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Self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Love and the Kingdom of God in Walter Kasper's Jesus the Christ

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ABSTRACT:

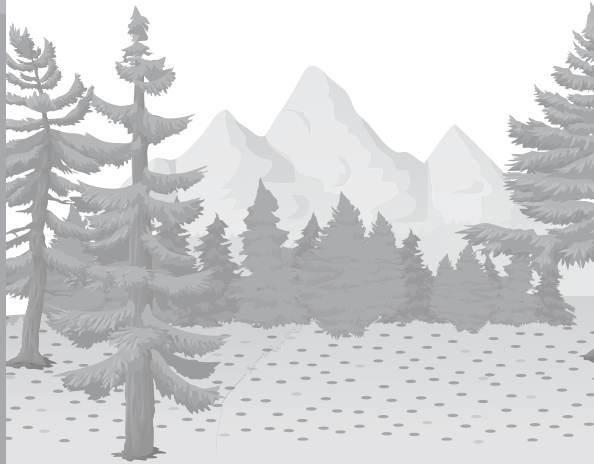
This piece is an examination of the Christology of Walter Kasper, a German Catholic cardinal and theologian. Through his work *Jesus the Christ*, Kasper shows God's self-revelation as love in the person Jesus Christ – the earthly and the exalted Jesus, who brings to human beings the message of his Kingdom, in which they can attain salvation, joy, peace, and justice.

Self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Love and the Kingdom of God in Walter Kasper's *Jesus the Christ*

by Sister Hang T.H. Nguyen, OP

INTRODUCTION

The question “Who is Jesus Christ?” echoes Jesus’ question to his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8: 29). Here Jesus is asking the question for his time, for the early Church, and eventually embodying an approach to theology termed “Christology.” For non-believers, the question concerns Jesus Christ, a



great historical figure of the past, who has influenced many people and human history. But for Christians, the question concerns both God and humanity. The Christians' answer to this question manifests faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the person of Christ is the answer to the question of human existence and is for the understanding of the meaning of all reality.

Walter Kasper (1933-) addresses this question in his work *Jesus the Christ*, demonstrating that God reveals himself as both divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ as love (John 4: 8).¹ Through significant words and acts and through the message on the Kingdom of God, Jesus brings about a just and peaceful humanity. In order to understand God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the message of the Kingdom of God, I will first identify Kasper's Christological approach in response to the problematics of modern Christology. Second, I will examine the texts to show his Christological focus on the earthly Jesus with the risen and transcendent Christ. Third, this piece explores the meaning of the central message of Jesus' proclamation that is the Kingdom of God in regard to the quest for love, peace, and justice. Finally, I will compare Kasper's idea of God's Kingdom with that of other thinkers to see similarities and differences in their views on its meaning and describe how to live in God's Kingdom in the present.

EXPOSITION

To begin his argument, Kasper points out the necessity and the problems of the historical-critical method and offers his own approach to Christology. For Kasper, historical-critical methods have several problems. They tend to describe Jesus as merely a man and disregard Jesus' assertion of His divinity. They attempt to dismiss Jesus' identification as God's Son and claim that these sayings are falsifications or mystifications by the Church. Also, historical-critical methods have reconstructed the historical Jesus and presented the earthly Jesus in critical opposition to the exalted Christ, the Son of

1 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, The Collected Works of Walter Kasper, vol. 3 (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), x.

God, as proclaimed by the Church.² They separate the earthly Jesus described in the New Testament from the exalted Christ proclaimed in the confession of the Church, that Jesus of Nazareth is the exalted Christ.³ Furthermore, the modern-critical method sees the earthly Jesus' central message about the Kingdom of God as wishful thinking, as a religious delusion. Many scholars have understood Jesus as a social revolutionary or social reformer who stood for social justice and liberation but ultimately failed.⁴ However, Kasper sees the historical-critical approach as necessary for a more complete historical interpretation of the Christian message.⁵ It is indispensable for arriving at the theological reflection of God's entrance into human history.⁶

In addition, Kasper provides his own Christological approach with important considerations for the question of the historical Jesus. With new biblical hermeneutics, Kasper notes that the earthly Jesus possesses consciousness of being God's Son when he addresses God as *Abba*, as His Father, and when he forgives sins indicating implicitly His full divinity and His standing in God's place. Kasper also explains and uncovers the soteriological meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the personal encounter of the risen Christ with his disciples.⁷ The statements in the New Testament prove that Jesus is the Son of God and affirm that the earthly Jesus is identified with the exalted Christ.

