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## **Kingdom Theology: Introducing Animists to Christian Perspectives**

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The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. [Ps. 103:19]

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. [Rev. 12:10]

**T**he tenseness of my visitors was apparent as they sipped tea at my house. They were wondering, “Will this missionary understand what we have come to explain?” After circling the problem for some minutes, they exclaimed, “Two of our children are possessed by spirits. They have been sick for almost two years now. What shall we do? What does Christ say about this?” These questions were asked by Kipsigis Christians of Kenya who greatly feared the anger of an irritable ancestor. As

most Kipsigis do, they believed that all spirits are ancestors and that ancestors frequently possess the living and inflict harm. Ancestors, who at death are separated from their physical bodies, become impatient when they are not called back into the realm of the living within a reasonable period of time. The anger of an impatient spirit is greatly feared.

These beliefs were so foreign to me that I had no ready answers. I lacked the theological framework to understand spiritual beings. The biblical message I preached had little to do with God's cosmic work in defeating spiritual powers. I could respond only by saying, "Let us pray God Almighty to free the children of the spirits." My inadequacy led me to search for theological models, rooted in biblical theology, that would speak to those coming to Christ from animistic backgrounds. It was evident that my Western theological framework, which had little to do with spiritual powers, was insufficient for teaching in animistic contexts.

### **The Individualistic Nature of Conversion Theology**

Western missionaries have grown up in a culture where the autonomy and dignity of the individual are stressed. The individual is considered more important than the group. Western mythical heroes are the strutting cowboy and the private detective who boldly confront societal injustice yet as loners stand apart from the group. For example, while admired and respected by the masses, the Lone Ranger "never settles down and marries the local schoolteacher. . . . It is as if the myth says you can be a truly good person, worthy of admiration and love, only if you resist fully joining the group" (Bellah 1985, 145). Heroes are individuals who, while respected and loved, never become participants in the group.

Individualism is stressed in every facet of life. At an early age children learn to distinguish between "my things" and "your things." As adults, they differentiate "my rights" and "your rights." Independent nuclear families mirror the culture as a whole; each nuclear family is independent of the control of the extended family. Elective democracy stands as the cultural ideal; each individual has an equal voice in government regardless of his understanding of the issues involved. Praise and honor are given to the individual who outperforms his peers; certificates of

achievement decorating the walls testify to his success. Even team sports are individualized with detailed statistics kept on each player. The accomplishments of star players—the number of strikeouts, home runs, and stolen bases—are frequently more important than the team who wins.

Such intense individualism is foreign to most animistic peoples. The Hopi consider all things as “ours” and seek what is right for the group. Teachers in such a society cannot praise the outstanding accomplishments of an individual student or give individual awards without causing severe cultural disruption. The Kipsigis of Kenya, although more individualistic than the Hopi, are also group-oriented. They live in a face-to-face society in which relations are worked out within the extended family. The dead are understood as the extension of the family in the world of the spirits. Within this context a missionary was justly rebuked for creating jealousy by publicly praising individual evangelists. Severe cultural disruptions frequently occur when Western individualistic perspectives are projected upon group-oriented peoples.

Individualism is based on the belief that a person has within himself the power to succeed. He needs no other powers or spirits, magic or wizardry to direct his life. His success or failure depends on his own individual achievement. If he succeeds, it is due to his human capabilities. If he fails, it is due to his inadequacies. An individual must make his way without reliance on social or spiritual resources.

Western individualism has become so intense that it has frequently undermined biblical Christianity. *My* rights and *my* needs become more important than God’s sovereignty and his wishes. Robert Bellah rightly comments that “modern individualism seems to be producing a way of life that is neither individually nor socially viable,” and he wonders if “older civic and biblical traditions have the capacity to reformulate themselves while simultaneously remaining faithful to their own deepest insights” (1985, 144).

