

The Church, the Kingdom, and Contemporary Evangelical Ecclesiology:
A Baptist Reassessment

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Introduction

Despite its centrality to the overarching storyline of the Scriptures, the Kingdom of God is surely one of the most commonly misunderstood concepts and themes in all of the Bible and Christian theology. Even more confusing, however, can be one's understanding of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church. Do they have no relation to one another, belonging to different dispensations in the sovereign plan of God, as some traditional dispensationalists have maintained? Or are Christians to see the Kingdom and the church as one and the same, as Roman Catholics understand it? Perhaps the answer is somewhere in the middle?

Christians since the closing of the canon of Scripture have struggled with these concepts and their applicability for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. "One of the most difficult questions in the study of the Kingdom of God is its relationship to the church," contends New Testament scholar and theologian George Eldon Ladd.¹ And, judging from the variety of theologians' opinions on this relationship throughout the history of the church, Ladd's statement is certainly correct. But only thirty years after Ladd recorded these words, theologian Russell D. Moore asserts that the difficulty in properly discerning this relationship had nearly dissipated, at

¹George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 103.

least among evangelical Christians. “Evangelical theology has emerged with a near consensus on the relationship between the Kingdom and the church, along with remarkably similar concepts of how the church should relate to the world in the present era,” Moore writes.²

So what brought about this evangelical clarity on the nature of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church, and how are Christians to best understand this relationship today? According to this aforementioned evangelical consensus, the Kingdom of God, defined as the reign or rule of God, is to be understood as both “already” and “not yet,” as both present in the person and work of Jesus Christ and still coming when he returns. The church, then, is an initial manifestation of the Kingdom and is the focus of its “already” aspect. The contention of this paper is that understanding the church as a colony of the Kingdom in this “already/not yet” framework makes sense best within a Baptist ecclesiology. The church, then, in its relationship to the Kingdom of Christ, is made up of subjects of the Kingdom, is ruled by the Words of the King, proclaims the gospel of the Kingdom, practices the ordinances of the Kingdom, and lives out the values and ethics of the Kingdom. A historic, confessional Baptist ecclesiology has the exegetical and theological explanatory power lacking in some contemporary expressions of evangelical ecclesiology, especially within some sectors of the “emerging church.”

Kingdom as Central Motif of Scripture

“Jesus is the King of God’s Kingdom, which is similar to the way that George W. Bush is the President of the United States.” Most Christians have probably felt the temptation to explain the Kingdom of God to a curious inquisitor using the above analogy, aware that it falls

²Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 131.

short of the reality of what is being explained in the Scriptures but not knowing any better way to describe it. That is because part of the difficulty in understanding the Kingdom of God in Christ today is the relative unfamiliarity of most of the world's inhabitants with kings and kingdoms outside of Middle Eastern dictators or the latest gossip column on England's Princes William and Harry.³

However, much is being done today in Christian scholarship and in churches to remedy this kind of unfamiliarity with and inadequate exposition of the Kingdom of God. In fact, with the rise of interest in biblical theology in the second half of the twentieth century much work has been done on the Kingdom of God as the central motif of the entire storyline of Scripture.⁴ This focus on God's building of a Kingdom for Christ from the Garden of Eden to the new heavens and new earth has provided a comprehensive framework through which Christians can read and understand the entire scope of the Bible, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

³Two scholars recently lamented this fact. "It is surprising that two thousand years after this startling announcement (Jesus' proclamation that the Kingdom has come), many Christians who sincerely want to follow Jesus know so little of the 'kingdom' that was at the heart of his ministry. Living as we do in modern Western democracies, the whole notion of kingdom is alien to our everyday experience." Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 131. Emerging church popular writer Donald Miller tells of his own personal misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God in recalling a conversation with a friend on the topic just a few years ago: "Our conversation that morning marked the first time I had given serious consideration to the kingdom of God. Before this I'd thought of God as a shepherd, a father, a bridegroom, and so on, but not so much as a king, at least not king of an actual kingdom." In Rick McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess: Preaching the Presence of the Kingdom of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 2006), 10.

⁴Chief among some of the main proponents of Kingdom theology today include Anglican theologians Graeme Goldsworthy and Vaughan Roberts. Perhaps Goldsworthy's most accessible work in this regard is *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991). Elsewhere Goldsworthy writes of the Kingdom: "The entire biblical story, despite its great diversity of forms and foci, is consistent in its emphasis on the reign of God over his people in the environment he creates for them." In Graeme Goldsworthy, "Kingdom of God," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 620. Roberts, who acknowledges his indebtedness to Goldsworthy in helping him form his thinking on the Kingdom of God as the central motif of the Bible, has written similarly widely accessible work on the topic. "Any unifying theme that is used to help us to see how the Bible fits together must arise out of Scripture itself, rather than being imposed upon it; and it must be broad enough to allow each part to make its own distinct contribution. The theme of the kingdom of God satisfies both requirements." In Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 20-21.

Scripture also tells of the unfolding revelation of God to bring about a union between Christ and his Bride, the church (Eph. 5:32).⁵ This was no “plan B” in the mind of God, but was rather the predetermined course of events laid out in God’s sovereignty from before the foundations of the earth (Eph. 1:3-10). Even the relationship between Adam and Eve was to point forward to this union between Christ and the church.⁶

So which is it? How are Christians to understand these two central themes of the Bible? Is Christ the King of God’s Kingdom, or is Jesus the head of his church? Or does he fill both capacities? The rest of this paper will examine the relationship between the Kingdom of Christ and his church.

