



"Meditate  
upon these things;  
give thyself  
wholly to them;  
that thy profiting  
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

---

Journal  
of  
Theology

**Church of the Lutheran Confession**

---

VOLUME III

OCTOBER 1963

NUMBER 4

# The Meaning of

## *BASILEIA*

### in the New Testament

When our *Journal* published its translation of an article by John Schaller on "The Kingdom of God" (*Das Reich Gottes; Quartalschrift*, April 1918), questions were raised and discussion followed which, we are sure, would have been welcomed by the original author and which we consider a most wholesome sign of interest. The convention essay appearing here is part of this discussion. It is offered here not as a final word on the subject, but to stimulate further thought and to facilitate further discussion at the pastoral conferences to which it has been referred by the convention. --Ed.

The assignment of an essay on the meaning of the Greek word *BASILEIA* had its origin in the CLC convention at Manchester, Wisconsin, a year ago. That convention dealt with a memorial in which Pastor Paul G. Koch questioned a number of statements occurring in a translation of Prof. John Schaller's essay on "The Kingdom of God" which appeared in the *JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY*, Vol II, No. 1, Feb. 1962. The four statements questioned were the following:

Page 20, bottom: "...we come to realize that the entering into the kingdom of God does not specifically signify the process by which the sinner becomes a child of God. To enter into the kingdom of God does not mean to be converted or regenerated."

Page 21, middle: "The creative act by which God transports a sinner out of death into life must have preceded the state of his being in the kingdom in the sense of the passage here under consideration."

Page 22, top: "To be in God's kingdom, therefore, means nothing else than this: that through God's gracious ruling one knows that one is under this rule of grace. In keeping with God's purpose that is the normal state of those who have entered His kingdom."

Page 24, bottom: "Whoever reaches for rank and honors in the kingdom of heaven and desires to be preferred above others is not yet therein. In the kingdom of heaven, under the Gospel rule of God, such thoughts simply do not arise. Whoever is under the sway of the Gospel rejoices in it as a child which is well aware of its weakness and inadequacy and therefore lays no claim to 'greatness.'"

The floor committee dealing with this memorial decided that "further clarification of the *Journal of Theology* essay is needed in order to give answer to question #6 of the Koch memorial," and therefore resolved "that a study of the essay in question be assigned for presentation to the next convention of the CLC, such study to give special regard to point #6 of the Koch memorial."

The same Committee on Doctrine studied Pastor Koch's essay on *THE MEANING OF EKKLESIA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*, and found itself in agreement with the substance of the essay with two exceptions. One was the statement: "In this latter usage *basileia* is a synonym of *ekkllesia* and denotes in almost every instance the Communion of Saints." The convention therefore also resolved "that an essay be assigned now for presentation at the next convention of the CLC re the meaning of *basileia*, such study also to give special consideration to point 1 above," (Proceedings, 1962, p.21 & 22).

President Albrecht will bear out that the present essayist had no inclination whatsoever to intrude upon this dispute, and that, in fact, every plausible excuse was proffered to evade the assignment. A "critical study" of the Schaller work has been requested. I surely do not relish the role of undertaking such a study of the work of an author for whom I have not only very great respect as a theologian but also hold high esteem as a grandfather. Since the assignment had been made, however, I did not wish to refuse making an exegetical study of the pertinent scripture passages and presenting my understanding of their meaning. I can only pray that the fruits of the study will contribute toward a solution of the controversy, and not add to the confusion.

The basic issue here appears to be whether the N. T. phrase "Kingdom of God" in its true sense refers only to the "eternal and continuous rule-activity of the almighty God,"<sup>1</sup> as Prof. Schaller holds, or whether the concept can also "denote the believers as the subjects of Jesus' Kingdom" and thus include the Church, as Pastor Koch contends.<sup>2</sup>

All of the four passages questioned in the Schaller essay are logical extensions of that writer's basic premise that essentially the expression "Kingdom of God" means only the gracious ruling of God through the Gospel, and does not, in its proper sense include the believers as subjects of that rule. This position is described by the author most clearly in these words (my emphasis):

"Thus we arrive at the proposition that the expression 'kingdom of God,' when employed by Scripture in its proper sense, appears exclusively as a designation for the gracious creating, working, ruling of God by means of the Gospel. "<sup>3</sup>

An examination of the four contested passages will show that they are indeed based on the basic premise quoted above, and stand or fall with it.

Since the sainted professor held that the "kingdom of God" refers only to God's royal activity or rule, and not to the Church, it followed naturally that "to enter the kingdom of God" cannot be the same as becoming a member of the Holy Christian Church by conversion. So he says:

"We come to realize that the entering into the kingdom of God does not specifically signify the process by which the sinner becomes a child of God. To enter into the kingdom of God does not mean to be converted or regenerated."<sup>4</sup>

By this he does not wish to be misunderstood as saying "that conversion and regeneration have nothing to do with the entering into the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> He quotes Jesus' words to Nicodemus "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" ... "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," (John 3:3, 5), and concedes that this indicates a relationship between regeneration and entering the kingdom of God, but holds that it is a relationship of cause and effect, that being converted is not the same as entering the kingdom of God, but is the cause of entering it.<sup>5</sup> Then follows the second controverted passage:

"The creative act by which God transports a sinner out of death into life must have preceded the state of his being in the kingdom in the sense of the passage here under consideration."<sup>5</sup>

Since according to Prof. Schaller's basic premise the kingdom of God does not essentially include the Church, "entering the kingdom" or "being in the kingdom" cannot mean the same as entering or being in Christ's Church. What then is meant by the many passages that speak of entering the kingdom of God? The professor's conclusion is summarized in the next passage questioned in the Koch memorial:

"To be in God's kingdom, therefore, means nothing else than this: that through God's gracious ruling one knows that one is under this rule of Grace. In keeping with God's purpose that is the normal state of those who have entered His kingdom; they know and by faith sense that that they dwell under the gracious Basileia of God and Christ."<sup>6</sup>

The fourth and last passage in question occurs when Prof. Schaller is discussing the dispute among the disciples as to which should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus at that time "called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 18:1-4. In this connection Schaller states (my emphasis):

"Whosoever reaches for rank and honors in the kingdom of heaven and desires to be preferred above others is not yet therein. In the kingdom of heaven, under the Gospel rule of God, such thoughts simply do not arise. Whoever is under the sway of the Gospel rejoices in it as a child which is well aware of its weakness and inadequacy and therefore lays no claim to 'greatness.'"<sup>7</sup>

This statement would be absurd if the writer were thinking of the kingdom of God as denoting the Church, for he had sufficient experience in the Church to be fully aware of how easily the desire for rank and honors actually arises among its members. John Schaller was not by these words trying to read the quarreling disciples out of the Holy Christian Church. He was not trying to say that you cannot be a Christian if you have ever detected such vainglorious ambition in your heart. We must remember his basic premise, that the expression kingdom of God does not in its proper sense mean the Church at all, but only God's gracious

rule through the Gospel. The line of thought seems to be this: The kingdom of God equals His gracious rule through the Gospel. To be in the kingdom simply means to be consciously aware that one is under this gracious rule. Now the author points out that if one is puffed up with pride in one's personal accomplishments and harbors grandiose ambitions, one is rejoicing in oneself, and therefore cannot be at that moment in a state of rejoicing in God's gracious rule. By Schaller's definition he is therefore not in the kingdom of God. Such thoughts do not come from being under God's influence, but indicate that at the moment at least, such a one is under Satan's evil prompting.