For the purpose of this study it is extremely important to note that individualism has critically affected the message communicated by Western evangelists. Emphasis is placed upon a person’s *individual* conversion. Prospective converts are led to consider individualized questions such as “What must *I* do to be saved?” “Are *you* saved?” “Have *you* received Jesus?” The emphasis upon the individual is shown by the stress placed on the per-

sonal pronouns *I* and *you* when asking these questions. The human response to God is emphasized rather than the sovereign working of God in the world.

This individualized formulation of the gospel, called *conversion theology*, presents some biblical truths but does not portray a holistic picture of God's working in the world. The nature of God and his mighty acts, God's saving work through Jesus Christ, and the degenerative character of sin, which has severed the relationship between the human and divine, are communicated as pieces of a cosmic picture not as an integrated worldview. These core theologies often become tangential rather than integral and indispensable parts of the core message.

Although Western Christians typically begin teaching non-Christians about personal salvation, they realize that other teachings are also required. Consequently, they attach other teachings to their conversional message. For example, since they realize that those converted must be organized into a group, they attach the concept of church. Frequently, one study brochure is developed to convert the individual and another to integrate him into the church. Even this appended teaching about the church is understood individualistically; the church is an aggregate of individual Christians brought together to minister to one another and worship God.

When Christian teachers see the newly converted struggle with sin, they belatedly tack on teachings about overcoming problems. These sins might involve marital fidelity, sexual purity, discipline and training of children, ethics in the workplace, or the achievement of success in a stressful world. Only when the Western Christian gets down to the level of overcoming problems might the message deal with the sovereignty of creator God. Even on this level, God might be looked upon as a functional being, a help-me god, formulated by culture so that believers might solve their human dilemmas. This god is a product of culture rather than the God of the Bible. Such functional Christianity is rootless because it does not begin with the nature and working of God. Too often secular answers are given to these problems because this functional form of Christianity is more rooted in human response than in an awe-inspiring belief in God's sovereignty.

Individualistic thought forms are diametrically opposed to animistic perspectives. While individualists believe they can chart their own courses, animists believe that they are living in an

interconnected world. They feel intimately connected to their *families*, some of whom are living and some of whom have already passed on to a spiritual realm. Animists also believe they are connected to the *spiritual world*. Gods, spirits, ancestors, and ghosts pervade the world, and their ambivalent yearnings affect the living. Animists frequently feel a connectedness with *nature*. The stars, planets, and moon are thought to influence earthly events. Events of the natural realm are so related to the human realm that practitioners divine current and future events by analyzing what animals are doing or by sacrificing animals and analyzing their livers, entrails, or stomachs. Animists also believe that they are connected with *other human beings*. They access the thoughts of other human beings through extrasensory perception or another type of thought transfer. Thus the animist believes that no person can live as an individual, separate and apart from his extended family, spiritual powers, nature, or thoughts of other human beings. Animists live in an interconnected universe.

Conversion theology is an inadequate model for converting animists for two reasons. First, conversion in animistic contexts frequently is not individualistic. Decisions to come to Christ might be made by a group of people interacting with each other and with God. For example, societies like the Hopi and Kipsigis make consensus decisions. A lengthy discussion precedes any response to the gospel message. The individuals in the group significantly influence each other to accept or reject the Christian message. Second, and more significant, the content of the biblical message encompasses more than conversion. The message to the animist must present a God who sent his Son not only to bring salvation from sin (Luke 19:10) but also to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8).

## The Cosmic Nature of Kingdom Theology

As I studied biblical theology within the Kipsigis context, I grew to believe that the focus must be upon God rather than upon the response of the individual. I began to study a kingdom perspective—that God in Christ has broken into the world to establish his own sovereignty and defeat the powers of Satan. As a consequence, my preaching began to center on the nature and

work of God. This message had cosmic dimensions far beyond the conversion of individuals. People were called to conversion on the basis of the mighty working of God in the world and disciplined to reflect the nature of holy God. This section shows that a kingdom perspective is the “scarlet thread that runs through the biblical testimonies” (Moltmann 1981, 95).

