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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO-DAY

AMID the present confusion nothing is more symptomatic, and revealing, and disastrous, than the confusion of values which results in a confusion of spheres of action. There is a general loss of a proper sense of calling or vocation. Nobody seems to know what the effective limits of his particular station or activity are. This is seen in its most solemn, and also its most ludicrous, form in the activities of two classes of professional speakers, the politicians, and the preachers.

Any night, over the wireless, you may hear politicians preaching of brotherhood and justice and a better world. Any Sunday you may hear ministers of religion eloquently pouring forth the good news about the coming victory, and social reconstruction, and the wonders of the peace that is to follow the war.

The great junction and marshalling-yard of this confusion is the idea of the Kingdom of God.

The only bright feature about this lamentable darkness of understanding is that for the most part the men and women serving in the armed forces of the Crown seem to be realistically sceptical about these promised glories of the peace. They already know humanity too well, with its capacity for stubborn misorganisation and repeated blundering and acquiescence in evil, to see this ideal aftermath of the war as anything but at best a pitiable dream and at worst a pitiable deception.

If this were to remain a self-deception on the part of the ministers and politicians who dream it, little harm would be done to anyone else. But the real pity is that such dreams are dangerous. They spread confusion, which, worse confounded, seeps into the whole life of the country; so that a generation is likely to be tainted with false views, false ideologies, false hopes, false life. And this infection spells death and disaster not only for the individual spirit, but also for the corporate life of the land.

What then do these self-appointed teachers say and imply? (They are self-appointed, for these opinions they utter about the future are not the teachings of their appointment, whether

as duly elected representatives of the people or duly ordained ministers of religion.) What they say issues from an astonishing and individualistic compilation and conglomeration of false philosophies, false optimisms, false understandings of the Church and the State and of the condition of humanity—a little from here, a little from there, and all mounting to a grand crescendo, in which fortissimo the strains of the Kingdom of God are thumped out as the theme-song which can deafen and silence all opposition.

This is true even of those speakers and teachers who would repudiate any connection with Christian teaching about the Kingdom of God, or who have never deliberately set about understanding that teaching. But that is incidental. What matters is what is said or implied.

They say, then, or they imply, that everything is on the way to being better. True, they admit, *en passant*, that there is a war on. There is carnage and there is grief. Call them, rhetorically, "blood and tears", and the truth is preserved and at the same time poeticised and made remote and irrelevant for this lonely woman, or that weary prisoner, or that creature dying amid the rubble of his home. They admit that there is a great deal of evil, but they see it as essentially irrelevant; and it is easy to palm this sorry side of life off on the vile abandoned Hun. He is largely (or, with some rhetoricians, he is *wholly*) responsible for the misery and the evil of life to-day. Our innocence is easily proved, they say. For is it not true that now, even now, we are not really ready for war?

Here is the first major confusion. For what merit is it that, seeing the need for total warfare, we are still unready, still unmobilised to the utmost of our resources, still retarding in group and class and individual selfishness the imperative demands of total warfare? This is not a proof of innocence, but a profound sign of our confusion of values and spheres: the confusion of reality with ideal expectations. Here the ready idea of the Kingdom of God, as the climax and consummation of the steady advance of civilisation, beckons the eloquent speaker to his pleasant peroration. He, and his audience, see the world as moving to an ever closer approximation to the Kingdom of God.

This was a favourite idea of the thinkers and greatest teachers of the generations preceding the last war. It is therefore

to be expected that the politicians and preachers should now be catching up on those ideas of the heyday of Darwin's evolutionary theories or of Henry Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*.

What is not to be expected, however, is the fact that these ideas of an unbroken (or at most temporarily interrupted) progress of humanity should be considered quite impervious to the plain sights of life to-day. Life to-day is vicious, brutal, without real concern for the true destiny of man as man, but demanding the total sacrifice of man.

It is truly hard to understand how these teachers reconcile the actual conditions and means of living with that charming prospect of a visionary peace and prosperity—after the war. They are blind to the reality. They wait for the automatic resumption of the temporarily disturbed flow of humanity "upward, ever upward". They do not see that this is against all nature, and especially the nature of men, evil, vicious, sinning, selfish, deprived.