Kasper also claims that modern historical criticism cannot prove our traditional faith, but it can show that our faith is grounded firmly on a historical foundation. Modern historical criticism provides us with a good way to understand our faith, to encounter Jesus the Christ, and to become His disciple. Furthermore, Kasper sees that the reconstruction of the historical Jesus and His message is incomplete unless the biblical message

2 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, xiii.

3 Ibid., xiii.

4 Ibid., xiv.

5 Ibid., xv.

6 Bernardo Estrada, Ermenegildo Manicardi, and Armand Puig i Tàrrach, eds., *The Gospels: History and Christology: The Search of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI = I Vangeli: Storia e Cristologia: La Ricerca Di Joseph Ratzinger-Benedetto XVI*, vol. 2 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 5.

7 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, xiv.

connects with the witness of the early Church.⁸ For these reasons, Kasper shapes his Christology relying on the Bible, Tradition,⁹ and the doctrine of the early ecumenical councils.¹⁰

EXAMINATION OF THE TEXTS

In his work *Jesus the Christ*, Kasper criticizes the problems of modern Christology to indicate the main tasks of today's Christology. Then he points out the central and starting point of his Christology, concentrating on the earthly Jesus with the risen and transcendent Christ.

Kasper starts his work with the identification of the three major modern Christological approaches and their challenges. The cosmological approach regards Jesus Christ as a full revolutionist.¹¹ The anthropological perspective sees Jesus Christ as a mere cypher and a model for an authentic human existence. The historical approach interprets Jesus Christ as the predetermined end of history.¹² These modern approaches contain several problems: 1) These methods present Jesus Christ as a mere figure of reference. Kasper recalls Hans Urs von Balthasar's critique of these approaches as a mere philosophy or ideology resulting in the reduction of Christian faith in Christ. Balthasar indicates the danger and defect of these approaches that set Jesus Christ in "a predetermined scheme of reference;" 2) William P. Loewe insists that Kasper opposes the reduction of Christology to "Jesus-ology" because of the threats that the historical Jesus might easily stand forth as the ground of faith;¹³ 3) These approaches exclude the sole interpretation and pre-interpretation of the traditional kerygma and dogmatic formulas of the Church and tend to detach the person from the work of Jesus Christ; 4) Finally, they detach the historical Jesus from the proclaimed Christ.¹⁴ Thus, faith in Christ of

8 Ibid., xv.

9 Ibid., 9.

10 John P. Galvin, "From the Humanity of Christ to the Jesus of History: A Paradigm Shift in Catholic Christology," *Theological Studies* 55, no. 2 (1994), 252.

11 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 6.

12 Ibid., 7.

13 William P. Loewe, "Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect," in *The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper: Speaking Truth in Love* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 88.

14 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 8.

the early Church is separately understood from the historical Jesus.¹⁵ In response to these challenges, Kasper points out three fundamental tasks of Christology today: 1) to make a connection between the historical Jesus with the Christian tradition as well as its relevance;¹⁶ 2) to relate Christianity and earthly concerns; 3) and to show the significant combination between Christology and soteriology.¹⁷

In order to show his Christological position, Kasper asserts the criterion and starting point of Christology to be the earthly Jesus and the risen, exalted Christ. Brian McDermott, writing about current Catholic Christology, points out that Kasper carefully distinguishes the starting point of contemporary Christology from other criteria. The content and primary criterion of Christology is the person Jesus Christ, the earthly Jesus and the risen, exalted Christ. The secondary criterion is the confession of faith in the Church that “Jesus is the Christ.” Both have foundations testified in the New Testament and in the ongoing life of worship in the Church.¹⁸ Another author, William P. Loewe notes that Kasper’s position adopts the historical inquiry of the person of Jesus Christ as a necessary source of Christology, but he does not regard it as a starting point of Christology.¹⁹

Therefore, we must note that, Kasper holds that the central content and the starting point of contemporary Christology is twofold: the living Christ of today is encountered only in the living faith of Christians at present, and Jesus of yesterday is met solely by members of the early Church. In his Christology of complementarity, Kasper pays attention to Jesus’ activity, message, and death. He holds the earthly and resurrected Jesus together while he recognizes their differences. This shows that Kasper regards the historical aspect of Jesus of Nazareth as an essential element, and as an implicit Christology. Meanwhile, Kasper also

15 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 25.

