The Kingdom of God

Defining and explaining the kingdom of God can be an extremely difficult task. Some people see the kingdom of God as being a part of the future, when Christ returns in glory. But, more recently, another view of the kingdom of God has appeared in society. It is proposed that the truest version of the kingdom is wherever God reigns, wherever his presence is felt, wherever he is declared king. But mere words sometimes are not enough to usher in the kingdom of God, to truly allow him to reign. As Heuertz explains in his book *A Simple Spirituality*, those who proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord need to humble themselves, slaying the giants of pride and arrogance, giving him spiritual authority in their lives (2008, 13-41). They need to be in Christian community, slaying the giants of individualism and independence, restoring social relationships to the authority of Christ. The practice of simplicity is needed to slay the giants of intemperance and excess, returning economic rule to Christ the king. Finally, the people of God need to practice submission in order to slay the forces of power and control, and bring political authority to the kingdom of God. When God is given these places in the lives of his people the kingdom’s defining characteristic, the *shalom* of God and the human flourishing it brings, is brought to pass.

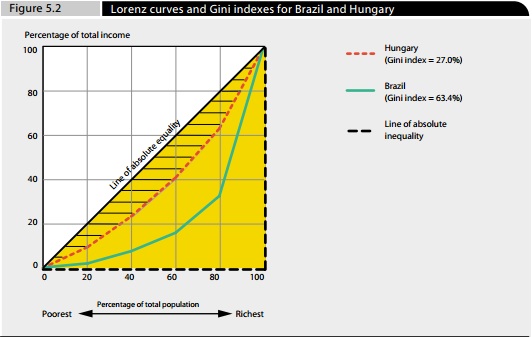
 The first area of humanity that God’s kingdom addresses is the spiritual world. While most would assume this aspect of the kingdom of God, it is imperative that we understand how completely God’s rule in the human heart changes things. The kingdom of God brings a spiritual change that renders people’s souls anchored to the love of Christ and frees them from personal sin and bondage. This compels them to take part in proclaiming the power of God and launches them into other areas ofcommunity transformation**.** Viv Grigg in *Cry of the Urban Poor* gives a compelling way that this soul transformation takes place. His four seasons of growth, security, commitment, quality, and calling, takes people through the process of letting go of their sin and allowing their spirit to rest securely in the love of Christ (2005, 165-184). They find security in God, in the body of Christ, and with themselves. Commitment to the body and to Christ follows as a time of testing and trail ensues. Then follows a season of quality of ministry where people mature in their faith, and in ministry. Finally, they move into a phase of naming and refining their gifts. This process then compels them to share the love they have found with others, bringing them also to a saving knowledge of God. Leroy Eims gives another example of a discipleship process in *The Lost Art of Discipleship* that guides people through a surrender of their soul to Christ (1978, 59-72). This process recognizes the needs of a person at the beginning of their faith and then at each stage of growth as they go deeper in God. This process is most striking because it does have a piece that emphasizes right living, a turning from sin, even if they don’t entirely comprehend initially why these sins are harmful to them. A crucial part of the conversion and discipleship process is repentance, a turning from that which does not glorify God, from their sin. This is best done in a community that can encourage and support a person through the process. As they go through this, they are moved to share their experiences with others. No matter what, communities and individuals of Christ should never forget their responsibility to share Christ’s love with other people. This will often be done with words; however, this is not the only way. While the West has failed to engage in the other forms of proclaiming the truth, they are still very much a reality of how God will be known throughout the world. Evangelism needs to be done through the spoken word. But that cannot be the only way in which it is done. The kingdom of God affects all areas of life, not just the spiritual world. *Shalom* is about the flourishing of human beings. People cannot be expected to flourish in social, political, and economic ways if the kingdom of God is not given a place in those areas of their lives. The transformed soul will recognize this need in their lives, especially those from impoverished situations, and look to the kingdom of God for freedom in every area, not just spirituality.

Taken from Kahlen Limjoco’s Instagram

Socially, the Lord declares people set back into right relationships with other people. Sometimes it happens through round about ways, but surrendering everything to Christ includes the ways in which people interact with one another. The kingdom of God declares freedom from social problems likes AIDS and a lack of educations through combatting personal sin. For example, when a father stops spending all of his money on alcohol, he is then able to pay the fees for his children to attend school. A woman stops prostituting herself, thus preventing the acquisition of further sexually transmitted diseases. However, restoring this area of life to the way God intended it to be is often far easier said than done. Often there is extreme fear, suspicion and apathy that taint the way the poor interact with the world around them (Grigg, 2004, 212-220). The following story illustrates one of the mindsets and cultural aspects that have to be overcome in restoring relationships to the way the Creator intends them to be:

An older gentleman at the bus stop talks to the young women waiting for the bus. While he does not appear homeless, he definitely isn’t doing well. She quickly realizes his fatalist attitude. “You born alone, you die alone. I been alone for 27 years. You born poor, you die poor. Rich man drive car, poor man take bus,” he says to her in what she believes to be an Armenian accent. There was so much anger and hurt in his eyes. She wanted to engage him, but knew she’d not have more than a short bus ride with him. What hope was there for this man that would allow him to trust people? What of Christ would allow him to believe the world and people could function differently?

