

The Manifestation of God's Kingdom, Do the Scriptures Promise a Godly Golden Age?

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The view that the status of the Kingdom of God is best explained in terms of a dialectic tension between the “already” and “not yet” of the Kingdom has long been defended by scholars such as H. Bavinck, G. Vos, G.E. Ladd and H. Ridderbos. Today this position is widely accepted by theologians of many traditions.¹ There is far less unanimity, however, concerning the question whether the kingdom will also come to expression in a millennium. Millennialists of all varieties conclude that certain Bible passages promise a godly golden age for this present world. In this they are opposed by non-millennialists (or *amillennialists*), who deny the Bible gives any promise of a millennium in terms of a period of godliness, peace and prosperity within the world's history. They believe that the passages in question should be interpreted either in connection with the N.T. church, or in terms of the new heaven and earth at the consummation of the Kingdom.

Millennial positions on a Godly, Golden Age

Of all millennialists the Dispensational Premillennialist is most prone to interpret prophetic promises about a future kingdom in terms of a millennium. The underlying premise that the present dispensation of grace comes as a “Great Parenthesis” leaves little room for the interpretation of any O.T. prophecies in terms of the Church. On this point historical premillennialists and postmillennialists are more biblical, recognising that the N.T. itself points to certain O.T. prophecies about Israel as fulfilled in the Church as the spiritual Israel. They are also prepared to accept that

¹ For its acceptance by Evangelicals see John Stott, *Making Christ Known, Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 1996), pp. 187-88. There has been less consensus on this issue in ecumenical circles. Thus the conference on Christ, the Hope of the World, at Evanston in 1952, “could not fully resolve the tension between hope in God's eschatological future and hope for the here and now.” *The Ecumenical Movement, An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, ed. M. McKinnamon and B.E. Cope (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 136.

the N.T. itself points to certain O.T. prophecies about Israel as fulfilled in the Church as the spiritual Israel. They are also prepared to accept that some of the promised spiritual blessings will come to full realisation only at the kingdom's final consummation. However, when it comes to prophecies concerning the physical or cultural splendours of the Kingdom there is a marked resistance to interpreting these in terms of the new heaven and earth. Hence there is a need for a millennium as a period where such prophecies can be fulfilled.

What is at issue here is a failure to recognise the basic continuity between this world and the next. The changes ushered in with the final state are seen not so much in terms of a renewal of heaven and earth, as a complete replacement of heaven and earth by a largely spiritual order. In this spiritual order, usually designated by the word 'heaven' alone, there is no room for physical activities, despite the fact that believers will have a resurrection body and live on a new earth. This spiritual order is conceived of as one where all earthly activities have ceased, and not just the evil and transient ones (like reproduction, see Mt. 22:30).

To illustrate this, let us consider some pamphlets published a number of years ago to promote the premillennial position.² Almost all of them stress the fact that there are some prophecies awaiting fulfilment in a manner that is not consistent with the eternal state. Thus one attacks the position that a passage in Daniel (not identified) could be talking of the eternal state because it states that people of "all languages" will serve the Messiah. "Will there be *languages* in heaven?" is the rhetorical question that supposedly demolishes the opposing view.³ Our answer is: yes, there is every reason to believe that all languages will be represented in heaven, but we will leave that for later discussion.

The same kind of arguments can be found with postmillennialists. For example, in a refutation of amillennialism, Andrew Sandlin argues:

... chapter 65:17-25 [of Isaiah] describes the new heavens and new earth, in which the people of God will no longer weep, life expectancy will be greatly expanded, the godly will eat freely of the fruit of their

² These pamphlets have been bound in a booklet entitled *The Millennium Manifested*, by 13 authors, (London: Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, n.d.).