16 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 10.

17 *Ibid.*, 10–12.

18 Brian O. McDermott, “Current Theology Roman Catholic Christology: Two Recurring Themes,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 2 (June 1980), 340.

19 Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” 88.

acknowledges that the real Jesus is infinitely richer and more complex than the historical Jesus, who is the fruit of historical-critical method.²⁰ For Kasper, the pre-resurrection Jesus plays a significant role, but it is not the sole criterion in his Christology. Hence, Jesus' resurrection needs to be understood as God's definitive self-revelation gathering up the earthly Jesus' message and activity, and as the kingdom of God having come in person, thanks to God's decisive act.²¹

Loewe observes that Kasper grounds his primary criterion of the earthly Jesus and exalted Jesus in the Gospels because he identifies the saving truth of Christianity with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in whom God and humanity are made one.²² McDermott also notes that Kasper, in his Christology, gives emphasis to the identity of the exalted Lord with the earthly Jesus,²³ the reality of the Incarnation and the salvific meaning of the true humanity of Jesus.²⁴ The four Gospels are convincing as faithful historical reports and testimonies of Church's faith in Jesus Christ as true man and true God.²⁵ The Gospels describe the early Jesus through his activity: message, miracles, death, and their meaning concerning the Kingdom of God. Thus, Kasper claims that the Gospels are not merely accounts of the biography or psychology of Jesus but rather the fulfilment of God's plan. The Gospels, as the witness to faith, present and interpret the earthly and risen Jesus in the light of faith.²⁶ The accounts of the Gospel present the Jesus of history through his life and mission: the message of the Kingdom of God fulfilling God's promise,²⁷ expressing God's love²⁸ and containing salvation;²⁹ the miracles as signs of the arrival

20 Brian O. McDermott, "Current Theology Roman Catholic Christology: Two Recurring Themes," 340.

21 Brian O. McDermott, "Current Theology Roman Catholic Christology," 341.

22 Loewe, "Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect," 92.

23 McDermott, "Current Theology Roman Catholic Christology: Two Recurring Themes," 340.

24 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 28.

25 Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, vol. 5, *The Collected Works of Walter Kasper: Vol. 5* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 32.

26 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 71–72.

27 *Ibid.*, 84.

28 *Ibid.*, 95.

29 *Ibid.*, 98.

of the Kingdom of God,³⁰ and the death on the cross as a source of life and God's love for humans.³¹

The Gospels describe the earthly Jesus as a unique man from God who does not fit into any other ancient and modern categorical model.³² Jesus is different from John the Baptist who engaged in the ascetic and solitary life apart from the world, but he lived among people. He is not like the Sadducees who focus on religious obligations of specific cultic and ritual observances. He differs from the Pharisees who teach religious and moral instructions. Jesus calls God his Father (Matt 6: 25-34) and does his mission like a servant (Luke 22: 26-27). He supports the poor (Matt 11: 28-30), heals the sick (Mark 1: 29-29) and respects women (Lk 7: 36-50) and children (Mark 10: 14-15). He also has meals with the sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2, 15), and he has no sign of hatred. Jesus comes into the world to do the will of God and to serve people so that everyone can recognize the goodness of God and praise him (Mark 2: 12).³³ Jesus, in his activity, shows his authority and reveals his divinity and God's presence on earth. He is an eschatological prophet who is filled with the Spirit of God (Mk 3: 28-29; Mt 12: 28) and brings God's final word and definitive will to the world.³⁴ The earthly Jesus is seen as the presence of God, and as a charismatic prophet of the last times—the time of grace—who comes into the world to reveal God's love and mysteries by his mission.³⁵

The Gospels testify the risen Christ whom God had raised from the dead. The earthly Jesus who had been crucified on the cross has been living. The resurrection is witnessed by his disciples and proclaimed to the world. The evidence of the resurrection encounters differs with the biblical evidence between the Easter kerygma and the Easter stories found at the end of the Gospels (Mark 16: 1-8). The Easter kerygma is revealed liturgically in kerygmatic and liturgical formulations of belief. These creedal statements are seen as apart from the accounts of the Easter stories concerning the reality of the empty grave which is missing from the Easter kerygma.

