

Is the Kingdom of God Realism (1940)

Preface to the 21st century edition, by Anne Mathews-Younes

To think that God not only offered us himself in the person of Jesus Christ, but also offered us His Kingdom, a master plan for the our lives and our world—this is indeed true and E. Stanley Jones reflects with depth and precision on the implications of this gift. This Kingdom master plan is not something that we ‘build,’ for it has been built into the framework of the world, and what’s more, it is a gift. Jones writes:

A note of warning must be uttered against the idea of “building the Kingdom.” The New Testament never tells us that we are to build the Kingdom. We are told to “see,” to “enter,” to “receive,” and to “proclaim” the Kingdom, but never to build it. What is the difference? The difference is profound and far-reaching. For if we are to build the Kingdom, then it is something that we bring into life, something that we produce. But the Kingdom is already in existence; it is a fact, so it is something we “receive” We are to build the Church, but not the Kingdom, for the Church is a relativism built more or less after the pattern of the absolute, the Kingdom of God The idea of building the Kingdom comes out of misplaced idealism—

that the Kingdom of God is an ideal. This idea is deeply embedded in our modern Christian thinking and must be rooted out at all costs if we are to make progress. (Jones, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?*, 100-102)

Read further, to grasp the significance of this gift as you explore Jones’ insights into the Kingdom of God:

When we look at the gospel as a whole, there are four great emphases: Matthew emphasizes the Kingdom; Mark, the Person of Christ; Luke, the human side of Christ; John, the experience of life. These four things are the Kingdom in four phases: Matthew throws the framework of the Kingdom around the whole movement and it is a movement to project the Kingdom into the whole of life; Mark presents the Person of Christ as the

concrete illustration of that Kingdom, the Kingdom in perfect operation; Luke lets us see this new Kingdom taking hold of raw human material and refashion it; John reminds us that the Kingdom is synonymous with Life. (Jones, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?*, 89)

Robert Tuttle, Emeritus Professor of World Christianity at Asbury Theological Seminary, has finished a new biography on Jones which will be published shortly, notes the following:

By the early 1930s Jones was increasingly identifying the central message of the New Testament Gospels as the Kingdom of God and affirming that God's kingdom is realism, not idealism and finding his justification for this realism in the pages of the New Testament. The book, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* written in 1940 is Jones' answer to this self-imposed question.

Robert Tuttle, *For a Time Such as This: The Life of E. Stanley Jones* (forthcoming).

Jones began to use the word totalitarian in reference to the Kingdom of God. His use of the word was intentionally provocative, hopefully making conventional Christianity uncomfortable with its watered down views of the demands of what it means to be the body of Jesus Christ. After all, the Russians (communism), Germans (Nazism) and now radical Islam (ISIS) fully understand the implications of totalitarianism. They know that their convictions should extend to every walk of life, politically, socially, and 'religiously.' Christianity, as the Kingdom of God, must embrace every human characteristic of body, mind, and spirit and every personal and institutional relationship. Unlike other forms of totalitarianism, however, the Kingdom of God (are you listening?) draws inspiration and strength from God and is thus able to affect total and permanent change in all of these human characteristics and relationships.² Stanley was not afraid to test his understanding of the Kingdom against the ways of the world, ironically, and this is only one of the reasons that Stanley is incredibly relevant today. The Kingdom of God is needed by both the East and the West. Moral decay threatens us all and Stanley says that the 'new morality' is nothing more than the old immorality demanding acceptance and public approval. As far as I can tell, today Christians have no master plan of their own. What do we do to bring life together? All of our so-called political answers seem

tawdry and cheap, divisive and impractical, all except one, Jesus' answer — the Kingdom of God. Perhaps God is applying shock treatment to ring us back to a reality of a true totalitarianism.