### *The Meaning of Kingdom*

The term *kingdom* means “a rule or reign, an exercise of authority.” When applied to the reign of God in the world, the term means “the rule or sovereignty of creator God.” G. R. Beasley-Murray thus equates the terms *kingdom* and *sovereignty* throughout his detailed text on the kingdom of God (1986, 74). George Ladd defines *kingdom* in the following way: “The *primary* meaning of both the Hebrew word *malkuth* in the Old Testament and of the Greek word *basileia* in the New Testament is the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. . . . A kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king” (1959, 19). The kingdom of God was established when Christ, the King, initiated his rule.

The synonymous parallelisms of Psalm 145:11–13 define the nature of the kingdom of God:

They will tell of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your might,  
so that all men may know of your mighty acts  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.  
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and your dominion endures through all generations.

God’s kingdom is one of glory and splendor. The synonymous parallelisms equate the kingdom with *mighty acts* and *dominion*. Thus God “does not merely sit on a throne, but he reigns by performing mighty deeds. His rule is not static but is expressed in acts of power” (Ferguson 1989, 7).

Although the church reflects the rule of God in the world, the kingdom cannot be precisely paralleled with the church. Old Testament kingdom passages confirm that the rule of God existed before the coming of Christ, the ultimate King, and the establishment of the church. Neither can the kingdom be strictly equated

with some cosmic event that will take place when Christ returns. Although the consummation of the kingdom will occur at the end of time, the kingdom of God is a continuing historical reality.

### *The Roots of Kingdom Theology in the Old Testament*

Although the word *kingdom* is seldom mentioned in the Old Testament, the meaning of the term has its roots there (Bright 1953). The term *king* is applied to Yahweh forty-one times. The theme of “God, the ruling Lord” is a thread running throughout the Old Testament (Beasley-Murray 1986, 17). This ruling Lord elected a people to become his “kingdom” although all the world was his (Deut. 7:6–8). This people was chosen to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5–6). As the Levites were priests of Israel, so Israel was to be a kingdom of priests for the world.

During this early period God was considered the king of Israel. When Israel wanted an earthly king, both Gideon (Judg. 8:22–23) and Samuel (1 Sam. 8:1–8) told the Israelites that God was their king. Saul was anointed the first king over Israel with the words “Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over his inheritance?” (1 Sam. 10:1). The rule of God was sovereign over the rule of the king. When these earthly kings followed the reign of God, they were blessed, but when they forsook Yahweh as their exclusive sovereign and acknowledged the sovereignty of other gods, they were driven out of their promised land (2 Kings 17:13–18).

Although Israel was God’s special kingdom of priests, God ruled over all nations. Not only Israel but all nations were accountable to God for their sins (Amos 1–2; Ezek. 25–32). God, who freed the Israelites from Egyptian captivity, also delivered the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir (Amos 9:7). God not only gave Canaan to the Jews but also allotted the Moabites and Ammonites their lands (Deut. 2:16–19). God sent the Jewish prophet Jonah to save the great Assyrian city of Ninevah. The theme of Daniel is that “the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men” (Dan. 5:21). “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over *all*” (Ps. 103:19, emphasis added).

Israel was elected to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5–6) to represent God before the world (Deut.

7:6–8) and to be “a light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6 RSV). However, Israel abandoned her priestly role and followed the gods of the nations. By so doing, the Israelites forsook the kingdom of God. Old Testament history portrays the failure of a chosen people to fully accept the rule of God because they were repeatedly seduced by animistic practices (2 Kings 17:7–23).