30 Ibid., 112.

31 Ibid., 146.

32 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 78.

33 Ibid., 75-76.

34 Ibid., 77.

35 Loewe, "Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect," 92.

However, a generally acceptable view is that the Easter belief stems from the discovery of the empty tomb.

Kasper notes that the theologian, Hans von Campenhausen, defends this view and regards the Easter stories as secondary in importance to the kerygma.³⁶ Despite their differences, both the Easter kerygma and Easter stories agree on Jesus' appearance to certain disciples after his death, his being alive, and his resurrection from the death proclaimed by his disciples. Kasper agrees with the Belgian theologian Adolphe Gesché that the New Testament tradition of Jesus's rising from the dead is drawn not from the historical facts but rather from the confession of faith and the testimonies of believers. Historical facts of the empty tomb can serve as a sign for faith but cannot provide proof of the resurrection. Thus, Kasper emphasizes that the witness of the resurrection is not only belief in historical fact but also in the risen and living Christ as well.³⁷

John Galvin, in his article on "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics," notes that Kasper makes the risen and exalted Christ the "focal point" of his Christology.³⁸ Kasper also emphasizes faith in both the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. This shifts from the Jesus of history to the exalted Christ of faith. According to the Gospels, the cross and resurrection stand as a midpoint of Christology, extending forward to the *Parousia* and backward to the pre-existence and incarnation. This transforms the meaning of Christ's life, since it says that God assumed a human history as well as a human nature. In his position, Kasper gives equal weight to both.³⁹

Some other approaches also attempt to express the faith in the resurrection. Historically, the resurrection faith is belief in what happens to the disciples and to believers. According to the German theologian Rudolf Karl Bultmann, the origin of the resurrection faith is the historical event, the self-manifestation of the Risen One, the act of God, in which the salvation of the cross is fulfilled as an act of salvation and

36 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 157–158.

37 *Ibid.*, 162–163.

38 John P. Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics," *Theological Studies* 20, no. 2 (April 1979), 131.

39 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 32–33.

an eschatological event. This is his central argument. He unifies the resurrection with the emergence of the resurrection faith.⁴⁰

Another German theologian, Willi Marxsen sees the difference between the historical and the theological. For him, the resurrection means that Jesus' work continues, the coming of God's Kingdom occurs again and again. The resurrection is not the central fact of Christian faith, but only the precondition for Jesus' work to continue.⁴¹ Still another German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, emphasizes the proof of the historical reality of the resurrection and maintains that the resurrection really took place by the historical fact of the empty tomb.⁴² With these problems, that is the contradictions and disagreements among theologians, the second Vatican Council made comments on revelation in general that are particularly relevant to the resurrection: "This plan of revelation is realized by words and deeds having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them."⁴³

Anthropologically, many other theologians attempt to answer the question of the human's purpose in life. Karl Rahner starts from a phenomenology of human freedom, which tends towards the absolute and the definitive act of freedom for human beings. Joseph Ratzinger makes similar points using a phenomenology of love, which is stronger than death. In a different way, Pannenberg begins from the phenomenology of hope. For him, the meaning of the image and symbol of the resurrection of the dead is human hope. Moltmann adds the hope for justice. Bultmann sees the concept of a general resurrection of the dead through a neo-Judaic apocalyptic lens as having followed logically from thinking through its conclusion to the idea of God's invincibly victorious justice. All these attempts claim that the question of the ultimate purpose of human beings' lives cannot be answered from their own history but only

40 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 166-167.

41 *Ibid.*, 167-168.

42 *Ibid.*, 170.

