

REIGN OF GOD

Jesus of Nazareth placed the “coming of God’s reign” at the very center of his mission. In the Synoptic Gospels, it functions as a central theological symbol through which the teaching, actions, and ministry of Jesus are to be understood.

While virtually all interpreters of the Scriptures recognize its importance, the precise meaning of the “Reign of God” remains a matter of ongoing theological reflection. It is clear, however, that Jesus did not invent this expression, nor did the early Church. Rather, it is deeply rooted in the theology and history of Israel, where God’s kingship and saving action are already at the heart of the covenant story.

Throughout Christian history, the interpretation of the “Reign of God” has taken different forms. One major question has been its relationship to the Church. St. Augustine, for example, tended to identify the Reign of God with the heavenly Church in its fullness. In some strands of medieval theology, the Reign of God was closely associated with the visible, historical Church on earth.

Understanding of this symbol is also shaped by one’s eschatology. Where God’s saving action is understood primarily as future and otherworldly, the Reign of God tends to be interpreted in individual and interior terms. Where God’s saving action is understood as already active within history, the Reign of God is more closely associated with social transformation and the renewal of human structures.

Renewed attention to the eschatological preaching of Jesus and the early Christian community has helped recover the full biblical depth of this key metaphor. The Reign of God is not simply an abstract ethical ideal, nor is it reducible to individual spiritual experience. At the same time, it cannot be separated from the concrete realities of justice, peace, and the transformation of human life, as liberation theology has rightly emphasized.

The key is to hold together the full biblical tension of the symbol. The Reign of God expresses the decisive and gracious action of God in history; it reveals the new quality of life made visible in the person and ministry of Jesus; it is a communal and cosmic reality that will be fully revealed at the end of history, and yet is already present, in a real though incomplete way, in the life of faith and the life of the Church.

In this sense, the biblical notion of the Reign of God remains continuous with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, while receiving its definitive shape and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection proclaim and embody God’s saving reign in the world.