

Presentation 1:
“Kingdom and Church in the New Testament”

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

1. For Orientation : Terminology

1.1. *ekklesia*: (*kaleo* –*ex*= to call out)

- a) The term occurs only two times in the Gospels (Matt 16:18 and 18:17) but frequently elsewhere in the NT: Acts: 5:11; 8:1, 14:23, etc.
 - In the *Septuaginta* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), it occurs often and translates the Hebrew word *qahal*, Israel’s assembly or congregation under God’s call (e.g., Dt 23:1ff.; 1 Chr 28:8)
 - The meaning of *ekklesia* in the first-century Roman world had to do with “assembly”, the citizens of a given community called together to tend city affairs (Acts 19:32, 39, 41)
- b) According to the Church Father Hippolytus: “It is not a place that is called church, not a house made of stones and earth... It is the holy assembly of those who live in righteousness” (*Daniel* 1.17.6-7)

1.2. Other terms used of Christian Church:

- a) *hodos* (from Hebrew *Derek*), Acts 24:14 “the Way”
- b) *koinonia*, e.g., Acts 2:42

1.3. Church as *koinonia*, communion, “fellowship”

- a) In the Bible, *koinonia* may take several forms from communion in prayer and Word to sacramental communion to sharing of goods (Acts, 2 and 4)
- b) Communion is trinitarian and in that trinitarian communion, the Holy Spirit is the agent and principle of communion: 2 Cor 13:13
- c) The basic verbal form from which the noun *koinonia* derives means “to have something in common”, “to share”, “to participate”, “to have part in”, “to act together” or “to be in a contractual relationship involving obligations of mutual accountability”

- The word *koinonia* appears in significant passages, such as the sharing in the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor 10:16), the reconciliation of Paul with Peter, James and John (cf. Gal 2:9), the collection for the poor (cf. Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:3-4) and the experience and witness of the Church (cf. Acts 2:42-45)¹

2. The Diversity of New Testament Ecclesiological Traditions

2.1. For a proper perspective on biblical theology of the church, it is important to note that there are several kinds of church traditions already in the NT and that they seem to allow quite a lot of diversity. As a result, to speak of *the* biblical model of the church is quite precarious an effort.

- a) E.g., the "charismatic" congregation of 1 Corinthians *versus* more established church tradition related to the Pastorals
 - James Dunn has argued that from the very beginnings, two "streams" co-exists, one more charismatic, the other more hierarchic and structured
- b) Various types of leadership structures among various churches; and so forth

2.2. Images and Metaphors of the Church in the New Testament

- a) A number of images from various strands of life occur in the NT drawn from agriculture, politics, and cult, such as the "household," "field," "bride," "vine," "flock," "temple," and so forth
 - The multiplicity of metaphors further highlights the importance of diversity
- b) Three major images that have gained greatest significance in theology:
 - The People of God: 1 Pet 2:9; Rev. 5:9
 - The Body of Christ: Eph 1:22-23; 1 Cor 12:27; Col. 1:18
 - The Temple of the Spirit: Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:5
- c) Implications to our topic: How much help can we get from the New Testament data when it comes to the questions related to the Muslim-Christian context

¹ "The Nature and Mission of the Church" (Faith and Order, 2005), # 28.

3. Kingdom and the Church

3.1. Scholarly consensus is that kingdom is both eschatological and present

- a) Kingdom of God means God's reign over his people, such as was with God and the covenant people in the Old Testament, as well as over the whole of creation
- b) The new community cannot be identified with *basileia* but the church serves the coming of the kingdom, although the kingdom finally comes by the grace and initiative of God

3.2. Interpretations of the relation of the church to the kingdom during history:

- a) From Augustine on, there was almost total identification of the kingdom and the visible church
- b) The Middle Ages continued this view in the Roman Catholic church
 - the presence in the visible church is tantamount to being in the kingdom of God (with sacramental system and excommunication)
- c) Many Protestants equated the invisible church with the kingdom
- d) In Classical Liberalism there was the identification between kingdom and the society of good will
- e) Evangelical Dispensationalism: a rigid dichotomy between the church and the kingdom of God with Israel being God's earthly kingdom

