

Die Reichsgotteshoffnung in den ältesten christlichen Dokumenten und bei Jesus

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The view that our Lord's conception of the kingdom of God was exclusively eschatological, originally advocated by Schmoller (*Die Lehre vom Reiche Gottes im Neuen Testament*, 1891) and afterwards urged with great strenuousness and skill by Johannes Weiss (*Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, 1st ed., 1892; 2d ed., 1900), seems to be rapidly gaining ground in Germany and may be confidently expected to become in the near future the reigning view to which, for the time being at least, the stamp "*wissenschaftlich*" will attach. Bousset, who at first held more or less aloof from Weiss in this matter, has in a review of the second edition of the latter's book in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (901, Col. 563-568), and more recently in a couple of articles in the *Theologische Rundschau* (October and November, 1902), in principle gone over to his view. And now, in the treatise before us, comes Wernle, an advanced Ritschlian, and arrives at the same conclusion in the most approved modern style. The trustworthiness of the Gospels as records of our Lord's teaching has become doubtful to such an extent that even in regard to a central topic like the kingdom it is esteemed unscientific and unmethodical to put directly the question: What view did Jesus hold on this point according to the Synoptical testimony? What these Gospels reflect is not in the first place the opinion of Jesus himself on any given subject, but the individually colored or historically modified conception of each Evangelist regarding the content of his teaching. Only by indirection, therefore, it is believed, can we approach the consciousness of Jesus at all. Wernle proceeds to apply this method of indirection. He first inquires what view of the kingdom each of the documents represents, and then seeks to weigh the probabilities that arise from the results thus ascertained with reference to Jesus' own original position. Meanwhile he congratulates himself on the substantial agreement between his own conclusions and those reached by Bousset, who still applies the direct method of interrogating the Synoptists. It goes without saying that an investigation conducted on this principle does not confine itself to the Gospels. Paul and the author of the Apocalypse, as writers standing nearer to the time of Jesus, can lay claim to being heard even before Matthew, Mark or Luke. And back of Matthew and Luke lie the Logia, bringing us nearest to the Lord Himself, although at present approachable through the Evangelists only. Wernle then begins with Paul. Here he finds a twofold conception of the kingdom of God, the eschatological one, according to which it is equivalent to the coming spiritual aeon, which shall take the place of the present world of *σαρξ* and *φθορα*. Thus: 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; and the church conception, according to which the kingdom is a present reality, and that not only as a kingdom of Christ but specifically as a kingdom of God, as Rom. 14:17 and 1 Cor. 4:20, compared with 1 Cor. 15:24 and Col. 1:13, show. This identification between the church and the kingdom, so far as we can see, applies only to the Epistles of the first captivity, to Ephesians and Colossians, because only here the *ἐκκλησία* becomes a collective, all-comprehensive sphere, what we call dogmatically the invisible church, whereas in the earlier Epistles it denotes the local church. The correct formula for Paul's earlier position, therefore, is that the *βασιλεία Χριστού* = the invisible comprehensive background of which the *ἐκκλησία*, are the single visible manifestations; later on the conception of the *ἐκκλησία* is enlarged so that it becomes interchangeable with that of the *regnum Christi*. And even so, the interchangeableness is not complete, for the *regnum Christi* over all things extends further than his organic headship over the church. What Wernle further says to characterize the Pauline conception of this present kingdom of God or Christ is somewhat one-sided: "It is no finished quantity, but in dependence on

the progress of missions its limits are widened, and that not peacefully, gradually, but by continual battles between God and his enemies, between the Spirit of God and the demons, whilst men are no more than passive objects about whom the struggle is waged." This scarcely covers Rom. 14:17, "the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Nevertheless, as a vivid description of what was certainly an important element in Paul's own extremely vivid and concrete mode of viewing the kingdom, and as a corrective of too abstract a representation, the statement has its value. Its one-sidedness foreshadows the one-sidedness of the interpretation in our Lord's own teaching of the twofold aspect of the kingdom, where, as we shall presently see, the tendency likewise becomes apparent to eschatologize as much as possible whatever utterances are found relative to a present kingdom; so that the present kingdom is made out to consist not in righteousness or communion with God as such, but only in certain pneumatic anticipations of the future aeon.