Inaugurated Eschatology and the Church

In his work, *The Kingdom of Christ*, Russell D. Moore traces the emerging evangelical consensus on the nature of the Kingdom of God in Christ, looking at the work produced in the latter half of the twentieth century by progressive dispensationalists such as Robert L. Saucy, Darrell L. Bock, and Craig A. Blaising and modified covenant theologians like Anthony Hoekema, Richard B. Gaffin, Edmund P. Clowney, and Vern Poythress. This consensus, Moore contends, “came as both traditions sought to relate their doctrinal distinctives to the overarching theme of the Kingdom of God as an integrative motif for their respective systems.”⁷

⁵All Scripture citations in this paper come from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

⁶“The reason God created Eve differently than He created all the other creatures is because He intended her to foreshadow the Church. This is why God put Adam to sleep (foreshadowing Christ’s death); opened His side (foreshadowing Christ’s wounds); took out flesh and bone and closed Adam’s side (foreshadowing the resurrection); built Eve from Adam (foreshadowing the building of the Church); brought Eve to Adam and married them (foreshadowing the marriage supper of the Lamb); and, then gave them a mandate to rule the creation (foreshadowing the everlasting Kingdom of Christ and His Bride.” William E. and Barbara K. Mouser, *The Story of Sex In Scripture* (Waxahachie, TX: International Council for Gender Studies, 2006), 67.

⁷Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 23.

The paradigm for the Kingdom of God through which these progressive dispensationalists and modified covenantalists viewed their respective theological systems was most ably put forth by George Eldon Ladd in his numerous works on the Kingdom.⁸ According to Ladd, the Kingdom of God is defined as:

the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history.⁹

The Kingdom of God, then, according to Ladd is both "already" and "not yet." In the person and work of Jesus Christ, the King of God's Kingdom, the eschatological Kingdom has reached back and broken in to the present age, and is present wherever the rule and reign of God exists.

Though the Kingdom is now (i.e., Mark 1:15), it is also not yet, as it awaits future consummation in which the reign of God in Christ will extend over all the cosmos (Rev. 11:15). Though Jesus is currently reigning at the right hand of the Father, we do not yet see all things under his feet. But the goal of the Kingdom of God is to do exactly that, "to subordinate all things to him as creator, judge, and redeemer. Of no other kingdom can this be said."¹⁰

Ladd wrote much on the topic of the church, and more specifically on the nature of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church. As noted earlier, Ladd believed this relationship was a difficult one to comprehend and understand, but still one necessarily worthy

⁸The first of these widely influential works to be published was Ladd's *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952). As Karl Barth's commentary on the book of Romans did to classical liberalism, Ladd's *Crucial Questions* did to traditional dispensationalism, as this work can surely be said to have been a bomb dropped on the playground of traditional dispensationalism.

⁹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 89-90.

¹⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Reflections on the Kingdom of God," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992), 40.

of examination. According to Ladd, there are five specific aspects to the relationship between the Kingdom and the church: the church is not the Kingdom; the Kingdom creates the church; the church gives witness to the Kingdom; the church acts as the instrument of the Kingdom; and the church acts as the custodian of the Kingdom.¹¹ The Kingdom of God is not directly identified with the subjects of the Kingdom,¹² but the existence of the Kingdom presupposes a people over whom the King will reign.¹³ The church as the people of God over whom Jesus reigns now (Eph. 1:22-23) are a people who live “between the times.”¹⁴

Therefore, this emerging evangelical consensus on the relationship between the Kingdom and the church “maintains rightly that the definition of the ‘already’ reign of Christ is the church.”¹⁵ Indeed, “the reign of Christ is focused in this age solely on His reign as Messiah over the people called into the Kingdom, namely, those who make up the church.”¹⁶ The church, the Bride of Christ over whom Jesus is head, is the focus of the Kingdom now. The Kingdom

¹¹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 111-19.

¹²“In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are people of God’s rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus’ disciples belong to Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men.” George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 262.

¹³“Since Messiah has come and begun his reign, since the age of Messianic blessing has begun, there must be a people of Messiah over whom He reigns and who enjoy His blessings. This people is the Church...” George Eldon Ladd, *The Young Church: Acts of the Apostles*, Bible Guides, vol. 15 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), 72.

¹⁴“Although Acts does not use the terminology of the two ages, it is not incorrect to say that it represents the blessings of the Age to Come reaching back into This Age. To use a different idiom, there is an overlapping of the two ages. The early church was conscious of living ‘between the times’; or better, it was living in two times. Along with the world, it still lived in the old Age; but because of the death and resurrection of Christ, it also lived in the Age to Come.” Ibid., 36.

¹⁵Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 151.

¹⁶Ibid., 152.

currently is expressed chiefly in terms of the community over whom Jesus rules and reigns, the church.¹⁷

Church and Kingdom in Church History

This view of the relationship between the Kingdom and the church has not always been so clear. Even if one accepts the thesis that the Kingdom of God is the central motif of the storyline of Scripture, he still has to define exactly what he means by “Kingdom.”¹⁸ Ladd notes four different conceptions of the Kingdom that have been espoused throughout the history of the church, including the ecclesiological, the eschatological, the soteriological, and the theological views.¹⁹ The former three views of the Kingdom all contain some truth to them, Ladd asserts, but ultimately they all fall short of doing justice to the biblical text.

In the end, Ladd contends that the Bible teaches the theological view of the Kingdom “because it finds the fundamental meaning of the Kingdom of God not in the church nor in an

¹⁷Progressive dispensationalist Darrell L. Bock remarks in a footnote in his commentary on the book of Luke: “In its initial phase, the kingdom as manifested in the church is a community of people who all look to the same hope in Christ. Thus, the kingdom’s presence primarily is manifested in believers who all serve and are accountable to the sovereign head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:19-22; Col. 1:12-14). The church universal is related to the kingdom, being its present expression, but the church is not all there is to the kingdom, since there is a kingdom to come. In addition, the church is not an institution seeking to seize power on earth or exercise coercive sovereignty, but is to serve and love humankind, reflecting the love of God, his standards of righteousness, and the message of his forgiveness and love in Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:9-13:7). These elements make up the mission of the church as light in the world (Matt. 5:14-16).” Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:1222.