3.3. Concluding Reflections

- a) God's reign extends to the whole of creation. Therefore, the kingdom is larger, more inclusive than the church or even society
 - the church is part of the kingdom
 - the church serves the coming of the kingdom and is a sign of its coming
 - the church has been graciously invited to the movement of the coming of God's kingdom
- b) The church is dependent on kingdom, the rule of God and at the same time, the church is also the product of the kingdom
- c) The church is graciously invited to participate in the coming of the Kingdom (although Kingdom's arrival is not dependent on the church)

- d) In this view, ecclesiology becomes eschatology-driven rather than static: the church is oriented toward the completion of the kingdom in eschaton when God will be
 - What the church is, is determined by what it is destined to be in the future of God and his kingdom

3.4. Church, Kingdom, and Eschatology

- a) M. Volf: “The all-embracing framework for an appropriate understanding of the church is God’s eschatological new creation. According to the message of Jesus, the gathering of the people of God is grounded in the coming of the Kingdom of God in his person... Commensurately, NT authors portray the church, which emerged after Christ’s resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, as the anticipation of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God”
 - The future of the church in God’s new creation is the mutual personal indwelling of the triune God and of his glorified people
 - This is the culmination of Jesus’ prayer: “I ask ...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (John 17:21)

3.5. Implications to our topic

- a) Can one belong to the Kingdom without belonging to the church?
- b) What about “Kingdom Circles”?

4. The Marks of the Church

4.1. In the ancient creeds, the marks are confessional, something Christians believe, rather than definitions

- a) Theologically put: they are both gifts (from God) and task (given to Christians)
- b) Classical marks: Unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity
- c) Theological reflection on the implications to our topic

4.2. H. Snyder: a Wesleyan expansion and revision of classical marks:

- a) They should be understood in dynamic tension with a corresponding notion:
 - The church is both one and diverse
 - The church is both holy and charismatic

- The church is both apostolic and prophetic
 - The church is both catholic and local
- 4.3. D. Bloesch: The “Practical Marks” that render the catholic and apostolic church visible to the world, have to do with the activity of the church
- a) Reformers: preaching of the Word and right use of sacraments
 - b) Pietism: fellowship of love (*koinonia*) and mission
 - c) Salvation Army: service
 - d) Protestant Orthodoxy: right teaching; orthodox belief
 - e) Anabaptism: peace, suffering, spiritually faithful ministers, separation from sin, and discipline
 - f) Bonhoeffer: “community”: not only love (Pietism) but sharing of goods and time
 - g) Pentecostal-Charismatic: spiritual gifts and empowerment by the Spirit
 - h) Liberationist movements: social concern
- 4.4. Theological question: the basis of the ecclesiality (the being of the church): Miroslav Volf
- a) Ecclesiality is being defined in terms of the presence of Jesus in the gathered community: “Where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well, perhaps a bad church, a church that may well transgress against love and truth, but a church nonetheless.”²
 - In addition to Matt 18:20, Volf refers to the Baptist J. Smyth’s definition (above) and the early Christian tradition
 - Ignatius: “Wherever Jesus Christ is there is the universal church”
 - Tertullian: *ubi tres, ecclesia est* (“Where there are Three, there is the church”)
 - b) Each local community is a church even if it does not have a bishop or ordained ministry
 - c) The theological implications of gathering in Jesus’ name
 - Way of identification: the church is not a club, a free willed organization but a group gathered in Jesus’ name
 - Doctrinal pointer: we need to be able to identify our Lord and his history

² *After Our Likeness*, ” 136.

- Both a privilege and responsibility: Volf illustrates this with the help of the mariners' uniform which signifies both a privilege and obligation
 - Commitment to other Christians: they belong to the same Christ and same body
- d) The role of the sacraments?
- e) The role of preaching?
- f) The role of separation from the world?
- 4.5. The missiological (and "practical") question: any external mark(er)s of the church such as size, age, location...?
5. **Final Reflections** on the implications of the New Testament perspectives on the kingdom and church to the topics under discussion.