The same degree of correctness and the same degree of one-sidedness may be recognized in the pages devoted to the standpoint of the Apocalypse. Of course that great emphasis was to be thrown on the future, one might expect in a book of this kind. Still passages like 1:6 and 5:10 are certainly not, as Wernle himself admits, mere instances of anticipated eschatology. Only, like the Christology and the Universalism of the Apocalypse, Wernle derives this conception of a present kingdom from the influence of Paulinism.

Among the Synoptists Matthew is first examined. Here the twofold representation of a future and a present kingdom lies on the surface. But the form in which the latter appears in a majority of instances, as in the parable of the mustard-seed and leaven, the exposition of the parables of the wheat and the tares and the fishnet, further in Matthew 16:18, 22:1-14, 28:18, 20, is at the outset declared younger than Paul, younger than the reality of the church itself, to which these sayings refer. In respect to the two parables first mentioned Wernle's procedure differs from that of Bousset, who thinks that these parables are wrongly understood to refer to the immanent development of the kingdom of God, the real reference being to the surprising suddenness with which the final kingdom will spring into being out of its present small miraculous beginnings and the immense proportions it will assume. We think on this point the exegesis of Wernle is to be preferred, although, of course, we do not share his views as to the later origin of the conception. In the whole Sermon on the Mount Wernle finds no trace of a present kingdom, not even in 6:33. And yet here, even if it be admitted that the  $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$  does not of itself exclude the eschatological reference, since "Seek his kingdom" might mean, "Strive after the privilege of future entrance into his kingdom," still the further statement, "All these things (i.e., such things as food and raiment) shall be added unto you," does not favor such exegesis. The "food and raiment" are to be added not to the seeking after the kingdom but to the kingdom itself, and it would give no sense to speak of them as additions to the eschatological kingdom. Besides, the combination "his kingdom" and "his righteousness" points to a present kingdom of predominantly ethical content. To the same view points the comparison of "the smaller in the kingdom" with John in Matthew 11:11-13, for where Jesus speaks of "greater" and "smaller," He, as a rule, does not measure by eschatological but by ethical and religious standards. Wernle thinks that, while the conception of a present kingdom here cannot be denied, this must be assimilated as much as possible to the future kingdom, so that after all Jesus would have in mind only the first signs of the coming aeon. Here we would rather go with Bousset, who openly acknowledges that the saying as it stands does not fit into the eschatological conception of the kingdom, although we must refuse to follow him where he endeavors to escape the consequences of this admission by

the following reasoning: “The original word of Jesus read: Among those born of women none is greater than John. The early church added: The smallest in the kingdom of God (= η εκκλησια) is greater than he.” Wernle bases his eschatological interpretation on the mysterious words about the βιαζεσθαι of the kingdom, which have so long been a veritable crux to the exegetes and on which even Dalman in his *Worte Jesu* has not been able to shed any new light. So long as the true meaning of the words is entirely obscure, the sole support for such a use of them must lie in the general congruity of the two ideas of eschatology and violence, a precarious enough basis. When our author finally reaches the conclusion that the first Gospel knows of a present kingdom in a twofold sense: (a) its presence in the miracles which anticipate its final coming; (b) its presence in the church as the regnum Christi, and declares the second form younger than Paul, we must enter our dissent, and maintain that, even discounting the passages of the second class, which speak in terms applicable to the later church (although we see no valid reason for denying such passages to Jesus), there remain still some well-authenticated instances in which our Lord refers to the kingdom as a present reality in the ethical and religious sphere.