³ James Payne, "Messiah's Kingdom Coming on the Earth," in *The Millennium Manifested*, p.22.

labour, and nature will again (much like before the Fall) harmonize with man. This cannot refer to the eternal state, since the symbolic discussion of life expectancy, agrarian labour, and nature's harmony with man are not appropriate to the eternal state.⁴

Isaiah's picture of people planting vineyards and building houses, of the wolf and lamb feeding together and the lion eating hay clearly do not fit in with Sandlin's conception of the eternal state. Since the passage is unambiguously introduced as a picture of the new heaven and earth, Sandlin finds it necessary to relocate the new heaven and earth to the present age.⁵ Sandlin, however, argues that it is the amillennialists who relocate the realm prophesied by Isaiah:

... the NT in no way interprets the OT kingdom passages promising a Golden Godly Age as fulfilled only in the church or the eternal state. In effect, therefore, amillennialism wants to "re-localize" the kingdom. It wants the glorious kingdom realities pledged by the OT limited to heaven, the church, or the eternal state. The kingdom promises certainly do pertain to all the earth in time and history, too.⁶

For Sandlin the way in which the kingdom promises will come to fulfilment in history is through the Christian exercise of dominion. By this interpretation: "Christians are charged with exerting worldwide dominion under Christ's explicit authority using the entire word of God as their manual for action and instruction"⁷ The key to this is the exercise of God's law: "As the righteous keep the law, they are blessed with increased

⁴ Andrew Sandlin, *A Postmillennial Primer*, Chalcedon Monograph Series #2 (Vallecito: Chalcedon Foundation, 1997), p. 25. We agree with Sandlin that there is much symbolism in the passage, but this need not lead us to the conclusion that the imagery is inappropriate for the eternal state.

⁵ Presumably he follows the interpretation of E.J. Young, who sees the creation of the new heaven and earth as a process of renewal which started with Christ's victory (see E.J. Young, *The New International Commentary, The Book of Isaiah*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, vol. III, pp. 513, 14). But such an interpretation hardly fits the NT picture of a world in bondage and decay awaiting the catastrophic renewal that Christ's return will bring (Rom. 8:19-22; Mt. 19:28; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rev. 21:1ff.).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.26

⁷ Sandlin, p. 44

dominion; and as they exert dominion, they employ the law as the instrument of that dominion.”⁸

This emphasis on divine law as the instrument by which the kingdom will be established is typical of those associated with the reconstructionist theology of the Chalcedon Foundation.⁹ Earlier forms of postmillennialism usually put more emphasis on the Gospel as the means by which Christ would conquer the world.¹⁰ At times when people were optimistic about the cause of the Gospel many interpreted the Bible’s prophecies of a godly, golden age in terms of the dawning of a postmillennial kingdom. Such optimism reigned especially during the time of the Puritan reformation, the various evangelical revivals and the heydays of Christian mission.¹¹

Another form of postmillennialism can be found in the liberalism of the last century, which saw the establishment of the kingdom as something to be achieved by human social and cultural efforts.¹² Here the reluctance to interpret the Bible’s prophecies of a godly, golden age in terms of eternity was motivated a spirit of anti-supernaturalism, which had no place for a new heaven and earth as a future reality. Much of this old liberal spirit can still be found in many pronouncements of the World Council of Churches. Here there is a tendency to identify all positive developments in history as signs of the presence of the kingdom.¹³ This expectation of a kingdom on

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.44, 45

⁹ This foundation promotes the views variously identified as Reconstructionism, Theonomy or Law-order.

¹⁰ E.g. Loraine Boettner writes, “Christ’s Gospel is to conquer the earth.” *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957), p. 32

¹¹ See my article, “Theology Between Christ’s First and Second Coming”, in the 1992 edition of this journal, pp. 26-35

¹² This position, associated with such theologians as A. Ritschl, A. Harnack and W. Rauschenbusch, finds a detailed expression in the work of E. Busz, *Die Christliche Mission, ihre principielle Berechtigung und praktische Durchführung* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1876), pp. 251ff.

