The importance of theocratic ideas in our times is too apparent to require justification here before the question can be raised about the relationship between Christian origins and theocratic ideology. The resurgence of theocracy as a form of social order within, for example, the Islamic revolution, Zionism, and certain Liberation theologies, makes it an issue of special concern to Christians everywhere. Accordingly, it is only natural to want to know what Jesus had to say on the subject, if anything, and to determine how it may be relevant for the Church today.

To be sure, the results of the study of this topic would not have been published in the present format had they been negative, that is, had the conclusion been drawn that Jesus had nothing or virtually nothing, to say on the subject. Had that been the case, it would have sufficed to give him a footnote and get on with the work. Rather, during the course of investigation, the conviction has taken hold that Jesus must have been a serious student of theocratic ideas. The outcome has been such as to make another kind of justification necessary before the discussion can begin.

The problem is not with theocracy, or Jesus, but with method, historiographical methodology to be exact. The investigator encounters enormous problems whenever the effort is made to reconstruct some aspect of the historical Jesus’ ministry, including whatever ideas he may have had about theocracy, upon foundations which can withstand the testing of modern historical science. Hence assurances must be given at the outset that the following examination does not neglect the obligation to apply the recognized standards stringently. Space does not permit extensive documentation either of the authorities or of arguments supporting the authenticity of various materials from the gospels. Consequently, the case for Jesus’ view of theocracy will be made from a highly select portion of materials, the origin and interpretation of which command a considerable consensus of opinion among scholars. The project may yet appear so daunting in the eyes of many as to raise not a few skeptical eyebrows, especially since it will be impossible to consider even in the briefest way all of those major facets of the problem which sound historical methodology stipulates. Nevertheless, that is the direction in which the discussion will go, though only the very smallest part of the way. Its sole justification stems from its purpose to stimulate the thought of those who realize that the Church must face the urgent issue of theocracy.

The investigation will begin with several preliminary remarks and proceed to situate the Jesus movement within its Palestinian setting. In order to do this, the background of the sectarian movements which arose within Judaism will be described against which features characteristic of Jesus’ movement may be clarified, particularly those elements theocratic in nature. Finally, a few theses will be ventured by way of conclusion which may apply to the present position of the Church.
A working definition of theocracy is required at the outset. A theocracy is a state which is governed by one or more divine beings either directly, or indirectly through priestly intermediaries. It is clear that a theocracy exists to extend the influence and prestige of the divinities it serves. For example, ancient Egypt was a theocracy in which even its economy was devoted to the maintenance of a sacred civilization through vast temple estates controlled by a priestly aristocracy. Similarly, it seems the Minoan kingdoms of Crete were theocracies. Christian examples include the Byzantine, Holy Roman, and Russian Empires, and Calvin’s Geneva, to name but a few. In fact, because interests of religion and state have gone hand in hand so often in human history, it may be very difficult at times to determine whether any particular example represents a genuine case of theocracy. Thus the distinction is a relative one according to which theocracies usually manifest a strong and enduring integration of peculiarly religious ideas throughout the structure and operation of the social order.

It is immediately apparent that the Israel of David and Solomon was such a theocracy, especially under Solomon who personally conducted the building of the Temple. The actual regent of Israel was not the king, however, but Jahweh (II Sam. 7:14). Many subsequent rulers in Israel were to learn to their regret that by tolerating or introducing the worship of other gods the special relationship between the King and His subjects was corrupted, inevitably leading to hardship and the disruption of the social order. Israel’s theocracy would never really regain the glory of its Golden Age lost after the death of Solomon when the state divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms. Despite numerous attempts at renewal, a never-ending cycle of decadence and decline had been initiated which was to prove Israel’s theocracy to be too frail to survive.

Yet even in its last hours the nation’s future restoration was depicted in terms of an ideal theocracy which would surpass its predecessor. As Hosea predicted in the North, it would be reunited.

And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together,
And they will appoint for themselves one leader. (1:11)

As Isaiah predicted in the South, it would never fade,

There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore. (9:7)

The secret to its success would lie in the unfailing obedience of God’s anointed ruler to perform all His commands and so serve as the instrument through which Jahweh would protect and bless the nation.

Contrary to what might have been anticipated in light of the catastrophes which followed, the exilic and post-exilic prophets never abandoned the dream of a reconstituted theocracy. Instead, they made it the heart and soul of their preaching as the epitome of God’s fulfilment of all His covenant promises. So Ezekiel proclaimed,

Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them. (34:23)

Their diet will be God’s Law,
And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep my statutes and observe them. (37:24)

God's response will be the guarantee of speedy aid,

It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. (Is. 65:24)

The lasting peace and plenty that would come to Israel would in turn secure its position over all the nations and make it the vehicle of their blessing. So universal will the realization of God's rule be that it will necessitate the overthrow of every power opposed to it, whether on earth or in heaven. The intervention required to bring it to pass will be so massive that it can be expressed poetically in terms of the making of "a new heaven and a new earth," because the sole analogy was the action by which He made the original Creation. In all of this the modest proportions of David and Solomon's empire barely remained discernible. Actually, they were eclipsed. From the history of the development of the idea of theocracy in Israel it is therefore clear that it experienced elaboration, expansion, and transformation.

Nor was the process of reinterpretation arrested with the cessation of so-called canonical prophecy. If anything, it was accelerated. Because of building frustration at the nation's continued failure to attain to the promises of the prophets, expectations were intensified. The stream of religious consciousness which carried the process further along has come to be called apocalyptic.

