

ARTICLE VIII.

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM.

BY THE REV. JAMES M. CAMPBELL, MORGAN PARK, ILL.

AT the centre of the eternal purpose of God, in which all things are embraced, lies the idea of his kingdom. The kingdom of God is no new thing. Under two forms it has always existed: *inwardly*, as a divine ideal floating before the minds of men, feeding their noblest hopes, and inspiring their sublimest achievements; *outwardly*, as a divine moral government, embracing all souls, all systems, and all events—a “kingdom that ruleth over all,” a kingdom administered for the good of all; “an everlasting kingdom,” stretching over all time, spanning all the ages.

Upon its spiritual side, as the sovereign rule of God over man *actually realized*, the kingdom of God is a thing of growth. Typified in the Jewish theocracy, personally revealed in Christ, it was at length firmly founded at Pentecost, through the manifestation of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

When the Baptist proclaimed to the Jews, “The kingdom of God is *among* you,” he announced the presence of the long-expected king. The one in whom the dream of ancient Israel is fulfilled; the one in whom the ages are linked together; the one in whom the kingdom of God has its unity, and through whom it is to attain perfect realization, had at length come. The kingdom silently administered throughout the past was now openly declared. The king had entered upon his inheritance. All authority was given into his hands: Over that moral empire which sweeps

the circle of creation, and which gathers into itself all good and loyal souls, he stood forth the rightful although as yet the unacknowledged sovereign.

At the first, no word was spoken by Christ touching his church. For a time the founding of his church was kept a profound secret. The gospel which he preached was "the gospel of the kingdom," the good news concerning the restoration of the world to the divine order; and yet before the kingdom could come it was necessary that the church be instituted; for the church was the vital germ from which the kingdom was to be built up, the creative centre around which the kingdom was to be constructed. From the holy society of the church was to be developed the holy society of a regenerated humanity.

Great confusion of thought exists regarding the relation of the church to the kingdom. The two terms "church" and "kingdom" are often used interchangeably. Canon Freemantle in his suggestive work "The World as the Subject of Redemption," defines the church as "the whole human race in all its modes of life inspired by the Spirit of Christ."¹ What he says of the church is true not of the church, but of the kingdom. It is the kingdom that is "the whole human race in all its modes of life inspired by the Spirit of Christ." Professor Bruce in his recent volume entitled "The Kingdom of God," makes the church out to be "practically identical with the kingdom of heaven." He is careful, however, to add that "the identity of the church and kingdom is not absolute, but relative only." The kingdom, he says, "is the larger category."² Dr. H. A. Ross joins together the two terms in question in the phrase "the church-kingdom"—a phrase which is admissible only when employed to express not so much what the church is, as what it is to become.

As we now behold it, the church is the brotherhood of

¹ P. 299. ² Pp. 264, 265.

Christ; the spiritual family of which he is the head; the elect band of disciples which he has gathered around himself, and bound together by the ties of mutual faith and love; the community of believing souls which he has called out of the world and chosen to be his representatives. As the Seer of Patmos beholds it, the church has grown into the kingdom. Those redeemed out of the nations are constituted unto God "a kingdom and priests." A perfect social state in which the sovereignty of God is realized has at length been reached.

As used in Scripture there are certain points at which the terms "church" and "kingdom" seem to overlap, and yet a valid distinction always exists between them. The kingdom is not, like the church, an outward organization with creeds and confessions for its passports of entry, and with rules and rituals for its inward administration, but an invisible, spiritual empire, composed of those who have bowed their spirits to the sceptre of divine authority; those whose lives are ruled by the divine will; those who yield their hearts to the drawings of the divine Spirit, and consent to follow his leading in their lives. In its highest conception the kingdom is a temple made without hands, a divine ideal brought down from heaven to earth; "the new Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from God." Hence it is designated in Scripture "the kingdom of heaven"—"the kingdom of the heavens," established on the earth, and making it "a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The kingdom, being wider and more comprehensive than the church, embraces many whom the church excludes; and, by parity of reasoning, the church, being narrower than the kingdom, excludes many whom the kingdom embraces. Professed believers constitute the church; partakers of the divine life constitute the kingdom. The church, as an outward communion of believers, is founded upon open con-