¹³ We see an example of this in the theology of Choan-seng Song, who argues that the whole of world history is salvation history. As a result Song is ready to view all kinds of historical events as signs of God’s Kingdom, including many of the political events that have recently taken place in China. His choice of terminology clearly shows that he is thinking of the kingdom when he writes that in the social upheavals in China “we seem to have an eschatological tension of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’.” It is clear that in the context the “not yet” does not refer to the eternal state, but rather the future of the present world. Choan Seng Song, “New China and Salvation History - A

earth causes many ecumenicals to stress the "already" of the Kingdom at the expense of the "not yet."¹⁴

The Amillennial view of the Godly, Golden Age

Over against the millennial expectations of a godly, golden kingdom in this present world, the amillennialist position here defended holds that the kingdom will not reach such a glorious manifestation until the world to come. The kingdom is certainly present here and now, and the signs of the kingdom are there for all to see. But we must not, with the ecumenicals, look for them in the works of unregenerate politicians, liberationists and freedom fighters. Rather we find these signs among those regenerated by the Spirit to enable them to do things pleasing to God (Eph. 2:10). The church, as the people of God, is therefore at the focus of the kingdom work of God's Spirit. But this does not mean that the kingdom is to be identified with the church. At the final consummation of the kingdom it will become clear that the kingdom is far wider than what God is doing in and through the church. The church is only the "first fruits" of the kingdom.

James identifies the church as the first fruits of all creation (Jas. 1:18). In the book of Revelation the hundred and forty-four thousand gathered before Christ's throne at the heavenly Mount Zion are said to be "redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4). A similar scene in the book of Hebrews pictures the church as worshipping at the heavenly Mount Zion:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly [ἐκκλησία] of the first born [πρωτοτόκων] who are enrolled in heaven...¹⁵

The word for "first born" is in the plural, indicating it is the worshippers, or church, who are identified as the first born. In an earlier article I have demonstrated that the *first born*, the *firstlings* and the *first fruits* all belong to

Methodological Inquiry," in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals - A Continuing Dialogue*, ed. S.J. Samartha (Geneva: WCC, 1974), p. 85.

¹⁴ For examples see David Bosch, *Witness to the World, The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1980), p. 215.

¹⁵ Heb. 12:22-23; cf. Is. 2:2-3; Gal. 4:24ff.

what the Hebrew terms the *chorem*, that which is dedicated to the Lord as the first and best.¹⁶ I argued that the identity of the church as the first fruits of the Kingdom is symbolized in the fact that the church began at Pentecost. The feast of the first fruits was a remembrance of the institution of the covenant at Mount Sinai on "the day of the assembly" (*yom haqqahal*, Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 16:9-12; 18:16; cf. Acts 7:38). Hence it was fitting that the day of Pentecost should mark the beginning of the church as the new covenant community. The Pentecost of Acts 2 marks the gathering of the first fruits of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷ The new assembly, or ἐκκλησία, was founded on the new covenant in Christ (Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 36:26f.; cf. Acts 2:38f.; I Cor. 11:25, Heb. 10:15f.).

As the first fruits of the new creation, the church is both a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God and a witness to its coming. In the same way that the works of Christ were a testimony that he had come to establish the Kingdom of his Father (Mt. 11:2ff.; Lk. 7:18ff.; 11:20; cf. Jn. 5:36; 10:25), so the Kingdom ministry of his followers is a witness to the world that the Kingdom is present and growing (Mt. 5:16; Acts 14:3; 15:12; Phil. 2:15; I Pet. 2:12; Heb. 2:3f.). God's "holy nation," the church, stands as a living proof of the marvelous things that God has done for his people (I Pet. 2:9; cf. Mk. 5:19).

The fact that the church is identified as the first fruits of the Kingdom also suggests that the Kingdom is wider than the church and includes other fruits that are yet to be reaped. According to C.L. Mitton, the expression "first fruits" has three connotations:

They symbolized something which in a special sense was the property of God, something which was representative of a larger whole still to be gathered in ... and something which was the best men could make it, since it was to be offered to God.¹⁸

The first and third connotations are clearly applicable to the church. The church is the property of God in a special sense, it is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (I Pet. 2:9). The church also represents the best efforts of Christ, who presents his church "without spot or

¹⁶ Bill Berends, "What Do We Celebrate at Pentecost?" *Vox Reformata* no. 63, 1998, pp. 42-66.