Thus we see that all four of the questioned passages from the Schaller essay begin from, and can be understood only in the light of, his basic premise that strictly speaking the believers are not a part of the concept of the kingdom of God as subjects, but that rather, "the expression 'kingdom of God,' when employed by Scripture in its proper sense, appears exclusively as a designation for the gracious creating, working, ruling of God by means of the Gospel."<sup>3</sup> The question then arises, is this premise sound? Is this a correct definition of the kingdom of God? Can it be supported from Scripture? Or can it be said that there are instances in the N. T. when "*basileia* is a synonym of *ekklesia* and denotes... the Communion of Saints" as Pastor Koch holds? Just what, then, is the meaning of *BASILEIA* in the New Testament?

### I. The Problem of Definition

A definition is by no means simple to arrive at. Just before Christ's ascension His closest followers asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). We easily feel slightly superior to them because they may have been still clinging to their old Jewish hopes that the kingdom of God would be a material, earthly restoration of David's kingdom, but with bigger armies, better

chariots, more extensive boundaries, and an even more glorious King. We perhaps wonder how it was possible that at that late date the disciples could still fail to understand that the promised kingdom was entirely spiritual in nature. But we should begin to soften in our judgment of them when we stop to consider how much of Christendom to this very day doggedly holds to the same misconception! Many still think of the kingdom of God as a material entity that needs some friendly lobbyists in Congress. How many are not still convinced that they are helping the kingdom of God come in its full glory by urging laws to keep business establishments closed on Sundays, by prodding the police to enforce anti-gambling ordinances, or by getting arrested in desegregation demonstrations? Is this basically different from the mistaken view that the disciples held? Any remaining condescension we might tend to feel toward them for their lack of clarity regarding the concept of the kingdom of God is likely to seep away entirely when we ourselves attempt a precise definition. It is not easy. Those who can see quite clearly what the kingdom of God is not, still have real problems to define just exactly what it is. Many are the scholars who look far less scholarly after a discussion of the concept than they did before. Almost every school of theological thought has at or near its heart its own individual understanding of the phrase.<sup>8</sup> One can understand what led Albert Williams in his "Key Words of the Bible" to speak of "the hopelessness of defining the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>9</sup>

Our minds, trained as they are in the thought patterns of Aristotelian logic, crave short, precise definitions. But nowhere in Scripture is any effort made to satisfy that desire with a complete analytical definitions of what constitutes the kingdom of God. The word *BASILEIA* occurs some 163 times in the New Testament. Very frequently one finds phrases that lead one to hope a nice tidy definition will follow: E. g., "Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven..." (Luke 13:20f); "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field... like unto a net, that was cast into



the sea. . ." (Matthew 13:44, 47); "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," (Romans 14:17); etc. Instead of a comprehensive definition however, one finds each time that one is being given but a single aspect of the whole, as if the kingdom of God is such a vast concept that it can be portrayed only piece by piece.

But let us be neither surprised nor disappointed if some of Scriptures' loftiest concepts cannot be condensed to a capsule form small enough for our finite minds to absorb at one swallow. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts," (Isaiah 55:8-9). Let God be God! The Holy Spirit simply finds this to be the best method of presenting the vast, supernatural idea of God's Kingdom to human minds: bit by little bit. The grander the diamond, the more will the connoisseur feel the need of examining it facet by facet. Those of you who attended Seattle's World Fair last summer and took a day out to drive around near-by Mt. Rainier found that it is quite impossible to do justice to such a magnificent mountain with one picture. You more likely used the better part of a roll of film, finding an entirely different scene with each new angle, light condition, or time of day. Even with the snap by snap method, you did not get nearly all of the grandeur. Nor does the Bible exhaust the subject of God's Kingdom. But if we add together the individual descriptions that are given, we do learn all we now need to know about it.

To begin, we might point out that for our present purpose, there is no significant difference between Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ. Each portrays the same concept from a different perspective. And there is even less difference between Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven. The latter two terms are used interchangeably, apparently according to the personal preference of the writers.<sup>11</sup> (Kingdom of heaven is

found exclusively in Matthew, where it is used 33 times, while Kingdom of God occurs only 4 times.)

The common reference in our day to a three-fold Kingdom of Christ, with distinctions between the Kingdom of Power, the Kingdom of Grace, and the Kingdom of Glory, will not be of much help to us in trying to learn the precise meaning of BASILEIA in the N. T., since this is a dogmatic distinction not found in the Scriptures. While the division into three concepts has its advantages when instructing our children and perhaps in preaching, it should not be pressed too far. As Prof. Schaller points out, there is inevitable overlapping between the borders of these "kingdoms."<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition to be obtained from God's Word for the expression "Kingdom of God" is in its contrasts with the kingdom of Satan, and again, with the kingdoms of the world. When the Pharisees tried to make Jesus a part of the kingdom of the devil by accusing Him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the Lord showed the clear distinction between those kingdoms: "If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? . . . But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you," (Matthew 12:26-28). What is the Kingdom of God? It is the opposite of Satan's kingdom. Wrap up everything you think of in connection with the Old Evil Foe —his tyrannous, hate-filled rule in the hearts of men, his legions of assistants with their dread, superhuman power carrying out his malevolent purposes throughout the world, his countless throngs of abject slaves bound and trussed with the bands of their own sin, his fiendish plans for their perpetual torment and shame. Now take this whole picture and convert it entirely to its opposite, changing everything from negative to positive, and you have a pretty fair concept of the Kingdom of God.

When Pilate asked whether Jesus were a king, the Lord phrased his brief description of His regime in terms that a

politician like Pilate would understand by contrasting it to earthly governments, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence," (John 18:36). Luther particularly loved to dwell on this sharp contrast between the kingdoms of the world, which are ruled by the sword and are interested only in material matters such as the physical welfare of its citizens, and on the other hand the Kingdom of God, which is ruled by Him through the Gospel and is concerned entirely with spiritual things such as grace, the forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life.<sup>13</sup>

## II. *New Testament Uses of the Term*

Since Scripture does not undertake to present a precise and comprehensive definition of what is meant by *BASILEIA TOU THEOU* and similar expressions, we must turn to a study of the context in which *BASILEIA* is used. It will by no means be possible or necessary for us here to study all or even most of the 163 passages in which the word is found. Those interested in more exhaustive treatments may find them written by abler pens in the Schaller essay under discussion, in Kittel's scholarly 59 page article on the term,<sup>14</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> We shall study particularly those passages that throw some light on the issue before us, namely whether the kingdom of God in its proper sense refers only to the gracious rule of God, or whether it also includes the community of believers, i. e., the Church.

