

DESTINY BULLETIN

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Dear “Special Friend” of Christian Destiny,

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WHAT IS THE MANDATE FOR THE CHURCH?

Our surprise continues when we realize that the question “**What is the Church supposed to do in the world?**” is again open to discussion. Believers who have studied the Bible down through the years of their Christian lives will remember that the Church is by definition “*the body of Christ.*” It is a mysterious but real entity which consists of all who have been born again and who live on earth or in heaven. It is the “divine organism” in this world that worships and serves our blessed Lord while continuing to rejoice that we are the members of His body.

We have also believed that the objective of our service for Christ in this world was to bring the message of the Word of God to others so that they too may believe the Gospel and be born again. We recognize that our first duty is to preach the Word, to hold forth the Word of Life. Conjoining this, we have the related duty of becoming examples of the believer via a life of selfless service for Christ. Overall, the objective of our living in this world is not primarily to change a sinful world, but to bring to people the hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began.

Through our years of service, we have traditionally exercised little confidence in our ability to change the social structure as such. We note in the Scripture that God has given this world up to uncleanness (Rom. 1:24), to vile affections (Rom. 1:26) and to reprobation (Rom. 1:28). We read that “*In the last days perilous times shall come*” (II Tim. 3:1), and that “*Evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived*” (II Tim. 3:13).

We note from the ministry of Christ that the social structure will end up in an awful period called “the Great Tribulation.” This is a time in which life will ultimately become unbearable. Indeed, “*Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved*” (Matt. 24:22). As a result of what we have seen to be the clear teaching of Scripture, we Christians have conducted a spiritual ministry, preaching, witnessing. At the same time, we have rejoiced in the derivative benefits of a social structure which was changed as a by-product, not particularly a product, of the Gospel. Indeed, when sufficient numbers of people believed in Jesus Christ, the social structure—as in America, England, France, the low countries, the Scandinavian countries and many other places—was transformed. Thus we have seen a demonstration of the words of Christ that we are the “*salt of the earth*” (Matt. 5:13). The Gospel was first; social change followed.

But now we are instructed differently. In our time there is a theological view which announces that indeed the mission of the Church in the world is to change society, to alter the social structure. Some of these preachers, called Reconstructionists, even insist that it is the responsibility of the Church to seize the actual political and military control of the world and create in the name of Christ a constantly improving society which ultimately becomes perfect.

The presenters of this view are also called “Theonomists,” believing that the law of God should be the core of the political society in this world and the imposed mandate for all. They rightly decry the corruption of this world and then argue that it can be done away with by the legal mandate of the Church.

The argument for the Reconstruction view of the Church is interesting. It begins (correctly) with properly recognizing that when God made man, He gave to man a mandate to have dominion over the world. He said to Adam, *“Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28)*. Man has, therefore, rightly been given dominion; he is “Under God” to be the master of the earth.

Reconstruction Theology is also therefore called Dominion Theology. But ah, is that dominion now?

While it is true that man is given dominion over the world, there was an intervening event of disobedience which changed all of that. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were tempted and did succumb to the blandishments of the serpent. So the Scripture says, *“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12)*. At this point of disobeying God, Adam relinquished the mandate for the human race and turned it over to the archenemy of God, the Devil. We know this to be the case because, on the occasion of the temptation of Christ, Satan offered to Christ the kingdoms of this world. We cannot doubt that this was a legitimate offer. Indeed, the Devil is called in Scripture the prince of this world and also the god of this world. The consequence is that the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one. The temporary condition in which this world abides is that it is still under the fearful power and unholy influence of the Devil. Therefore, the Christian is admonished: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8)*. The Devil (yes, by God’s permission, but that is another story) still retains the power to possess individuals, to oppress others, to sift us as wheat. Satan retains the power to do many dreadful things in this world. As a consequence, we are never told by the Lord that it is our responsibility to build a perfect society in this passing human scene. Despite our best intentions, all who attempt such a program in a fallen society will end up in frustration.

From the days of the Jerusalem commune until now, the attempt of man to produce heaven on earth has been fascinating to watch, but always frustrating and tragic in its consequences.

The nature of the Church is not this. The Church is that invisible body of believers which labors for Christ in the form of the communication of a spiritual message. We labor in the midst of a social structure which is at times cooperative and at times persecutorial. But still we labor, remembering that we seek a city which does not exist on earth but in heaven, whose builder and maker is God. We will live one day in the new Jerusalem, but the New Jerusalem is not yet.

Let us agree, however, that a Christian, to the extent of his empowerment, should labor to be of influence in the world. That influence is first of all spiritual, but it can take the strategic form of the economic, the political, and other modes as well. The preservation of our Christian opportunity is a cause for which we must labor in this world. Indeed, the integrity of the nation—which is one of the powers that be and ordained of God—is the worthy object of a Christian’s prayer and efforts. In pursuit of these efforts, he rejoices in each little victory which will continue to open before him the

blessed gift of spiritual opportunity. However, he does not drop into despair when his efforts are frustrated, since he knows that the prince of darkness is still around and that Satan's final defeat will come only on the occasion of the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

All who labor to produce a reconstructed world do well to remember that the kingdom is not yet. A perfect society indeed will come, but in the meantime, we labor in the midst of many forms of frustration and unfulfillment. Adoniram Judson put it well when he said:

“In spite of sorrow, loss and pain
Our course be onward still
We sow on Burma's barren plain
We reap on Zion's hill.”