This book offers a fresh and powerful message to today's world, a world bristling with its many challenges. Each of these challenges has different causes but, as Jones well knew and spent his life explaining, all challenges—whatever their cause—find their solution in the soul of a person who knows their place in the Kingdom of God. I am deeply grateful to Leonard Sweet and Howard Snyder, both scholars of Jones' writings and profoundly committed Christians, for their generous commentary on this seminal presentation by Jones of the Kingdom of God and its perennial relevance. I took the liberty of annotating many of the names that Jones referred to in his book, names that would have been familiar to readers in the 1940s. All biblical quotations are taken from *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. This book could not have been reprinted without the assistance of the Rev. Shivraj Mahendra whose publishing, editing and theological skills were essential to this project's success. I don't know how Shivraj finds the time to move these E. Stanley Jones reprinting projects forward with his customary speed, expertise, and precision. I am deeply grateful to him. Andrea Wesson, trained at the Rhode Island School of Design, created the innovative and symbolic cover illustration. Nicholas Younes contributed his considerable editing expertise to ensure that the text is clear and doggedly pursued the needed annotations. Barbara Hubbard brought her years of experience as an English teacher to double and triple check the grammar and punctuation. I am surrounded by gifted people and I am blessed because of them. I trust that in turn you will be blessed by this book.

ANNE MATHEWS-YOUNES, ED.D., D.MIN. March 2018

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FOREWORD to the 2018 edition, by Leonard Sweet
THE SIMPLEXITY OF THE KINGDOM

If the hallmark of a great book is its ability to raise as many questions as it answers, you have before you a great book! Few biblical concepts are simpler and yet more complex than that of “kingdom.” The “simplicity” of the kingdom starts at the beginning. Mission and Ministry are not one and the same. There is one mission (simple) but many ministries (complex). The one mission is the simplicity of God’s “Thy-Kingdom-Come” mission. The many ministries incarnate the complexity of God’s “Thy Kingdom-Come” mission in every context. Hence the “simplicity” of the kingdom. When Jesus said simply “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt.6:33), he did not mean for his disciples to do this first, get it over with and then go on to something bigger and better. “Seek first the kingdom” means to seek it always, everywhere and in all things. The kingdom is the Ultimate Utmost. The kingdom is the simplicity of the sequential and the complexity of the simultaneous. Or in the words of E. Stanley Jones, one of the greatest missiologists in the history of Christianity , seeking the kingdom is not a facile idealism but rather fundamental realism. Jesus did not contemplate and teach a new religion. He did contemplate and teach a kingdom where God reigns, and where the individual person has significance not in and of themselves, but in relation to God’s rule and reign. Social relationships are to be rearranged, not to become more just in themselves, but to manifest the will and wisdom of God’s design for our universe. In the kingdom we are to love enemies, not because they are persons worthy of love, but because in loving our enemies we become “sons of our Father who is in heaven.” In kingdom economics, individuals are less significant in and of themselves than in relationship to God their Creator, and God’s creation of that person within an intricate web of relationships. There is no individualism in Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom. The individual is always an integral part of a covenant people, never an isolated unit. In the ethos, ethic and economics of the kingdom, humans have lofty value in relationship to God, but they are never given absolute value. The one absolute is Jesus and his revelation of the rule and design of God, which we call “kingdom.” Even though E. Stanley Jones wrote before this language became known, in his theology kingdom is the DNA of the gospel, the

distinguishing characteristic and backbone of “The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person,” as Jones put it in the title of his later book (1972). You cannot have a kingdom without a king. Or in Jones’ words, “Incarnation shows us realism about God and realism about man and makes history significant and science and art and culture possible instruments of the Divine” (p. 23). Historically, there have been three possibilities for understanding the kingdom. First, the kingdom is wholly other. Second, the kingdom is within the hearts of Jesus’ followers. Third, the kingdom is both within and without, individual and communal. It was this third possibility that captured the imagination and galvanized the preaching of E. Stanley Jones around the globe. It is what led to this book you are about to read. As someone who came out of the most hard-core of the “Be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17) holiness tradition, it took me many years to understand where holiness “separatism” had gone wrong. Separation is not “from” the world but “for the world.” When Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world” John 18:36), the Greek preposition ‘ek’ used in this verse does not mean “of” but “from.” Jesus’ kingdom is not from the world but it is for the world. The kingdom of which Jesus was the foretaste and fulfilment is all about the here and now, not some ideal time and some ideal place, far off in the future. “Thy kingdom come” is where realism abounds, where real relationships of beauty, truth, and goodness flourish.

God’s kingdom is acting now (Mk. 1:15, Lk.4:18). God’s kingdom is moving toward the future (Mt.8:11; Mk. 9:1). God’s kingdom is inaugurated by Jesus’ presence (Lk. 16:16). God’s kingdom is where God is present and people pleasure in God’s presence. God’s kingdom has come, is come and is continually coming. God’s kingdom comes by God’s act, not by our actions.

