

# The Realisation of The Kingdom of God in Neo-Vedanta

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**J**esus' teachings on the kingdom of God vary in different situations. In the Lord's prayer he prays, "*Thy kingdom come... on earth*". He said to a group of Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is *in the midst of you*", to Nicodemus, "unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God", to his disciples at the last supper, "... my Father *appointed* a kingdom for me". Along with the discussions in other parts of the world concerning these various concepts of the kingdom of God, our Indian Christian theologians and Hindu spiritual leaders, especially Neo-Vedantins have rendered significant contributions towards its development.

*The Neo-Vedantins:* The Neo-Vedantic Christological affirmations, in relation to the intention of the kingdom of God, are derived from the early and the later Neo-Vedantins.

## The Early Neo-Vedantins

*Swami Vivekananda* agrees with the view that 'the kingdom of God is in the midst of you' and invites people to proceed for a deeper spiritual journey to realize that "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). At a stage a soul will be able to realize that he is God himself, but only a lower expression of Him. Swamiji calls Christ a non-dualist (Advaitin). He thinks that Jesus in his saying "My kingship is not of this world" means that this kingdom is not the one which the Jews expected but this kingdom is actually within ourselves, existing in our innermost beings. Jesus saw every person as the embodiment of the same imperishable spirit as himself.<sup>1</sup> Swamiji says:

"Think not you are trampled upon and tyrannized over as if you were slaves, for within you is something that can never be tyrannized over, never be trampled upon, never be troubled, never be killed, you are all sons of God, immortal spirit. 'Know' he declares, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you'.<sup>2</sup>

When the spirits, dwelling in mortal bodies, are purified, the kingdom of God is found in themselves or they will dwell in the kingdom of God. Vedantins also believe that the kingdom of God is

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within us. Swamiji thinks that through renunciation a spirit can be cleansed for attaining perfection in order to be in the kingdom. Christ shows us the way to become perfect. He helps us to find our true divine nature. Because he leads us to the truth that the kingdom of God is in our midst. Swamiji understands renunciation as Sanyasa which was the emphasis of Jesus' teachings. He looks at Christ as an Advaitin when he says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". This implies that the spirit in man or woman is of God. "It is the breath of God." This pure spirit is covered with Maya of worldly dust and dirt. When we are able to clean it, we find God in it. Therefore Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is within you." Renunciation is the way to God-realisation.<sup>3</sup> Jesus meant it so when he asked the rich young man to sell all his worldly riches and take up his own cross and follow the master.

*Swami Abhedananda* claims that Jesus' teaching to work for others, to die for others and to be always aware of the spiritual oneness with God is also the purpose and the end of all religions. Jesus' teachings were also on self-denial, charity, control of passions, renunciation, universal love, faith in God and the realisation of the unity of the individual soul with the universal spirit.<sup>4</sup> His teaching on unity found in "I and my Father are one" is described according to Vedanta as, 'I' and 'My' do not refer to the physical form but it refers to the divine self, the higher spirit which dwells in the human soul and which is immortal, perfect, single and one with God. The students of Vedanta do not care about whether Jesus was historical or not but they recognize the saviour Christ in the manifestation of the universal logos. The Vedantins call Christ a Yogi. Yogi is the one who attains union with God. Abhedananda finds three stages of Divine realisation in the teachings of Christ. Firstly, a dualistic teaching in which God is addressed as the Father in heaven. Secondly, a qualified non-dualistic teaching in which he explained the Father as the vine and the human beings as the branches. Thirdly, a non-dualistic teaching in which he claims that he and his Father are one. Being in such a state he would say, "who is my mother, who are my brothers? ... whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister and mother." As he himself is spiritualized, his father, mother, brother and sister will also be of spiritual sphere.

*Swami Akhilananda* thinks that Jesus Christ, the divine incarnation, came to show the true nature of human beings. He taught them about God-realisation in order to help them find their true self. The attainment of God-realisation is the attainment of the kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup> If we neglect our soul and value the whole world, it will be impossible to receive the kingdom of God. A spirit must

necessarily have God-realisation. As Jesus says "...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things (eating, drinking, wearing) shall be yours as well."