¹⁸Presbyterian theologian Peter J. Leithart gives a brief overview of the most common understandings of the Kingdom throughout the history of the church, including the millennial model, the eschatological model, the ethical model, the mystical model, and the sacramental or liturgical model. Peter J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1993), x-xi. Leithart believes that the sacramental model is the most biblical, and understands the nature of the relationship of the Kingdom and the church as follows: “The kingdom is where the body of Christ is found, whether we speak of His body incarnate, sacramental, or ecclesiastical.” *Ibid.*, 21. This particular view of the Kingdom and the church makes sense of Leithart’s theology of theonomy, as he sees less distinction between the Kingdom now and the Kingdom to come than Christians of other eschatological positions.

¹⁹George Eldon Ladd, “The Kingdom of God and the Church,” in *Foundations* 4 (1961), 164-168.

eschatological order nor in an earthly social order but in the redemptive rule of God himself.”²⁰ Fundamental in understanding the interrelationship between the Kingdom and the church is acknowledging the fact that one must define “Kingdom” before he can define “church—and vice versa—as well as an acknowledgement of the fact that throughout the history of the church there have been various interpretations of this relationship. For the present purposes of this paper, we are building upon the emerging evangelical consensus of the church as an initial manifestation of the Kingdom, the focus of the “already” reign of Jesus in the already and not yet view of the Kingdom.

Church and Kingdom in Baptist History

Throughout Baptist church history that have only been a handful of theologians who have dealt with the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church in some detail. This paper will focus primarily on those theologians associated with the Southern Baptist Convention from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century up to the present day.

Of the Baptist theologians and ecclesiologists who have focused on the Kingdom and the church, perhaps the most prolific was John Leadley Dagg, the first writing Southern Baptist theologian and quite possibly its most thoughtful ecclesiologist. Dagg viewed the Kingdom of God primarily in terms of the general rule of Christ over all of human affairs, and whose subjects are divided between the obedient (believers in Christ) and the disobedient (unbelievers).²¹ At the

²⁰Ibid., 168.

²¹Dagg writes: “The kingdom of Christ is the kingly authority with which he, as mediator, is invested, and which he exercises over all things, for the glory of God and the good of his church. The peculiarities of this divine reign are that it is exercised in human nature, and that it grants favor to rebels.” J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1990), 139. Dagg goes on to say that Jesus Christ presently reigns at the right hand of the Father, and “The subjects of his reign are divided into two classes; the obedient, and the disobedient. To the obedient, all the blessings of his reign are promised; and the disobedient, he will ultimately gather out of his kingdom, and banish to everlasting misery.” Ibid.

final judgment in the eschaton, Christ will judge between the obedient and the disobedient subjects under his general kingly rule.²²

Few Baptists have dealt with the interrelationship between the Kingdom and the church in as much detail as Dagg. James Petigru Boyce, the first president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, deals little with the biblical concept of the Kingdom and not at all with its relationship to the church in his systematic theology.²³ Edgar Young Mullins, one of the most influential theologians in the history of the SBC and the primary crafter of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925), wrote that the primary meaning of the Kingdom of God is individual and ethical, for it is “the reign or rule or dominion of God in the human heart and life.”²⁴ Mullins understood the relationship between the Kingdom and the church in terms of the ethics of the Kingdom lived out by members of each church.²⁵ A generation after Mullins, Herschel H. Hobbs, the primary crafter of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), wrote simply that the Kingdom is not the same as the church. The Kingdom of God is, in a greater sense, “the rule of God in his universe and over all created beings, of which the church is a spiritual element.”²⁶

²²Dagg explains: “Families, nations, and local churches, are societies of external organization; and they are organized for the present world. At the end of the world, all these organizations will cease. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world; but at the end of the world, when earthly organizations shall have passed away, he will gather the wicked out of his kingdom; and the kingdom itself, freed from all rebellious subjects, will continue forever.” *Ibid.*, 141-42.

²³James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Hanford: Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887). It is also interesting to note that the *Abstract of Principles*, the first and still the confessional statement of Southern Seminary, does not contain an article or statement on the Kingdom of God.

²⁴Edgar Young Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1925), 56.

²⁵Mullins writes: “The local church is in harmony, or is meant to be in harmony, with the principles of the kingdom. In a real sense it reproduces, or localizes, and perpetuates the kingdom of God on earth. Its doctrines and polity must conform to the teachings and to the essential nature of the kingdom.” *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁶Herschel H. Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964), 117.

Jesus' earthly ministry and proclamation of the Kingdom served "to establish God's reign, not only in men's hearts, but over all things in the universe."²⁷

Unfortunately, little work has been done by some of the best-known contemporary Southern Baptist theologians and ecclesiologists on the interrelationship between the Kingdom and the church. The two most prolific Baptist systematic theologians of the last three decades, Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem, each devote less than one page in their respective systematic theologies to the relationship between the church and the Kingdom, and each mostly gives a synopsis of Ladd's view of that relationship.²⁸

In addition to a lack of work done on this topic by contemporary Baptist systematic theologians, a scarcity of scholarship on the issue of the relationship between the Kingdom and the church exists even among today's most prolific Baptist ecclesiologists. R. Stanton Norman does not deal with the issue explicitly in either of his works on Baptist ecclesiology,²⁹ and John S. Hammett references the Kingdom only in passing, when expressing his support congregational polity.³⁰ Mark Dever, in his books on the topics of the church and biblical theology, almost never deals with the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church.³¹ While these ecclesiological treatments (especially that of Dever) presuppose certain connections between

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1051-52, and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 863-64.

²⁹See R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just A Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001) and *That Baptist Way: Distinctives of A Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005).

³⁰John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 147.

³¹See Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); and *Nine Marks of A Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

Kingdom and church, these connections are not explained in detail. An explicit focus on the Kingdom would only enhance the groundbreaking work these scholars are doing on issues of a believers' church vision. Within a Baptist framework, the evangelical consensus on this interrelationship makes sense not simply at the level of theory but at the level of practice as well.