If it is true (as these teachers say, indicating their true affinity with the teaching of a past era) that there is

One far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves,

it is also true that the movement of men is equally into evil. Man is getting progressively worse, even if also he is getting progressively better. If it is true that our powers are more efficiently organised and our sympathies more widespread (witness how the "heathen Chinese" are being slowly, reluctantly, accepted as our allies and brothers in misfortune, and how the Russians—ah, the Russians! who shall say what is the leading attitude towards those enigmatic peoples, viewed with such suspicion, and bitterness, and acclamation, and patronage, and fear, and delight, and doubt, and hope), it is also true that our disorder is more apparent and our involvement in stupid and evil situations deeper and more hopeless.

No; this is no temporary aberration, to be put right when the war is over. There is something here, far more deep-seated than a mere mistake of direction, to be put right when the war is over. Far less is it possible, with those super-optimists who urge us on to better efforts, to think of our present way as a detour to the golden age. It is a far truer reading of history

which sees the golden age in the irrecoverable past, the gates of the garden of Eden for ever closed on guilty mankind, mankind for ever on the move—towards the Kingdom of God? Yes! But also deeper and deeper into the kingdom of evil, into judgment and death and desolation of spirit.

Thus, then, the present-day teachers from pulpit and wireless and newspaper, involved though they are in the tragic situation of mankind, fail to see any tragedy. They do not see something far worse than mistakes to be rectified in due course. They do not see the resurgent, obstinate, perverted will of men, willing this evil condition of affairs. Their garbled reading of the history of mankind is so contradictory of the facts, their view of progress is so subtly naïve beyond the best dreams of Satan, their confusion of the categories of living is so maladroit, so absolute, so shockingly misleading and falsifying, because they do not see man as he is. They see man as naturally good, needing only an assortment of allurements, incentives, threats, appeals, fears, ideals, and what not, to push, browbeat, hasten, urge, sweat, tumble and compel him on the road to victory, peace, the Kingdom of God.

They do not see that mankind is composed of individuals, each one an amazing farrago of baseness and of nobility, such a piece of work, half-angel, half-devil, as ought always to have in his totality a central place in the understanding and the appeal of the speaker—if man is to be made what it is his destiny to be made.

It is God's will that out of the farrago should arise the faith of the sons and daughters of God. That is the only purpose common to humanity, and the only destiny which proposes a human course for humanity. Anything else is mere fate, the blind *Heimarmenē*, the zealous politician, the babbling preacher.

That is the real failure of the rhetoricians and the would-be leaders of the people. They do not see the object. Or rather, they see only objects, causes and ideals and ideologies and men and women as objects, or a congeries of units constituting an abstract ground of appeal, when the truth is the single individual, the subject, the living human being who alone counts, who alone is the concern of all the historical purpose. He it is, in his solitary desolation, and his grandeur, his misery and his infinite possibility, who decides that "one far-off divine event"; and it is for him, and not for any cause or class or idea, that

that far-off divine event is a reality. The Kingdom of God is *for persons*. It does not exist as an ideal, nor is it some abstraction like brotherhood or peace or justice or democracy. But as these things have life and reality only in the individual, and then in the society formed by the conscious individual aware of his possibilities, so the Kingdom of God exists in reality only for the real life of persons.

It is obviously pleasanter and easier to avoid the pressing claims of the human being in favour of the claims of "humanity" or of "the rights of a class" or of the "natural aspirations of the race". This maintains the validity of the "ideal", at the same time as it smooths out the ugliness and the evil, resolving them in the artificial simplicity of the goodness of mankind. Inevitable progress, and natural goodness: these are the twin offspring of the unholy union of false abstraction and a secularised idea of the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes a querulous note creeps into the preacher's Sunday morning address. What does this mean? Is he tiring of the promised glories? Is the constant postponement of the coming Kingdom rousing a suspicion in his mind, that perhaps after all the King of that Kingdom, despite the ringing eloquence of his professional ambassadors, and their mounting asseverations of the certainty, the immediacy, and the indescribable happiness of that Kingdom, if only . . . —that the King may perhaps after all have other intentions, that perhaps after all the King of that Kingdom has another understanding of glory, and another expectation of what kind of people are praying *Lord, Lord and Thy kingdom come?* Does the preacher, as he looks up from his old manuscript, or glances down at the hasty jottings of a Saturday night—" (1) The Kingdom is at hand; (2) Have faith that the Kingdom is at hand; (3) We must trust that after the war all will be well again"—perhaps see, in a moment, blindingly, terribly, on the upturned faces an unfamiliar yet immediately recognisable expression, so that when he looks down again, there, between his paper and his thoughts, filling all his thoughts, filling the familiar building, throbbing through the irrelevant booming of the organ, there is the image and the presence of despair?