### The Later Neo-Vedantins

*Swami Prabhavananda* looks at Christ as teaching human beings to seek God within them. He feels that the kingdom of God is not to come with observation. Nor can it be found here and there, but only in our innermost beings. Jesus lived amidst his disciples in order to teach that the kingdom of God is amidst them. As he says, "...you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). But it is our ignorance that impedes us to comprehend his presence in us. But this ignorance can be removed by another immediate experience of God-realisation. As Christ says, "...unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom" (John 3:3). When we are reborn in spirit we become perfect. Jesus rightly says, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The term "heavenly Father" does not mean that the kingdom of God is heavenly. But God is present in us through Christ.<sup>6</sup>

*Swami Satprakashananda* thinks that Jesus taught about the kingdom of God in three different senses, (a) Popular concept (b) as the abode of God, (c) God-consciousness, a state of full spiritual awareness.<sup>7</sup> The popular concept indicates an earthly kingdom which is found in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come..." and also in, "come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The abode of God indicates a celestial dominion. Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth... but... in heaven" (Matt. 6:19,20). This refers to a spiritual kingdom after death where people can go through faith and devotion. The state of God-consciousness points to the most significant truth shared by Jesus when he says, "The kingdom of God is within you". This kingdom is realised in one's lifetime before death. As Jesus says, "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27). We can have God-consciousness right here and now. It is an awareness of our immortal and eternal spiritual self. Swamiji thinks that it is the "smallest mustard seed" which grows into a large tree or a small bit of yeast which leavens many measures of flour. Likewise, a little spiritual sense grows within ourselves until it finds itself as complete God-consciousness in the kingdom of God.

*Swami Ranganathananda* looks at Jesus as the one who makes revolutionary attempt by emphasizing that the kingdom of God is

'at hand' and 'within us' in order to make people conscious of the spiritual realisation of the kingdom here and now. He thinks that Jesus patronized the moral and ethical demands of a spiritual religion rather than the faith of a socio-political religion. According to Swamiji, a complete transformation of character through perfection can help us to realise the kingdom of heaven within us.<sup>8</sup> Swamiji finds that the spirituality which Jesus offered is not comfortable but a 'heroic path of adventure,' a life of complete renunciation in the sacrificial love of God. God-realisation is possible through such uncomfortable spiritual journey. Christ's gospel is the gospel of spiritual redemption and this message will pass through Indian experience and bear much fruits of tolerance, gentleness, peace and fellowship when the Lord's spirit is fully captured.

*Swami Prajnanananda* thinks that the Christhood and the kingdom of God belongs together illuminating one another. He also feels that the teachings of Jesus are in complete harmony with those of Vedantain in India.<sup>9</sup> He feels that Christ's whole being was saturated with the spiritual fervour of an Indian Yogi and Christ applied great emphasis on practicing good works, pity, kindness, peacefulness, alms and complete disinterestedness of heart which help us to enter into God-realisation leading into the realisation of the kingdom of God.

*Bhawani Sankar Chowdhury* thinks that Christ's kingdom of God is a realized-spiritual state which is called Atmaloka in the Upanishads which is the main goal of human life. Christ taught that the people are sons of God. When the spirit realizes its unity with the spirit of God, it attains the joy of salvation and does not take into account the sufferings of the world and this state of our hearts takes us into the realisation of the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The establishment of the kingdom of God amidst people is similar to that of the new creation in Christ. Though the concept of the kingdom of God was not new, Christ gave it a new dimension. It pierces through to the inner-most self of human beings. The Neo-Vedantic thought took a bold step to recognize the realisation of the kingdom of God as the universal message for God-realisation which has to be realized right in the midst of our life here and now. To realize God in one's deepest self is the highest truth of life. Jesus came not to destroy any religious structure nor to create any new religion, but he came so that all people may have life and have it abundantly.

## References

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