The most decisive influence upon the flowering of apocalyptic thought was probably the national crisis exploited, and possibly provoked, by the Hellenistic king, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). During the power-struggle for the Jerusalem highpriesthood, the Jewish aristocracy seized the opportunity to refound the city on the order of a Greek colony. Since Antiochus supported their initiative, the only alternative for those loyal to the Law, the pious or Chasidim, was open revolt. It was led by the Maccabees, who established their dynasty (Hasmonean) at that time. No sooner had the traditional religious institutions been reinstated, however, than the revolutionary coalition splintered, as so often occurs. The Maccabees and their supporters wanted to press their advantage and pursue a policy of total liberation and political autonomy, whereas many of the Chasidim withdrew their support, being satisfied with the return of religious freedom. The disintegration of the Chasidim led to the rise of sectarian movements in Judaism. Their ensuing tensions and conflicts centered around differing theocratic ideologies including the strategies by which they were to be implemented. It appears, therefore, that the apocalyptic milieu attending these upheavals had produced competing theocratic claims.

Several major movements may be noted here. Although one has to reckon with internal developments and changes, they were still in existence at the time of Jesus. The Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes had survived nearly two centuries when he began his ministry, perhaps more. Theocratic convictions were fundamental to all three. Because these movements possessed wide-ranging influence, some consideration of their theocratic beliefs is essential to understanding the outlook of the people to whom Jesus made his case.
Regardless of the fact that their support among the people appears to have dwindled with time, the Sadducees, for example, were important because of their aristocratic position and their priestly leadership in the operation of the Temple. Rudolph Meyer has summarized their views:

To have the mind of the Zadokite or Sadducee is to be sustained by the concept of a particularist temple state which along the lines of traditional eschatological hopes is the seed for the purification of the Holy Land, its liberation from all Gentiles and semi-Gentiles, and the restoration of the idealized kingdom of Israel as David once reigned over it.\(^1^5\)

However, specifically apocalyptic thought would not have had more than a limited influence upon their views, because they denied some of its most characteristic features: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all" (Acts 23:8).

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were less conservative. They were open to theological developments, including the broader currents of apocalyptic. Unlike the Sadducees, for example, they regarded the tradition of oral Law to have an authority equal to that of the written Law (The Pentateuch). Their ordained theologians, the Scribes or Rabbis, were thus the nation's legal experts, possessing enormous influence among the people.\(^1^6\)

Both the courts and the Temple cultus conformed with their rulings. They shared with the Sadducees the vision of a renewed and liberated Israel, but they believed this could not be achieved except through mass education in the ways of righteousness propounded by the Law. They were also, like the Sadducees, realists who were prepared to compromise the political integrity of the nation in order to avert disaster while holding out hopes of eliminating their rivals and thereby of occupying a position from which they might dictate the reform of the nation. Some within their ranks may have been pacifists, as is possibly suggested by the paraphrase of Is. 11:4 in one apocalyptic work which shows the Messiah achieving victory apparently without the aid of an army:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He shall destroy the ungodly nations with the word of his mouth,}\\
\text{So that at this rebuke the nations may flee before him.}^1^8
\end{align*}
\]

Distinguishing more sharply than the Sadducees between the institutions of this age and those of the age to come, the Pharisees' religious zeal tended to keep the hopes of the people high that God would fulfill the promises He made through the Prophets.

Perhaps the most zealous of all, the Essenes, about whom little was known until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, had given themselves over entirely to apocalyptic speculations of a radically theocratic nature.\(^1^9\) They believed, against the Sadducees, and probably against the Pharisees, that they alone preserved the pure priestly lineage which would qualify them for absolute control of restored Israel. They too believed that their circle would provide David’s promised successor. Actually, they anticipated that redeemed Israel would have a kind of co-regency in which the highpriest would possess higher authority than the descendant of David, thus guaranteeing the integration of the Law within the affairs of State. They taught that they alone represented the faithful Remnant within Israel and that the many Jewish outsiders, such as the Sadducees and Pharisees, would be purged from the Holy Land along with the Gentiles. Their scrupulous adherence
to the letter of the Law led to their withdrawal from much of the life of mainstream Judaism and to the formation of conventicles, or cells, in which possessions were community property, slavery was prohibited, etc. In sum, they had organized themselves according to the standards and principles which they believed would prevail in renewed Israel once God had acted to deliver it in accordance with His promises. Although the Essenes appeared to the ancient world to be quietists and pacifists, the discovery of certain of their secret documents as well as the participation in the First Jewish Revolt (66-73 A.D.) by certain of their members suggest rather that they were waiting for the time to strike which God had predestined from eternity.

To the three theocratically-minded sects mentioned above must be added a fourth, the Zealots. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says that theologically they were like the Pharisees except that they would not accept foreign domination. Although he attributes its founding to the Roman census of 6 A.D., it evidently shared deeply those sentiments which had motivated many of the adherents to the cause of the Maccabees and which continued to animate those who resisted the Romans from the very start. In effect, the Zealots emerged from the radical wing of the Pharisees, appealing to the First Commandment for their rationale. Because it enjoined the righteous to shun other so-called gods, and because the Emperors, by accepting the worship of their provincial subjects, were implicitly claiming divine honors (sometimes explicitly so), the Zealots felt themselves obliged to reject the Emperors, that is, to obey God rather than man. Their zeal for the Law included, like the Essenes, economic reforms, as can be inferred from the occasion when they burned the Temple archives in order to destroy all legal records of debt, etc. The movement consolidated itself first in Galilee, and then managed to plunge the whole nation into the catastrophic First Jewish Revolt. Their strategy seems to have been to precipitate an armed confrontation between Rome and Israel which would force God to intervene in order to save Israel and restore it, as promised, to full religious and political autonomy.