43 Vatican Council II, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, on November 18, 1965," no. 2.

from eschatology. People can find the answer by looking at the history and searching for the signs in which the end is portrayed.⁴⁴ Therefore, resurrection faith reveals who God is in his divinity and offers humanity a future of hope (Rom 4: 18).⁴⁵

Theologically, those to whom the Risen Lord appeared are the witnesses of the resurrection. Their faith in Christ establishes how the early Church speaks to Christ's mission. This appearance is God's revelation in which we come to know God himself, and God's act by which God made the Risen Lord manifest (Acts 10:40). But God also reveals himself in the hiddenness and mysteriousness as the transcendent Lord (John 45:15).⁴⁶ The appearance is the revelation of the crucified Jesus as the risen and transcendent Lord, who has made us his own (Phil 3:12). Furthermore, the Risen Lord's appearance is deeply interpreted as part of the eschatological events which reveal the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The glory of God is shown in his identification with the crucified and resurrected Christ. The appearance has become the Risen Christ's manifestation which the apostles experienced and presented in their act of faith and adoration. Therefore, the Easter faith that the apostles encounter is not an actual experience, but rather a spirit vision seen as the foundation of the Easter faith.⁴⁷ The accounts of the New Testament show that the apostles, through Easter faith, became aware of the reality of the Kingdom of God which had finally come in Jesus Christ through his death, through the shining of God's glory on the face of their crucified Lord. Especially the Easter faith of the first apostles forms the fundamental structures of the faith of the Church, in which the faithful stand with their faith on the foundation of the apostolic testimony. Faith in the risen Christ from the witness of the apostles is handed down in the Church. And only in and through this witness is the risen Christ, through his Spirit, actually present in history. Jesus is said to be risen in the kerygma and permanently present in history through the witness of

44 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 171-172.

45 Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, The Collected Works of Walter Kasper, Vol. 5 (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 47.

46 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 172-73.

47 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 174-75.

the apostolic Church.⁴⁸ Therefore, Kasper claims that the central point of Christian faith is God's saving activity through the person and history of Jesus Christ, and future proclamation of the Christian message will relate to this central point.⁴⁹

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

From the discussions examined above, Kasper indicates that the Christian faith is ultimately grounded on the resurrected Christ, who is identified by the earthly Jesus. Through Jesus Christ, God reveals Himself as his love and his Kingdom as a just life for human beings. In order to understand God's self-revelation and his Kingdom, it is necessary to deepen some main themes of the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ in order to uncover the meaning of the Kingdom in relation to the quest for love, peace, and justice today.

The main themes come from the heart of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God, described through his person. The Gospels show that Jesus is the Kingdom of God, the One who fulfilled God's promise as well as humans' hope for the establishment of a just life which was never fulfilled on earth. Thus, Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is seen in the context of humankind's searching for peace, justice, freedom, and life.⁵⁰ The Kingdom of God is seen with three characteristics: eschatology, theology, and soteriology.

Within its eschatological character, the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament is understood as the reign of God established and ruled by God – "God is King." God promised an earthly kingdom under the kingly rule of God which would last forever and would be over all of the nations. It was explicitly regarded in the book of Daniel, as the prophet spoke about an eschatological reign coming down to earth from heaven (Daniel 2: 34-35); and as an earthly messianic Kingdom originated by God (Daniel 2: 44). Therefore, in the New Testament, when Jesus proclaims, "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt 1: 14-15; Mark 10: 7; Luke 10: 9,11), he speaks of the two stages of the Kingdom: one is the

48 Ibid., 76–77.

49 Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 98.

50 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 81-82.

appearance at the present time, and the other is the final judgment at the end of time. Jesus started a new age, the time of salvation when the God of Israel now exercises his lordship on the earth; hence, the eschatological hope is fulfilled.⁵¹ For Joseph Ratzinger, the message of the Kingdom is also about Jesus himself. In Jesus, God here and now acts and rules as Lord. With Jesus' presence and actions, the Kingdom of God is said to be at hand and really exists in time.⁵² However, the full manifestation of the Kingdom has not yet come. It is still coming in the future. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, the message of God's Kingdom creates a hope which will be fulfilled when God is finally "all in all" (1Cor 15: 18).⁵³ Thus, Jesus taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), and to ask God for the fullness of the Kingdom because God alone is in charge of the accomplishment of the Kingdom. No purely human program could equate to the fullness of the kingdom.⁵⁴ However, John Bright speaks of an "eschatological community" which is the community of those who have already been living in the Kingdom though its fullness in the Church. But its arrival is in the process of arriving through living the Beatitudes. So the Church is said to be the first fruit of the Kingdom of God, the sign of the Kingdom in the future.⁵⁵

With theological character, the Kingdom of God is God's Lordship consisting in the sovereignty of God's love. God's love is manifested through his creation of the world, his support and care for all creatures.⁵⁶ God's Lordship is also expressed noticeably in the way Jesus calls God his Father, *Abba*. Jesus combines the term "Father" with the reign and authority of God showing that God's Kingdom is viewed as God's rule in love.⁵⁷ According to the theologian Benedict T. Viviano, the Kingdom of God is not a part of any political program or any project of

51 Ibid., 84-85.

52 Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Part Two (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press), 61.

