

4. Here Already and Still to Come

The New Testament speaks of the Jesus Christ happening as already here and still to come. When we stop to think about it, this quality is true of a wide range of our everyday experiences. When we first meet someone, that person becomes here for us, but there is more to come. Every human being is a mystery of such vastness that no first meeting can reveal everything about that person. As we live with someone for a long time, we may become amazed as to how much unexpected “more” is still being revealed. Our tendency to wrap up another human being in our own mental package is never successful for long. Every person retains the ability to rip loose from our packaging and surprise us once again.

Large-scale conditions of the entire planet are also “here already and still to come.” This is true of global warming. It is already here in terms of increasing weird and dangerous weather patterns. And there is more to come. Much more.

The large-scale social conditions of every society also are “here already and still to come.” Democracy is here already, strongly developed in some places and deeply longed for in many more places. Yet democracy may still be in its adolescence with much more to come.

Truth about almost everything has this quality. We know a great deal about the human brain, but a vast mysteriousness persists. Researchers know that there is much more knowledge to come. Human consciousness is an everyday experience for each awake person, yet human consciousness is a deep mystery with much more consciousness of consciousness to come.

The early church spoke of Jesus’ “Kingdom of God” as a happening that was “already here and still to come.” This meant that the Kingdom of Satan (the Reign of Sin) was already ending with its full end still to come. The terminology of the two kingdoms remains cryptic for people today. Nevertheless, within this way of talking are insights that are extremely important for Christian theology, and, yes, with still more insight to come. Here are three clarifications already present in contemporary theologizing:

(1) This two-kingdom drama indicates the communal nature of the Christian revelation. The Kingdom of God happens to persons, but to persons in community with other persons. “Kingdom” is a sociological, not a psychological category. In the context of this thinking, the psychological is viewed as one aspect of the sociological. Most Christians today have become victimized by an “individualistic overemphasis.” It will take some awakening to let the sociological aspect of Christian origins sink in. It takes effort just to notice that becoming a member of the Kingdom that the Jesus Christ revelation reveals means “joining a communion of people.” Secondarily, it means becoming a more authentic person, but even this vision of authentic person includes being a communal being. Many modern writers know that human authenticity includes being-with-others, but Christian theology is still struggling with this topic. The term “Kingdom” may bother us, for social royalty has been opposed by democratic thinking. Kings, queens, and kingdoms can come across today as old fashioned talk. And it is. We can translate “Kingdom of God” as the “Reign of Reality” or the “Community of Authenticity.” Similarly, we can translate “Satan’s Kingdom” as the “Reign of Illusion” or the “Liar’s Establishment” etc.

(2) For the Kingdom of God to be “already here” means the reappearance of the humanity that we essentially are, have always been, and will always be. The coming of the Kingdom is a breaking through of the real me and real you and real us as a victory over the anti-kingdom of estrangement, despair, bondage, and malice. The Kingdom of Satan is a real experience, but it is fragile. It can be undone by the Real. The anti-kingdom or reign of sin is actually nothing but a perversion of the real humanity that

has never gone away, but has been merely suppressed by bad choices made by our ancestors and by us. This dreadful “fall” is real enough in our everyday experience, but it is a fall from something that has not gone away, is currently returning, and will come in its fullness, for it is the Real. In other words, the Real has already won, is winning, and will win over the unreal. To have hope for a coming Kingdom of Realism among humans is a sociologically and psychologically realistic hope, because this hoped-for Kingdom already is, has always been, and always will be who we humans truly are. In the end, Reality always wins over unreality. In fact, even now all our unreality is dependent upon Reality for the fragile existence that unreality has.

(3) Thirdly, we who have received the “grace” to dip into the coming Kingdom of Reality, have the responsibility to build new Kingdom-forms of Life here on Earth in our space-time coordinate, and do so both psychologically and sociologically. Grace can happen now, for this Kingdom is already here and its breakthrough into our living present takes no time at all to take place. Sin, though strong, is fragile. Sin is “nothing” compared to the power of the already here and coming Kingdom. But the flesh and blood manifestation of that “already here and still coming Kingdom” takes time to emerge and become manifest in flesh and blood realization in our psychological and sociological living here on Earth. This is a deep paradox of two seemingly contradictory truths: (a) the Kingdom is created by God, not humans; and (b) the Kingdom is built on Earth by human beings for whom the Kingdom has already come in embryo. The Kingdom’s existence is not “up to us.” Nevertheless, the manifestation of the Kingdom here on Earth is “up to us.” This “up to us” does not mean a greedy passion to impose our own beloved ideals; it means a *surrender by us to realism* (i.e. to Reality, to God in the sense outlined in these essays).

Instantaneous Spirit and Temporal Patience

We surrender to the Kingdom by witnessing to what has happened to us and what can happen instantaneously to anyone else who is aware enough and willing enough to allow this surrender to happen to them. And we surrender to the Kingdom by thinking through the implications of this surrendered life for envisioning the well-being of entire human societies, and assuming responsibility for designing those fresh designs and creating the strategies for moving toward those fresh designs from wherever we are in current social existing. This justice building is an ongoing, never finished, permanent revolution of social life. This permanent quest for justice is a manifestation of the Kingdom here on Earth within our space-time coordinate of influence. We also surrender to the Kingdom by designing fresh designs for the well being of our own being and that of our companions in realistic living. This includes moving strategically, step-by-step, toward daily, weekly, yearly manifestation of effective nurture designs for our own person and for that of our companions. Such community building is also a permanent revolution.