There can be no question that the basic meaning of the noun *BASILEIA* before and during the N. T. period was that of the reign, the royal rule, the kingship, the sovereignty of a king. This is the predominant meaning of the word when used in a general sense by other Greek writers of the period, such as Philo.<sup>16</sup> This is demonstrated extensively by Kittel, who says of *BASILEIA* as used in the N. T.: "As to the general use

of this term, it must be said that the word, which we mostly translate as kingdom, realm, originally means only the being, essence, situation, of a king." But he also adds: "Inevitably an often-found second meaning follows: the dignity of a king shows itself in the territory ruled over by him, in his realm .... In *basileia* both meanings are present. In Revelation 17:12 and 17, 17, the double sense seems to be indissolubly present."<sup>1</sup>

There is particularly one instance in the N. T. where *BASILEIA* can have only the pure meaning of royal rule, *die Koenigsherrschaft*. Strangely enough, Schaller's essay does not refer to this passage, which would support its basic argument. The idea of realm, subjects, or territory is so completely absent in this instance that the K. J. V., which otherwise always translates *BASILEIA* as "kingdom," here finds it impossible to do so. In Rev. 17:18 we read: "The woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." The original Greek says, "...which has the *BASILEIA* over the kings of the earth." (ἔχουσα βασιλείαν) This cannot mean "which has the kingdom over the kings." It can only mean "which has the rule over the kings of the earth. The New English Bible puts it nicely by saying, "that holds sway over the kings..." Another instance where the ruling activity is strongly presented occurs in Revelation 11:15, where we are told that "the *BASILEIA* (singular, not plural as in KJV and Luther) of the world" has come into the possession of our Lord and His Christ. The NEB gives the only possible value to *BASILEIA* here by translating, "The sovereignty of the world has passed to our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

There are altogether seventeen passages where the idea of "sovereignty" is so strong in *BASILEIA* that the NEB or RSV or both translate it as royal power, kingship, reign, sovereignty, or some similar term instead of "kingdom."<sup>18</sup>

We might discuss two more such instances. One wonders what the malefactor was thinking of when he asked: "Lord,

remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Did he picture Christ entering a realm, or heaven? This might seem likely, because Jesus answered, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," (Luke 23:42). But some MSS have an interesting variant reading according to which the thought would not be "when you come into your kingdom," but rather, "when you come in your royal power," (ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ, instead of εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν). The RSV follows this by translating, "remember me when you come in your kingly power."

When Christ was answering Pilate's question as to whether he was a king, He would not have been answering the question very directly if He had been speaking of His realm when He replied: "My kingdom is not of this world." More likely, Jesus was here using the original meaning of BASILEIA. Then His reply becomes a very specific answer to the question: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Answer: "My kingdom is of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world," (John 18:33, 36). And so the RSV has it.

Although there are then numerous instances where BASILEIA in the N. T. has predominantly the original meaning of royal rule or status, it can by no means be said that this is the exclusive meaning of the word. There are also passages where it has little or none of that concept at all, where in fact the meaning is just exactly what we today usually mean by the word kingdom, namely a realm, a territory, with all its natural resources, its inhabitants, and everything that goes with it. Thus when the devil took Jesus "up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" (Mat. 4:8), he was not showing Him anything as intangible as royal activity or rule. He was showing Him the physical empires, together with their gold and silver, their manpower, their treasures and their glories.

One might think at first that Jesus meant "rule" or "reign" when he told the Pharisees that "Every kingdom di-

vided against itself is brought to desolation," since it would indeed make sense to say that every regime divided against itself faces destruction. But the context favors the secondary meaning of "realm," for Jesus immediately adds the illustration, "every city or house divided against itself cannot stand," (Matthew 12:25). Similarly, when Jesus as a sign of the end foretells that kingdom shall struggle against kingdom, he is thinking of realms with their populations and armies as the context "nation shall rise against nation" suggests, (Mat. 24:7). Again, when Herod, pleased with Salome's dance, offered whatsoever she would ask, "unto the half of my kingdom" (Mark 6:23), he was not offering her half of his throne, but anything she might desire, up to the value of half his realm.<sup>35</sup>

We come now to a discussion of the passages which contain the very specific phrases "the Kingdom of God" and "the Kingdom of Heaven." Do these expressions refer exclusively to God's gracious ruling activity through the Gospel, or may they also refer to what we commonly call the "Kingdom of Grace," i. e., the Church? In this connection it is very interesting to note that although the secondary meaning of "realm" is at times so completely absent in BASILEIA that the NEB or RSV in 17 places can safely translate the word with "royal power" or a similar term, they never translate so with the set expressions "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven." Here they always translate "kingdom."<sup>24</sup>

One of the most common uses of this highly significant phrase is found in such passages as Luke 4:43, where Jesus says, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent." This expression or similar ones (preaching the gospel of the kingdom, showing the glad tidings of the kingdom, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, hearing the word of the kingdom, etc.) are found some 18 times in the N. T. In these instances the term Kingdom, or Kingdom of God is used as a grand theme to cover everything that Jesus or the apostles preached. Many were the sermons they preached. They covered a multitude of subjects. Yet the

sum and substance of all the subjects put together was the "Kingdom of God." This, then, is a vast concept! It seems to me this brings us back to the great mountain and the little camera taking many snapshots. "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people," (Matthew 9:35). Are these not all-inclusive terms? Everything He preached about was included in the concept "the gospel of the kingdom." Of course Jesus preached about the sovereignty of the gracious King who is so concerned over His fallen, sin-burdened subjects that He had no peace in eternity until the plan had been devised by which they might be saved. Jesus declared that God's love for the world was so great that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He foretold how this royal Son in His program to redeem His people "must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day," (Mark 8:31). All of this royal activity was a most prominent part of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached. There was more. He also preached about the manner in which He would establish His gracious, saving rule in the hearts of men — not by levying taxes or enlisting soldiers or by brandishing a sword, but by planting the seed of the Word in human hearts, by working and nourishing faith through the holy sacraments which He instituted for that purpose. All of this too, belongs in the grand picture of the Kingdom which Jesus preached. Was this all He taught? Did His sermons not deal also with the objects of all this royal planning and sacrificing and ruling? Did He not have much to say about the community of believers which His gracious Gospel rule would produce? Did He not describe how this fellowship of His followers was to administer the keys to heaven, exercise church discipline, go into all the world preaching the gospel to every creature and administering the sacraments? Did He not devote large portions of His sermons to the life and conduct of His believing disciples? (cp. the Sermon on the

Mount). Is not all this also to be included in the "Kingdom of God" which Jesus and the apostles preached? Here the complete plan of salvation is alluded to. Here is outlined the entire relationship between the Savior-King and His blessed subjects. Here is summed up the whole of God's vast and numerous promises to man. Just as the kingdom of Satan may be thought of as including not only Satan's reign of terror, but also his imprisoned victims, so the Kingdom of God may be thought of as including both His gracious Gospel reign in the hearts of His believers, and also the believers themselves as the objects of that rule, or the subjects of that kingdom.

The concept "Kingdom of God" appears to me to be so large and so rich that the greatest danger lies in trying to restrict it and narrow it down, insisting that it means only this or that. It can happen all too easily that someone is given a particularly deep insight into one facet of this rich term, but then, entranced with the depth and beauty of that one facet, he comes to think that this part must be the whole. Then it becomes necessary to try to force all the other passages dealing with other facets into this one mold. This can result in some very strained interpretations.<sup>19</sup>

In my studies for this assignment, I have found no reason why the expressions Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven as used in Scripture are not wide enough to include both the idea of God's gracious sovereignty through the Gospel, and also the objects of that rule, the believers as citizens of the Kingdom. In some passages the primary thought of royal power at work is the more prominent; in others, this idea is farther in the background, and the concept of "Church" comes out more clearly. The context in each case must decide which is predominant. But both are usually present together.

The "royal rule" side of the picture comes out strikingly in Matthew 12:28: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God,



then the kingdom of God is come unto you." The flight of the overpowered devils was graphic evidence that God's almighty power was now in full operation in that area. Another instance where the idea of "Church" is very far in the background is in Mark 9:1, where Jesus says: "There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." This cannot refer to the second coming of Christ, because Jesus says that some of His hearers would still be alive when it occurred. The event foretold is rather the destruction of Jerusalem in the year year 70 A. D. The Kingdom of God is wherever Jesus the King is present, ruling with His grace and power. When Jesus spoke these words, He was ruling with grace. But He tells the Jews that some of them with their own eyes would "see" His ruling when it is carried out "with power," namely with power to destroy in judgment. The usual working of God's Kingdom is invisible, but in the judgment over the obdurate Jews, the royal activity of Jesus "with power" would clearly be seen.