53 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 88.

54 Benedict T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1998), 16.

55 John Bright, *The Kingdom of God – The Biblical Concept and the Meaning of The Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 233.

56 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 89.

57 Ibid., 90.

the social revolution. Rather, God's reign is with love and peace given to all unconditionally.⁵⁸ Furthermore, God's Lordship shows itself in his sovereign freedom to love and to forgive, as Luke names the perfection of the Father in heaven as mercy (Luke 6: 36). God's fatherly love reaches out to the lost and restores the dead to life (Luke 15: 24).⁵⁹ Thus, the message of God's Kingdom in love means that God is the ultimate source of human existence and salvation. With the entry into the Kingdom of God, the world enters into salvation.⁶⁰

According to the soteriological characteristic, the Kingdom of God is interpreted as salvation through his love⁶¹ that brings joy as an essential gift to humans.⁶² The salvation brought about by the Kingdom of God includes the forgiveness of sins and the rejoicing at having encountered the boundless and unmerited mercy of God. God's love expresses itself in acts of mercy that include the self-offering of Jesus on the cross which justifies us by grace and brings us to salvation.⁶³ Thus, the Kingdom of God is totally God's acting to bring salvation to the world.⁶⁴ The salvation of the Kingdom of God is the coming to power in and through human beings through the self-communicating love of God. Through love, human beings can find the meaning and fulfilment of their life and the world.⁶⁵

Jesus' miracles demonstrate the Kingdom of God. In his mission, Jesus proclaims the new age of God's Kingdom through both his preaching and his acts of healing, forgiving, exorcizing, and raising the dead which manifest the divine power, and the hidden but powerful presence of God's Kingdom.⁶⁶ Jesus' miracles are signs of the arrival of God's Kingdom which means the end of Satan's power and the beginning of

58 Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 21.

59 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 92.

60 *Ibid.*, 95.

61 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 95.

62 Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith.*, 46.

63 Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, 70.

64 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 92.

65 *Ibid.*, 998-99.

66 Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: St. Paul, 2002), 111.

divine power in Jesus.⁶⁷ In the eschatological of meaning, Jesus' miracles become a sign of humans' hope for the new and reconciled world both at present and in the future,⁶⁸ in which humans may live forever with God and for the living God.⁶⁹ Jesus' miracles manifest God's justice and power in human lowliness. Another important aspect of Jesus' miracles is the sign of faith. Miracles and faith go closely together. Miracles aim at leading humans to faith and requires faith, as Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 5.34). Besides, miracles are recognized as acts of God performed with God's love and almighty power. Thus, belief in miracles is trust in in God's almighty power and providence. The real object of this belief is God, not extraordinary phenomena.⁷⁰

Jesus' proclamation of the message of God's Kingdom is also expressed by his act of suffering and death on the cross. Jesus' death on the cross is an event through which God has reconciled humans to himself (2Cor 5:19-20). Through Jesus' passion, the world which is unjust and cruel becomes pure and stronger because the infinite love of God is greater than the vastness of human evil;⁷¹ God's deep love is fulfilled by the fact that Christ died for humans' sins. By his saving acts God himself comes down to humans and draws them back up to himself.⁷² Jesus' passion accompanies the Kingdom of God, relating to the Last Supper of Jesus, in which Jesus foretells his approach to suffering and identifies it as an eschatological message of God's Kingdom. Jesus' death is connected with the Kingdom of God in which God comes in lowliness and suffering to serve and redeem humans.⁷³ The Last Supper also implies an anticipation of the eschatological Kingdom of God in which the gracious mercy of God is already being extended. So, God's Kingdom does not end at Jesus' death, but it is a continuation of what Jesus had begun in his lifetime.⁷⁴

67 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 112.

68 *Ibid.*, 112–13.

69 Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 111-112.

70 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 115-116

71 Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 230-231.

72 *Ibid.*, 252–53.

73 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 144–48.

74 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 66.