fession of Christ; the kingdom, as the inner dominion of God over the heart, is founded upon the secret acknowledgment of divine supremacy. We might say then that the sphere of the kingdom is identical with the sphere of personal religion. Where there is a religious life *there* is the kingdom; for the kingdom is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost"—it is the reign of God in the heart. The sphere of the church, on the other hand, may be said to be identical with the possession of faith in Christ. When the Saviour says, "Upon this rock I will build my church," it matters little whether we take his words as referring to himself or to the confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; Christ, the Son of the living God, is the Everlasting Rock upon which the true, spiritual church is built. To deny him is to renounce all valid claim to connection with that society of which he is the head. To acknowledge him is to supply the condition—the *sole* condition—of entrance into his fold. Any one who acknowledges his living presence in the heart is already in the kingdom, but those only who acknowledge him openly as "the Son of the living God" have a right to membership in his church.

There are two classes, who, although outside the church, have a place within the kingdom, viz., those to whom faith is impossible because of the absence of the outward testimony necessary to its production, and those who are incapable of faith because the faith faculty in them is undeveloped. To the latter class infants belong. Regarding them it is expressly stated, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Infants are not, by baptism or otherwise, to be received into the church. They are rather to be recognized as belonging to the kingdom, and are to be trained up for admission into the church upon open confession of their faith. They belong to the general community of Christ's people, and form a large and interesting part of his spiritual

empire. Their standing within the kingdom is not conditioned upon personal knowledge or faith, but upon their connection with Christ, or if you will, upon Christ's connection with them; upon the hold Christ has on them, and not upon the hold which they have on Christ. Should they die in infancy, they are not put upon probation, but enter at once into the presence of the king, among whose subjects they have been enrolled. Christ will be made known to them in the future world; not for the purpose of awakening them to repentance, but for the purpose of perfecting their character. Already within the matrix of heaven's nurture, they, in the world to come, will be progressively instructed in the things of Christ, progressively sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, that they may be fitted to enjoy the privileges, and exercise the rights and duties, of their heavenly citizenship.

This distinction between the kingdom and the church helps to solve a dark problem which often perplexes and pains many a sensitive, godly heart. Death has come into a Christian home and snatched away an amiable youth whose latent faith, of which a pure life was evidence, had not blossomed into open confession of Christ. The parents hope the best for their child, although the narrow scheme of salvation which they have been taught, and which they have unquestioningly accepted, forbids all hope. Their hearts are, however, better interpreters of God than all the creeds. But where can they find a firm foundation for the reasonable conviction that it is well with the child? Their child was not within the church. True; but may he not have been within the kingdom? If he did not openly disown Christ, and take his place in the ranks of his enemies, who shall judge the hidden purpose of the heart from the imperfect fulfilment of the life? May not the Omniscient One, looking at the inner essence of faith rather than at its outward form, see deeply buried in the breast some crushed seed, which

under the favoring skies of the heavenly summer-land may yet develop into avowed discipleship of the Christ of Calvary, whom the heart has implicitly trusted, and secretly loved?

What an edifice of error has been built up upon the false assumption that there is salvation only within the church! Instead of affirming that there is salvation only within the church, all that there is warrant for affirming is that there is salvation only within the kingdom. Many who are outside the church are saved; none who are outside the kingdom are saved. It is as king that Christ is judge. In the final judgment he decides the destinies of men, not on the ground of their relation to his church, but on the ground of their relation to his kingdom. From among those untaught by the written word, all who yield themselves to the kingly presence, whose authoritative voice is heard in every heart, share with Christian believers in "the great salvation." They are "made to drink of one Spirit"; they are satisfied from the same breasts of consolation; they are heirs of a common inheritance. They may not know that the invisible presence before which they bow is the presence of the invisible Christ; but "the Lord knoweth them that are his." He knows the secret ones who refuse to bow the knee to Baal, and who reserve the homage of their hearts for himself alone. And, when despondent Elijahs, walking by sight, think that they alone are left faithful to God, Christ, looking from the visible church to the invisible kingdom, sees "a remnant according to the election of grace" which he has "sealed out of every tribe."