After reading this book I wanted to ask Jones why it seems that Jesus doesn’t approach the kingdom, or the culture, from the standpoint of “social structures.” In fact, what is stunning is Jesus’ refusal to address social institutions as institutions. When Jesus does refer to the state (Mark 12:17), for example, he orients his remarks to the demands of God, not the needs of the state. Nor did Jesus teach the rights of the individual and the worth of the individual soul. Humans are infinitely precious because

they carry the Maker's Mark— "Imago Dei." Jesus is always and everywhere concerned with subjects not with objects.

I also finished my reading of this book wanting to talk to Jones at length about the insidiousness of modern "individualism" when it appears at its best. For example, is it really the needs of your neighbor that inspire you to respond with kingdom virtues and kingdom values? Human needs may be the triggers, but isn't it the needs of your humanity, and your relationship with God, that require us to respond? Or is that just individualism cloaked in biblical theology? After all we are to "judge not," not because we are offending that person in our "judgmentalism," but "so that you be not judged." I am to forgive, not because the person needs my forgiveness, but I forgive that I may be forgiven. But once again, the finger points back at me, which is still individualism. Is the real motivation for social justice a just society, or is the motivation for social justice our moral responsibility to God and to our humanity? The thread that ties this book together is the insistence that kingdom is not something that is emerging from within history and is present now as a hope or ideal. Rather, the kingdom already exists in the person of Jesus and is drawing history toward itself, or Himself, and humankind toward The Human One, Jesus the Omega Point. To know Jesus is to know the future and to live in the kingdom: now, as a reality and not a never-realized ideal. The fact that the kingdom of God is not something we can build ourselves does not release us from the obligation to build better social institutions. But it does free us from the delusion that these fallen institutions are or can become the kingdom of God. Biblical scholar N. T. Wright, in *Surprised by Scripture* (2015), makes the helpful distinction between building the kingdom of God, which is not biblical, and the biblical notion of building for the kingdom of God, where all we do that is of value in all arenas of life is taken up into God's comprehensive renewal of the cosmos. Do goodness, beauty, and truth. God does the rest. Jesus' teaching about the kingdom is so much more radical than current comprehensions. Of course Jesus foretold the kingdom, someone has quipped, and we got the church. But even for Paul, the church provides Jesus less with a physical medium for acting than moves as an expression of the organic nature of community as the body of Christ. The focus is on its corporal nature and interlocking members, not on its ability to act on behalf of Jesus. If the radical realism of Jesus' teaching about the

kingdom whizzes over our heads, it hit his contemporaries between the eyes. “When his friends heard of it” [i.e. Jesus starting to preach and proclaim the kingdom], “they went out to lay hold of him for they said ‘He is beside himself’” (Mk.3:21). Since no one seems to be laying hold of us for being “beside ourselves,” it makes one wonder if our teaching about the kingdom has become so tepid and tame that it has lost the threat to the status quo you find outlined here. In this book, you will see what happens when the imagination of one of the church’s field theologians is captured by the radical realism of the kingdom. The question is whether the church today has an imagination sufficiently active and alive to catch the excitement and vision. In the epilogue to “Saint Joan” (1924) by George Bernard Shaw, two clerics are discussing the execution of Joan of Arc. One of them, de Stogumber, speaks of the traumatic effect upon him of witnessing St. Joan’s martyrdom:

DE STOGUMBER: Well, you see, I did a very cruel thing once because I did not know what cruelty was like. I had not seen it, you know. That is the great thing: you must see it. And then you are redeemed and saved. CAUCHON: Were not the sufferings of our Lord Christ enough for you? DE STOGUMBER; No. Oh no: not at all. I had seen them in pictures, and read of them in books, and been greatly moved by them, as I thought. But it was no use: it was not our Lord that redeemed me, but a young woman whom I saw actually burned to death. It was dreadful: oh, most dreadful. But it saved me. I have been a different man ever since, though a little astray in my wits sometimes. CAUCHON; Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?”

As Cauchon puts it in Shaw’s play: “Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?”

“Thy kingdom comes” with the imagination of Christ. “Thy kingdom perishes” without the imagination of Christ. The kingdom is that simple. The kingdom is that complex.