From the preceding discussion, inadequate as it is, so much is clear: Jesus grew up in a society in which theocratic ideas were commanding ever-greater prominence and power at every level. Having been educated in the Pharisaical institution of the synagogue and raised in the homeland of the Zealot movement, he was not unfamiliar with the theocratic doctrine which had been built upon the legacy of the prophets. Its essential features were plain enough: God was about to perfect His people and their institutions, making it possible for them to achieve their rightful destiny at the head of the family of nations. Thus the coming of the Kingdom was expected to be attended by the unleashing of a flood of divine as well as purely human powers which would thoroughly purify the world and transform its life on a universal scale.

The question is whether any of this was significant for Jesus. Considering it was such an important subject for debate among his contemporaries, there is some ground for suspecting he may have entered into the discussion too. The remaining space is devoted to determining whether the gospels provide sufficient information to permit a tentative reply to the question. In keeping with the opening remarks, reference will be made solely to a selection of gospel materials which, according to scholarly consensus, appear to possess
strong links with the historical Jesus.

The impression Jesus made on those around him is likely to offer a clue. Modern
researchers have established that he was being assessed against a background of various
religious types: the charismatic Rabbi, the magician/wonder-worker, the rebellious
elder, and the itinerant, provincial prophet. Evidently, his behavior and speech caused
his contemporaries to view him thus. Of course, these categories overlap with one another
to some extent, the last one being especially inclusive, but cumulatively they reveal that he
was taking an active interest in the religious affairs of his times, a fact which did not
escape the attention of some of those who encountered him.

Nor did Jesus live unto himself. As is commonly the case for such religious figures,
he organized a group of followers, and like John the Baptist, he was persuasive to the
point of commanding their loyalties despite setbacks. It is apparent that his example and
instruction had met a variety of their needs. What was most likely to have made the
difference for them also happened to be the core of his message, which, not surprisingly,
according to universal agreement among scholars, concerned the coming of God's Rule.
In the words of R. H. Fuller,

Jesus appears on the stage of human history as a prophet who
announced the impending advent of the Reign of God. This Reign, or King­
dom, is interpreted exclusively in terms of the cosmic eschatology of Jewish
apocalyptic. The manner in which St. Mark summarizes the preaching of Jesus at the outset of his
account is therefore understandable: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at
hand; repent and believe in the good news” (1:15). The address of so controversia l an issue
ensured him of a hearing.

His was not merely another voice among many, either. He actually managed to give
his approach a fairly novel twist by resisting the impulse to indulge in the usual apocalyp­
tic fantasies regarding the time of the End. Whereas H. Braun attributes Jesus' reserve to
the fact that he “did not intend to give information about the imminent end but to sum­
mon people because of it,” in one sense he could not have done otherwise because of his
unparalleled conviction that the moment when it would seize the world decisively was
devastatingly unpredictable. According to Jesus, the Kingdom came without warning.

I tell you, on that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be
taken, and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the
same place; one will be taken, and the other will be left. (Lk. 17:34-5)

That Jesus could be right was an unsettling prospect. As Braun explains, “The end
comes suddenly, and, therefore, threateningly.” The effect upon Jesus' audience was to
call into question their relationship to the Kingdom. He had undermined whatever com­
placency or confidence they might have had with the thought that precious time was
slipping away in which they still had the opportunity to take some kind of decisive action
before it was too late. Those, like the Essenes, Pharisees, and Zealots, who relied upon
apocalyptic speculations and a renewed commitment to the Law as an adequate prepara­
tion for the Kingdom's coming, might dismiss Jesus' claim. For others, however, a real
dilemma might develop which could lead to increasing anxiety.
Some responded to the new note of urgency which he struck with the expectation that he would tell them what to do. The result was that he quickly had an audience for the rest of his teaching. Roughly similar to the rules of membership in other sectarian movements, the norms of the Jesus movement obliged followers to submit themselves to disciplined instruction out of an awareness that the standards for entrance to the Kingdom were high.

The kingdom of heaven is like a drag-net cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. (Mt. 13:47-8)

So high, in fact, were the standards, that some welcomed whatever light he could shed on them, while he compounded their problems by making his way of life the exclusive prerequisite to qualification for life in God's Kingdom. Nevertheless, he remained adamant.

Therefore, every one who hears these words of mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall; for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall. (Mt. 7:24-7)

From the vivid description above it may be seen that Jesus regarded his instruction much as if it were a survival manual designed to help his listeners through the difficulties ahead.

Inevitably, the soundness of his teaching and the authority behind it were contested. No wonder that the strongest challenge, according to the gospels, came from a movement which had its own firm ideas about the Kingdom: the Pharisees. Jesus' defense was of two sorts. One was a basic wait and see approach. The future would bear out the validity of his doctrine:

For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the angels. (Mk. 8:38)

Whether or not he intended to allude to himself as the heavenly Son of Man from Dn. 7:13, Jesus did appeal to the glorious figure for a future intervention that would justify his words and works as having been divinely authorized and approved (see Mk. 14:62). Of course, the issue had scarcely been resolved, since he had still not offered any concrete proof of his authority. What is remarkable to note, however, is that he had resorted to one of the classic Old Testament visions of the coming of the Kingdom.

The other half of Jesus' defense was more to the point, although it raised fresh problems of its own. He declared, "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk. 11:20). Once again, Jesus had indicated how startlingly different his view of the Kingdom could be. It would not come upon the world solely in the form of a universal convulsion witnessed by everyone. It was somehow already present, because in accordance with apocalyptic hopes an unprecedented attack had been launched against the powers of evil. Similarly, when the seventy had returned
from their mission he said, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk. 10:18). Indeed, Jesus defended himself to the Baptist by characterizing his whole ministry as the scene in which God's Reign was present.