Toward a Baptist Understanding of Church and Kingdom

George Eldon Ladd rightly notes the fact that “There can be no Kingdom without a church—those who have acknowledged God’s rule—and there can be no church without God’s Kingdom; but they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men and women.”³² But how does the one relate to the other? A robust ecclesiology is needed in order to make sense of inaugurated eschatology.³³ Indeed, the new society created by the “already” reign of Christ is not some unexplainable force or group, but rather a church, a colony of the Kingdom.³⁴ The very presence of this new society on earth proclaims to a world enslaved

³²Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 117. Ladd speaks of the indispensability of the church to the Kingdom and the Kingdom to the church: “The Kingdom of God necessarily involves the church. The church is the people of the Kingdom, those who have accepted the redemptive rule of God. The rule of a King must have a people, and the church consists of those who have received the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:15), i.e., who have bowed before God’s rule in Christ and have been brought thereby into that sphere of life over which Christ reigns. They have been delivered from the powers of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). They know the blessings of God’s rule which are righteousness and peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). In addition, they are those destined to enter the Kingdom in its eschatological consummation.” Ladd, “The Kingdom of God and the Church,” 168.

³³“Without a clearly developed doctrine of the church, the benefits of inaugurated eschatology are virtually nullified, as it is almost impossible to differentiate between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ aspects of the Kingdom.” Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 151.

³⁴“When Christianity discusses the new society, it speaks not of some intangible future reality whose specific features it cannot as yet identify, but of the regenerate church called to live by the standards of the coming King and which in some respects already approximates the kingdom of God in present history.” Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 4:522.

to the principalities and powers of this present darkness that Jesus has crushed the head of the serpent, and he is King.³⁵

So while the question of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church has long puzzled theologians through the ages, there is now considerable agreement among evangelical scholars on the nature of this relationship. The church as a Kingdom colony is the focus of the “now” aspect of the now but not yet, and is therefore a model of the coming Kingdom of Christ, when Jesus’ rule extends from his church to the entire cosmos. The church, while the focus of the already aspect of the Kingdom, also relates to the not yet aspect of the Kingdom as well. This is precisely because the church is “the ‘eschatological company,’ the body of those who bear testimony by words and deed to the divine reign, which Christ will consummate at his return and hence will be present throughout the cosmos.”³⁶

Therefore, building upon Ladd’s view of the Kingdom of God as both now and not yet, the church, as the focus of the “already” reign of Christ, is to witness to and model the coming Kingdom in five ways: the church is made up of subjects of the Kingdom; is ruled by the voice of the King; proclaims the gospel of the Kingdom; practices the initiatory and ongoing ordinances of the Kingdom; and lives out the values and ethics of the Kingdom. In all of these aspects, the church can never be divorced from her head, the King of the Kingdom, Christ Jesus.

The Church is Made Up of Subjects of the Kingdom

³⁵“The Kingdom of God intends a visible social order, a tangible community that arose in Palestine and stretched throughout the Hellenistic world to girdle the globe, a new order consisting not merely of invisible relationships but one in which justice and grace are properly and visibly united... The fellowship of the faithful—humble men and women taking a new stand in the midst of history—reflects to an unwilling world the coming glorious kingdom. Possessed and conscious of a social character and direction, and politically concerned and relevant, the church of Christ Jesus emerges as a new organism in history that embraces Jews and Gentile alike; its message, in fact its very presence, announces to the world that Christ has shattered mankind’s enslavement by and to idolatrous powers.” Ibid., 527-28.

³⁶Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 622.

The Kingdom of God is where God rules or reigns, and currently Jesus has been given “as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22), which is where the King rules now.

Therefore, the church, which is the body of Christ, is to be made up only of those who have entered the Kingdom by submitting to the Lordship of Christ by faith. In other words, the church should only be made up of those who have been born-again (John 3:3, 5).

This is why a church made of Christians and their “covenant children” doesn’t make sense within an already but not yet framework of the Kingdom. The church, in its membership, is to model the coming Kingdom, which means that it will be made up only of those who will be spared as sheep instead of condemned as goats by the coming Judge.³⁷ It is true that *all* men will someday bow the knee to King Jesus and confess him as Lord (Phil. 2:9-11), but that does not mean that they do so willingly or joyfully. Instead, the church is to be made up of those who acknowledge Jesus’ Kingship *now*, confessing that one day all men will see by sight what those who are in the church believe by faith.³⁸

The newness of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), then, is hardly expressed in churches made up of both regenerate and unregenerate members, as was the nation of Israel. Under the new covenant, God’s people no longer have to travel to the temple in Jerusalem “as the *location* where God’s presence must be sought and found,” for Jesus is the new temple.³⁹

³⁷Though Ladd is right when he says that “entrance into the Kingdom means participation in the church; but entrance into the church is not necessarily synonymous with entrance into the Kingdom,” the Kingdom colony is to do its very best to ensure that the two are as close to synonymous as possible. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 265.

³⁸“The Second Coming of Christ will mean nothing less than the disclosure to the world of the sovereignty and lordship which is already his. He is *now* the Lord; he is *now* reigning at the right hand of God. However, his present reign is seen only by the eye of faith. It is unseen and unrecognized by the world. His second advent will mean the unveiling—the revelation—the disclosure of the lordship which is already his.” George Eldon Ladd, *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 32.

³⁹James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 147. The thesis of Hamilton’s excellent work is that “[I]n the old covenant God faithfully

Christ's words to Nicodemus—that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3)—surely imply that only those who have been born again may be admitted to membership in the new covenant community.⁴⁰ The Kingdom colony, then, is to be pure and undefiled in her membership (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), being made up only of those who have been united to Christ by faith. Paul's frequent explanations of spiritual gifts do not make much sense if there are members of the church not yet given gifts of the Spirit in order to contribute to the building up of the body (1 Cor. 14:26).

This holiness of the new temple has everything to do with biblical church discipline.⁴¹ The church is commissioned of Christ to pursue those who have left the fellowship of the church, with restoration in mind (James 5:19-20), and to confront those who have sinned against another member of the body (Matt. 18:15-20), knowing that before the Good Shepherd pursued us we, too, were like sheep who had gone astray (Matt. 18:12-14). Those in persistent sin are not to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 5:11), and are ultimately to be handed over to Satan, in the hope “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). We pursue church discipline with the goal that all men and women with names on our church's membership rolls should have a place at the table, both in terms of partaking of the Lord's Supper in the present and partaking of the eschatological wedding feast to come (Rev. 19:6-9). Ultimately, those who

remained *with* His people, accompanying them in a pillar of fire and cloud, then dwelling among them in the tabernacle and the temple. Under the new covenant, the only temple is the believing community itself, and God dwells not only among the community corporately (Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16), but also *in* each member individually (John 14:17; Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 6:19).” *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 166.