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Is the Kingdom of God Realism (1940)

FOREWORD to the 1940 edition by Adrian Taylor

THE INCREASE OF emotional and spiritual maladjustment in this chaotic modern world is well known. For thirty-five years I have been a surgeon seeking the diagnosis and cure of organic disease and injury. One would suppose that a surgeon would, from the very nature of his work, have a physical bias in his approach to disease. But I also have had ample opportunity to observe the effect of lack of spiritual harmony upon the whole organism. Anger, fear, resentment, antagonism, jealousy, hate, the sense of inferiority or guilt, and the like are all so important in the consideration of a patient's story that I have come to believe they play a predominate role in the majority of even surgical cases. Too often, for instance, does the thyroid surgeon see a goiter patient precipitated into a crisis by an emotional storm. The gland may undergo deleterious transformation from harmful emotional stimuli, and then in itself become the site of chemical and metabolic processes continuing the emotional instability, a vicious cycle being thus established.

Fortunate, indeed, is such a patient if he falls into the hands of an understanding physician who can calm the storm and bring peace and confidence. In this way alone is it possible to initiate successfully the medical and surgical regime, which so often leads to complete, and permanent cure. In like manner, in the history of a victim of stomach ulcer, the essential facts may have to do with maladjustments or environmental difficulties, and it is certainly true that no organic cure can be permanent until a solution for these is found. This lack of harmony in the realm of the spirit may lead to functional disorder and to organic disease, which cannot be cured before adjustment of the underlying conflict. A large majority of the surgical cases, which come to me, should never really have come. They could have been headed off by the acceptance and practice of the way of life that Dr. E. Stanley Jones outlines in this book. For most of these cases—not all, of course— began as wrong moral and mental attitudes in the patient. These wrong moral and mental attitudes created functional disturbances in the physical organism, and these, in turn, became organic or structural disease. When that occurs, I see these patients as a surgeon, but they could have been headed off by the

kind of Christianity presented here. Dr. E. Stanley Jones gratefully recognizes what science has done, is doing, and will do for the relief of organic disease. For his part, by spoken and written word, he is pointing the way out for countless sad, discouraged, hopeless souls, and in this book points to Him who, above all others, is able to drive from the soul of man all these unlovely harmful things “through the expulsive power of a new affection.”

There can be no doubt of the scientific soundness of the facts presented in this book, nor can there be any doubt that the future well-being of the world depends upon the bringing together in harmonious co-operation medical science and the kind of religion which this book represents.

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Is the Kingdom of God Realism (1940)

Foreword by E. Stanley Jones

I am not particularly interested in describing the ordinary meanings of the word “realism” in this book. Rather, I am extremely interested in pursuing the central skepticism of the day: Is the Kingdom of God Realism? Will it work?

SOMEONE HAS CYNICALLY remarked that if you do not believe in the depravity of man, then look in the dictionary and see how words, associated with man, are degraded by that association. This is not fair, of course, for many words coming from a very lowly origin are upgraded by contact with man. However, the word “realism” has suffered degradation in recent associations with man. For example, we speak of the “realism” of Clemenceau, the Tiger, reading hate and revenge into the Versailles Treaty; of the “realism” of the risqué novel; of the “realism” of the debunking biographies; of the “realism” of a great deal of modern psychology, which is described in the words of one of the truly sound and able ones, Dr. Link, “Here we find a collection of speculative and pseudoscientific theories which have already helped to undermine the morals and thinking of a civilization.” Obviously, the word “realism” needs redemption. For if it means “according to reality,” then it should be one of the grandest words in our vocabulary. Particularly so to the Christian who believes that reality has meaning, purpose, and goodness at its heart. For if “grace and reality are ours through Jesus Christ” (Moffatt) then “grace and reality” are connected, so that reality not only has meaning, purpose, and goodness at its heart—it has redemption as well. But I am not particularly interested in describing the ordinary meanings of the word “realism” in this book. Rather, I am extremely interested in pursuing the central skepticism of the day: Is the Kingdom of God Realism? Will it work? Or is it a beautiful, but impractical idea, which breaks its delicate wings upon the hard facts of real life? It may work in another and different world, but will it work in this hard workaday world of ours? Is the Kingdom of God an unnatural imposition upon the ordinary framework of humanity? Is it an attempt to give human nature bent for which it is not made? Is the Kingdom of God the ground plan of the universe, so that if you do not build upon it, then the house of human living topples into ruin here and now, or is the Kingdom of God an idea which might