What then is our duty towards those who are inside the kingdom, but outside the church? Plainly, it is our duty to try and bring them into the church. Gather the children into the shelter of Christ's fold; bring them into avowed discipleship; get them to assume personal Christian obligation. Where there is implicit faith, labor to develop it into explicit faith; where a secret hope is indulged, labor to have

“the good confession” witnessed before many witnesses. See to it that all heathen, at home and abroad, inwardly called by the Holy Spirit, are also outwardly called by the word of truth. Call them into the gospel feast; call them to that higher, holier, and more fruitful life which can come only through the knowledge of Christ, and through faith in his name; call them out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, out of solitude into fellowship, out of the outer court of God’s temple into the holy of holies.

From what has been advanced, the relation of the church to the kingdom begins, we trust, to grow more clear; but to be still more explicit we proceed to break up our general conception into practical detail, by remarking,

1. *That the church is the seminal centre of the kingdom.*—It is a microcosm containing within itself the rudiments of a world-wide empire; the nucleus of a new society embracing in its completed form the whole of human kind. In brief, the church is a society gathered out of the world; the kingdom, in its ultimate stage of development, is the world gathered into a society—it is the world-kingsdoms transformed into the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

The unseen hands of Christ are silently building up a kingdom that cannot be moved; and as the vital centre of his immovable kingdom he has established a church against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail. Working from within outwards, the church is destined to expand until it fills the world; becoming at last an external kingdom, and then vanishing from sight, being lost in the kingdom it has created, as the seed is lost in the flower. The church is temporal; the kingdom is eternal. The church passes away when its work is done, but the kingdom into which it melts, endures forever.

Seeing, therefore, that the church is the vital core of the kingdom, seeing that when the church is weak the kingdom is weak at the centre, and that when the church is

strong the kingdom is strong at the centre,—how can we better strengthen the kingdom than by strengthening the vital, fruitful forces within the church? What any single Christian can do to advance the interests of the kingdom of God on the earth must be done mainly through the church. Open channels of usefulness have been provided by the church, into which the most affluent lives can pour their richest treasures, and have them conveyed to the needy with the least possible waste. Let any one discard these well-constructed channels, and the chances are that the stream of his religious activity will thin out, and lose itself in the desert sands. To make our lives most effective for the kingdom, we must work from within, making the church the central sphere of our operations; building up the kingdom by building upon the foundation laid in Zion.

2. *Through the church the kingdom is manifested.*—

Before the world the church stands the outward witness of an everlasting kingdom, over which Immanuel reigns; the memorial of the advent of the king to his earthly dominions; the evidence of his continual indwelling, through the Spirit, in human souls and in human society.

It is hard for the world to believe in a kingdom whose king and court are out of sight. The main evidence that this unseen kingdom really exists is furnished by the church—which is the body of Christ—the outward embodiment of his spiritual presence, the outward manifestation of his spiritual kingdom.

It has sometimes been said that the kingdom of heaven chiefly manifests itself in the world in and through the local church. Would it not be more correct to say that the kingdom of heaven chiefly manifests itself in and through the *universal* church? Within the local churches there is one true church, variant in polity and doctrine, but possessing substantial unity of faith and life. This undivided body of Christ is in a special sense his human kingdom; not the

whole of it, by any means, but the best part of it, the part of it which stands out most clearly to the eye of the world. Here are those who acknowledge Christ as their only sovereign; those who delight in being under his government; those who are his faithful citizens and loyal subjects; those who have openly bowed in subjection before his throne, swearing undying allegiance to him as their Lord and king.

In their relations to each other the members of the church are a democracy, a brotherhood; in their relation to Christ they are a kingdom. On its higher side the church is not a republic, but a pure and absolute monarchy, administered by one whose will is supreme, and whose sovereignty is absolute. It is only when looked at upon its lower or human side that we are warranted to speak of the church as "*the Republic of God.*"

The point at which the church and kingdom coalesce is that both imply the dominion of God over man: the point at which they differ from each other is, that in the one case this divine dominion is openly confessed and expressed; whereas, in the other case it is often falteringly acknowledged and faintly revealed. It is no opening of the mystery to say that there are two churches; one visible, the other invisible. There is a visible church, and an invisible kingdom. Of the invisible kingdom the church is the outward witness, the prophetic representation of what the world is yet to become.