The investigation of the Gospel of Luke yields quite a different result. Here Wernle finds, so far as the author himself in distinction from his sometimes intractable material is concerned, nothing but a desire to treat the kingdom as a future thing. Luke is even charged with so manipulating the connection in which certain utterances of Jesus occurred as to make the conception of a present kingdom vanish out of them. From this motive he separated 7:28 and 16:16 and gave the latter a setting which robs it of the last vestige of its original reference. It is hardly possible to believe, apart from the questionableness of the procedure from a moral point of view, that an intelligent writer like Luke can have consciously wrenched an utterance of Jesus from a context in which it was perfectly intelligible and forced it into a new context where, as Wernle himself admits, it loses all sense. What possible meaning can he have attached to the palpable contrast between the law and the prophets which were “until John” and the ευαγγελιζεσθαι of the kingdom, which began from then, if this latter term expresses no more than the announcement of the future kingdom? Was there perhaps no such announcement of the kingdom in the law and the prophets? And if the period beginning with John brought something more, something new in reference to the kingdom, then Luke must have attached in this one passage at least a stronger meaning to the ευαγγελιζεσθαι and the whole theory about his attempt to eschatologize the kingdom-conception falls to the ground. We confess to equal skepticism with reference to the motive which, according to Wernle induced the Evangelist to place the parables of the leaven and the mustard-seed in chap. 13, viz., the emphatic expression of an anti-Judaistic Universalism, the tree growing out of the mustard-seed forming a pointed contrast to the fig-tree of vs. 6-9. Unfortunately the polemic against Jesus described in vs. 10-17 arose from the ruler of the synagogue, while it is expressly stated in vs. 17 that the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Jesus; it can, therefore, never have furnished to the mind of Luke a justification for the rejection of the Jews *en masse* and the adoption of the Gentiles in their stead, and thus fails to account for the insertion of the two parables in this context. More convincing is what the author writes about the enigmatical words of chap. 17:21, η βασιλεια του θεου εντος υμων εστιν. We must confess that considerable weight attaches to the arguments he advances for an eschatological interpretation of this saying. His exegesis briefly amounts to this, that the words mean that, in contrast to its coming, μετα παρατηρησεως, the kingdom of God will suddenly stand in your midst—i.e., it will be realized quite unexpectedly. The only thing which makes us hesitate to accept this is the fact that Luke elsewhere frequently employs the phrase εν μεσω for the idea “in the midst

of,” and not a single time εντος. This raises the question whether after all εντος does not mean here “within,” so that the passage would remain a witness for the immanent conception of the kingdom. Finally, we receive a very unsatisfactory answer to the question what may have induced the third Evangelist thus to scorn the idea of a present kingdom at a time when the latter had become perfectly familiar. Wernle explains this from the sad developments the writer had witnessed in the history of the church, experiences which rendered it impossible for him to recognize in the church any longer the beginning of the manifestation of the kingdom of God. But at any rate, it must be replied, these sad experiences did not prevent Luke from placing the high estimate upon the church to which the Book of Acts bears witness on every page. If the church was good enough to be made the subject of an extended treatise, it cannot have been too bad to pass for the provisional embodiment of the kingdom. And who will believe that such a consideration determined Luke to fly in the face of the explicit statements of the Apostle Paul, who had declared the church the present kingdom of God?

Mark’s position again is held to differ from Matthew’s in another respect. While in chap. 4, in the parables of the mustard-seed and the seed growing of itself, he incorporates material which identifies the kingdom with the growing church, yet it is not the thought of this identification which his main interest attaches. All the parables in this context are given, not for the sake of their subject-matter, but for the sake of their form. The frame is more important to Mark than the picture. His philosophy of the parables carries back into the teaching of Jesus the sharp separation between the church and the world as it was first worked out by Paul. Jesus must have spoken in mysteries to those outside, Mark reasons, because in the Evangelist’s own day the world is incapable of understanding the truth of the Gospel. Wernle, however, in so far differs from Jülicher, as he does not believe this theory to have originated from a misunderstanding of the parabolic form of teaching. The theory was there first; afterwards the philosophy of the parables was adjusted to it. But whether this hypothesis presents itself in one form or another, to our mind it labors under the serious disadvantage that it leaves the question unanswered, why the Evangelists introduce this peculiar explanation of our Lord’s parabolic teaching at one definite juncture of his ministry and do not associate it with the parables that come before or after. Even if Jülicher’s contention were correct that they mean to offer it as an explanation of the parabolic teaching as a whole, the fact that it is thus introduced at one particular point ought to make cautious critics pause and reflect, whether after all there may not be a historic basis for this theory of the Evangelists in Jesus’ own intention on a certain definite occasion. Apart from this unintentional introduction of the church-kingdom idea in the material of the parable Mark makes no reference, Wernle thinks, to a present kingdom. On the contrary, he everywhere identifies the kingdom with the future aeon. Here, as in Luke, we obtain no satisfactory answer to the question why the Evangelist should have taken pains to avoid the once firmly established idea that the church was a real, if only a provisional, embodiment of the kingdom.