The expectation that God’s reign would break more fully into the world in the person of the Messiah is also reflected in Old Testament prophetic writings. One would come announcing “peace” and proclaiming “Your God reigns!” (Isa. 52:7). Ezekiel raised the expectation that Israel and Judah would be reunited and that God’s “servant David” would be king over them (37:24; 34:23, see also 30–31). The chapters of Daniel that deal with the setting up of a great kingdom compare the kingdoms of the earth to the coming kingdom of God (2, 7, 8). God’s kingdom, which will “never be destroyed” (2:44), will crush all earthly kingdoms (7:13–14, 17–18). The Messiah, who brought the kingdom, was given “dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him” (7:14 NASB).

These passages give only a brief sampling of the developing kingdom concept in the Old Testament. The concept continued to evolve during the intertestamental period<sup>1</sup> to the point where the Jews of Jesus’ day were reported as asking themselves if Jesus could be the Messiah who would bring in the expected kingdom (John 7:40–43).

### ***The Breaking in of the Kingdom in the Ministry of Jesus***

With the coming of Jesus Christ the word *kingdom* began to connote God’s distinctive reign in his Son. In Christ, God established a sovereign rule that would never be destroyed.

Jesus was born during a time of great messianic expectation. The Jews believed that God was about to fulfill the messianic prophecies by sending the Messiah to sweep away the wicked kingdoms of human sovereignty and fill the earth with righteousness. But Jesus did not come to destroy the wicked kingdoms of this world but rather to destroy the kingdom of Satan. Ladd says, “The kingdom of God is here; but instead of destroying human

1. For a complete description of the concept of the kingdom in the Old Testament and during the intertestamental period, read Beasley-Murray’s *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (1986:3–68).

sovereignty, it has attacked the sovereignty of Satan” (1981, 56). Although the coming kingdom could not fulfill earthly Jewish expectations because Christ’s kingdom was not “of this world” (John 18:36), messianic anticipations served to draw thousands to hear John the Baptist and Jesus proclaim the imminence of the kingdom. These expectations were part of God’s timing in preparing the world to receive his message (Gal. 4:4).

The kingdom began to break into the world with John the Baptist. He was the first to proclaim “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1–2 RSV). Luke 16:16 signifies that John is a dividing line between two periods: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached.” The term *until* (*mechri*) is used in an inclusive sense meaning “up to and including” John (Beasley-Murray 1986, 94). John is the “man who formed the watershed of the ages, who bridged the gap between the period of promise and the period of fulfillment, and who by his proclamation opened a way for the kingdom of God” (Beasley-Murray 1986, 96). When John was put in prison, concluding his ministry of introducing the kingdom, Jesus began his ministry (Mark 1:14).

Jesus’ message is summarized in each of the synoptic Gospels by the statement “Repent, for the kingdom of God [heaven] is at hand” (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15 NASB). The phrase *at hand* has connotations for both the present and the future. It means “‘drawing near,’ ‘breaking in,’ ‘in process of becoming’” (Ferguson 1989, 24). The synthetic parallelism of Mark 1:15 helps to clarify the meaning of *at hand*: “The time is fulfilled” is synonymous with “the kingdom of God is at hand.” The first phrase “looks backward, while the second looks to the present and future; the first announces the end of the old era, the second proclaims the beginning of the new” (Ambrozic 1972, 21–22). Beasley-Murray thus interprets this passage to mean, “If the time before the kingdom is finished, the time of the kingdom has begun” (1986, 73). In Jesus Christ, God has broken into the world to initiate a rule that will never be destroyed. In a sense the kingdom was coming yet it was also in their midst in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. When Christ the King came, the kingdom began to break into the world.

Because it addresses a Jewish audience with messianic expectations, Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes the kingdom. The book begins with a genealogy designating that Jesus is “the son of

David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). The messianic title *son of David* is used nine times to describe Jesus (Ferguson 1989, 20–21). He was born as "king of the Jews" (2:2). He told parables of the kingdom (chap. 13), used kingdom power to cast out demons (12:28), and taught principles of righteousness inherent in the kingdom (5:20). His triumphal entry was pictured as the coming of the Messiah in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. Jesus died as "the king of the Jews" (27:11–42). The concept of the kingdom is so dominant in Matthew that the word *kingdom* is used fifty-one times in this Gospel while only eighteen times in the Gospel of Mark (Senior 1984, 237). Jack Kingsbury says, "The single most comprehensive concept in the first Gospel is without doubt that of the Kingdom of Heaven. It touches on every major facet of the Gospel, whether it is theological, christological, or ecclesiological in nature" (1975b, 128). Although dominant in Matthew, the kingdom motif is significant in all the Gospels. This teaching "pervades the entire proclamation of Jesus recorded in the gospels and appears to have determined the course of his ministry" (Beasley-Murray 1986, x).