WHAT FORM DOES THE KINGDOM TAKE IN OUR WORLD? Closely akin to the aforementioned concerns in these times, the issue of *“the kingdom”* has revived itself greatly in the Church of our time. The result is that there is presently great confusion over what we mean by *“the kingdom of God,” “the kingdom of heaven,” “the kingdom of His dear Son,”* and other kingdom presentations in Scripture. Out of the discussions of these days, we see views being pressed upon us which identify *“the kingdom”* with one or another physical, touchable human institution in our present world. The Reconstructionists hold that *“the Church is the kingdom.”* The Mormon *“Church”* holds that they are indeed Zion. The Roman Catholic Church holds that they are in fact the kingdom, the new Israel. The word *“kingdom”* has been attached to other things which are applied to these days such as *“kingdom living,” “the work of the kingdom,” “the kingdom message,” “kingdom authority,”* and many others. Therefore, the idea of *“the kingdom”* has become part and parcel of many an evangelical conversation.

Let's then quickly review the kingdom concept in the Scriptures. There is first of all *“the kingdom of God.”* The kingdom of God is all of that over which God rules. This includes all of the physical universe and each individual who willingly consents to be a part of, and to obey the dictates of, that kingdom.

“The kingdom of heaven” must be understood in a somewhat different manner. Mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is *“heaven on earth,”* offered by the Lord Jesus to His covenant people. In this sense, the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of which Israel was the constituent in the Old Testament. So it was that Christ is presented as coming *“to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom. 15:8)*. This kingdom of heaven was clearly offered to Israel by Jesus Christ and then was categorically rejected by the Jews. We cannot say, therefore, that the kingdom of heaven exists in any place on earth today because of Israel's rejection of Christ. Therefore, we may well call the kingdom of heaven *“the once and future kingdom.”* The message which Christ preached in His earthly ministry is thus called *“the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23)*. Toward the end of His earthly ministry, however, Christ announced that *“My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36)*.

Consistent with this announcement, Christ gave us many parables in the Gospel of Matthew which announced the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form. These presentations were made to appeal to the imagination, the bright anticipation, and the earnest concern of all who would believe throughout the ages of Church history. They were not primarily given as doctrinal lectures; rather, they are parables which should stimulate the sanctified imagination. One of the things they do teach,

however, is that through the history of the Church, the kingdom could not be declared as existing in an external, physical form. Rather, it had an existence that was inward and mysterious.

The present discussion, however, would take us in the other direction. Large bodies of believers are coming more and more to hold that the kingdom does exist physically on earth or can be made to exist in some external form even now. The Reconstructionists, the liberationists, the Roman Catholics and many of the cults hold that in one form or another, “the Church is the kingdom.” The Church, therefore, and especially its leadership, must take to itself kingly responsibilities (and kingly prerogatives). Under this rubric, sacerdotalism takes over and the Pope, the bishop, the general superintendent, the pastor takes to himself a large measure of regal authority which is nowhere mandated in Scripture. So, kingdom authority, the ability of Christ, indeed the power of God to work in external things, is thought to be projected from heaven and devolved upon the Church and its leadership in our time. “We are the kingdom” is the current impression.

If this is the case, the Church should in our present time have the ability to cure every sickness, raise the dead, banish evil and impose its authority everywhere. Vast human authority and responsibility come upon any church which declares itself as being identical with the kingdom. How many religious institutions in our time have become promoters of delusion, attempting to vainly produce kingdom phenomena here and now?

What in fact is the form which the kingdom of God does take in the world today? The fact is that, in our present time, we live in a world which is in rebellion against the kingdom of God. It, therefore, cannot, as such, be called a willing part of God’s kingdom. The kingdom in the world today, therefore, takes the form of individuals who step out of the darkness of this world and are translated into “*the kingdom of His dear Son.*” The kingdom of God, therefore, exists on the basis of growth which is “soul by soul and silently.” The rulership of God in our world is, therefore, inward in the life of the Christian. It is mysterious; it is a matter of the soul and the spirit as against taking definitive external forms. The Christian, therefore, must be very careful in announcing that even the Church or the Gospel takes a “visible form” in our present time.

The Church is not buildings, organizations, pulpits and steeples. No, the Church is that beautiful but invisible fellowship of believers which is the communion that comes from the mysterious spiritual core of Christianity. “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” is the ultimate reality that we can know in this world. It is in fact the prelude to glory divine. In the meantime, before we enjoy that glory divine, we must be more thoughtful than ever about the doctrine of Christ, the truth most surely to be believed. In other times, the Church has moved into the dark ages because it allowed itself to be subverted by another Gospel, another truth beside the truth of Christ. The dark ages may not come again. They will not, however, as long as we retain our theological integrity and commit ourselves to no other message save the Gospel of the grace of God.

Taken from the writings of Dave Breese