⁴¹Hamilton's succinct line of argumentation in favor of church discipline is as follows: “God's dwelling must be holy. The New Testament gives instructions on church discipline that we might keep God's new temple holy. In order to practice church discipline, we must pursue a regenerate church membership. Our prayer should be that God will enable us to live as those in whom He is pleased to dwell.” *Ibid.*, 168.

leave the fellowship of the Kingdom community and do not return are to be thought of as unbelievers, for that is how they always were (1 John 2:19).

Becoming a part of the Kingdom colony means devoting ultimate allegiance and devotion to Christ, confessing “Jesus is Lord” (Rom. 10:9),⁴² and telling all men, “there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:7). This does not mean forsaking subjection to other authorities, but rather now showing submission to the kingdoms of this world “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet. 2:13) and “also for the sake of conscience” (Rom. 13:5), knowing that all things have yet to be put under Jesus’ feet.⁴³ Ultimate allegiance, however, is owed to the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Subjects of the King bow the knee willingly to Jesus, knowing that someday every knee will bow to him, whether willingly or unwillingly.⁴⁴

The church, then, is not a democracy, but rather a Christocracy, with King Jesus ruling on his throne. All of the members of the Kingdom colony, both individually and corporately, acknowledge this rightful Kingship of Christ.⁴⁵ In fact, joining the church is in itself a public declaration of being rightly related to the King.

⁴²“The lives of those who choose to hear and follow Jesus are not to center in the Torah, but in Jesus himself. His disciples are to give full allegiance and devotion *to him*. Few images express more vividly the total commitment and absolute loyalty Jesus demands: loyalty to God’s kingdom is expressed in loyalty to Jesus.” Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 137. R. Stanton Norman writes: “The earliest confession of the church (‘Jesus is Lord’) distinguished those who believed in Jesus from those who did not. This confession came to identify those who were truly the disciples of Christ.” Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 38.

⁴³“Even though Christ’s liberation has freed him from enslavement to the alienating powers of this world, the Christian is to subordinate himself to the institution of human government (1 Pet. 2; cf. 1 Tim. 2). Only within the new society, the church, is the King of kings as yet recognized as such; this awareness the church is not to force upon an unbelieving world. Its role is to witness to the world by a new way of life through voluntary subjection to the Lord the coming King.” Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 4:531.

⁴⁴“The proper subjects of Christ’s kingdom are a willing people, who voluntarily give themselves up to his authority, and serve him with delight.” J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1990), 225.

⁴⁵“The corporate aspect of Christ’s lordship is revealed as the congregation collectively submits itself to his direction. The church is not a collection of ‘ministries’; rather, the members of the congregation function together corporately and singularly in the ministry of the lord of the church. He purchased the church with his blood.

Ruled by the Voice of the King

The subjects of the Kingdom of God bow the knee to their King, but not a king in the abstract. Instead, each confessor of allegiance to Christ bows the knee to a specific King, King Jesus of Nazareth. He is a King who has a voice and who now “rules the obedient new society by the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ Indeed, as Jesus tells the crowds at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Therefore, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ must be a community that seeks to be obedient to the words of the King, written down for us in the Bible.⁴⁷ The voice of the King is recorded in Holy Scripture, which is “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Through the preaching of the Word, the Kingdom colony is being prepared to discern the voice of Christ, as opposed to the words breathed out by the spirit of antichrist (2 Tim. 4:3-4). John warns the churches about the false teachers who come in the spirit of antichrist, looking to deceive and lead astray members of the flock (1 John 4:1-6). However, the churches are to trust the voice of the apostles and prophets, whose testimony is true, and upon whose foundation the church has been built, “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). This is why Paul admonishes Titus to appoint as elders only those men who may be able to stand firm on and teach the truths of the Word of God and will “rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

He owns the church; the members of the congregation are simply the stewards of his possession.” Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 44.

⁴⁶Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 45.

⁴⁷“The written revelation of God is the standard through which the Lord speaks to his church.” Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 44.

The Word of the King, then, is unchanging, and will forever serve as the standard for faith and practice for all of the Kingdom colonies. This Word given to the people of God, the very voice that created the heavens and the earth (2 Pet. 3:5-6), will one day also call out and “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25).

Proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom

Each Kingdom colony is also given the responsibility to verbally proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom, the good news that Jesus is Lord (Matt. 28:18-20). This verbal proclamation of the Kingdom was at the center of the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. 3:2; Acts 1:3), and Paul of Tarsus (Acts 19:8). This same message Christ commands his disciples, the foundation stones of the church, to proclaim as well (Matt. 10:7).

The gospel of the Kingdom is preached not only in terms of individual forgiveness of sins found through the shed blood of Christ, but also in terms of a resurrected Christ who has defeated the principalities and powers and who reigns triumphant at the right hand of the Father. Indeed, the church proclaims that its very existence comes from the fact that Christ has risen from the dead.⁴⁸ The gospel should also be preached with the goal in mind that its hearers would forsake all other “kingdoms” in order to voluntarily submit to the invisible reign of the Lord Jesus in his church, into “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).

The preached gospel comes as an invitation, but an invitation with an authority because the one giving it is a King (Matt. 22:8-10). It also comes with a sense of urgency, for “everything is ready” (Matt. 22:4). The gospel is a victory proclamation, knowing that what Christ has accomplished in the past will be consummated in the future.⁴⁹ By its very nature, the

⁴⁸Carl F. H. Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 44.