¹⁷ See also the article on "Ἀπαρχή," by H.G. Link and C. Brown in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, pp. 415-17.

¹⁸ C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle of James* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1966), p. 59.

wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). But how must we interpret the second connotation, that there remains a larger whole still to be gathered in? Mitton himself argues that this refers to the rest of humanity, so that the church as the first fruits becomes a sign for the salvation of all of mankind. He bases this on a statement in the Epistle of James, who wrote, "Of his own will he [Christ] brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων, Jas. 1:18).

While Mitton concedes that word κτίσμα is commonly used of the material things of creation rather than human life, he nevertheless argues that James is here referring to humanity.¹⁹ As well as implying an unbiblical universalism we believe that this rather forced exegesis needlessly restricts the scope of God's renewal to human beings.²⁰ There is no reason why the word κτίσμα cannot be taken at its face value. The Kingdom of God is not just concerned with humanity, but with the whole cosmos. We therefore prefer Peter Davids' interpretation of the passage, that "the consummation will include the whole creation."²¹

The idea that creation itself will be the object of God's work of renewal is clearly taught in Romans 8:19-21. Here Paul states that all of creation "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God," for at that time nature itself will be freed from the bondage of sin. At the final judgement Christ himself will come with his angels "to gather out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire" (Mt. 13:40-43, cf. 49-50; 25:31-33). With the removal of these sinful elements the world itself will undergo a regeneration (παλιγγενεσία, Mt. 19:28), and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). These words

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ The interpretation that limits the renewal spoken of by James to human beings also introduces a note of universalism. This universalism comes out more strongly in the commentary of Martin Dibelius, who interprets the first fruits as "a temporary down-payment to be followed by the remaining members of the species." In *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, revised by Heinrich Greeven, translated by Michael A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 106.

²¹ Peter H. Davids, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle of James, a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 90.

speak of a "cosmic regeneration."²² They speak of the time when the new heaven and the new earth will be established (Is. 65:17; 66:22; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1), the time when Christ will make all things new (Rev. 21:5).

Does this picture of cosmic renewal leave room for the possibility that some of man's cultural products may also have an eternal significance? J.N.D. Kelly answers this question in the negative, on the grounds of Peter's statement that "the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (κατακαήσεται, II Pet. 3:10). Kelly interprets this to mean that "all the products of nature and, above all, of human culture, civilization, art and technology" will be destroyed.²³ However, to come to such a conclusion on the basis of this text alone is questionable, both because the text has a number of variant readings concerning the destiny of these works, and because the identification of these "works" (ἔργα) is uncertain. While Bo Reicke agrees with Kelly that the ἔργα refer to human culture, he follows the alternative reading of the Greek text, which states that these works "will be laid bare" (following the N.E.B. translation of εὑρεθήσεται).²⁴

T. Fornberg maintains that the reference is not to human but to divine works, arguing, "if the author had had the sinful deeds of man in mind, the unity of the verse would be broken, since it otherwise describes God's creation."²⁵ But this unity is also preserved if we understand the text to be speaking of works that are the outcome of the sanctifying activity of God's Spirit. The good works of those who are recreated in Christ Jesus are not only pleasing to God, but are works which "God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Hence Peter's words should not be taken to mean that there is no continuity between the present world and the world to come, but rather that the present world will be completely cleansed from the evil of the present age. In the same way that there is a continuity of identity in the person who is born anew, so too the world will undergo a new birth that will preserve its essential

²² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans; the English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 305.

