* but not about the *location* of the Kingdom. Of course it is not "from" this world, but rather from God, otherwise it could not heal this sick world. But in and through Jesus it is in this world and, as Jesus said these words, the Kingdom of God stood in person before the governor of the Roman Empire.

If it is the Kingdom of the creator God then it encompasses the entire creation, heaven and earth, the invisible and the visible sides of this world and is therefore otherworldly in heaven as well as worldly on earth. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for the coming of the Kingdom "on earth as in heaven," and mean with heaven the side of creation which already totally corresponds to God and with the earth the still disputed side of creation. We expect a new heaven and a new earth from the future of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is, therefore, as earthly as Jesus himself was and whoever glances at his end will say: The Kingdom of God has been indestructibly planted into this earth with the cross of Christ. With the resurrection of the crucified one, the new birth of the entire creation begins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, "remain faithful to the earth!" because it is worth it!

Is the Kingdom of God only a matter of God or also of humans? Can we "do nothing" or can we also accomplish the messianic works?

"The Kingdom of God is a matter of God," some church declarations like to say in order to conclude, "humans cannot and need not construct this Kingdom" (*Magedeburger Erklärung*, Oct. 1988). This amicable separation of God and humans invalidates everything that the New Testament says of Jesus. Where does Jesus remain in this split? Was he God? Was he human? Wasn't he the God-human, the God become human? All Christian confessions of faith say this

in any case. Therefore, the first sentence is false; it must say: *The Kingdom of God is a matter of Jesus.*

In the community with Jesus, people have, as described, sensually and physically experienced the Kingdom of God, not provisionally and ambiguously, but rather as clearly as a sick person who has been healed, a sinner who has been accepted, and a lost person who has been found. As a matter of Jesus, the Kingdom of God can really be experienced. And it can really be practiced by humans as well. "Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33). In the community of Jesus, the power of God is experienced. Through this experience, humans become "coworkers for the Kingdom of God" and do the same messianic works as Jesus himself: "Preach as you go, saying, 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons'" (Matt. 10:7-8). In the sense of Jesus, the *Kingdom of God is therefore also a matter for us.* "God" means real freedom, and true freedom means God. "Kingdom of God work"—this is what the missionary and the diaconal services of Christians in the world were rightfully called in the nineteenth century. "Kingdom of God work."

Is the Kingdom of God a different world or does this world become different?

Some imagine the Kingdom of God as another world which is to come after the end of this world. Some imagine eternal life as another life after death which is to follow after this life. But this leads to error and to the devaluation of God's creation. The new creation is not another creation, but rather the new creation of this disturbed world. Eternal life is not another life, but rather the resurrection of this life into the life of God. "This mortal nature must put on immortality," emphasized Paul. Kingdom of God, therefore, means that this world becomes different, and out of violence and injustice is reborn peace and justice.

The Kingdom of God, therefore, can also not be limited to a religious or a moral or a spiritual area. As Kingdom of the Creator God, it must be as universal and also as colorful and manifold as is this whole, rich creation. It is helpful to translate "Kingdom of God" as "Recreation" wherever it is referred to in the Gospels. Therefore: "Become alive, because the new creation of all things is at hand."

Even if we only experience the seed and the sprout from this, the waking up in the morning and the healing from illnesses, we have no right to set limits for the new creation of all things and to keep the Kingdom of God out of the economy or world politics. Everywhere life is threatened the living God becomes involved!

Is the Kingdom of God a theocracy or union with the living God?

The literal translation says "theocracy," but "Jesus' concern" emphasizes the revival of all creatures in the community of the Creator. Kingdom of God—that is *the wide space* in which there is no more pressure. There is no human freedom without this free-space of God. Kingdom of God—that is the *fulfilled time*, the moment to which one can say: "Linger on, you are so beautiful." It actually lingers and is without end. Kingdom of God—that is the God who has come to

rest, who inhabits God's creation and makes it into God's house. All creatures become fellows of God's house. Kingdom of God—that means God is near and is present and allows God's creatures to participate in God's attributes, in God's glory and beauty, in God's vivacity and God's goodness, because at the same time God participates in the attributes of God's creatures, in their finiteness, in their vulnerability, and in their mortality. Kingdom of God—we already experience it here in love because "who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:6).

So we expect it there: the redeemed creation in God and the God who rejoices in the creation. I call this understanding the *Christian conception* of the Kingdom of God. If Christ is the Kingdom of God in person, what then is the Kingdom of God other than the cosmic incarnation of God?

"FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD ..."

Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Matt. 6:33).

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God stood at the top of his agenda; for us, other things constantly intervene, mostly one's own interests.

We want to try to place the Kingdom of God once again in the first position of our lives. Let me take up the old idea of the different forms of the Kingdom of God in this world, but without their static character of an unchangeable order by saying more concretely what is to be strived for in these various areas of life in the sense of the Kingdom of God. I will speak of the *humanization* of human relationships and conditions, of the *democratization* of politics, of the *socialization* of the economy, of the *naturalization* of culture and of the *Kingdom of God orientation* of the Church.

1. Marriage, family, friendship, and relationships are the most intimate areas for human persons becoming human. Because between man and woman as well as between parents and children all cruelties directly injure, the task consists of becoming human to one another and in dealing with one another to be a Christian.