There are other passages in which the idea of "sovereignty" far outweighs the concept of "Church" in the expression Kingdom of God, but these few may suffice as examples for our purposes. There are many passages where both concepts seem to be almost equally present. There are also a large number of uses where it appears to this writer that the idea of "the gathering of believers" is not only present, but actually overshadows the original thought of "royal activity."

The Schaller essay<sup>20</sup> and Kittel<sup>21</sup> both concede only two passages where *BASILEIA* in the N. T. refers specifically to the Church. They are Revelation 1:6 and the parallel passage Revelation 5:10. (Some manuscripts read "kings" instead of "kingdom" here, but the latter is definitely preferable as being closer to the O. T. quotation from Exodus 19:6). Revelation 1:6 says: Christ "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father," and 5:10 reads: "hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on

earth," (both RSV). Even in these instances where we are told that Jesus has made the believers into a kingdom, Prof. Schaller still retains the "royal activity" concept by viewing these people, not as subjects of the Kingdom, but as "associates in the kingdom... as co-regents who participate in his regal rule."<sup>20</sup>

As much as I hesitate differing with such respected authorities, I must confess that I have been accustomed to see the concept "Church" in many more than the two passages quoted above. E. g., Matthew 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." This difficult passage is probably best taken to refer to the forcefulness of a vigorous faith which grasps the offer of salvation with the sort of violence a drowning man might exhibit in clutching at a life preserver thrown to him. But now Jesus says that the "kingdom of heaven suffereth violence." To me it is difficult to imagine the "ruling activity of God" suffering violence and being taken by storm. But it is not hard to picture the New Jerusalem being thus violently assaulted by desperate sinners who see no other place of safety and salvation.

Jesus promises that in heaven "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," Matthew 13:43. Will they shine in the "rule" of the Father? Why should not these righteous saints be considered as an integral part of the Kingdom of God? Here is a picture of the Kingdom as it will be seen in heaven. And a glorious picture it is! Thousands upon thousands of blood-bought souls, clothed in the robes of Christ's righteousness, and each of them shining with the pure brilliance of the sun!

We must hasten on by taking passages in groups. Six times there is reference to people who are "least" or "greatest" in the Kingdom of God. Would the sense not have been the same if, instead of asking "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven," the disciples had asked "Who is the

greatest in the Church?" Jesus made it clear that the idea of "rule" and "sovereignty" does not play in here at all by setting a child in the midst of them, and saying "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 18:1-4).

That brings us to the most common of all uses of *BASILEIA TOU THEOU*, when Scripture speaks of the Kingdom of God as something that one "enters," "goes into," "sits down in," or is simply "in," (45 instances). Close in thought to this are the 17 passages which speak of the Kingdom of God as a possession which one "inherits," "receives," or that can be thought of as belonging to someone (Theirs is the kingdom... yours is the kingdom... of such is the kingdom, etc.). These passages present no difficulty whatsoever for those of us who find room in the Kingdom of God for the idea of a fellowship of believers. For us, to "enter the kingdom of God" means much the same as to "enter the Holy Christian Church." One enters God's kingdom at the same time and in the same way that one enters the Church of God. This takes place when the Spirit works faith, and when God through the Gospel thus begins to have His way with His gracious rule in our hearts. For us there is no need to draw any fine distinctions between conversion and entering the kingdom. There is agreement that one becomes a member of the Communion of Saints by means of conversion. But did not Jesus also identify conversion, or regeneration, as the means of entrance into the kingdom of God? Hear Him as He tells Nicodemus: "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," (John 3:3, 5).

The element of the "Church" is so strong in many of the passages that speak of entering into or being in the Kingdom of God, that when Scripture paints a picture of the kingdom of God and labels it as such, it could just as easily have given it

the title "Communion of Saints." E. g., Luke 13:28-29: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." Is this not a very graphic picture of the congregation of believers? Is this not the obvious meaning, that lies right on the surface? When interpreting Scripture we have a responsibility to accept the most obvious meaning, unless there are other portions of Scripture that make this impossible. I know of no such passages in Scripture which forbid our thinking of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the other believers as an integral part of the concept kingdom of God. I know of nothing in Scripture that would compel us to divorce the people from the essence of the kingdom and assume that "the expression 'kingdom of God,' when employed by Scripture in its proper sense, appears exclusively as a designation for the gracious creating, working, ruling of God by means of the Gospel,"<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine).

How does the Schaller essay deal with the large class of passages that speak of entering, sitting down in, inheriting the Kingdom of God, etc. ? He writes:

"As Scripture undeniably employs the expression "kingdom" also in a metonymic sense, even our sketchy study of the subject would be inadequate without a review of this derivative manner of expression. . . We are at this point to consider the many passages in which the "kingdom" is described as a place to which people may come, or a possession to which they may attain."<sup>22</sup>

To "enter the kingdom" is then not understood by Prof. Schaller to mean enter the fellowship of believers, but to become consciously aware, to know that one is under God's rule of grace.<sup>6</sup> In this connection we should remember that this use of the expression Kingdom of God which we are now con-

sidering is not a rare or occasional one. It is by far the most common use found in the N.T. The definition of the Kingdom of God that the Schaller essay espouses would require us to believe that Scripture uses this expression far more often in a derived or metonymical sense than in its proper sense. This should give us pause and make us cautious. I can't help wondering whether it is not somewhat arbitrary to declare that such and such a restricted usage of a term presents the only "proper" sense (German: im eigentlichen Sinn), and that all others are metonymical, unless Scripture itself makes this clear. If Scripture does not define the essence of the term, who is to declare with authority where the "proper sense" ceases and the derived sense begins?

The question may arise whether we are not perhaps pressing too insistently upon Prof. Schaller's wording, that the "expression 'kingdom of God,' when employed by Scripture in its proper sense, appears exclusively as a designation for the . . . ruling of God."<sup>3</sup> Is it not perhaps his intention merely to point out that the primary meaning of kingdom of God is the ruling activity of God, while allowing that Scripture also uses the term in a secondary sense to describe the communion of saints? This is not his thought. While conceding that the N.T. uses BASILEIA in a metonymical sense as a "place" or "possession," he insists that Scripture does not use it even in a metonymical manner to designate the Church (with the possible exception of Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 as discussed above). Prof. Schaller writes:

"Before proceeding, we again affirm the fact that Scripture knows nothing of that metonymy so current among us, by which we refer to the creatures to whom God ministers in a special manner as King, and thus specifically to the Church on earth, as His kingdom. No one may say that such a metonymy is not justifiable; it comes to mind readily and so definitely expresses a correct idea that there is little ground for an objection to its use in the casual speech of the Church. But it is not

proper to transport this metonymy into the Scripture and let it determine the meaning of this or that passage. It is not indigenous to Scripture,"<sup>23</sup> (Emphasis mine).