The Kingdom of God is understood significantly in the exalted Jesus. Kasper sees the resurrection as “the inner unity of an eschatological, historical and theological event.”⁷⁵ Jesus’ resurrection is an eschatological event, in which Jesus is the first being raised from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection is the real event of salvation and God’s effective intervention in the history of human life. Jesus’ rising from the dead means that he begins a new life in God (Rom 6: 9), and the resurrection is a beginning of the new creation (1Cor 15: 42).⁷⁶ It is an event of faith in the exalted Jesus that the crucified Jesus now continues living with God.⁷⁷ R.L. Stice notes that this is a new aspect of the resurrection which Kasper emphasizes.⁷⁸ For Kasper, raising up to the right hand of God includes two meanings: Jesus’ being with God in the dimension of God’s power and glory; the risen and exalted Christ’s being with us in a new way.⁷⁹ Likewise, Joseph Ratzinger claims that Jesus does not return to his old life and die again but he lives in the realm of the living⁸⁰ and creates a new space of being in union with God for us.⁸¹ In this regard, John P. Galvin also asserts that the corporeality of the resurrection is necessary to be understood as the continuity of the contact with the world, despite it being in a fully new and divine manner.⁸² Historically, Jesus’ resurrection also shows that the historical Jesus with a real body is actually resurrected. His resurrected body has absolutely entered into the Kingdom of God and has been still with us in God’s way.⁸³ Theologically, Jesus’ resurrection is a redemptive event that gives us hope for the resurrection of the dead in the future, hope for eternal life regarding faith in God’s love and faithfulness which remains forever (1Cor 13: 8),⁸⁴ along with hope for the new existence in Christ. The new being in Christ expresses many indispensable aspects: life, justice, redemption, peace, and

75 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 191.

76 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 183-184.

77 *Ibid.*, 190.

78 R.L. Stice, “Jesus The Christ: The Christology of Walter Kasper,” *Heythrop Journal* 49, no. 2 (2008), 244.

79 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 191.

80 Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 273.

81 *Ibid.*, 274.

82 Galvin, “The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics,” 130.

83 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 192–93.

84 *Ibid.*, 197–98.

forgiveness. Especially, with the new being in Christ, Christians become the people of freedom for God.⁸⁵ They are free from sin and become slaves of righteousness (Rom 6: 18), being free from death (Rom 6: 5-9) and being free from the law regarding love and the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13: 10).⁸⁶ Thus, the resurrection is the revelation of God's Kingdom including his eschatological act with love, faithfulness, and the new life in Christ.

THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

From the arguments of the central message of Jesus' proclamation above, we can acknowledge that love, peace, and justice are seen as the signs of the Kingdom of God. It is helpful to compare this idea of Kasper's with other thinkers such as Benedict T. Viviano and John Bright to see similarities and differences in their views on its meaning and how to live in God's Kingdom in this time.

According to Kasper, the message of the Kingdom of God is understood in the apocalyptic framework including not only the quest of Israel but also the human quest of peace, freedom, justice and life. In the context of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God, he rediscovers the world as God's creation and proclaims God as the Lord of all creation. Thus, the acts of healing, exorcizing, and raising from the dead are signs and participations of this new and reconciled world made whole. The coming of God's Kingdom brings salvation to the world. God's action demands a human response. Human response does not only mean that we can build up the reign of God, but also human conversion and faith. God's action is not violence, but love.⁸⁷ Kasper emphasizes that love is the center of Jesus' moral attitude and teachings. Jesus does not want to wound but he heals wounds and puts an end to violence by commanding people to love their enemy (Matt 5: 38-48).⁸⁸ It is decisive to live as new people in this old world (Rom 6:4) because the Kingdom of God, which has already begun, is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14: 17). Therefore, Kasper realizes that Jesus' calling is to give help and healing in the world so that the justice, peace and joy of the coming of God become

85 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 199.

86 *Ibid.*, 200-201.

87 Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: Continuum, 2012), 167-168.