Go and report to John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me. (Mt. 11:4-6)

He took this emphasis so far as to legitimate his pronouncement in the present of that forgiveness which God had promised for the coming of His Kingdom (Jer. 31:31-4):

In order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins - He said to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home. (Mk. 2:10-1)

Hence it is no exaggeration to say that Jesus' insistence upon the presence of the Kingdom in what he said and did, and in what his disciples said and did as his representatives, became his trademark.13

With so much teaching devoted either to the Kingdom's present or to its future aspect there is reason to consider whether he might have combined both aspects somewhere in his teaching. The parables of the mustard seed (Lk. 13:19), the leaven (Lk. 13:20-1), the patient husbandman (Mk. 4:26-9), and the sower (Mk. 4:3-8), are likely candidates. The first reads,

[The kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches.

The term of comparison is not with the seed but with the amazing contrast between an unpromising start and its overwhelming success. As J. Jeremias has shown, the other three parables are similar:

The feature common to all four parables is that they contrast the beginning with the end, and what a contrast! The insignificance of the beginning and the triumph of the end! But the contrast is not the whole truth. The fruit is the result of the seed; the end is implicit in the beginning. The infinitely great is already active in the infinitely small. In the present, and indeed in secret, the event is already in motion.14

These parables illustrate the irony that the earth-shattering event of apocalyptic forecasts actually has a debut so inconsistent with its presumed character that its opening may pass unnoticed. Jesus' provocative insistence that the start is unassuming is wholly in keeping with the character of the Kingdom as he understands it. After all, it follows from his conviction that the Kingdom's coming is chronologically unpredictable, and from his conviction that the Kingdom was somehow actually present in his ministry, that the very nature of the Kingdom's manifestation is its radical unpredictability. Hence Jesus was cutting at the roots of apocalyptic conventions which had fostered misperceptions on the part of many who were prevented by them from detecting that the Kingdom had already dawned in his mission.15 At the same time he was not slow to celebrate his victories:

I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. (Lk. 10:21)
The preceding discussion has established that the Reign of God stood at the heart of Jesus' message. The relationship of his teaching on the subject to the apocalyptic matrix of his milieu has been made equally apparent. Jesus affirmed its essential concept that God had planned long beforehand to intervene in history and to effect lasting redemption. Moreover, he borrowed freely from it, and when he innovated, he did so in response to it. So far the discussion has focussed primarily upon how Jesus viewed the Kingdom's arrival, finding his most original thought to have been the dual aspects of a present as well as a future coming. Next the focus will shift to examine what Jesus viewed the nature and substance of the Kingdom to be, and more specifically, what place Israel was to have in the ultimate theocracy.

The investigation may proceed with a consideration of the relationship in the teaching of Jesus between the future aspect of the Kingdom's coming and what its coming is to bring. N. Perrin identifies Jesus' view of the consummation to consist of

Judgment, the vindication of Jesus himself, the establishment of the values of God, and the enjoyment of all the blessings to be associated with a perfect relationship with God. Clearly, Jesus' perspective closely resembles current apocalyptic orientations towards the subject. The sole prominent difference concerns his anticipation that he personally would be vindicated. Even then, however, he shared the hope of vindication with the Essenes, Pharisees, and Zealots, and possibly the Sadducees, because each movement longed for the day that would prove to the world that their approach had been the one approved by God.

When the main elements in Jesus' view are isolated, the lines of continuity with, as well as divergences in detail from, apocalyptic speculations stand out boldly.

1. The Final State Of Being. Jesus taught that the redeemed would have an angelic-like existence (Mk. 12:25). The inklings for this idea may be seen in Dn. 12:3. What originally was a metaphor for exalted status in Is. 14:12-14 had been interpreted by some to denote a new order of eternal being: I Enoch 39:7, 104:2-4, and 1QSb IV, 25.

2. Institutions. Jesus taught that the institutions essential to the People of God would be renewed and reconstituted.

A. The nation purified: "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). From this saying, and Mk. 8:38, the organization of the redeemed community appears to be a hierarchy—God, the Son of Man, angels, apostles, and the people. Is it any wonder that the mother of James and John should ask Jesus for privileged positions in the hierarchy on their behalf (Mt. 20:21), or that the apostles should ask the Risen One, "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

B. Related to the ultimate position of Israel is the ultimate position of the other nations. The parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt. 25:31-46) reflects the teaching of Jesus behind it to the effect that they too would be judged by the
Son of Man and his angels before his throne (v. 31). Mark's version of the parable of the mustard seed (4:30-2) indicates that the nations, symbolized by birds (already a stock metaphor for the nations in Ezek. 17:23, 31:16, and Dn. 4:1 fff., see I Enoch 90:30, 33, and 37), will take shelter under God's Reign.

C. The end of kinship. As in Mk. 12:25 above, an angelic-like existence in which there is neither marriage nor procreation implies the dissolution of the family with its roles, operations, and culture.

D. The cultus perfected: "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands" (Mk. 14:48). The different forms in which this saying has been preserved make it exceedingly difficult to say anything more than that for the existing Temple and all that it represented in Jewish life (the center of the economic system, its bank; the center of administration, including the law courts and all official records, and of the conduct of worship, remembering that these spheres of life are not separated in a theocracy) Jesus substituted a new Temple. In fact, it is not even certain the saying refers to the consummation. Apocalyptic speculations based on OT texts (e.g., II Sam. 7:11) declared that God would build a temple in which His glory would reside eternally (Jubilees 1:28, I Enoch 90:28ff.), which is possibly Jesus' meaning here, or it may refer to a present fulfillment within the community of his disciples as it did, at least in the first instance, among the Essenes at Qumran (4Qflorilegium). In any case, Jesus' references to the Bride/Bridegroom motif (Md. 2:19), to the satisfaction of hunger in the future (Lk. 6:21), to the banquet at which the patriarchs will be guests of honor ( Mt. 8:11), and to the wine which Jesus would drink with his disciples when the Kingdom had come (Mk. 14:25), presuppose the consummation and the celebration of its associated Messianic Banquet in fulfillment of OT prophecy, for example, Is. 25:6. Since the place for the festivities is none other than the Temple mount, the goal of all worship is achieved in the unbroken enjoyment of the Presence of God.