We have already discussed a number of examples where the idea of "gathering of believers" appears strongly in the concept Kingdom of God. I see no reason even for calling this a metonymical use. BASILEIA in its proper sense can include both the ideas of a king's royal rule, and his realm. There is, however, one usage that must be considered figurative. This is found when Scripture uses the expression "Kingdom of God" not only to include God's ruling activity and the believers whom He rules, but goes a step further to apply the term to the entire "visible" church, including not only the true saints in Christ, but also the hypocrites. This is done in the parable of the tares and the wheat, which are allowed to grow up together until the time of the harvest.... Here Scripture itself explains that even though the term "kingdom of heaven" is applied to the entire picture ("The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field," etc. Matthew 13:24) that nevertheless the tares planted by the evil one are not a real part of the kingdom in the proper sense. Jesus explains: "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one," Matthew 13:28. Other instances where the Kingdom of Heaven is used to designate the Church in a wide sense are the parables of the fish net that gathered of every kind, both good and bad (Matthew 13:47ff), and the parable of the marriage feast, (Mat. 22:11f). Luther shows how the word "Church" is used not only in its specific sense by Scripture to designate the assembly of believers, but also in a wider sense to include Christians and hypocrites. The same is true of the expression Kingdom of Heaven. It should not be necessary to repeat the quotation from Luther's exposition of Joel<sup>36</sup> which was quoted in full in Pastor Koch's essay last year.<sup>37</sup> Suffice it to say that Luther here refers to the Kingdom of Heaven parables of the wheat and tares, the fish net, and the marriage

feast as descriptions of the "visible" Church, but shows that the hypocrites are of course not a part of the true Church.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession speaks in the same way regarding these parables: "Christ also speaks of the outward appearance of the Church when He says, Matthew 13:47: 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net,' likewise, to 'ten virgins;' and He teaches that the Church has been covered by a multitude of evils, in order that this stumbling-block may not offend the pious; likewise, in order that we may know that the Word and Sacraments are efficacious even when administered by the wicked. And meanwhile He teaches that these godless men, although they have the fellowship of outward signs, are nevertheless not the true kingdom of Christ and members of Christ; for they are members of the kingdom of the devil."<sup>38</sup> (emphasis mine). The analogy of Scripture (cp. John 3:3, 5) thus compels a figurative understanding of the term Kingdom of Heaven in these parables.

### *III. The Church Fathers' Understanding of the Kingdom of God*

We wish to consider now the manner in which the Church Fathers have understood the term Kingdom of God in the New Testament. Did they take this to refer exclusively to the royal ruling activity of God through the Gospel, or did they believe it also referred to the Church?

The Apostolic Fathers are not unanimous on this question. In the *Didache*, for example, a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Church is implied, while in other writings the two are looked upon as very much the same thing.<sup>25</sup> Thus the difference of opinion on this subject can apparently be traced back to the very time of the New Testament. In later times, Augustine identified the Kingdom of God with the Church.<sup>26</sup>

In the Lutheran Confessions we find first of all that the Kingdom of God means more than just the Church, since it involves also all of God's activity for His Church. In his *Large Catechism* Luther writes thus on the Petition, "Thy Kingdom Come:"

"But what is the kingdom of God? Answer: Nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, that God sent His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to Himself, and to govern us as the King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience, for which end He has also bestowed His Holy Ghost, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power."

In the same connection Luther writes that when we pray "Thy Kingdom Come," we pray not for a crust of bread or a temporal perishable good, but for an eternal inestimable treasure and for everything that God Himself possesses."<sup>40</sup> That is a lot to pray for! It shows us that Luther also considered the Kingdom of God to be a very large concept.

And yet, the Confessions also do not fear to equate the Kingdom of Christ with the Church. Three times in the same column of the *Apology* (Art. VII & VIII: Of the Church) this is emphatically set forth:

"The Church is the kingdom of Christ, distinguished from the kingdom of the devil. . . . Therefore, the Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is properly the congregation of saints. For the wicked are ruled by the devil, and are captives of the devil; they are not ruled by the Spirit of Christ. But what need is there of words in a manifest matter? . . . If the Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it follows necessarily that the wicked, since



they are in the kingdom of the devil, are not the Church; although in this life, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the Church, and hold offices as teachers, and other offices in the Church. Neither are the wicked the kingdom of Christ."<sup>41</sup>  
(My emphasis)

Luther had a particularly fine, scriptural way of writing about the *BASILEIA*. In his major writings he, like the Bible, seems little inclined to undertake a clinically detailed definition. Rather he makes heavy use of the snap-shot method. Hundreds of times he writes 'The Kingdom of God is....,' and each time follows one beautiful facet of the whole picture. He laid much stress on God's gracious ruling over His Kingdom.<sup>30</sup> But he also spoke of the believers as making up the Kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> As far as the relationship between *BASILEIA* and the Church is concerned, Luther (although it cannot be called a favorite expression with him, also did not hesitate to equate these two. We find phrases such as this: *'Mit diesem Gleichnis will (Christus) zeigen, wie es zugehe im Himmelreich, das ist, in der Christenheit auf Erden...'*<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere he says:

"Christ cannot be the Head of an evil community, although it is subject unto Him as Lord; even as His Kingdom, namely, Christendom, is not a physical community or kingdom...."<sup>32</sup> (emphasis always mine)

Would you perhaps by now like a nice, short, simple two-line definition of the Kingdom of God that could be used to explain the concept to a catechumen class? Luther's fellow theologian Spalatin once sent him a list of weighty theological questions. Luther apologetically replied that a small puppy got his teeth into the letter, so that not all of the questions could be read. But fortunately the one most important for us was still legible. Spalatin was asking about the Kingdom and righteousness of God. Lutheran swered: "Das Reich Gottes ist die Kirche Christi, welche durch das Wort Gottes regiert

wird."<sup>33</sup> (emphasis mine) I believe this covers it as well as can be done in a nutshell.

Perhaps we can quote also from a more recent writer. Those of you who make much use of Lenski's Commentaries, know that when he writes about the Kingdom of God he also stresses the royal, gracious rule through the Word. Yet he does not exclude the people of God from the essence of that concept. He says, e. g.:

"The children and sons of God, as heirs of the Kingdom, in whom God's grace is displayed, constitute the Kingdom in the specific sense. The Kingdom is in them."<sup>34</sup> (my emphasis)

#### *IV. Conclusions*

To summarize some conclusions, I have not been satisfied that Scripture compels us to share the view that the concept "Kingdom of God" in the New Testament refers only to the ruling activity of God to the exclusion of the people so ruled. Nor does there seem to be useful purpose in defending the statements which are logical extensions of that formulation. Even though this might conceivably be done, there is still reason to doubt the value of interpretations that require such extensive explanations and clarifications.

I hope, however, that no one will get the mistaken opinion that I find little of value in the Schaller article. Quite the opposite is true. Although I have of necessity dwelt largely on the point of dissent from the Schaller essay, the impression should not be left that the value of its contribution to our theological writings may be minimized. Nor should the actual point of difference be misunderstood. At the risk of being repetitious, let it be said once more that I have no protest when Schaller says that the Kingdom of God is God's gracious royal activity through the Gospel. I object only when he claims this to be the exclusive idea in the term. I also have no ob-

jections whatsoever when he emphatically stresses the primary importance of this basic aspect of the Kingdom of God, the royal activity. This is the vital part of the picture. It is also the very aspect that is all too easily and all too frequently lost sight of. Though Prof. Schaller may have been using stronger artillery than necessary, he did have the right target in his sights, and his aim was unerring. We are much in his debt for emphasizing that side of the subject that is most important. Can there be any question as to which is the more significant, God's planning, sacrificing, redeeming activity, or the object of all that activity, the Church? Human thinking easily overplays the latter. But it hardly needs to be pointed out to those who have been bought with a price that what God does in the Kingdom of God immeasurably exceeds in importance whatever role His subjects may play therein. He is the King! His nature, His purpose, His qualities give the character to the the Kingdom. Without His gracious working there could be no Church at all. It would be unfortunate indeed if because of my remarks to the effect that the royal activity of God is not the exclusive idea in the Kingdom of God, anyone would come to the conclusion that this is then a disposable part of the definition. That would be throwing the baby out with the bath.

