

## **Covenant and Kingdom: A Theological Quest**

No one will deny that in the Scriptures two realities of faith found in its text are (i) Covenant, and (ii) Kingdom. Even the most apt theologians and scholars are not always easy with their understanding of these two and of their relationship. Are they in juxtaposition, that is, side by side? Does one cover the other? Are they conterminal? What does each mean to the other, and each mean in the light of the other? Here is a happy research excursion for the student or master of the Scriptures. How would we go about first defining and then relating them—the Covenant and the Kingdom?

A working definition of the Kingdom of God could be ‘The reign and rule of God’, but that, though correct, has so many connotations that it does not easily come into acceptance let alone understanding. As to the Covenant of God, what description and what working knowledge can apply? Call it an agreement between God and Man and you fall into the pit of construing it as a contract between two with all its legal connotations. Contract replaces communion. Call it unilateral and you are only comparing it with the grace-less bilateral arrangement. Unilateral is not, then, a good enough term, but just a description which acts as a marker, marking it off from bilateralism. Not even God imposes: He creates relational communion and gives it as a gift. Is it, then, that we have to talk about union and communion in regard to Divine and human relationships? Is there nothing to guard us against God, or keep our self-respect from being damaged by such a Covenantal relationship?

Ask yourself, ‘When was God first—so to speak—the God of Covenant? When was He first the King? Was He always the Covenant God? Was He this before creation, Covenant God before He created, King when He was Father, and Father when King? Did His action of creation ensure creation is innately covenantal for ever? If so, was He this by grace design, or was it just the way He ever was? Is the Trinity constituted of God in innate covenantal relationships—the Persons each One with the Others—or is there a dynamic of love present which makes the unity? Would this not make a Quaternity, Love being the most powerful? Could there be—would there have to be—a hierarchy of love, with the Father Himself being love (I John 4:8,16), and the Son the Son of that (His) love—Colossians 1:13—and the Spirit the Spirit of love, the Son having love in eternal generation, and the Spirit in the eternal process from the Father and the Son? Is, then, the Trinity not the Divine Flatland, the joy of the joyless levellers?’

When you have the answer to these questions ask further: ‘Is God the Covenant God, covenantal prior to creation, so that creation is posterior to Covenant? If this is so—

creation follows Covenant—then is not Covenant innate to creation, and even to Kingdom? Indeed is creation not innately covenantal? Is creation for the purpose of being itself, or being itself for the matter of Covenant and even Kingdom?’

If we want to know more of what Covenant is innately, then could we not conclude that God’s Covenant is that relational bond of God and Man which God determined and executed—through creation—by love? That it was not given by grace in the sense that grace is concerned with recovery and restoration, and in one sense is not operative until the clear need for it arises, that is, the Fall? Grace is not required where there is innocency. God as love creates, and though His love certainly has grace in view for the exigency of a fall, yet the gift nature of creation means that it comes from total love. We may think of grace as innate to love, but in doing so we must not think of it as a prop to the pure gift of creation, as though creation has some fault line on which it may shatter.

Would it be reasonable to conclude that God’s Covenant is innate to His nature, and that His love relationship which bonds Man to Himself is that Covenant? With the advent of the Fall, then, that does love not change? Does Man’s attitude to God mean he rejects being (mandatory) Covenant partner with God and will use the resources of his being God’s image—the moral resources of that image—to fulfil his own plan for himself and creation Is it right to conclude that Covenant is God’s action to bind Man to Himself, and that rebellion is Man’s rejection of the proper ontological relationship by which God’s eternal purposes are fulfilled?

Having gotten some view of Covenant, do we then proceed to the idea of the Kingdom of God? Does Covenant tell us that this King is not aloof from His subjects, and that His reign is carried on in dialogue with Man whom He rules and whom He loves? Is there a relational dialectic? In this sense can a kingdom be without a covenant? Would God’s reigning then never have been dictatorial or impersonally detached? Is it that the King loves His subjects? Is the Kingdom, then, not territorial, and the subjects not contained within certain perimeters? Can the Kingdom of God be static, a culture to be observed and defended? What do we mean by saying ‘The Kingdom *of* God’ and ‘the Kingdom *of* Heaven’? If the immoral cannot enter this Kingdom, then who is moral and how does this one become thus?’

Are these questions worthy of consideration? Can we pursue them via further questioning? Does Kingship arise primarily from ‘Author Copyright’ or is God’s Being Royal by nature of His case? What paradigm do we have for ‘Royal’? What is the heart of God’s Kingdom authority? Dare we begin with human analogies? Does God break through by means of a special action—revelation—the unfolding of a mystery which we insist on making a difficult puzzle, worthy of our solving by our mighty minds? Might Kingship be that of Divine Fatherhood for which there is no human parallel, but a loving,

creating, redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting Mind and Heart which determines creation shall occur, Man shall be the image of the Divine, and that the moral nature and suffering of God will pursue it through every twist and turn of evil and good, and finally capture it on a Cross set against a hill variously called Golgotha and Calvary?

Is Covenant the Divine-human bond initiated by the Father-King so that His people may be with Him in every happening and exigency? Is the Kingdom that moral power of the King which would repel an evil thing from trying to enter it, yet welcome in the worst of sinners by grace, which is Divine love acting itself out in the horrendous suffering of the Son as he becomes as the muck-heap of the earth? Is this Father's Son so disfigured by human evil that he appears to be that very distortion of true moral form and innocence, so that nothing seems true any more and all the world's the field for cynicism?

Could it be that out of Covenant love the Kingdom arises as it crushes universal evil and sin for ever more, and destroys all the works of the Devil so that only purity can anymore exist anywhere?

I would like to be close to your mind and hear the throb of your heart as you take up these questions of Covenant and Kingdom, for I discern that they are the primary questions we must ask as men and women of faith, as sons of the Covenant, and children and members of the Kingdom of God.

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