Matthew comments that Jesus "went throughout Galilee, . . . preaching the good news of the kingdom" (4:23). Proclamation was accompanied by the deeds that defeated the powers of Satan: demons were cast out by the power of God and the sick were healed (Matt. 4:23–24). According to Mark's account, those who heard the kingdom proclamation of Jesus were told to "repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15 RSV). The Good News of the kingdom of God was now operative among them; it was now time to respond to the mighty acts of God in history! With such expectations it is no wonder that thousands flocked to hear the proclamation of the kingdom from Jesus of Nazareth, who was acclaimed as the long-awaited Messiah of God.

### ***Two Kingdoms in Opposition***

The Gospels picture two kingdoms standing in opposition to one another. The kingdom of God came with power to defeat the dominions of Satan. When a demon-possessed man was healed by Jesus, multitudes of Jews began to wonder if Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David. The Pharisees, becoming jealous, retorted that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus replied by describing two opposing king-

doms. The demons were not cast out by Beelzebub because Satan would not fight against himself (Matt. 12:22–27). Then Jesus said, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28 NASB). Deliverance from demon possession demonstrated the emancipating power of God that had entered the world to defeat the power of Satan.

In Matthew 12:29 Jesus gives the analogy of the binding of the strong man in order to carry off his property. Satan in this context is the strong man; however, Jesus, the implied stronger man, is able to bind him. When healing the spirit-possessed, Jesus entered the house of Satan, bound him, and took possession of his property. This defeat of Satan was characteristic of Christ’s ministry. He was breaking down the authority of Satan by entering his domain, a world controlled by his power (1 John 5:19).

It must be noted that the stronger man “*first binds the strong man*” before he may “*plunder his house*” (Matt. 12:29 RSV, emphasis added). The satanic influence in a person must be defeated before God can take possession of him. “The plundering of the Strong Man’s house takes place only *after* he had been defeated” (Beasley-Murray 1986, 109).

The defeat of Satan during Jesus’ ministry was a foretaste of what Jesus did in breaking the chains of death and being raised from the dead (Col. 2:15). The entire ministry of Jesus was characterized by triumph over Satan. This has become a testimony to later generations that “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 RSV).

Thus the kingdom was proclaimed not only by word but also by deed. Jesus proclaimed the message of the kingdom while at the same time casting out demons and helping the blind to see and the lame to walk (Matt. 11:5). The kingdom in the New Testament is seen as the “dynamic activity of God, operative in, with, and through” Jesus Christ (Beasley-Murray 1986, 74).

### ***Kingdom Perspectives in Early Christian Proclamation***

The kingdom was also proclaimed in the ministry of the early church. When Philip went to Samaria and “proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:5), his message was “the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul was said to have gone “about preaching the kingdom” (Acts

20:25). His ministry was reflected in his conversional experience. Christ called him on the road to Damascus to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles—"to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Paul in Rome declared the "kingdom of God" (Acts 28:23) to the Jews. Pauline Epistles proclaim deliverance "from the dominion of darkness . . . into the kingdom of the Son" (Col. 1:13). Apostolic preaching might be summarized as kingdom proclamation.