⁴⁹“One thing that the church shares with first-century apocalyptic communities, like the sect at Qumran, is the conviction of being an eschatological community and a witness by both word and deed to the sure victory of

Kingdom is to be made available to all men, and all men may enter into it granted they respond in obedience by faith in Christ. The good news is an invitation to partake in fellowship not only with King Jesus but with other subjects of his Kingdom in the church (1 John 1:3). The preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom is to bring men and women to salvation in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:15), urging people to repent of sin to be a part of the Kingdom now even as the church prays for God's Kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10).

Practices the Ordinances of the Kingdom

As a Kingdom community, the New Testament has much to say about the church's definition and purposes in terms of its membership and ordinances.⁵⁰ Having already dealt with the church as made up of subjects of the King, we now turn to the Kingdom colony's two ordinances: baptism and Lord's Supper. These ordinances, performed by the church now, are also "clearly eschatological in nature."⁵¹

Not only are churches to be made up only of those who have been born again to "see" the Kingdom of God, but of those who have undergone the initiatory rite into membership of the Kingdom colony, baptism. In the act of baptism both the church doing the baptizing and the one undergoing the baptism are declaring the reality of a man who has bowed the knee to King Jesus

God's Kingdom. However, at one all-important point the church stands in a unique situation which no first-century Jewish group knew. Its witness to God's victory in the future is based on a victory already achieved in history. It proclaims not merely hope, but a hope based on events in history and its own experience. Indeed, the church is an eschatological community not only because it witnesses to God's future victory but because its mission is to display the life of the eschatological Kingdom in the present evil age. The very existence of the church is designed to be a witness to the world of the triumph of God's Kingdom accomplished in Jesus." Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 337-38.

⁵⁰Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 161.

⁵¹Ibid., 163. Moore goes on to write: "Baptism is a matter of inaugurated eschatology, considered by Paul as a sign, not only of union with Christ in the present, but also of resurrection in Him in the eschaton (Rom. 6:1-11). The Petrine teaching likewise presents baptism in light of the eschatological enthronement of Christ after His resurrection, ascension, and triumph over the powers (1 Pet. 3:20-21). Likewise, Jesus treats the question of the Lord's Supper eschatologically in its institution, not only by relating it to the new covenant but also by tying it to the messianic table in the Kingdom of God (Luke 22:16-17, 20)." Ibid.

and has therefore entered into Christ's Kingdom. Baptism signifies a believer's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6). The baptism itself does not save the believer in Christ, but is "an appeal to God for a good conscience" through Christ who has been raised from the dead and is now lifted up above "angels, authorities, and powers" (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Upon hearing and believing the "preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," people in Samaria "were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). And the command to baptize is given by Christ to the church, as a part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). It signifies not only entrance in to the Kingdom at hand, but also signifies a relationship to the Kingdom come.⁵²

This means that only those who have made personal repentance toward God and professed faith in Jesus Christ are to be baptized and allowed into the benefits of church membership.⁵³ "Covenant children" are not to be sprinkled with water and made to be members of a church, as they cannot declare personal subjection and obedience to the King of the Kingdom. Indeed, because baptism symbolizes a personal ultimate allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom, it may be properly deemed "an enlistment."⁵⁴

⁵²"Baptism is eschatological in orientation likewise in that it is practiced with a view towards participation in the kingdom of God, the glorious eschatological fellowship of God with his people... [T]his act points to the coming of God's reign and symbolizes our hope of participating in that eternal community." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 701.

⁵³"And this radical, existential, eschatological character of the new age, an age of which John was the harbinger, is congenial to a theology that makes personal repentance before God and faith in Christ the necessary prerequisites of baptism. By contrast, it goes against the very grain of the theology of infant baptism—with its stress on the 'federal holiness' of 'covenant children' as 'members of the visible church' by virtue of their 'physical birth' to believing parents." Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace: An Appraisal of the Argument that as Infants Were Once Circumcised, So They Should Now Be Baptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 67.

⁵⁴Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power*, 118. Leithart, a Presbyterian, curiously speaks of baptism in terms that only make sense if the one being baptized is a believer in the Lord Jesus and not an infant: "Through baptism, God seals us as sons, co-heirs with Christ of His kingdom. Having crossed through the baptismal waters, we enter the promised sanctuary land to enjoy its bounty." *Ibid.*, 114.

Though baptism is a one-time initiatory and declaratory act into membership of the Kingdom community, participation in the Lord's Supper is an ongoing ordinance of the church. The Lord's Supper is not a monthly or quarterly after-service "snack," in which the church's congregants try to feel as somber and sorry for Jesus as possible for the agony through which he went on the cross. Instead, feasting at the Lord's Table is a victory celebration and a proclamation of the battle won by Jesus over sin and death.⁵⁵ Jesus' body has been given for the disciples, and his blood has been poured out to initiate a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins through Christ (Luke 22:19-20).⁵⁶ The very fact that Jesus promised that he "will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25) conveys a certain confidence within the church in the ultimate victory of God. The church proclaims "the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26), a death that was overcome in resurrection, and a coming back that is certain. Partaking of the Lord's Table is no light matter (1 Cor. 11:27-32), and unbelievers or those in persistent sin are not to partake of this church ordinance (1 Cor. 5:6-13).

The Lord's Supper, then, is to look forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when all the redeemed of all the ages will eat with a slain and resurrected King Jesus of Nazareth seated at the head of the table (Rev. 19:6-9). But until that day, the church eats together of the

⁵⁵"The Cross is not a symbol of suffering only, but also of victory. Jesus crushed Satan's head by His death. When we proclaim the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming His triumph over sin, death, and hell. The feast of the kingdom is, like Abraham's, a victory feast." *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁶Especially in the Gospel of Luke is the uniting of the Kingdom and table fellowship seen. "All ten Lukan meals may be read as foretastes or proleptic experiences of the messianic kingdom banquet (cf. Is. 25:6-8; Zech. 8:7-8, 9-23), since the Messiah is present at them." Scott W. Hahn, "Kingdom and Church in Luke-Acts," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony C. Thiselton, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 309.

broken bread and the fruit of the vine in anticipation of the Kingdom to come and in celebration of the Kingdom at hand.⁵⁷