Last of all, the Logia are scanned for an answer to the alternative: future or present kingdom? The answer is believed to be important, because this source, at least in the parts common to Matthew and Luke, shows no trace of Pauline influence. Both sides of the alternative are represented in about equal proportion. But the passages belonging to the former class are all-comprehensive, cover the entire Christian life, have a practical regulative significance. On the other hand, those pointing in the direction of a present kingdom are explainable from specific motives. The two sayings which make the kingdom date from the time after John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11, 12 Luke 7:28; 16: 16) must be interpreted in the light of the desire of the early Christians to prove to the followers of

the Baptist that the religion of Jesus was something specifically new. In a similar way Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20 furnish an illustration of the early apologetic use made against the Jews of the casting out of demons in the power of the Spirit, in proof of the divine character of the church. And with reference to the only remaining instance, that of the parables of the leaven and mustard-seed, the hint is thrown out that even this in the intention of the Logia represents an apologetic attempt to justify the smallness of the beginnings of things with the prospect of their greatness in the end: "The divine powers have begun to work, the demons are fleeing, the great cosmical revolution is sure to follow." The kingdom is there, but only by manner of anticipation, in the miracles, not in moral or religious influences as such.

Last of all, on the basis of the foregoing the position of Jesus in the question at issue is defined. This is done in the following propositions: 1. Jesus emphatically affirmed the strictly eschatological conception of the kingdom. 2. In all probability the belief that in some sense the kingdom is incipiently present can be traced to Jesus Himself. This cannot be affirmed with certainty, inasmuch as the idea might have sprung from the early Christian apologetic. Still after due consideration Wernle rejects this alternative and affirms the authenticity of the utterances involved. 3. The sense in which this presence of the kingdom was affirmed by Jesus can have been none other than the dramatic-supernatural sense. Of an ethical or immanent conception the ancient sources contain no trace. The ethical and internal have their place in the teaching of Jesus, but only as conditions for entrance into the future kingdom. With the kingdom as such they do not at any point coincide. Paul in this respect had a more internalizing conception than Jesus, inasmuch as he at least declared the kingdom to consist in "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." To Jesus and his first disciples the miraculous element stood in the foreground. 4. So far as can be traced, Jesus held this conviction regarding the presence of the kingdom in the sense defined from the beginning to the end of his life, no development or change of attitude on this point appearing in any of the sources. 5. It is confidently assumed that Jesus had begun to denationalize the conception of the kingdom. On this point lay his great contribution towards the universalism of the religion associated with his name. While his belief in the presence of the kingdom has, against his intention, become the great weapon by means of which the Catholic Church has usurped her hierarchical power, the denationalizing tendency has lifted the idea of the kingdom for all the future clear out of the sphere of ecclesiasticism.

The question may be asked, What is lost by such a reconstruction of our Lord's teaching as is here proposed? What difference does it make if the immanent ethical element be taken out of the kingdom-idea, provided it retain a prominent and necessary place elsewhere in his teaching, say among the requirements for entrance into the kingdom. We answer that in our view it is impossible here to alter the internal arrangement of ideas without at the same time modifying the spiritual emphasis. The kingdom of God was to Jesus the supreme religious ideal. Consequently, whatever is made to fall outside of this can no longer lay claim to absolute importance. If righteousness ceases to be a part of the conception of the kingdom, then, however much it may be insisted on as an entrance requirement, it assumes the character of a means to an end. For this reason we believe that the ultra-eschatological interpretation of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom involves a serious danger to the recognition of his authority as final in the ethical sphere. The spirit of the age is not over friendly to eschatology, and on the other hand is inclined to ethicize in every direction. Will it still continue to bow before Jesus as the supreme teacher of ethics after having been told that righteousness did not

form a constituent element of his crowning religious conception? The semi-apologetic tone in which even now writers like Bousset and Wernle speak of the eschatological strain in the ethics of our Lord makes us fear that this question will have to be answered in the negative.