

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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The Kingdom of God provides the basis for the church and its mission. The expression *Kingdom of God* (or its equivalent *Kingdom of heaven* in the Gospel of Matthew) occurs more than one hundred times in the Gospels, quite often in the records of Jesus' teaching. Since its meaning can only be understood against the background of the Old Testament, in the first section of this chapter we shall examine the Old Testament basis for the Jewish messianic hope, while in the second section we shall explore the meaning of the expression in the Gospels. On that basis, in the third section we will draw a few conclusions regarding the importance of the Kingdom of God for our understanding of the mission of the church.

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First, the mission of the church is kingdom mission—the continuation of the mission of Jesus through which God intends to fulfil his purpose for humankind and for all creation. The church is not the kingdom; rather, it exists in the service of the kingdom, to give witness about the kingdom by being, doing, and speaking.

Second, the mission of the church takes as its starting point the kingdom that has already entered into history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The church acknowledges Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Lord and seeks to live out that confession.

Third, the mission of the church is not restricted to the religious sphere of life, but has to do with every aspect of it. From this perspective, there is no secular-sacred divide, no separation between the public and the private or between justification by faith and the struggle for justice.

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The meaning of the kingdom of God for the mission of the church is highlighted by the following call in the document that emerged out of the Consultation on "The Church in Response to Human Needs in 1983:

The reality of the presence of the kingdom gives us the courage to begin here and now to erect signs of the kingdom by working prayerfully and consistently for greater justice and peace and toward the transformation of individuals and societies. Since one day God will wipe away all tears, it grieves us to see people suffer now. Since one day there will be perfect peace, we are called to be peacemakers now. We humbly yet urgently call upon you, the churches, to stand with us in this ministry of practising love and seeking to restore the dignity of human beings created in the image of God.