There may be some concern over the practical implications of dissenting even to this extent from Prof. Schaller's position. What was he trying to accomplish in particular with his essay? Was there some special danger, or abuse, or false position that he was trying to ward off? He wrote this paper toward the end of the First World War. In his introduction he speaks of the false conceptions current during that time, according to which people came to think of the "Kingdom of God" as an appropriate name to describe "the good guys" —the Allies—the nations that were fighting "to make the world safe for democracy." We have the same thing today in the notion that anyone who resists Communism is a soldier of the Cross, and that any nation lined up with the "West" against the communistic drive for world supremacy

must therefore be a "Christian nation," carrying out God's purposes. This is all but a part of the old inclination to externalize the Kingdom of God and make of it something material that even those without faith can grasp and appreciate. Surely the Schaller essay, by restricting the concept Kingdom of God to the Lord's royal activity and eliminating people from it entirely, would help combat such earthly day-dreaming. But is it necessary to reach so far for ammunition? Surely Jesus made this point more than abundantly clear by stressing again and again in unmistakable terms that his Kingdom was entirely a spiritual one. "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Luke 12:14) He asked with some annoyance. "My kingdom (or kingship) is not of this world," (John 18:36). "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you," (Luke 17:20-21). Here are adequate safeguards, and to spare, to ward off an earthly conception of God's Kingdom. St. Paul also adds to the arsenal. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," he thunders, "but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17). He that hath ears to hear will hear. Many will not hear even such clear testimony to the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is spiritual. But if they don't want to surrender their mistaken worldly notions when they hear Christ's clear words, then we also will not get them to do so, even if we remove the people of God from the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven. This we shall not do.

And what can be said regarding the relationship of *Basileia* and *Ekklesia*? Are there some New Testament uses where they can be called synonyms? While such a statement can be understood correctly regarding certain New Testament passages where the Church concept is particularly predominant in the expression Kingdom of God, it would be well to be cautious regarding its use as a general statement. Calling the two synonyms loses sight of the fact that the Kingdom of God generally is a much wider concept than "Church,"

since it must also include whatever the King is doing for His Church. And this is the most vital factor, that should never be lost.

When the pastor faces his congregation from the pulpit, he is looking at the *EKKLESIA*, whether the members are listening or dozing. The believing souls sitting there constitute the Church. This can be a very still and static picture. But now when God adds the action, when the powerful Word is dispatched by the Spirit through the mouth of His preaching spokesman and pierces the hearts of the believers, moving them anew to hate sin, love their Savior and resolve to amend their lives, then you have the dynamic element added. Then you no longer have only the Church, but the motion picture that portrays the Kingdom of Heaven in operation.

This brings to an end the presentation of my views on this controversial subject. I am by no means so optimistic as to imagine that everyone will consider this a satisfactory solution to the problem. This need not be considered a calamity. Since our understanding is imperfect, it is inevitable that there will be differences in our understanding. Here is an area where we particularly should be careful. We, with our very proper insistence upon complete unity of doctrine, must be careful that we do not begin to insist on unanimity of opinion, when dealing with a matter that Scripture does not clearly teach as doctrine. Luther, after studying the pertinent Scripture passages regarding the Savior's mother, may have come to the conclusion that Mary was *semper virgo*. Many of us, studying the same pertinent but inconclusive passages, hold the opinion that Mary probably had other children after Jesus. And yet we are on very good terms with Luther. It would be the worst form of dogmatism if any theologian were to insist that everyone else must accept his interpretation of passages dealing with such exegetical problems. Prof. Schaller, let it be said, has not done this. We have quoted a portion of his essay in which he points out that

there can be no objection to the common manner of speech among us that refers to the Church as the Kingdom of God. Though he himself does not find any trace of the Church in the New Testament use of *BASILEIA*, neither does he cast off as heretics those of us who do. Failure to see eye-to-eye on a point of interpretation such as this is surely no cause for withdrawing the hand of fellowship. There is no doctrinal difference here.

This essay should not be brought to a close without at least a brief effort being made to place this entire matter in its true perspective. There are other things vastly more important about the Kingdom of God than the question whether, properly speaking, the Church is an essential part of the concept or not. Remember, God never considered it necessary to provide us with a scientifically detailed definition of that all-glorious Kingdom. Think of those poor disciples on the Ascension Mount. Here their divine leader — who knows the answer to all questions — was leaving them. It's their last chance. With bated breath they ask the question that still nags in their minds: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:6). This was the time now for Christ to settle all the disciples' questions, problems, and debates about the Kingdom. What did He answer? "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons. . . . but ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:7-8). In other words: There are more important things for you to worry about than such speculation. Get busy at your job of witnessing to the Risen Christ!

It will be forgiven us if there is some vagueness around the edges of our conception of what the Kingdom of Heaven is, but it will be tragic indeed if we fail somehow to get into it. As Luther points out, the Kingdom of God will come. We needn't worry about that. But our great concern and prayer should be that that blessed Kingdom should come to us with its grace and salvation, and also that we do all in our power

by our Spirit-filled witnessing to bring others into this saving Kingdom. Then there will be time enough in Heaven to have all the questions answered, at that time when we —O wondrous grace! — will be so much more than subjects in God's Kingdom, when we will, according to His faithful promises, all be lords and kings in our own right, each wearing his own crown as a co-ruler in eternity with Christ, sharing the kingship with our gracious Lord, who will then indeed be Lord of lords and King of kings.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

### Bibliography with Code Abbreviations:

- KG -- *THE KINGDOM OF GOD*, by Prof. John Schaller, as translated in the *Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, October & December, 1961, and Vol. II, February & April, 1962.
- BKW -- *BIBLE KEY WORDS* from G. Kittel. *THEOLOGISCHES WOERTERBUCH ZUM NEUEN TESTAMENT*, Translated by Coates, Vol. II, Part III on *BASILEIA*. Harper Brothers, 1958
- St. L -- *SAEMMTLICHE SCHRIFTEN*. Dr. Martin Luther, St. Louis Edition.
- CT -- *CONCORDIA TRIGLOTTA*, Concordia Publishing House
- EKK -- *THE MEANING OF EKKLESIA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*, by Rev. Paul G. Koch, presented to the CLC Convention in Spokane, Washington, 1961.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE*. Schaff-Herzog.
- KEY WORDS OF THE BIBLE* A. Williams.
- LEXICON OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT* by Bauer, Arndt, Ginrich.
- GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*, Thayer. Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, Lenski.

## References and Foot Notes:

1. KG, Oct., 1961, p.23
2. EKK, last page.
3. KG, Dec. 1961, p.11
4. KG, Feb. 1962, p.20.
5. KG, Feb. 1962, p.21.
6. KG, Feb. 1962, p.22.
7. KG, Feb. 1962, p.24
8. See Schaff-Herzog article on "Kingdom of God."
9. A. Williams, *Key Words of the Bible*, p.157.
11. BKW, p.38. Also KG, Oct. 1961, p.22; Dec. 1961, p.12;  
Pieper, *Dogmatics III*, p.289.
12. KG, Oct. 1961, p.24.
13. St.L, Vol III, 5, and frequently elsewhere.
14. BKW, Vol. II, part III.
15. E.g., *Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* by Bauer, Arndt-Gingrich, also Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
16. BKW, p. 22ff.
17. BKW, p. 32f.
18. Luke 1:33; Luke 19:12, 15; Luke 22:29; 23:42; John 18:36 (3 times); Acts 1,6; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; Revelation 1:9; 11:15; 12:10; 1:6; 5:10; 17:12, 17, 18.
19. E.g. KG, Feb. 1962, p.1962, p. 23f on "Except your righteousness shall exceed..."
20. KG, Feb., 1962, p.15.
21. BKW, *BASILEIA* p. 55.
22. KG, Feb. 1962, p.14.
23. KG, Feb. 1962, p. 14f. See also Footnote Dec. 1961, p.12.
24. 2 Timothy 4:18 and Revelation 12:10 may appear to be exceptions, but are not.
25. BKW, p.57.
26. BKW, p. 59.
27. CT, p. 711, 50-51.
28. CT, p. 231, 16.
29. St.L, XI, 509f.
30. St. L, XI, 886; VIII, 525; XI, 2001; V, 385;



31. St. L, X, 380; IV, 1846; XII, 1421; XII, 529. (Also Erlangen Ed. XXI, 184, quoted elsewhere as saying: "Blessed means that God rules in us, and we are His Kingdom.")
32. St. L, XVIII, 1025, translated in Pieper, *Dogmatics III*, 400.
33. St. L, XXIIa, 452.
34. Commentary on St. Matthew, Lenski, p. 92 (on Ch. 3, 2).
35. BKW, p. 34f.
36. St. L, VI, 1629 on Joel 3:17ff.
37. EKK, p. 2.
38. CT, p. 233, 19.
39. CT, p. 711, 51
40. CT, p. 713, 55.
41. CT, p. 231f.