²³ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1969), pp. 364-65; cf. Donald Senior, *1 & 2 Peter* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1980), *in loc.*

²⁴ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude, Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), *in loc.*

²⁵ T. Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society, a Study of 2 Peter* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977), p. 75.

identity (note the same word παλιγγενεσία is used for Christians and the world, Titus 3:6; Mt. 19:28; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

Herman Bavinck points out that even as 2 Peter 3:7 speaks of the destruction of the world by water without implying that nothing is left, so the destruction of the world by fire leaves room for the survival of what is good. He adds that such continuity is also implied by Paul's statement that it is the "form" (σχήμα) of the world that will pass away (1 Cor. 7:31).²⁶ William Dyrness interprets Peter in a similar way:

The newer translations follow the better manuscripts and read for "burned" "discovered" or "laid bare" (cf. NIV, NEB). This reading implies that the process of judgment is such that the essential qualities of the earth will be preserved, while what is evil will be destroyed. This is consistent with the use of fire in Scripture as a purifying rather than a destructive element (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15 *et al*). What is envisioned here, then, is a judgment through fire, a kind of cosmic death out of which emerges a renewed earth.²⁷

This is also the view of Howard Snyder, who interprets Peter as follows:

The earth will undergo a change, a refining fire – but it will not be annihilated! The whole creation will finally be set free (Rom. 8:21). As with our bodies, so with the earth: "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:53). We know that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50), but the whole creation order will undergo a fundamental change, a transformation, a redemption. And the model for all this is the historical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrected body of Jesus is the model, the proof, the demonstrated power and the hope of God's final redemption of this earth – an earth just as physical as the molecules that made up the body of Christ.²⁸

The continuationist position is also defended by Albert Wolters. He argues that the way Scripture speaks of salvation in terms of redemption and

²⁶ H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1930), vol 4, p. 699.

²⁷ William A. Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1983), p. 179.

²⁸ Howard A. Snyder, *A Kingdom Manifesto* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 32.

restoration implies continuation. He writes: "In a very significant sense restoration means that salvation does not bring anything new", and adds "To put it in the traditional language of theology, grace does not bring a *donum superadditum* to nature, a gift added on top of creation; rather, grace *restores* nature, making it whole once more".²⁹ Appealing to Col. 1:20, where Paul speaks of the restoration of "all things" (τὰ πάντα), Wolters argues that these words "preclude any narrow or personalistic understanding of the reconciliation he has in mind."³⁰ For Wolters, the kingdom of God which is here present will continue on to eternity embracing "all of creation, not only in all its departments, but also in all stages of development."³¹

It is clear that many of those who speak of the continuation of creation include works (ἔργα, see above) done by man in developing creation, but not all man's works. According to Hendrikus Berkhof that is where God's judgement comes in. Appealing especially to the O.T. terms *shofet* and *mishpat* he points out that the biblical picture of judgement is not just one of condemnation, but also affirmation. At the great judgment the outcasts, mistreated and marginalised will be affirmed, while the wicked will be condemned. This also goes for their works, which will either be affirmed or condemned.³²

This understanding of judgment as consisting not just of the condemnation of the wicked but a separation of all men and their deeds into what belongs to the kingdom and what is foreign to it can be found in some of Christ's parables. Thus in the parable of the wheat and the tares we read that at the end of the age "the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Mt. 13:41). While the conclusion that what is good and pleasing to God will be left is only implied in this parable, it comes out more strongly in the parable of the talents. Workers who please their master retain their talents and are rewarded with more (Mt. 25:29). Thus Christ encourages his people to lay up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy (Mt. 6:20).

In Rev. 14:13 it is expressly stated that those who die in Christ will have their deeds follow them into his rest. G. Beasley-Murray explains:

²⁹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 58, 59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³² Hendrikus Berkhof, *Well-Founded Hope* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), pp. 33-37

This is a Jewish thought baptized into Christ. An early rabbinic dictum, often cited by later Jewish writers, ran, "In the hour of a man's decease neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls accompany him, but his knowledge of the Torah and good works.' More commonly it was said that a man's good works reach heaven before he dies, and bear testimony to his merit. This, however, is an expression of the Jewish teaching of salvation by works, which is other than John's. His stress on the redemptive power of Christ (as in ch. 5) indicates that the works which accompany a man to God's throne are the fruit of Christ's redemption in his life. Such works are confessed by Christ as 'perfect in the sight of my God' (3:2), and so outlast this world and are taken up into the eternal kingdom."³³