Lives Out the Values and Ethics of the Kingdom

As an initial manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ, the church is not only to verbally proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom, but also to exhibit the values and ethics of Jesus' rule and reign. In other words, the subjects of the Kingdom will live in such a way that exhibits the truth that the Kingdom has come and that the Kingdom is coming, as a people who belong to this age and the age to come.⁵⁸

This is shown in the good acts that are done by the church to those who are outside of the church, but especially to those who are within (Gal. 6:10). The unity between Jew and Gentile within the church declares to the outside watching world that Jesus Christ has torn down the dividing wall in his death, burial, and resurrection (Eph. 2:11-22). Church members should treat others better than themselves, showing the same kind of humility that was exemplified by the King (Phil. 2:1-11). The Kingdom colony should exude peace with God and with one another (2 Pet. 3:14), knowing full well that Christ is still to return in judgment. The love shown to one another within the church, John reminds us, is a love that is expressed not in empty and idle talk but rather "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). The King of the Kingdom has also give his subjects a new standard by which they must strive to treat one another (Matt. 5-7). Peter urges

⁵⁷"In the supper we do not only anticipate communion with the Lord as a hope for the distant future. We also experience the future community proleptically in the present. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus' promise of an eschatological fellowship becomes a present reality. Our Lord comes among us and communes with us. In this sense, therefore, the celebration is an experience of present community." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 701.

⁵⁸"If Jesus' disciples are those who have received the life and fellowship of the Kingdom, and if this life is in fact an anticipation of the eschatological Kingdom, then it follows that one of the main tasks of the church is to display in this present age the life and fellowship of the age to come. The church has a dual character, belonging to two ages. It is the people of the age to come, but it still lives in this age, being constituted of sinful mortal men. This means that while the church in this age will never attain perfection, it must nevertheless display the life of the perfect order, the eschatological Kingdom of God." Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 268.

the churches to supplement their faith in the Lord Jesus with virtues such as knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, in order that they may persevere and enter the gates of the Kingdom of Christ, an entrance that is here and is yet still before them (2 Peter 1:5-11). Faith is to be accompanied by good works to the poor and outcast, in hopes that one day the King will say to us, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).⁵⁹

The way in which believers in the Lord Jesus act now will have direct impact upon how and in what way they will rule with Christ in his coming Kingdom. Jesus promises the churches in Thyatira and Laodicea that to those who persevere in faith to the end, Christ will grant them ruling authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). In other words, Jesus is training his subjects of the Kingdom to be kings and queens of the cosmos.⁶⁰ This is why Paul can be so furious with the disordered nature of the church at Corinth: “Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!” (1 Cor. 6:3).

Living out the values and ethics of the Kingdom is never to replace the verbal proclamation of the Kingdom, of course, but rather come alongside of it.⁶¹ Churches are

⁵⁹Henry writes that the church witnesses to the Kingdom through social action, a witness that gives credibility to the coming Kingdom: “Letting the world know that God cares for man in the entirety of his fallen human predicament is inescapably essential; displaying in the fellowship of believers what that means lends effective and winsome proof to the Christian claim. If believers do not live the Christian life in the churches, how can they hope to herald Christ in the world as the only Way? If the new man is eclipsed in present daily life, and the new society is but a future vision, then contemporary alternatives to the Truth will rush in to fill the yawning gap of a plummeting world. Like a street corner observer, the church will be only watching the passing parade instead of leading and directing the rescue.” Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:541.

⁶⁰Ladd comments on Rev. 2:26: “The idea appearing in 1:6 is made more explicit in the present passage: the saints are to share Christ’s messianic rule over the nations. The saints are a kingdom because they will share Christ’s kingly reign. Christ promised his disciples that they should inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). He promised the twelve that in the new world they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28); and the same promise is repeated in Luke 22:30. The same basic idea is found in Paul’s assertion that the saints shall judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). The premillennial interpretation of 20:4 sees the fulfillment of this promise in the temporal messianic kingdom which intervenes between the parousia (19:11-16) and the new age when the new heavens and the new earth will displace the old order (21:1ff).” George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 53-54.

reminded to conduct themselves as those who ultimately belong to another Kingdom, that those outside the church may see their “good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11-12). And those in churches are to conduct themselves in such a way that any member of the colony may be able to say to any man, believer or unbeliever in the Lord Jesus Christ: “You would like to know what the Kingdom of God is like? Then come with me to my local church at nine o’clock this Sunday morning, and you’ll be given a glimpse.”⁶²

The “Emerging” Church and the Church

Not only has Ladd’s view of the Kingdom had untold influence on contemporary evangelical scholarship and its adherents’ understanding of the church, but the Kingdom as both already and not yet is also greatly accepted within the “emerging church.” A primary think tank for the movement is Fuller Theological Seminary, at which George Eldon Ladd taught for decades in the twentieth century. Emerging church leaders such as Rob Bell have received academic degrees from Fuller Seminary, and some of the movement’s most vocal proponents, such as Eddie Gibbs, Ryan K. Bolger, and Ray S. Anderson, are all employed as professors there.

⁶¹For example, emerging church pastor Rick McKinley suggests the superiority of “being” as opposed to “speaking” in witnessing to the Kingdom: “What *would* the world think if we loved our sisters in Cuba enough to take them medicine? And how much could our lives say *without speaking* if we were willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom? The act alone would preach volumes.” McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 154.

⁶²“As the church enjoys this foretaste of the banquet to come, it becomes the prime exhibit of what the future kingdom will look like. Think here of a film preview, a few minutes of actual footage from a film not yet released. This trailer is shown so that the potential audience can catch a glimpse of what the whole film will look like once it is ready to be shown in its entirety. One important function of the church is thus to be a picture, a brief representation, a sample of what the future in God’s kingdom will be.” Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 200.