3. Blessings. Jesus taught there would be compensation for the righteous who had remained loyal despite the times of trial associated with the in-breaking of God's Reign. The Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-10, Lk. 6:20-3) and several other sayings (Mt. 18:4, the lowly shall be exalted, and Mt. 19:30, the last shall be first, etc.) teach that these compensations will come in the form of reversals in the status of the elect. Their trust in God will be vindicated. Again, there is a fundamental harmony between Jesus' view and the current apocalyptic expectations, although the emphasis on the reversal motif places him more closely to other "outsiders" like the Essenes.

The description above is, remarkably enough, fairly complete, containing most of the evidence that could possibly be cited for the historical Jesus and leaving aside very little evidence of whatever nature. No evidence excluded would be likely to alter the picture of Jesus' teaching on the consummation. One astonishing result is the realization that Jesus had so very little to say on the subject, and that what he did have to say was not so very
Unlike what others had been saying for some time with the exception, of course, of those modifications of detail necessary to adapt speculations to his sectarian needs.

However, as has already been explained, there is more to Jesus' view concerning that which God's Rule brings than merely its future aspect. Consequently, it is necessary to consider also that portion of God's Rule which the present inaugurates.

1. The Present State Of Being. Although angelic-like existence had not yet been received, neither could it be said that the disciples simply continued in their former state. Jesus had used the intimate address for God in his prayers, "Abba" (Mk. 14:36), and had taught his disciples to pray likewise, so, apparently, Lk. 11:2 (see Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15). Such a radically different relationship presupposed some sort of discontinuity with the former state of being.

2. Institutions. Jesus' strategy was to try to capture the attention of the nation in his bid to prepare it for the Kingdom's future coming. His message generated a movement which, like other apocalyptic sects, held out the challenge of renewal and reform while time remained.

A. The nation purified: "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-4). Jesus' message is to recall the nation to its purpose as declared by the prophets. Experiencing rejection, he predicted judgment would fall, "Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Mt. 11:21). And again, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah"... "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Lk. 11:29, 32). Jesus' movement, those who accepted him as the eschatological agent of the Kingdom's coming, became through their repentance the only sign Jesus would give his people. His followers in turn spread the presence of the Kingdom when they took his ministry out to the nation (e.g., the mission of "the twelve"). At least, that is, the occasions in which the Rule of God might be felt were being multiplied geographically. The mere choice of "the twelve" and their destiny as judges of the twelve tribes (Mt. 19:28) indicates that the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus' ministry was already reconstituting the nation in accordance with God's Will. The transformation of the social system which constitutes the People of God may be observed in the reformation of its hierarchical structure. In response to the squabbles among "the twelve" as to which was the chief, Jesus taught, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant"... "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk. 22:25-6, 27b). In one stroke Jesus inverts the chain of command, the system of decision-making, the power of authority, identifying those communal activities of the utmost consequence with service that estab-
lishes its credibility and therefore its right to recognition as authoritative. This brief saying encapsulates the entire governmental process of the People of God through which His Rule comes to expression in the present.

B. The presence of the Kingdom in the ministry of Jesus has no immediate effect upon the status of the nations. Yet, in as much as the People of God are being reconsecrated to their task of being a Servant people among the nations, there arises *ipso facto* the possibility that their status may change.

C. The family too is reconstituted under the direction of Jesus. In a sense the dissolution of the family is already under way. Having been told his mother and brothers were outside expecting he would want to see them, he said, “Who are my mother and my brothers?... Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mk. 3:31-5). Doing God’s Will as it is being defined in the presence of His Reign takes precedence over every other relationship, including familial obligations, regardless of the Fifth Commandment. Similarly, “If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:26).

D. The cultus perfected: Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple represents his boldest step in summoning the People of God to renewal. He takes possession on behalf of the Temple’s King in good theocratic manner. Rather than submit to Jesus’ instruction, the other theocratic movements in control of the Temple, both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, decide that he must be stopped. They would not accept his challenge to their authority reflected by his attempt to put an end to the exploitation of the Temple’s patrons which had made a small portion of the priestly aristocracy fabulously wealthy. However, as significant as the move by Jesus is for determining how the presence of the Kingdom had asserted itself in his ministry, it belongs together with a wide range of reforms taught by Jesus that were designed in one way or another to perfect the worship of God by His People. To the amazement of his sectarian rivals he simply abolished the laws of ritual purity (Mk. 7:15). These were at the very heart of the Pharisaic and Essene versions of theocracy. It is not certain whether he supported the abolition of all ceremonial legislation. Anyway, he did not fast (Mk. 2:3), and he showed a wanton disregard for the Sabbath (Mk. 3:2, Mt. 12:2), and he kept company with notorious transgressors of the Law (Mk. 2:16), he corrected Moses’ toleration of divorce (Mk. 10:9), he forbade the making of oaths (Mt. 5:33-7) and he rejected oral Torah (Mk. 7:10-3). Jesus’ polemic everywhere presupposes a return to a radical and unfettered dependence upon God, precisely what one would expect of a time when His presence was asserting itself directly in an unprecedented manner. His rejection of anger (Mt. 5:22), hatred (Mt. 5:44), and retaliation (Mt. 5:39), especially in the religio-political sphere was absolute. He avoided entrapment as a Zealot by the Sadducees without affirming any loyalty to Caesar whatever and he defended the doctrine of resurrection against them (Mk. 12:13-
27). Jesus' way of perfection, therefore, led him inevitably along the way of polemic against the Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and even the disciples of John the Baptist. The presence of the Kingdom in his renewal movement necessitated an assault on the sectarian barriers which had left the People of God bitterly divided among themselves. He attempted to restore its fellowship on the basis of a radical concept of love for the other as illustrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), which abolished all class, ethnic, and religious differences. Finally, Jesus seems to have attempted to rehabilitate the religious calendar by proclaiming that the time of the eschatological Jubilee had appeared in his ministry. It was a year when God would have to provide for all necessities (Lk. 12:29-31), when all debts would be remitted and slaves freed (Mt. 6:12, Lk. 6:33-8, Lk. 16:1-8), and wealth redistributed to restore the balance of the community (Lk. 12:33). Whether Jesus taught the inauguration of such a Jubilee in so many words is arguable, but that the presence of the Kingdom in his ministry (Mt. 11:4-6) fulfilled the prophetic hopes for a restoration on that order is likely, particularly in light of the fact that he took it upon himself to proclaim forgiveness and reconcile transgressors of the Law: "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt. 9:13).