As Grigg points out in his chapter on “Citywide Transforming Revival” in *The Spirit of Christ and the Postmodern City*, social transformation is likely only to follow spiritual revival and renewal (2009, 175-184). A cities return to the spiritual authority of Christ can causes social transformation, though it will not necessarily happen, Grigg states. Further, he concludes that one evidence of this happening would be a wide spread grief or anger whenever biblical ethics are violated in the public arena. Inversely, there is an outpouring of grace and forgiveness that heals wounds and divisions within a society, according to Sandford in *Healing the Wounded Spirit* (1985, 3-26). This aids in the restoration of relationships between people of all levels of society. A place for grief, anger, mourning, and repentance is needed to recognize the depravity of what has happened and been broken, but it cannot stop there. After the hearts of individuals and groups of society have been humbled, those who have been wronged need to extend the grace and forgiveness they have received from God to those who have wronged them. People become restored to each other. Once this happens, economic and political transformations have space to occur, extending the rule of the kingdom to these arenas of life.

 A submission to the kingdom in economic principles would create a different economic order entirely, causing the citizens of the kingdom to view and interact with money and business in a completely counter-cultural way.However, it can often be difficult to create economic change among the poor because they have no excess cash flow with only enough to survive day by day (Grigg, 2004, 212-220). Further, for many, the organization and forethought required to manage money differently than they are used too is very difficult. In addition to this difficulty, there is also the question that many face about what kingdom economics looks like. Which is better, a place of thriving creativity and innovation, though with a high income disparity, or a lower disparity of wealth and thus a higher standard of living for the poorest in society? The World Bank uses the Lorenz curve to describe the income inequality between countries. “The deeper a country's Lorenz curve, the less equal its income distribution” (Soubbotina, 2000, 28). At the time the graph represents, Brazil’s market was growing enormously, containing much untapped potential. There was impressive room for continued growth. However, the poor were living in deeper poverty than those in Hungary. What should Christians view as the common good for all that should be pursued? Which would allow for greater *shalom* and human flourishing? What would the kingdom of God look like economically? Clive and Clara Beed, in “Assisting the Poor to Work: A Biblical Interpretation,” would argue that it needs to look like cooperative economics (2010. 13-37). Within a poor community this could mean the people coming together with what little they have to support each person in their time to create their own business. They are using their own money, are accountable to a group for repaying the loan (interest free), and have a group with which to discuss business ideas and garner advice. This idea works well for those with entrepreneurial talents; unfortunately, not everyone has such abilities (Grigg, Course lecture in TUL500, Fall 2012). What is an economic solution for these people? Those in the upper and middle classes can provide a kingdom honoring solution. Clive and Clara Beed also suggest that those who own their own business and employ others choose to employ the poor in society (2010, 13-37). God created work as a part of his solution to poverty, thus, those who declare him king should create work for those in desperate poverty. But it is more than simply paying your workers a livable wage. They suggest that business owners create cooperative businesses with all of their employees. Then each person is given a piece of ownership in the company, and has a personal stake in the success of their job. This kind of employment is kingdom employment, reflecting the principles of the year of Jubilee expressed in Leviticus 25. Further, in relation to the way an individual handles their money, scripture seems to call all those who recognize Christ as Lord and King to a life of economic and material simplicity (Bellingham, 1987, Study 14). Money that is not required for the needs of an individual should be used to uplift those who are in times of economic difficulty, as 2 Corinthians 8: 14 declares, “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,” (NIV). This idea could be expounded upon much further, but the intention of this paper is to give only a brief overview of how the kingdom of God impacts economic life.

Take from *Beyond Economic* Growth, by the World Bank, 28.

The final aspect of society that the kingdom of God affects is the political realm. By calling Christ king there are certain political implications that cannot be escaped. Thus, the kingdom of God addresses the political injustices present in every situation, declaring freedom from oppression and justice for all wrongs done. This is an area close to God’s heart, for he speaks of justice 300 times in the Old Testament alone (Bellingham, 1987, Study 6). The primary thing to be addressed in this area is the oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful. The desire to pile up wealth and power is seen as the primary cause of oppression in the bible, even when it is the marginalized oppressing the marginalized (Bellingham, 1987, Study 6). In today’s society this is often displayed when the poor are involuntarily excluded from economic and social participation simply because they don’t have the required resources. The church is called to participate in rectifying such oppressive situations, so as to allow for the whole flourishing of each person within a society (Hanks, 1983, 43-60). However, this will look different in every circumstance, and may be far more convoluted than any would hope or be able to make sense of. There are few key building blocks to seeing political justice and sustained advocacy throughout a city. First, it is important to have a strong theological core behind the work being done. This allows for vision to be cast with more fortitude than without one (Grigg, 2010, 174). Second, there must be adequate social analysis done, so that communication is done in a way that speaks to the major components of culture. Finally, it is often necessary to communicate with the broader society in secular language in order to attain public validation (Grigg, 2010, 163-174). These three things must be understood and applied to any situation of advocacy being done. There are any number of circumstances that this might need to be done in, most commonly, advocating for land rights for the dispossessed is a crucial first step. However, it could be in the areas of sanitation, paved roads, public health availability, or anything the poor are frequently denied access to for no reason other than their current lack of resources.

When life, in its entirety, is surrendered to God, there develops holiness among each person. Thus, when this happens at a community level, when a group of individuals comes together and surrenders not only their personal lives but how they as a group interact within society, community transformation happens. This is the kingdom of God coming to reign among men. Spiritually this looks like people turning from their sin and growing in their faith in God. As they turn from sin, social relationships are transformed to better reflect the way God intended for humans to relate to each other. When people are relating to each other through the blood of Jesus, they seek the welfare of the city they are in, the way that Jeremiah 29:7 compels the Israelites to do when they are exiled. This happens through economic change, uplift among the poor and different business strategies and goals among the upper and middle classes. Finally, it affects the way that justice is practiced. A movement of justice needs to be grounded in theology to be sustainable, but should be expressed in secular language to garner the support of all of society. The whole of life, individual and corporate, is to be tied to the kingdom of God. Only there will the greatest good be found for all.

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