Norbert Reim

---

## Luther on Unity

---

This is so great a good that no human heart can grasp it (therefore it necessitates such a great and hard fight). It must not be treated lightly, as the world maintains and many people who do not understand, saying we should not fight so hard about an article and thus trample on Christian love; rather, although we err on one small point, if we agree on everything else, we should give in and overlook the difference in order to preserve brotherly and Christian unity and fellowship.

No, my dear man, do not recommend to me peace and unity when thereby God's Word is lost, for then eternal life and everything else would be lost. In this matter there can be no yielding nor giving way, no, not for love of you or any other person, but everything must yield to the Word, whether it be friend or foe. The Word was given unto us for eternal life and not to further outward peace and unity. The Word and doctrine will create Christian unity or fellowship. Where they reign all else will follow. Where they are not no concord will ever abide. Therefore do not talk to me about love and friendship, if that means breaking with the Word, or the faith, for the Gospel does not say love brings eternal life, God's grace, and all heavenly treasures, but the Word.

*Sermons from the year 1531*

W.A. 34. II. 387

(From "Day by Day We Magnify Thee" --Muhlenberg Press, by permission)

# ==== P A N O R A M A ====

WISCONSIN — "The Isolated Synod." Overlooking the  
ALONE? smaller Norwegian ELS which had made  
its move some weeks before, *TIME Magazine*  
used this heading to report the step by which Wisconsin completed an action that had already been implied when it suspended fellowship with Missouri in 1961 on the basis of Romans 16, and that had been foreshadowed when the 1962 convention of the Synodical Conference made mockery of the principles on which that body had been founded by forcing two synods by sheer weight of majority votes to remain in a fellowship that they had already publicly renounced. For now Wisconsin and its Norwegian sister had to declare their formal withdrawal from this fellowship of synods that had once meant so much. In a day when church bodies are growing ever larger by successive mergers such an action would hardly make sense, either to *TIME* or to the rest of the world. But there are a few of us to whom it does make sense, and who in spite of unresolved issues that still lie between us will admit to feeling a certain surge of pride over our former brethren who have found it within themselves to take this decisive action.

Having acquired some experience in this business of isolation, we venture a few observations. The first and most important is this, that with God at one's side there is no such thing as isolation. And we have Him at our side as soon and as long as we stand on His Word. Wisconsin has been through a long and wrenching struggle over the question of whether and when to withdraw from a fellowship that had lost its validity and meaning. It will find reassurance in the Word that tells all of us that it is indeed right to separate, even as it is always right to avoid those that are causing divisions and

offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned. That Word is clear, even as it always has been clear. Let the bright sun of the Word shine on those issues, and the fogs of fear and confusion will have to give way. Then there will be light for the further tasks that need to be done. Or to change the figure of speech. If Wisconsin and its Norwegian sister have suffered deep wounds in these internal struggles, they will find healing in the Word when it confirms the rightness of the action that has been taken, and strength for the work that lies ahead.

By way of a second observation we suggest that this isolation is by no means as severe as the coiners of the phrase seem to think, or as the "isolated" ones may feel. That upper-crust Lutheranism is indeed in a bad way is revealed by another article in the same issue of *TIME*, August 23, 1963. Reporting on the recent Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki, Finland, this widely read news magazine tells the world that 800 delegates spent twelve days trying to produce a modern statement of Luther's classic Reformation doctrine that man is justified by faith alone, but that the debate ended in failure. After explaining that a new theological commission was appointed to rewrite the rejected statements and to report to the next Assembly five years from now, *TIME* tells of the increasing efforts of high-level Lutherans to get away from Luther's emphasis on the *sola fide*, *sola gratia* (which one university professor described as "an embarrassment") in favor of greater recognition of the role of works in the article of Justification. But while this reveals a tragic deterioration in Lutheran theology, we are certain that it will open the eyes of many of the rank and file of the various Lutheran bodies. There is already a strong reaction against the inroads of modernism, a reaction which cuts across all synodical lines. One could sense it in the recent Lutheran Theological Free Conference held in Minneapolis during the last days of October under the auspices of an organization (largely from TALC circles) that calls itself *THE WORD ALONE, Inc.* This same reaction will play a signifi-

cant role in the November Free Conference announced by disturbed Missourians, the State-of-the-Church group. It should be strongly in evidence in the Free Conference which Wisconsin is sponsoring and for which arrangements are being made by a committee on which conservative members of TALC and Missouri are likewise represented. This evidence from Helsinki that Lutheranism is losing its grip on the doctrine of Justification, the central doctrine of the Reformation, should add fuel to the fire that seems to be smoldering in these free conferences. It should rouse many others to the fact that our Lutheran heritage is indeed in grave danger of being lost. It should demonstrate convincingly that the real line of demarcation in present-day Lutheranism does not lie along the vertical lines separating synod from synod and church from church, but rather along the horizontal lines of stratification. Where the top layers, those of the new theology, want to go is clear. That the lower levels of conservatism do not want to go along is equally clear. What the middle strata will do is uncertain —very uncertain.

But this brings us to our third observation. We have once before spoken of Wisconsin's opportunity to become the nucleus of a new grouping of Lutherans. Now this opportunity is practically being thrust upon them. For the free conference movement is crying out for positive leadership. The Minneapolis Conference impressed us as being a movement that does not quite know where to go. Last year's State-of-the-Church Conference was thrown into confusion by the injection of foreign issues. There is great danger that these conferences become forums where earnest people who see their churches slipping can give vent to their fears and their feelings, but having done this, return to their former *status quo*, comforting themselves that they have testified, and so gradually learning to live with conditions that they vigorously denounce and deeply deplore, but to live with them nevertheless, without doing anything more about it. There is also the further danger that in these gatherings where conservatives huddle together for mutual comfort they begin to practice a unionism which differs from the high-level ecumenicism only in the fact that it takes

place on the ground-level of conservatism — but unionism nonetheless!

Here we see Wisconsin's opportunity to be of real service to the cause of conservatism. It knows what to say to the high-level movement toward a new association of Lutheran Churches in the U.S.A., to take the place of the old National Lutheran Council. It said it in that letter declining the invitation of the Big Three (The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and the Lutheran Church in America) from which we quoted the essential points in our issue of last April, page 21. Furthermore, Wisconsin has taken the action of separation, an action which for many conservatives is still so unthinkable, but without which the effect of their testimony is simply lost. It will indeed need to put its own house in order, to clean up the debris left on its premises by the internal struggles of which we spoke before. The strength of its testimony depends on this. Wisconsin has the advantage of size. It can make itself heard. If it will now stand up publicly and practically for the principles which it has advocated in its letter, if it will insist that the differences in doctrine and practice which are present also among conservative groups be frankly acknowledged, that removal of these differences be made the prime business of the meetings, and that all practice of church fellowship, all forms of joint worship and joint church work be avoided until actual unity has been achieved, then something fruitful may still come of the free conference movement. Then conservative Lutheranism will have found itself again.