3. Blessings: no greater indication of the presence of the Kingdom in the form of eschatological blessing is mentioned than the assurance that God's Will is being obeyed (e.g., Lk. 12:31). The renunciation of fleeting securities is only possible because a stronger, abiding security has taken hold. The way of Jesus brings with it a liberation for those who can claim the presence of God's protecting Rule in the prayer he taught them to pray.

A comparison of the Rule of God in its present aspect with the Rule of God in its future aspect reveals where the thrust of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom may be found. He is far more concerned with its present manifestation than its future consummation. It is a theocracy in action, committed to reconstructing the institutions God ordained to mediate His grace and loving kindness. There can be no "spiritualizing" or "individualizing" this Reign of God away. The evidence all points in one direction towards Jesus' forthright teaching about the God who had begun to assert His sovereign authority by reforming His world, which meant beginning with His People as a whole.

The unifying principle in Jesus' perspective regarding the Kingdom's coming, whether considered in accordance with its present or future aspect, seems to be the concept of reversal. As pertains to the future aspect, the consummation brings a host of surprises. The ultimate state of being, the ultimate status and constitution, and the ultimate quality of life possessed by God's People are not those which the casual observer of its history would be likely to predict. It succeeds against the odds, and the reason for its success does not lie in its own capabilities, of course, but in the God who acts. He it is who stands in the breach and turns rout into triumph. Hence history's verdict, as it were, is overturned, reversed.
More exceptional still, however, is the fashion after which the principle of reversal is already operative in the presence of the Kingdom. To rebuild a nation anew from the ground upwards, so to speak, calls for a master plan. It requires great power and resources, an imposing leadership most adept at intrigue and diplomacy, and an aggressive body politic, to name but some of the elements missing from the Jesus movement. In actuality, God’s nation is not reconstituted by the spoils of war, opportunism, stealth, or enviable statecraft, but by someone who lacked the credentials, the backing of the aristocrats, the intellectuals, the wealthy, and many of the common folk, and who carried it off in an occupied homeland, torn by factions and headed for catastrophe. Jesus attributed the renewal uniquely to the presence of God’s Rule. God’s final initiative had created the role for its special agents, Jesus and his followers, and had empowered them to act accordingly, and even the model for that role embodied the principle of reversal, in as much as the successful ruler in God’s theocracy is not a conquering hero but a slave.42

What, then, is the outcome of this investigation? Firstly, it is beyond question that Jesus was conversant with at least a portion of the range of current theocratic thought. Secondly, Jesus formulated his theocratic ideology in terms of apocalyptic, drawing upon its idiom to communicate his message, the content of which was expressly theocratic in nature. Thirdly, the key to Jesus’ view of theocracy consists of his claim that it is already present in his ministry and in the ministry of his movement. Fourthly, Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom was directed to his nation to bring its life and institutions into conformity with the structures which God’s final initiative required. The opportunity may be taken to reiterate that these conclusions are based on evidence the authenticity of which is no longer for the most part contested, except in some largely immaterial details.43

Perhaps the discerning reader has spotted some of the implications of these findings more quickly than the author did after completing the examination. At the outset there was little more than a guess as to the direction in which the study might lead, and, as it has turned out, that too was badly mistaken. Originally, the fairly standard approach had been taken to the effect that Jesus’ view of the Kingdom was primarily “spiritual” and “other-worldly,” by which it was assumed that he emphasized the future aspect of the Kingdom which would be an altogether different, “heavenly” world, and to the degree to which the Kingdom was in fact present it was so “spiritually,” that is, inwardly, invisibly, and certainly not physically.

On the strength of the preceding investigation, however, that assumption must be discarded. Jesus’ view of theocracy was more complex. It is true he allowed for the future, cataclysmic intervention by God customary for apocalyptic thought, yet it is also true that he had extremely little to say about it, judging from the sources. Rather, his eye was upon what God’s Rule had already instituted in the present and was making possible before it intervened climactically. Therefore, Jesus’ theocratic views are of paramount significance for this world. They focus on a theocracy that has already come to power, one that is not less “spiritual” because it has begun the reconstruction and renewal of the existing order of things, in as much as the design, resources, and implementation rest with God alone, which only befits the nature of true theocracy.44