Ray Anderson, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and the first to provide something akin to a systematic theology for emerging churches,⁶³ studied under Ladd at Fuller and acknowledges his great influence upon him then and now.⁶⁴ Anderson maintains that emerging churches are not interested in “kingdom building,” but rather in “kingdom living.”⁶⁵ Practically speaking, the church is part of the “workplace” of the world, and “has its own calling and mission to serve the workplace and to empower disciples of the kingdom in their partnership with God.”⁶⁶ The church, then, merely exists to “outsource” the Christian’s “need for communion with other believers and our instruction and guidance from the Word of God, and recharge our spiritual batteries for our daily life” in the “secular sacrament” that is the workplace.⁶⁷ After all, Anderson contends, the church is merely a part of the fallen world, a “human institution.” “There will be no church in heaven,” Anderson writes. “It will be kingdom living, first class!”⁶⁸

Emerging church pastor Rob Bell, who was educated at Fuller, similarly emphasizes the Kingdom of God as a central theme of the Scriptures, and even deals with the relationship between the Kingdom and the church when he comments on Matt. 16:19 and 18:18. In giving the keys of the Kingdom to his disciples, Bell states that Jesus “is giving his followers the authority to make *new* interpretations of the Bible. He is giving them permission to say, ‘Hey, we think we

⁶³A book that contains endorsements from such emerging church leaders as Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Eddie Gibbs, and John R. Franke, and a foreword written by Brian McLaren.

⁶⁴Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 96.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 96-116.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

missed it before on that verse, and we've recently come to the conclusion that this is what it actually means.”⁶⁹ This ability to “reinterpret” texts still belongs to the church today, Bell contends. Bell also picks up on this idea of the “sacred workplace.” The church, defined as “a community of people who are learning how to be certain kinds of people wherever they find themselves, so they can do whatever it is they do ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus,’” is to train its people to do “things for God” at all times, “everywhere.”⁷⁰

Anderson and Bell are right to emphasize the fact that Christians should view their workplace as a type of “mission field,” though it is unclear whether or not the “mission” is to proclaim Christ that co-workers may come to believe on him. But to do so at the expense of the centrality of the corporate community of the church is to give in to the very individualistic tendency that they are claiming to criticize. On the one hand, this de-emphasizing and devaluing of the church should come as no surprise from a parachurch institution like Fuller Seminary. On the other hand, it is a shame and an irony that the seminary at which George Eldon Ladd did the majority of his work has produced so many graduates and employed so many professors who have embraced his view of the Kingdom while abandoning his emphasis on the Kingdom’s relationship to the church.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, both professors at Fuller Seminary, also pick up on this emphasis placed on the Kingdom amongst emerging church adherents in their work in studying emerging churches and their leaders. They remark on how “strange” it is that “the

⁶⁹Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 50. Bell continues: “And not only is he giving them authority, but he is saying that when they do debate and discuss and pray and wrestle and then make decisions about the Bible, somehow God in heaven will be involved.” Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 85.

church for so long missed the kingdom emphasis in the witness of the authors of the Gospels.”⁷¹ Thankfully, emerging church leaders have finally succeeded where their parents failed: “Quite dramatically, emerging churches stress the kingdom of God much more than their paradigm/purpose-driven/seeker parents ever did.”⁷² It quickly becomes clear, however, that in “emphasizing” the Kingdom of God the emerging church adherents are actually only pitting Jesus and the Gospel accounts against Paul and his Epistles in ways that would make liberal scholars beam with pride.⁷³ In focusing more acutely on Jesus, the Jesus of “popular culture,” not Jesus of “the church,” is to be preferred.⁷⁴ Apparently the Jesus of pop culture has more to do with what is found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John than does the Jesus who is proclaimed in most churches. As the authors put it, “In a time of immense cultural change and disconnect with the church, emerging churches retrieved the Jesus of the Gospels but not necessarily the Christ of history.”⁷⁵ Emerging churches nearly altogether divorce the Kingdom from the church, preferring greatly the former to the latter.⁷⁶ In this radical separation of the Kingdom from the church, some emerging church leaders may have reverted back to a mutated strain of “reverse

⁷¹Ryan K. Bolger and Eddie Gibbs, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 47.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³“How did emerging churches come to emphasize the gospel of the kingdom? It began as a change of focus from the Epistles to the Gospels as a way to understand Jesus more profoundly.” Ibid.

⁷⁴Karen Ward, a pastor in Seattle, Wash., tells the authors: “The cultural view ‘gets’ that Jesus was for the marginalized and the oppressed. It is only the church that needs to be trained to look at Jesus again. They took a poll here in my area of Seattle and found that 95 percent of the nonchurched have a favorable view of Jesus, so Jesus is not the problem. It is the church they dislike, because they do not readily see the church living out his teachings.” Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶“Jesus was not a church planter. He created communities that embodied the Torah, that reflected the kingdom of God in their entire way of life. He asked his followers to do the same. Emerging churches seek first the kingdom. They do not seek to start churches per se but to foster communities that embody the kingdom. Whether a community explicitly becomes a church is not the immediate goal. The priority is that the kingdom is expressed. Inherent to kingdom activities is that the community will reflect the local context, and therefore forms vary greatly.” Ibid., 61.

dispensationalism.” That this development comes largely through the direct and indirect influence of Fuller Seminary is remarkable.

Conclusion

As an initial manifestation of the coming Kingdom of Christ, the church has quite a responsibility on her shoulders. However, each Kingdom colony carries out her tasks with joy in, love for, and obedience to her Head, the King, Christ Jesus of Nazareth. Baptist churches, in particular, must realize the full magnitude of the fact that each and every church must contain within her body only those who have entered the Kingdom of God through being born-again, lest anyone show up to the wedding supper of the Lamb dressed unworthily (Matt. 22:11). At that great feast all of the redeemed of all of the ages, from every tribe and tongue and nation and people, will look down to the head of the table and see a King seated there. As he passes the bread and the wine perhaps we will see the scar in his side or the nail-holes in his hands and his feet, from which the precious blood of Christ flowed so that each man may be seated there. And as we continue to bow the knee to this One who alone was able to overcome sin and death, perhaps then we will realize the full meaning behind this community, behind this Kingdom.

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