88 Kasper, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 37.

visible at present.⁸⁹ Kasper understands the Church as the actual presence of the Kingdom within history. The Church as the holy people of God commands justice because holiness is impossible without justice.⁹⁰

Like Kasper, Benedict T. Viviano sees that justice and peace are the signs of God's Kingdom. He furthers the way to fight for justice is through love and forgiveness. During Jesus' earthly ministry, he stood on behalf of the poor, the outcast, the lowest class, and foreigners, to speak for them, fight for their due, and obtain for them their dignity. Jesus himself in his trial faced injustice and violence. However, with love Jesus manifested the victory of God's Kingdom over such powers in a non-violent way which is the way of the Cross by which Jesus meekly embraced suffering and death. Jesus rose from the dead having forgiven those who had crucified him and called for unity.⁹¹ In the message of Romans 14: 17, Viviano interprets that the Kingdom under the kingly rule of God will bring the best state of social justice, peace and happiness to humans.⁹² Human beings do not directly construct God's Kingdom. Rather, the Kingdom is an eschatological gift of God. God is the only One who decides the total manifestation and accomplishment of the Kingdom. He emphasizes that although human effort is not the conclusive factor inaugurating the fullness of the Kingdom, people could contribute to the coming of the Kingdom through their preparation for it. By praying and living a good moral life together with intelligence, planning, and actions permeated with love, believers can contribute to the building up of a society with justice and peace as its priorities.⁹³ Thus, through earnest prayer and good works the world could be well prepared for the Kingdom to come. Differing from Kasper, Viviano sees the Church as the community of the followers of Jesus, who are called to follow Jesus in his non-violent path to pursue justice, and to continue his ministry on earth with the power of the Holy Spirit to give birth to the Kingdom.⁹⁴

89 Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (New York: T & T Clark, 2015), 97–98.

90 *Ibid.*, 163.

91 Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 21.

92 *Ibid.*, 18.

93 Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 22–23.

94 *Ibid.*, 21.

Like Viviano, John Bright notes that believers should prepare themselves to fulfill God's Kingdom in the present time. As citizens of an "eschatological community," believers should submit themselves to the rule of God's Kingdom. Such rule is the ethics of Jesus depicted in the Beatitudes with the poor in spirit, the meek, the hunger for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, and the peace-maker. By living the Beatitudes, the believers follow the example of Jesus and commit themselves to his teachings. Thus, they are gradually trained in accordance with the principle of the Kingdom so as to be fit for it. And in so doing, they participate here and now in its fullness in the age to come.⁹⁵ Bright sees that the Church is the first fruit of the Kingdom of God, the sign of the Kingdom in the future. Thus, the Church belongs to the eschatological community. The Church is more than an institution. In fact, in its essence, the Church is a mystical communion with Christ, a community of the disciples of Jesus, and the sacrament of Jesus himself and His Body. The Church as it is now not the Kingdom of God fully revealed. The Church is on the way to transformation and purification in order to manifest its eschatological state.⁹⁶

The message of the Kingdom of God with regard to love, peace, and justice in the views of Kasper, Viviano, and Bright are similar because they are based on biblical tradition, especially on the words and actions of Jesus which express the character of God's Kingdom. They all approach the Kingdom of God with an eschatological perspective in that its full manifestation has not yet arrived, but human beings can approach it by following Jesus in his moral life and ethical acts. They also agree that God's Kingdom is at hand in the person Jesus Christ. They all focus on God's love through his actions which bring salvation, love, and justice to humans. All agree that the Church is understood as God's Kingdom which has eschatological meaning, but we are called to participate in it through acts of love, peace and justice. Besides the similarities, some different expressions are identified in the way to fulfill God's Kingdom. While Kasper pays attention to Christian's conversion and faith, Viviano emphasizes their life of prayer and good works. While Kasper sees the

⁹⁵ Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 233.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 247–48.

Church as the holy people of God, who cannot be unjust, Bright shows that the Church is on the way to the perfection in God.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kasper, through his work of *Jesus the Christ*, shows God's self-revelation as love in the person Jesus Christ – the earthly and the exalted Jesus, who brings to human beings the message of his Kingdom, in which they can attain salvation, joy, peace, and justice. Especially, in our modern time, everyone - both believers and non-believers - is looking for a better place to live and has made a great effort to build up society with concern for both human values and the integrity of creation. Therefore, the message of God's Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus has served to point us in the right direction in the quest for social justice so as to fulfill Christian hope, which is not only for eternal life with God but also for the Kingdom of God on earth. This Kingdom is a reign with the power of love and forgiveness that will bring forth the ultimate justice, peace, and happiness.



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