The transforming impact of Jesus’ mission on behalf of the Kingdom’s presence is
especially striking in its political, economic, and social dimensions. For instance, in his version of theocracy there was no room for that coercion through the threat or use of violence without which no ruler could hope to "lord it over" his subjects. Instead, Jesus pursued the slave-paradigm of leadership, expressing the power of God's redeeming, steadfast loving kindness. Similarly, such a role did not permit of retaliation, or of the hatred of enemies, which in his milieu amounted to a flat rejection of revolutionary violence fostered openly by the Zealot movement and secret ly by the Essenes. Thus his decision not to adopt the stance of a conquering hero in the manner of a latter-day David constituted an attempt to subvert the dynamics of government founded and maintained by force, a quintessentially political act if ever there was one. So, the popular opinion that Jesus was not concerned with politics because he was not a military Messiah may be seen to be unfounded.\(^{45}\)

Regarding the economic dimension to Jesus' theocracy, it is no secret he inveighed against materialism. He cried,

\[
\text{But woe to you who are rich,} \\
\text{for you are receiving your comfort in full.} \\
\text{Woe to you who are well-fed now,} \\
\text{for you shall be hungry. (Lk. 6:24-5a)}
\]

Jesus also saw that materialism endangered salvation, as the episode with the young man portrays (Mk. 10:17-23), which explains Jesus' outburst, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" But it is one thing to descry the evils of materialism like the prophets of old, and quite another to espouse an economic program.

Yet that is precisely what Jesus did. Like the theocratic movements of the Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots, Jesus too sought for economic reform. He claimed that the presence of the Kingdom, or that making it a priority to behave in a manner worthy of the Kingdom's future coming, introduced the possibility of economic reconstruction through liberation from anxiety for material security, "But seek for his kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you" (Lk. 12:31). The result was to put an end to the "business as usual" routine in the basic patterns of human life consisting of the operations which nurture and promote it, operations which are essentially economic.

Jesus cleared the path for economic reform in obedience to God's Rule by proscribing the accumulation of material wealth:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mt. 6:19-21)

He justified his commandment by arguing that the accumulation of wealth could not happen except at the expense of service to God's Rule:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.\(^{46}\) (Mt. 6:24)

The two activities are mutually exclusive because both necessitate such a high level of preoccupation in order to achieve their respective goals that sufficient time, energy, and
resources exist to pursue only one or the other, but not both.

What turns Jesus' economic reforms into a thoroughgoing program is their integration into the unilateral renewal and reconstruction of God's People which had commenced with the inauguration of His Reign. The termination of activities designed to accumulate wealth would inevitably tend to eliminate economic exploitation within the Nation. By breaking the vicious cycle which kept the mass of people at the subsistence level as tenant-farmers and artisans, or reduced them to slavery, a national economic harmony might result. The whole life of God's People would be radically changed from the impact. Jesus' strategy of confrontation emerges in his approach to the tax-collectors, the emblems of parasitical exploitation and oppression. God's Rule included them, Jesus proclaimed, and like Matthew (Mt. 9:9-12), their new status obligated them to reform profoundly their practices (see the Zaccheus episode, Lk. 19:1ff.). The scope of Jesus' approach was so wide that in principle it would leave no sector of economic life untouched.

The impression may not be easily dismissed that Jesus' theocratic ideology mandated what was tantamount to the conversion of all economic activity. God's Rule was to be expressed in economic terms by the reversal of the flow of economic life. By directing economic processes away from channels of self-preservation and self-interest and into channels of restitution, redistribution, and emancipation, he sought to put the material well-being of God's People on a new footing. So the popular notion that Jesus attacked the evils of riches in order to promote "spiritual" concerns is at best but partially accurate. Since redirected economic activity is economic activity nonetheless, it is preferable to conclude that Jesus' concept of theocracy had a place for positive economic development as one of the tangible signs of the presence of the Kingdom.

Lastly, a feature from the social dimension of Jesus' theocratic thought may be considered. As previously noted, Jesus heralded the reconstitution of the structure of the family. He did this in order to further his policy of national reconstruction by dislodging the unchecked dominance of family loyalties. It may be difficult for moderns to appreciate the degree to which the "extended family" served as a social mechanism to ensure survival. Competition among family groups to acquire or maintain relative position and influence at any level was fierce. Hence family life was the cornerstone of the class-structure. It represented, therefore, one of the leading factors responsible for those ills against which the Kingdom militated. Jesus perceived that the unity of God's People could not be restored as long as the seat of discord itself was left unchanged. So his version of theocratic ideology disclosed itself again in his effort to reverse dominant social trends associated with family rivalry. He taught that the needs of others were to take priority even where these conflicted with interests of the family group:

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Mt. 5:46-7)

For the promotion of family interests he substituted the development and conservation of the theocracy he had inaugurated (Mk. 3:31-5, Lk. 14:26). Thus he severely restricted the
influence of the family in order to reduce its status and relative autonomy, rightly suspecting that otherwise the pattern of new allegiances brought by God's Reign would be frustrated.

The discussion has managed to highlight a few of the important features in Jesus' view of theocracy. It may be reiterated that Jesus' version of theocracy was a viable alternative to other contemporary ideas. It was as concrete and displayed as thorough an integration of political, economic, and social dynamics. Nevertheless, it clearly was also the most radical and venturesome. Whatever else may be said for Jesus' ideology, it was original.

Several theses may now be proposed which relate these findings to the situation facing the Church.

1) The Church may have to reconsider seriously the extent to which it approximates to the political, economic, and social theocratic entity Jesus apparently instituted.

2) Other political, economic, and social ideologies must be assessed in terms of Jesus' ideology.

3) The distribution and exercise of political power based on military violence or its threat must be examined and Christians be informed of their obligations to follow the example of Jesus.

Many additional theses might be suggested, but these will suffice to show that Jesus' views on theocracy, that is, God's Rule, possess immediate consequence for the life of the Church, and the life of the world.

FOOTNOTES


2 See the useful presentation of these criteria in I. H. Marshall, I Believe in the Historical Jesus, Eerdmans, 1977, pp. 200-11.