3. *Through the church the kingdom is ruled.*—It is the predestined plan of God that over the new society contemplated in his eternal purpose—the new society into which the church is to be developed—the saints are to reign. Kingly power has been put into their hands. They are appointed to be the governing and controlling influence in all the world's affairs. Of them it is distinctly affirmed that "they shall reign upon the earth."

In the exercise of his royal prerogative, Christ says to

his people: "Go, disciple all the nations," "*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.*" "Go delegated with my authority; go clothed with my power; go speak in my name; go establish my kingdom; go to all the nations, and demand from them instant and unconditional surrender to my kingly rule."

Is the church fully conscious of her high dignity? Is she alive to the fact that to her belongs the right to lay down the law of social life—the royal law of love, for which the isles still wait? Does she stand in the high places of the earth, speaking and acting with authority, as an ambassador invested with sovereign power? Is she fully aware that it is given to her to utter the omnific word which is to still the tempest of industrial and social strife?—that she is the burning bush out of which the I AM now speaks to every new deliverer of the race? Is she striving to make her influence supreme in society, ever realizing the fact that the final settlement of all the social and moral questions that perplex the world is in her hands?

To those who deny the right of the church to sit with Christ upon his throne, exercising judicial authority over the affairs of his kingdom, and arbitrating in his name, in all disputes between man and man, it is enough to reply, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" In claiming for the church the right to occupy the highest place of honor and power in God's kingdom—in claiming for her "the power of the keys," which at first was given to Peter as her representative—we are simply claiming for her the crown-rights which belong to her as the bride and co-regent of the world's rightful sovereign.

4. *The church is heaven's chosen instrumentality for the realization of the kingdom of God in the world.*—To gather up the results of Christ's earthly mission, to win back a world which had risen in revolt, to establish the authority of God over men, to recreate human society,—the

church was instituted. It is the appointed instrument by which the world is to be subjugated to Christ, and his kingdom made universal on the earth. The church is a circle within a circle; it is a citadel within a fortress; it is the grand metropolitan centre of the kingdom from which go forth those aggressive agencies which are to conquer the world, and bring it under the sway of the Prince of peace.

Social reformers have held out the delusive hope of a new social order which is to make new men; the church makes the new men, and trusts to them for the making of the new social order. A regulative and a ruling force, the church is also a regenerative force. It does more than promulgate outward law: it generates and propagates spiritual force. It commands love, and it produces it; it destroys selfishness, which is the root of all the wrong which man inflicts upon his brother-man, and it awakens pure and holy love, which is "the fulfilling of the whole law."

Having "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever," Christ "sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." Enthroned in the place of supreme moral power, he is calmly waiting for the ultimate triumph of his kingdom. Upon what does he base his great expectations for the future? Upon the co-operation of his church. All that he expects to see realized, will be realized through his church, within which he has lodged sufficiency of power to overturn all antagonistic forces, to mould human institutions, to create a new social order, to regenerate the moral life of the world—in a word, to bring in the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Lord's people of to-day are beginning to have a realizing sense of the important truth that the church is not an end, but an instrumentality; but what is still somewhat obscure to many minds, is the precise end for which the church is an instrumentality. That end is undoubtedly the kingdom of God. The church does not exist for herself,

but for the kingdom. Instead of saying, with Neander, that "the church is the final aim which Christ proposes to his activity," we would say, that the kingdom is the final aim which Christ proposes to his activity, the final aim also which the church ought to propose to her activity. To establish the kingly rule of Christ upon the earth is the final object of all the manifold ministries of the church. For that she unceasingly prays and labors; for that she freely expends her choicest treasures of men and means; for that she devotes herself to works of philanthropy, preventive and remedial. The explanation of her consuming zeal and untiring toil is found in her inborn purpose to destroy the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of God. The continual burden of her desire is voiced in the words: "Our Father, which art in heaven, thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Looking beyond herself, going beyond herself, she ever waits, and prays, and works for the coming to earth of the Father's kingdom.