Does the preacher scold through the impassioned periods of his "inextinguishable" optimism, because for a moment, of terror and dismay, all hope is extinguished, and despair with

fierce insight sees men and women as they are, in their awful duplicity of heart, in their divided lives, in the unceasing conflict of a will divided against itself, restless, sinning, yet tired of sinning?

If only that moment persisted; if only the querulousness deepened into a sense of the wrath and judgment of the King of that Kingdom, there would be preachers again in the land. But the moment dies, and in its stead there flows again, in the boundless harmony of ceaseless eloquence, the need of faith, the adequacy of faith, the near prospect of a speedy settlement, when all will be well. And the preacher wanders through the misty heights of his rhetoric, deceived by his own words about the nature of life; so that he is content to think how well he "stimulated the morale" of the people.

And sometimes, into the measured insipidity of the politician's sentences, through the complacent certainties, a note of another quality sounds. It is ringing and bright, incisive, the voice of authority. Here is the other way out of the nothingness of his understanding of the audience: the way of the whip, the way of the *Herrenvolk*, the way of the man with power; it is the only human escape from the false view of the Kingdom of God—the cul-de-sac of the totalitarian state. If you ignore the reality of human nature, and join with that ignoring a passionate desire for the advancement of the Kingdom of God, your only logical outcome is in a State which is determined, within certain limits, to establish the Kingdom of God, or certain selected items out of the Christian programme of the Kingdom, by force. In such a way, seeking to escape the awful duplicity of human nature, its pull towards evil and its restless desire for good, you build a kingdom based on that very duplicity—a glittering achievement, honeycombed with death, foul with the rotting spirits of the cowed subservient masses forced into it.

Thus the preacher and the politician join hands to maintain the deception about life, the preacher with sentimental rodomontade, the politician with gradually hardening self-assertion into a total claim on the life of his audience. The preacher preaching of the new social order, and the politician preaching of brotherhood and a light beyond the darkness, alike borrow their terms from the teaching about the Kingdom of God. But they teach a false idea to an audience falsely understood. If they saw the source of their querulousness or of their

growing exasperation, in the divided and despairing spirit of men, would they dare to speak at all? Alas, the momentary insight only serves to thicken the haze of sentimentality in the preacher's appeal, and to quicken the tempo of the politician's climb to power over the masses.

But it is not to the masses that the teaching of the Kingdom of God speaks, but to you—you there, in loss and disaster; you in loneliness and despair; you in uneasy doubt about the worth of all your travails, whether they are to achieve some laudable and desired social change, or to win your beloved back to yourself, or to stave off invasion from your home or the insidious waves of indecision and perdition in your own spirit; you on picket, alone with the stars—and with your own disordered crumbling hopes; you who come Sunday by Sunday to be bemused by the difference between the rosy ideals of the preacher and the hideous evil and futility you encounter in your week-day routine; you who deliberately, or casually, hopefully, or despairingly, await the stimulation of the postscript to the News; and you who prepare those talks and sermons, you who late on Saturday night flog your disturbed emotions and confused thoughts into a semblance of passion for the Kingdom of God, and in the back of your mind sense a futility and misapprehension that strengthen with the years—it is to you all, but to each of you singly, that the teaching of the Kingdom of God speaks: to you all, but to the same need in each.

First, it is the need of understanding yourself. You do not understand why you should be constantly aware of disharmony, and futility, and that gnawing fear that, after all, even with the best efforts, the world may indeed be "no better off" after the time of catastrophe and carnage. But be realistic in your attempt to understand yourself. Recognise that this is what you are as man—man or woman, young or old, this is your human fate, to be caught in the toils of evil, and to be aware of good, to be always on the move, to be perpetually in reach of the possibility of real change, which always remains a possibility, to actualise and bring about only such an infinitesimal amount of permanent achievement, while aware at the same time of that inexorable, absolute demand in yourself, which at its keenest and clearest is the Christian command to **BE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

The command does not refer to quantity, but to quality. It does not ask you to compare yourself with others, or to count

the good against the bad, or to let spirit be dismayed at any concentration of evil, not a thousand bombers, not every city wiped out, not every friend lost. But the command is inexorable, that you seek first the Kingdom, that you go on seeking it, that you may fail again and again, and see your spirit sink bruised into the stream of life, but always go on, rise again, die a thousand deaths, let your faith be a fighting faith. Be brave to remain with the uncertainty of faith. Rise again out of the mists of the sentimental and the practical deceptions, which promise the Kingdom of God as a nearby achievement in world-history. Learn to snap your fingers at that reading of history, which is a fiction of the philosophers and other speculators in the market of human hopes. And if you reach that rare inner awareness that the Kingdom of God is within you, take that truth too with the trembling faith which knows it must always fight, blind, if it is to be—faith.