This proclamation of the kingdom is especially apropos in animistic contexts. Simon of Samaria was a sorcerer considered so powerful that he was acclaimed as "the Great Power" (Acts 8:9–11). Philip powerfully preached the mighty acts of God in defeating the powers of Satan—the message of "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). Simon, perhaps drawn by the demonstration of power that accompanied Philip's message, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). Even Simon as a Christian could not resist seeking power. He thought that Peter and John, apostles sent from Jerusalem to impart spiritual gifts to the new Samaritan Christians, were power brokers similar to the animistic practitioners of his tradition. Simon, therefore, approached them about buying the power of the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:18). Although he probably had received apostolic gifts through the laying on of hands by Peter and John, he now wanted the power to dispense these gifts. He was equating the power of God with the powers of his animistic heritage.

### *Inaugurated Eschatology*

In biblical writings about the kingdom there is an evident "tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' The kingdom has been inaugurated but has not yet been completed" (Osborne 1987). Christians, who have been "strengthened with all power according to his glorious might" (Col. 1:11) in the present age, anticipate "the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light" (Col. 1:12). They have "tasted . . . the powers of the age to come!" (Heb. 6:5 RSV). The concept that the kingdom has already broken into the world but has not yet been consummated is termed *inaugurated eschatology*. The rule that God has initiated in Jesus Christ actively continues through those who believe in him and will be consummated at the end of the age (Beasley-Murray 1986, 80).

The parables of the kingdom make clear the nature of the rule of God in a world where the powers of Satan continue to exist. In the parable found in Matthew 13:24–30, the tares and the wheat exist side by side. The tares represent “the sons of the evil one” and the wheat “the sons of the kingdom” (v. 38 NASB). Since the roots of the tares have mingled with those of the wheat, removing the tares would endanger the harvest. The focus of the parable is on the command “Allow both to grow together until the harvest” (v. 30 NASB). Jesus teaches that the good and bad are not separated in the present age. This is the final work of God when he consummates his kingdom with judgment: The tares will be separated from the wheat and “THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH . . . in the kingdom of their father” (13:43 NASB). This parable thus gives a reason for the continuance of Satan’s kingdom even though God’s kingdom in Christ has broken into the world.

Although the kingdom of God has come, the kingdom of Satan continues to exist. Contrary to Jewish expectations, the arrival of the kingdom of God did not eradicate the kingdom of Satan.

This concept of inaugurated eschatology compels the animist, who is overwhelmed by evil forces, to wait on the Lord to act. The animist knows that evil forces coexist in this world with forces of God. He must not “consult the mediums and the wizards” (Isa. 8:19 RSV) but “wait for the Lord” (Isa. 8:17) and turn to “the law and to the testimony” (Isa. 8:20). He must not “consult the dead on behalf of the living” (Isa. 8:19). Knowing that both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan coexist in this present world, the Christian of an animist heritage is able to differentiate the two.

## **Kingdom Proclamation in Animistic Contexts**

Kingdom theology is appropriate for Christian proclamation in animistic contexts for a number of reasons. First, kingdom theology provides an interpretive model based on the Word of God for explaining the world. Spirit propitiation and appeasement of both malevolent and ambivalent spirits and gods are of the realm of Satan; the worship of the awesome, majestic Creator is of the realm of God. Spirit possession, black magic, and witchcraft are of the reign of Satan; God protects the Christian from the malevolent use of all such powers in his kingdom. In

the kingdom of Satan morality is relative, defined by society and by relations with ambivalent spiritual beings. In the kingdom of God morality is defined by a holy God who expects his people to reflect his nature. Kingdom theology, therefore, provides a holistic philosophy to help the animist understand the reality of God in the world.