3 However, the investigation is not interested in the historical Jesus per se, but in examining a core of materials ascribed to him which are generally accepted to represent his teaching, and subjecting these to analysis.


5 The particular task of the Chronicler was to demonstrate precisely this truth.

6 All biblical quotations are from the NEB (some are adapted slightly). An indivisible monarchy is presumed to be superior to a divisible one.

7 A very common theme, e.g., Is. 2:2-4, 42:5-9, 60:1-14, Ezek. 34:26-31, Mic. 5:7, Zeph. 3:8-20, Zech. 8:11-3.

8 See the heavenly struggle being conducted by God's angels against the evil angels, Dn. 10:13, 20-1, and Is. 24:21.

9 So Is. 65:17 and 66:22 probably are meant metaphorically.


12 In fact Judah the Maccabee, meaning "the hammer" (in fulfillment of Jer. 51:20-37), was the principal leader during the initial period.

13 Although the origins of these movements are obscure and the dates uncertain, it is generally agreed that they were already in existence before the end of the second century, B.C. It is also likely that one or more of them was heir to extensive antecedents dating back far earlier. Such an explanation is preferable to supposing that they were merely the result of the splintering of the Chasidic coalition responsible for the revolt.
That several of these movements at least claimed to represent the true tradition and spirit of Judaism suggests that their essential positions and outlooks would not have been held in contempt by the mass of the people. Whereas Jacob Neusner would minimize the influence of the Pharisees, for example, their virtual domination of the synagogue institutions suggests otherwise (From Politics To Piety, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972, passim).

See his article in TDNT, vol. 7, p. 44.


Consider Jn. 11:47-53. In any case they were often conciliatory.

As translated by H. F. Ryle and M. R. James, The Psalms Of Solomon, Cambridge: At The University Press, 1891, p. 139, v. 27, and in 17:37-8 the Messiah relies upon God and not an army (see Zech. 4:6 and Ps. 33:16-8):

“For he shall not put his trust in horse and rider and bow, nor shall he multiply unto himself gold and silver for war, nor by ships shall he gather confidence for the day of battle. The Lord himself is his King, and the hope of him that is strong in the hope of God.”

The introduction by G. Vermes to the Essene literature from Qumran is a helpful guide for those unfamiiiar with the subject, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Penguin Books, 2nd ed., 1975, pp. 11-68.

Antiquities, XVIII, i, 6, and Wars, II, viii, 1. Although it is not certain that this “fourth sect” mentioned by Josephus is in fact the Zealot movement, his description is clearly related to that revolutionary movement which he discusses at length elsewhere in his work. Therefore, here the term will be used in its non-technical sense to cover the militant wing of national freedom fighters.

Wars, II, xvi, 6.

The heavenly and earthly realms are always shown as cooperating as the consummation unfolds. For the earthly scene as the place which benefits most from this teamwork see below, note 44.


Thus he did not dwell on the “signs” which the discerning observer desired to know in order to be able to respond appropriately. Even less did Jesus produce a timetable of the End, whereas apocalyptic displayed such a tendency, e.g., Dn. 11:2-12:13 and I Enoch 90:6-42.


Ibid., p. 37.

The Essenes even had a two-year novitiate. The Pharisees could be described in Jn. 7:49 as having the following opinion: “But this multitude which does not know the Law is accursed.”

So, e.g., Mk. 10:17-22. Parallel passages to quotations from the Gospels will not be noted unless important. Usually, that passage which is cited is generally regarded as the form closest to the ipissima verba.


The Parables Of Jesus, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972, p. 152.

Ibid., 152.


Perrin, op. cit., p. 183.

For the notion of authority as credibility which must be earned, see Braun, op. cit., pp. 116-26.


Against Perrin, op. cit., p. 171, there is no good reason to suppose that the presence of the Kingdom is manifested exclusively in the experience of individuals. The explicitly corporate nature of the movement Jesus founded argues strongly to the contrary.

By adopting the figure of the slave Jesus could not have better expressed his opinion of the powerful and those who are ambitious for power in the usual sense of that word. Antiquity despised slavery and all it represented. By dying the “slaves’ death,” crucifixion, he only sealed definitively his critique of traditional exercise of power. For crucifixion as a punishment associated prominently with slavery, see M. Hengel, Crucifixion, London: SCM, 1977, pp. 51-63.

Occasional editorial adaptations and modifications of the gospel traditions cited have not been sufficiently significant to warrant discussion.

As Perrin has ably demonstrated, the Reign of God was to be established in this world and not in some world.
"beyond space and time" (op. cit., pp. 68-73). Yet he resists the conclusion that seems to follow from the notion that the Kingdom is already present, namely, that the world is already being transformed in certain final ways.

It is therefore important that Jesus actually did reject the use of military force within God's Rule and the absolutism predicated upon the threat of such use. Despite the attempt to make Jesus out as an armed revolutionary (S. G. F. Brandon, Jesus and the Zealots, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), which fails for lack of evidence, it is scarcely credible that the Romans would have done nothing to stop him, since that is what they did to public menaces to order (see Pilate's action against the Samaritan "prophet", Antiquities, XVIII, iv, 1; the action a few years later against James and Simon, sons of the founder of the Zealot movement, Judas the Galilean, Antiquities, XX, v, 2; and numerous other engagements of the Romans, for example, at the death of Herod, antiquities, XVII, x, 2-10. For the whole question see M. Hengel, Victory over Violence, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).


46 See Hengel, op. cit., pp. 4-28, for the systematic exploitation of the people and resources of Palestine by its overlords and their collaborators from the time of Alexander through the Roman period.

47 Of course the application of these commands is not restricted to the family, but is naturally inclusive of the family (and other groups) as well.