Learn that though the Kingdom of God is always at hand, always "just round the corner" to the inner expectation of faith, it is not and never can be at hand for the speculator and the eloquent preacher of world-history which is seen with objective and alluring appeal. Learn what faith means, as a real way of living, and not a mere ingredient or addendum in times of special stress. Learn that the Kingdom of God is present to such faith, faith which is in the waiting, and that all life opens out for the faithful. Yet learn that this opening prospect is not shown as an extended upward incline to the gates of heaven, but as a prospect always blurred (seen darkly), and without conclusion in man's plans, but with conclusion only (because concluded already) in God's plan.

This is a greater wonder than the fictitious wonder offered by those who equate man's efforts towards betterment with the Kingdom of God. For this wonder is that the Kingdom of God is already established. The Kingdom is God's order, and is complete in God's will. This we perceive in faith, which is the response to the Word spoken in the Son. The Kingdom of God is independent of all world-history, all movements of men, backwards, forwards, up, down, or in the dreary circle of human independence and arbitrary self-willed rebellion. The Kingdom of God does not depend on men's efforts: it awaits their faith in its King. It is in this sense that the Kingdom of God is here and now, because it is in Christ; in this sense too that it is never

here and now, but always summoning men, and only at the end of time will judge the works of men, because it is the perfection of Christ's being in creation.

Thus the Kingdom of God, which is the aim of all the good and the love and the peace and the bright vision which men have ever held for a moment, is truly the Kingdom *of God*: men have no say: they must only obey. Keep this faith clear of muddy emotions and the dubious stimulation of morale. Do not expect the Kingdom of God to rise out of the ruins of our cities or the crumbling morals of the western world. Expect it to rise out of the good heart of God, and in God's time, the utter wonder of all: the time when eternity breaks in on time.

Here is the point of the deepest confusion of all. It is imagined that the Kingdom of God is related directly to the future situation of men, for instance, to a new League of Nations, or to a new order in the West or in Asia or in the whole planet, which with time, little by little, or after this time of catastrophe, may be brought about by a "miracle" of resolution on the part of men. But the Kingdom of God is not related to the future, any more than it is bound up with the past. The Kingdom of God is not in time—in the sense of being, or having been, or being about to be—in this sin-ridden, conjectured time, where the future is an uncertain guess and the past a collection and recollection of probabilities and approximate understandings and the present an ever-passing, elusive instant without meaning. The Kingdom of God is not in that kind of historical time. But it is in God's time. The Kingdom of God is the historical expression of Christ's being. "He is before all things and in and through Him the universe is one harmonious whole."

Where then is this known, where seen? Where does the toiling life of humanity meet this mystery of Christ's perfect being in history?—In Christ's time, which is filled with eternity. Christ's time, God's time, is not accessible to the understanding. You cannot understand, you can only believe. Christ entered time and history—but He is eternal. God spoke His Word out of eternity—in time! This revolutionises the idea of life by revolutionising actual existence. This is God's way of movement (which the philosophers reduce to understanding—and therefore misunderstand—by describing it as the unmoving ground or the absolute or the ideal), a way which cannot be understood, but simply believed.

There is nothing to be done, nothing that can be done, to help the plan of God. This must positively be maintained against all the plans of men, interesting and effective though these may be. The only response to the Kingdom of God is to believe. But to believe is doing of the first importance. It is an active, existential judgment on all confusions of spheres, such as we have seen in the speech of the preachers and the politicians. It is action, in patience and long-suffering, cheerfully enduring all things, never being shifted from the hope of the Gospel, God's entry into time.

This you may find for yourself. It is your only real value, and standard, and hope for living. It is real, not an imaginary state of affairs after the war. It is far nearer than that imaginary state of affairs will ever be, for it is now—and wherever you are, if you are in faith. Come then to yourself, out of the far country where the speakers speak on and on, pouring forth the synthetic husks of idle sentimentality and dangerous illusions of a man-made millennium; come back to faith; wait upon God. He waits for you.

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