Beasley-Murray finds further support for the "sanctification of the whole order of this created world and its products" in the world to come in Rev. 21:24.³⁴ Here we read that the kings of the world bringing the treasures and glories of the nations into the new Jerusalem. Many other commentators and theologians follow this same interpretation. Thus H. Berkhof writes:

The Bible, not only in its OT eschatology but also in the NT, speaks quite matter of factly about the continuation of culture and human society in the city of God. But these images are matched by no less vivid images of the destruction of the present world. Compare Rev. 21:2 (the new Jerusalem descends out of heaven) and 21:24,26 (the cultural treasures of the nations are brought into it).³⁵

Richard Mouw has written a small publication based on a similar interpretation of these verses. He points out that the passage in Revelation is an allusion to Isaiah 66, where the prophet speaks at some length of the cultural contributions of the nations to the new Jerusalem. Mouw observes that the full richness of this description can only be understood when it is kept in mind that in the ancient days kings were not just political figures, but also

³³ G.R. Beasley Murray *The New Century Bible Commentary, Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), p. 228.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

³⁵ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of Faith* trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 539.

the chief patrons of the nations' art and culture. To the outside world, the kings "were the *bearers*, the *representatives*, of their respective cultures."³⁶

The contributions of human culture to the new Jerusalem are not necessarily restricted to the end time. Already God's people are laying up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt (Mt. 6:20; 19:21). Already they are producing "fruits of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11; cf. Jas. 3:18), the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22), "the fruit of light" (Eph. 5:9). The new man in Christ is created for good works, so that he may serve God with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:10; Rom. 14:17,18). That is why the interim between the establishment of the Kingdom and its consummation at the return of Christ is a busy one for God's children. It is a time when God's servants will be growing fruits in God's vineyard (Lk. 20:9-18), gathering in God's harvest (Lk. 10:20; cf. Lk. 14:15-24), multiplying God's gifts (Lk. 19:11-27), and using their talents to God's glory (Mt. 25:14-30). In the new order of Christ, even such mundane acts as eating and drinking obtain a new significance as these activities are done for the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31; cf. I Pet. 4:10,11).

The Kingdom of God is here. It can be discerned in those whom God has redeemed, the first fruits of the Kingdom. It can be discerned in their works, when in the power of the Spirit they bear fruits for the Kingdom, executing the Kingdom task, serving God's creation in word and deed. But as these are only the first fruits, there is more to come. For the whole earth belongs to the Lord, who created it and reigns over it. Already we can observe the leavening action of the Gospel message at work far outside the boundaries of God's redeemed community. Already we see the influence of Christ's authority and power extended far beyond those who acknowledge him as King. The whole world will witness the reign of Christ. When that is achieved, Christ will come and claim it all for his Kingdom, so that every knee may bow to him, and every tongue may confess that he is Lord (Col. 2:10,11). At that time all evil elements will be removed, and the whole cosmos will be renewed and regenerated, so that, once again, it may reflect the holiness, righteousness, and glory of its King. It will be a time when creation will be freed from decay by being "born anew" after the glorious liberty of the children of God. It will be a time when the last enemy of the Kingdom will be destroyed. When all this has been accomplished, Christ will hand over the Kingdom to his Father (I Cor. 15:24).

³⁶ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 26.

Creation began with a garden, filled with potential for human cultural activities. But it will end with a city, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). To this city all the treasures of humanity will come when the kings of the earth shall carry the glory of the nations into it (Rev. 21:24; cf. Is. 60:3,5). The Garden of Eden will become the New Jerusalem. The continuation between the garden and the city is graphically portrayed in the presence of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2). In the city the potentials laid down at creation will come to their consummation. At this time the Sabbath of creation will become the eternal Sabbath, where God's people share in the rest of their Creator (Heb. 4:11).