Second, kingdom theology introduces the reign of God, which equips believers to attack and defeat the powers of Satan. By the power of Christ, fetishes and altars are destroyed, satanic laws overturned, and the spirit-possessed healed. God in his spirit protects his children so that there is no fear of magic or witchcraft. A Christian's relationship to God casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Above all, in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins so that harmony with God and with his world is reestablished. Just as Jesus did, the church actively confronts Satan's powers in all their manifestations in order to bring people under the sovereignty of God. Christians have the assurance that they will overcome because they have a greater power than that which is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Third, kingdom theology makes no dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. It acknowledges that the encounter between God and Satan is actively taking place in this world. God heals the sick, blesses and protects his children, and casts out spirits as manifestations of the kingdom. God controls all facets of his world, both physical and spiritual. No dichotomy should be made between these two realms. The missionary working in an animistic society must believe in the reign of God over all domains of life.

Fourth, while conversion theology is individualistic, kingdom theology is systemic. It aims to Christianize the entire cultural system. Not only must the individual give allegiance to creator God in Jesus Christ, but the customs, mores, and laws that have been contorted by the influence of Satan must also be Christianized. Ethics and morality thus become part of the proclamation of the kingdom of God. For example, rites of passage must be made Christian. When a child is born, he is blessed before God rather than having an ancestor called into him. The coming-of-age rite will initiate children into Christian adulthood. Prayers for God's blessing upon marriage rites will mirror faith in God rather than having beer spit upon a traditional wedding band asking for ancestral blessings. Birth, marriage, and coming-of-age rites must all demonstrate the nature of Christ. During times of

drought and famine, God, the giver of rain, is beseeched in prayer. The reign of Christ must be seen in every facet of life.

In kingdom theology the encounter between God and Satan is overtly declared.

## A Suggested Metaphor in Animistic Contexts

There are many different metaphors of the atonement. Similar to colors of a prism produced by one ray of light, different metaphors of the atonement are used to explain the mystery of God's saving work of bringing people to himself (Steeves 1990, 15). Fisher Humphreys has given three biblical metaphors of the atonement. Peter's metaphor in his sermons in Acts conceives the atonement as the dawning of a new age in Jesus Christ in an eschatological setting. Paul's metaphor in Romans and Galatians pictures atonement as justification in Christ within a legal setting. The writer of Hebrews describes atonement as sacrificial expiation in a legal setting (Humphreys 1978, 19–29). While these metaphors would be understandable to an animist and would shed additional light on the radiance of God's atonement once he becomes a Christian, they would not create an urgency in his heart to hear the Christian message.

The metaphor which does stir the heart of the animist is that of Christ, the triumphant one, who defeats the principalities and powers. In his death Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities" and "made a public display of them" (Col. 2:15 NASB). Conversion, therefore, is not simply personal salvation but also "cosmic redemption" from the powers (Bruce 1984, 113). This metaphor is the classical doctrine of the atonement, reintroduced to Western theology by Gustav Aulen in *Christus Victor*, proclaimed by the church whenever animists forsake their paganism to worship their emancipating, sovereign Creator (Driver 1986, 71–86).

Throughout the generations people have come to God from animistic contexts and have needed to view Christ as the one who is victorious over the powers. While Westerners have tended to feel uncomfortable with Aulen's perspective and have de-emphasized it, the animist gladly responds to the Good News that the powers of Satan have been defeated in Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, an overemphasis on this metaphor creates triumphalism, an emphasis on power, which Christ, who had all power,

gave up. However, without the power of God the animist can never free himself of the power of Satan. Only the message of the Triumphant One who defeats the powers will free the animist from his bondage. May the news of the Triumphant One be mightily proclaimed!

Western formulations of theology are inadequate to affect animistic peoples like the Kipsigis. If Kipsigis Christians had been presented a coherent kingdom theology from the beginning, my visitors would not have needed to ask me how to deal with spirit possession. From her inception the church would have been actively confronting the powers of Satan. My response "Let us pray God Almighty to free the children of the spirits" was right. Nevertheless, the fact that the question was asked at all shows how movements growing out of a Western secular heritage seldom deal with any theology beyond conversion. Those converted have no theology with which to confront Satan. Western missiologists must become better theologians, doing biblical theology, in order to formulate a theology of the kingdom, showing God in Jesus breaking into the world to defeat the powers of Satan.