And, if Wisconsin stands for these things, firmly and publicly, we know that it will not stand alone.

E. Reim

WISCONSIN — Whether the foregoing is just a pleasant  
HOW BIG? dream from which there will be a rude  
awakening, or whether there is to be a  
serious effort to translate it into reality will depend, as far  
as men are concerned, largely on Wisconsin, particularly its

leadership. To put one's house in order, to clean up the debris left from previous struggles, that calls for a bigness which is quite different from the numerical size of a corporate body. This calls for greatness, spiritual greatness. And there the question is indeed: Just how big is Wisconsin?

The immediate signs are not encouraging. When word reached our Spokane convention in 1961 of Wisconsin's action in suspending fellowship with Missouri we rejoiced in the fact, but pointed to "issues that still lie between us," listing three points pertaining to the questions of Fellowship, the Clarity of Scripture, and the Call. When questions were asked as to the meaning of these points, particularly also from Wisconsin circles, the whole matter was presented at some length by President Albrecht in the columns of the *Lutheran Spokesman* (Jan., 1962, p. 8ff.). A beginning of discussions was made in November of last year when a subcommittee of the Wisconsin Commission on Matters of Doctrine met with CLC representatives. The need for further discussion was recognized, but the subcommittee stated that the decision would rest with the Wisconsin Commission as a whole, to which they would be reporting. Since then a year has passed, but at last reports the Commission was still discussing "the advisability of arranging a meeting with the CLC."

This is what we mean when we say that the signs are not encouraging. The Wisconsin Commission is probably convinced that there is no foundation for the points that have been raised by our CLC. If that is the case, they have nothing to fear. It should not take long to demonstrate the fact — if it is a fact. But they should also consider that these three points represent the serious judgment of earnest men — former brethren — who stand ready to back up their statements. Does this not call for further consideration?

Such a discussion could, of course, just possibly reveal the presence of some of that debris of which we spoke above, and so present a problem of disposal. But willingness to face

up to it — would that not add immeasurably to the stature of everyone involved, revealing a truly spiritual greatness? So the question becomes rather a pointed one: Is Wisconsin big enough? We pray that it will be.

E. Reim

AND NOW — It should be clear that we cannot  
C. L. C. ! ask questions like the foregoing without  
above all applying them to ourselves, re-  
serving the severest test for our CLC. Just what is our pur-  
pose in drawing attention again and again to these unresolved  
issues and insisting that they be removed? Are we really con-  
cerned purely for the welfare of an erring neighbor, for the  
truth of the Word, for the glory of God? Or are we just trying  
to prove how right we were in the first place? Surely, if  
there is even a shadow of vindictiveness leading us to cry for  
"satisfaction," if we have in any way let past differences breed  
an enduring hostility, then we are unfitting ourselves for  
whatever service we might otherwise be able to render. For  
let there be no mistake about it. We are witnessing a crisis  
in the history of conservative Lutheranism. This calls for the  
best in each of us. So let us be very sure that we carefully  
avoid putting anything into the way of true agreement. Let us  
remove all obstacles on our part. Let us learn to pray with  
David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and  
know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting." Let us do whatever lies  
in our power to advance the cause of agreement. But let it be  
true agreement, one that has its basis in Scripture, and in  
Scripture alone.

Thus we can show that even our little Church of the Lutheran  
Confession can be *BIG*.

E. Reim

JUST FOR THE  
RECORD

The *Deutsche Ev. Kirchenzeitung* reports:  
"At the pastoral conference for Lithuania  
convened at Insterburg on May 19, Professor

Grau-Koenigsberg delivered an essay on the theme: 'Regarding the doctrine of inspiration and the first chapter of the Bible.' The lecturer distinguished between Holy Scripture and the Word of God: the former being not free of errors, the latter, however, being infallible. The essentials in Holy Scripture are the divine thoughts of salvation as expressed in the history of the covenant which the God of Israel established with Abraham and brought to fulfillment through the surrender of His Son on the cross. Whatever ideas of temporal nature, or such as deal with the physical sciences, are woven into these redemptive concepts in which we place our faith and trust are imperfect and of passing value.

This development of thought the speaker then applied to the first chapter of the Bible; and he closed his dissertation with a profound interpretation of the Creation-Sabbath as the central subject in the entire content of the record of creation. The floor discussion elicited considerable dissent which eventuated in the adoption of the following resolution (presented by Pastor Pauly-Ragnit): 'That we gratefully accept the presentation of Professor Grau as a contribution to science, but refer to science as such the task of resolving the problem of inspiration; while we on our part, when asked to express our personal convictions, unanimously confess that we stand upon the foundation of the Holy Scripture as the Word of God.'

. . . . .

The reader of this Journal will be forgiven for assuming that the above was clipped from a late issue of a German church paper and for thinking, as well he may, that all this sounds very much like a report which might have come out of St. Louis. In a certain sense it did, but not as may be supposed. The item offered here in translation, appeared in the



periodical *Lehre und Wehre* formerly published by the Missouri Synod. And the date is July 1892!

When one muses upon the things which were said 70 years ago by Professor Grau and hears them echoed in the theology of Professor Scharlemann of Concordia Seminary who has so recently presented similar shop-worn profundities as (of all things!) "exploratory," a certain feeling of indignation is difficult to suppress. When one notes, moreover, how the moss-grown notions of the St. Louis professor are given asylum by his colleagues and superiors while they at the same time continue to affirm their belief in an inerrancy and infallibility of Holy Scripture, one cannot resist printing also the acid comments of the sainted Dr. Franz Pieper who reported the goings-on at Insterburg under the heading: "The yes-and-no-position of the 'believing' pastors in Germany."

"So long as one offers such compliments to a theological 'science' which undermines the foundation of the Christian faith," he wrote, "instead of calling it by its proper name, namely idiocy, apostasy from the Scriptures will not be ward-ed off. How in the world should 'science' manage to 'resolve the problem of the doctrine of inspiration'! Apart from the revelation of Scripture itself, what should 'science' know about spiritual, divine things? What a naive impression of science those people must have who say: 'We shall leave it to science as such to solve the problem of the doctrine of inspiration!'"

E. Schaller

---

# C O N T E N T S

---

VOLUME III

October, 1963

NUMBER 4



THE MEANING OF *BASILEIA*  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT 1

Norbert Reim

LUTHER ON UNITY. . . . . 32  
Quotation

PANORAMA

WISCONSIN — ALONE? . . . . . 33  
E. Reim

WISCONSIN — HOW BIG? . . . . . 36  
E. Reim

AND NOW — C.L.C.! . . . . . 38  
E. Reim

JUST FOR THE RECORD. . . . . 39  
E. Schaller



---

THE JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY (Church of the Lutheran Confession) is published at New Ulm, Minnesota, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Subscriptions are payable in advance at the CLC BOOK HOUSE, Box 145, New Ulm, Minnesota. The rate is \$3.00 per year for five issues: February, April, June, October, December. All correspondence other than subscriptions or changes of address should be addressed to Prof. E. Reim, Editor, Route 22, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The Editorial Committee: E. Reim, Chairman; C. M. Gullerud; E. Schaller; M. Galstad.