The art of loving has to be learned. We learn it through the forgiveness and freedom from guilt which we experience and in the amazing miracle of the new beginning. In that "wide space where there are no pressures" we accept each other, we grow with one another, and we develop together. Love entails the friendship which knows how to combine affection with the respect for the freedom of the other. This is the respect for the secret of the other and his/her yet-to-be possibilities. If love ends, then we form a rigid image of each other. We judge and mutually pin each other down. This is death. But love liberates from such images and holds the future open for the other. We have hope for each other; we, therefore, wait for each other. This is life-giving life. Human relationships are more than marriage and family, they are the basis of every society. Here it holds true in the name of "Jesus and his concern" that a society is only as good as the well-being of its weakest members. The right of compassion belongs not only in

caritas and *diakonia* but rather in the constitution of every society which claims to be humane. Social legislation and organized health care is to be measured on the burden of the poor and on the relief for the sick. Whoever wants to perceive the humaneness of a society must also look into the prisons, as Tolstoi suggested. With the eyes of the crucified Christ, one looks at the society, so to speak, "from below."

2. The *democratization of politics* is that program which originates from human and civil rights and organizes state institutions in such a way that they are there for the people, but not the people for the state. State power and exercise of power can today only be legitimated through appeal to human dignity and human rights. This is not only true for the domestic politics of a state but also for its foreign policy. Limits of state power and exercise of power are set through human rights beyond which they lose their legitimation. Therefore, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, Thesis 5, said: "The Church reminds the state of the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and justice and with this of the responsibility of the ruling and ruled." This reminder of the Kingdom of God prohibits, in my opinion, the "deterrence" of potential enemies with world destruction through nuclear weapons. This reminder of the Kingdom of God mandates in my opinion, however, the interference in the internal matters of other states when human rights there are tread upon.

3. The *socialization of the economy* does not necessarily mean expropriation and nationalization but rather the just distribution of work possibilities and profits to all who are concerned, that means to men and women as well as the people of present and future generations. There is a written social contract in all societies. But there is also an unwritten contract between the generations. In my opinion, what has to be addressed today is (a) the just distribution of work and life possibilities in the cross-section of society, and (b) the just distribution of work and life possibilities in the longitudinal section of present and future generations. (Because the children are the weakest members and the future generations have no voice in the present day decisions, the costs for the present profits are shoved off on them. This contradicts the justice of the Kingdom of God.)

4. The *naturalization of our culture* is also called the "ecological reform" which is necessary today. The culture up to now has been set up to subdue nature and to make it useable for the human. The future culture will have to integrate itself into the cosmic conditions of the earth and to respect the independent rights of fellow-creatures if humanity is to survive. The natural environment must be protected from the destructive grip of humans for its own sake. It sounds paradoxical but it is true: only when humans no longer stand in the center of their culture does humankind have a chance to survive. Human beings are neither the crown of creation nor is everything created for their sake. The human being is a creature in the greater creation community, created to praise God.

5. The extroverted *Kingdom of God orientation* of the Church must once again replace the modern, introverted Church orientation of the Kingdom of God. The Church is not there for its own sake but rather for the "concern of Jesus." All

inherent interests of the Church itself—maintaining the status quo, extending influence—must be subordinated to the interests of the Kingdom of God, otherwise they are unjustified. If the spirit and the institutions of the Church correspond to the Kingdom of God, then it is the Church of Christ. If they contradict the Kingdom of God, then the Church loses its right to existence and will become a superfluous religious community. The Kingdom of God orientation of the Church today means evangelization and liberation. The divine mission of the Church consists of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all people and first to the poor in this world in order to awaken faith which lifts up and makes certain. The divine mission of the Church consists at the same time of bringing the oppressed their freedom, the humiliated their human dignity, and those without rights their rights. Evangelization and liberation complement one another just like the uplifting of dejected spirits through faith complements the healing of abused bodies. It is the message of the base communities and the congregations of the people in Latin America, Asia, and Africa that both belong together inseparably: the mission commandment of Christ and the revolutionary imperative; the repentance sermon and the transformation of unjust conditions in economy and politics towards better justice; peace with God and the struggle for a more peaceful world. Where the Kingdom of God is at hand, the people of God come together. Then the church proclaims the message of the Kingdom and leads the world into the saving conversion. The Church is an evangelizing and a liberating community.

Let me close with an appeal:

First the Kingdom of God—then the Church:

Dear Bishops, pastors—male and female—church administrators and all of you who are concerned and who, in fat books and expensive surveys, pose the anxious question, “What will become of the Church?” Forget about the Church—think about the Kingdom of God, seek its justice and the living Church shall be yours as well!

First the Kingdom of God—then the State:

Dear politicians, citizens—female and male—and all who are worried about the security of the state or who are frightened by its power: Forget about the State—think about the Kingdom of God and about its justice and you will hold the power of the State in its limits and you will put it to the service of the rights of all humans and the rights of nature.

First the Kingdom of God—then the economy:

Entrepreneurs, trade-unionists, manufacturers and consumers, and all of you who work toward growth of the gross national product of your country: Forget the profit and forget the growth—think about the Kingdom of God and its justice, about justice for the poor people in the countries of the Third World and in the shadows of our First World! Think about justice of the future generations for whom

we work! Think about justice for nature from which we live! Think the longterm and not the short-term and a "sustainable development" will be ours as well!

First the Kingdom of God—then one's own identity:

Those who lose themselves for the sake of the Kingdom of God will find themselves. Those who hold onto themselves in vanity or self-pity will lose themselves. Do not withdraw, get involved! This hurts indeed, but those who find the Kingdom of God, find themselves, and those who truly and really find themselves, find the Kingdom of God because the Kingdom of God is also inside, very deep "inside in us."

Participate in the Kingdom of God and today let something from the rebirth of all things become visible which Christ will complete on his day. Become alive because your life comes. It will make you blossom and will also make you fruitful.