Both psychological and sociological manifestations take time. We have to be patient with the slowness of our own psyche and our own society to change toward greater realism. At the same time, our participation in the coming Kingdom takes no time at all. Becoming a member of the “already here and still coming Kingdom of God” is instantaneous and remains instantaneous for our whole life. The coming of the Kingdom requires nothing at all but our surrender to its coming. It is entirely the gift of God, we contribute nothing to its coming except our own instantaneous surrender to its instantaneous coming. Our contribution in life is not to the Kingdom’s coming, but to the Kingdom’s manifestation in flesh and blood living within the time-bound slow-changing patterns of our own psyche and society.

The theological image of “already here and still to come” teaches us *patience*. I

would be amiss to expect my psyche to be corrected of its ineffective functioning in one weekend course. The Texas political situation is not going to be positively transformed in one election cycle. In all things manifest in temporal history, patience is required.

At the same time, the theological image of “already here and still to come” teaches us impatience or *urgency*. I and everyone I know or will ever know can enter the Kingdom now, instantaneously. No waiting is needed. Now is the time, the only time, to enter the Kingdom. Waiting for some imagined “readiness” is rejecting the Kingdom. Postponement is rejecting the Kingdom. Postponing is just continuing in the kingdom of despair, bondage, and malice. If you have a broken bone, a dysfunctional personality, or live in a tragic society, you will need to be patient within a significant time period for healing those temporal conditions. But in the case of the Kingdom’s coming, this takes place now, instantaneously. It takes no time to surrender to the process of the Reality in which you already live.

All your past, present, and future fallenness is forgiven. Reality accepts you home to realism right now. And the realistic righteousness that constitutes the Kingdom of God is already complete, already here, and is being given to you instantaneously, not parceled out over time. All that is required of you and of me to enjoy this righteousness is an unconditional surrender to the Reality that accepts us now for complete realism.

What stops me? I do! What stops you? You do! What stops you is the “you” that you think you are—a you that you mistakenly want to continue being. Nothing else stops you from unconditionally surrendering to who you really are. A surrender to realism is a courageous step. It takes you through your experience of despairing over who you thought you were, turning that fabricated self loose, and allowing the true self to flow. The righteousness being given to you right now is freedom from that old self, freedom for freedom itself, freedom to choose fresh options. The freedom possibility is now being given to you to pick up one foot and place it down on the path of realism, then to pick up the other foot and place it down following the first foot, and so on. Now is the time of “Yes” to Reality, and “No” to unreality. Reality supports you in this. Supports you now—instantaneously. Pick up. Live.

Tomorrow will provide new challenges for the realistic living of this life, but the dynamic will be the same: pick up your old bed of sloth, postponement, and meanness, and drop those fabrications in some trash-can along the way of your “Yes” to Reality. The Kingdom of Reality has already come and is still coming. You and I can go with it, now, instantaneously, no wait is necessary.

Looking Again at the Resurrection of Jesus

Many people have had difficulty believing that the Biblical stories about resurrection have anything to do with our being resurrected, so the following story that Luke tells in chapter 24 is most helpful in revealing the contemporary and personal nature of resurrection. We read here of two disciples who have a resurrection experience. After the crucifixion they leave Jerusalem on a seven-mile walk to the village of Emmaus. Jesus is walking with them, but they do not recognize him. Here is my interpretation of this line in this story: Our profound humanness is always walking with all of us, even though we do not recognize it. Jesus (profound humanness) speaks to them:

“What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?” They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas replied, “You must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard all the things that have happened there recently.” “What things?” asked Jesus. “Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man—a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God’s eyes as well as the people’s. Haven’t you heard how our chief priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we were hoping he was the one

who was to come and set Israel free. (24:17-21)

That last sentence is surely one of the strongest expressions of despair in the whole of human literature. The story does not say exactly what these two disciples were expecting, but clearly the crucifixion of Jesus was not it. And clearly they did not want to follow any longer such a risky and seemingly useless life. They were fleeing from the city of death in which their hopes had been totally dashed. If we wish to personally feel this part of the story, we might try to remember times in which our hopeful expectations turned out to be completely out of touch with reality. Then in Luke's story, Jesus provides some theological education:

"Aren't you failing to understand, and slow to believe in all that the prophets have said? Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find his glory." (24:26)

I take this to mean that all prophetic persons, all tellers of truth to their deluded times, suffer the rejection and hostility of the deluded. When they arrive at Emmaus, these two disciples sit down to eat supper with this stranger (Jesus), but they still do not recognize who he is.

Then it happened! While he was sitting at table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. (24:30-31)

So what happened? They got a new view of how Jesus was the Messiah. They got it instantaneously. The horrific event of losing their mentor in such a cruel, stupid, and tragic way was as it should be. This is what a Messiah looks like. This is what happens to authentic persons under the conditions of our actual world. Was it not always so? Understanding the Christ in that way proved to be a transformative vision. They had just walked seven miles before supper, and before they even finished eating, they rose from the table and walked seven miles back to the city of death, to the tomb of their hopes that Jerusalem had become for them. The despairing events they had fled became the glory they returned to live. This transformation is the resurrection!

Until this sort of thing happens in your or my internal life, we have not experienced the resurrection. It remains an enigma at best, and more likely a superstition that we have to dismiss. So here is the next personal question: "Have you, have I experienced resurrection in a manner that it is not just accepting a belief that someone told me to believe, but an event that has actually happened to me, an event that has affected my whole body, including my legs and feet so that they could walk seven miles back to the "worst" experiences of my life and find them good?" Is that word "good" too much? Yes, it is certainly extremely much, for this transformation is an Infinite shift. So let us face that question in all its radicality: When has some truly grim, delusion-smashing Friday become Good Friday for you or me? When have I or you faced this option of instantaneous surrender to the full realism of flinging my life and my death into the fray of history's real drama? This is the resurrection. It could happen to you or anyone now, today, this instant. And whatever has already happened, there is more to come.

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