decorate and adorn the roof of life, but would not be missed if left off? Dante says: “Thy will is our peace,” but is the will of God also our plan, the way we are made to work? Are the laws that underlie the Sacred Scriptures the laws that underlie our being? Has God stamped any laws in our being, in our nerves and in our tissues, and are they the same laws that Jesus was uncovering when He spoke on Judean hillsides? Is the truly Christian man the unnatural man, the eccentric, the odd one? Or is he the man who has caught the way to live; therefore, a harmonized, rhythmical, and effective person? Are the laws of sociological living, as far as we have been able to discover them in our half-lights, turning out to be the very laws of the Kingdom of God? If we had a truly Christian society, would it be a good society—the best society? Can you compartmentalize Christianity into churches on Sunday, and then run our economic, social and international life the rest of the time on pagan principles without coming to just the kind of a mess we are now in? Can you violate the law of love, any more than the law of gravity, without getting hurt? Can you run society on hate, fear, selfishness and dishonesty without its breaking down? Is evil a parasite on the good? Does evil have to throw around itself enough of love, of confidence, of unselfishness, of honesty to keep itself going, and would it sink without these lifebuoys which it borrows? Will the universe back evil? Does evil end in self-stultification? Does evil end in self-frustration? Is evil suicide? If on the other hand, when we find the Kingdom of God, do we find ourselves? Are we freest when most bound by the Kingdom’s laws? When we find the Kingdom of God, do we find Life? The author hastens to say that the answers to these burning questions are offered very inadequately in this book. No one knows better than I do. I wish that I could start this book all over again and try to construct better answers. But such as the answers are, I believe in them. They have been burned into my being by the fires of experience. At the close of this summer’s session of the Sat Tal Ashram in the Himalayas, after I had gone over the manuscript with a keen group, one of the keenest minds I know in East or West, an Indian, said, very thoughtfully, “Well, Christianity really is true, isn’t it?” Although he had been a Christian all his life, it seemed a very glorious dawning of a very glorious fact. The same impression has been made on me as I have gathered the evidence: Christianity is true! And if it is true, then that is the best news that this world contains. After my return to America, I went over the

manuscript at two North American Christian Ashrams at Saugatuck, Michigan, and Blue Ridge, North Carolina, and received gratefully the suggestions and reactions of an American group. Much of their wisdom has been embodied in this book, for which I am more than grateful. The comment of a very thoughtful layman interested me immensely: "Within ten years, the view-point and attitude of this book will become common property in the Christian Church, and when it does, it will create a Christian revolution." Whether in his enthusiasm he overstated the matter, I am not sure. For I know what a rough-hewn attempt this is to express something that has gotten hold of me very deeply. Whether or not the reality of the Kingdom of God creates a revolution in the Christian Church, certainly it has created one in me. I see now as I have never seen the eternal fitness of the gospel—it fits the soul like a glove fits the hand. They are made for each other. But it not only fits the soul, it fits the body and the mind in the same fashion. Physically and mentally we are fashioned in every fiber and nerve cell to obey this kingdom Way as the law of life. To live in any other way is to live against oneself and hence to stultify oneself. This is also true of sociological living: The laws of human society, when we really discover them, are the laws of the Kingdom of God deeply embedded in the relationships of people, the way those relationships work when they work well and harmoniously. I have always believed these things, in rather a vague way, but now they have become overwhelming. I do not hold them any more— they hold me. To the non-theological reader, the first chapter from page 29 on may prove a little tedious. If so, I suggest that you skip it. But I have felt that I must lay the foundations of "the Kingdom of God as realism" referencing the pages of the New Testament if it is to hold the Christian conscience. In these first pages I have tried to expound the mind of Christ as realism. I have only touched the fringes of that mind, I know, but everything there seems to point in one direction, namely, to realism. If this is so, we may have to change mental gears about Him, for many of us have thought of Christ as a very stimulating, but impractical idealist. If we discover that He was a realist— a realist so far ahead of us in actual life and achievement that we think Him an idealist, then we must change our whole attitude toward the Christian gospel. It is not something that we can take or leave alone. For it stands before us—and in us—as Destiny. It is the way that

we are made to live, and to try to live some other way is not only foolish but also impossible. You cannot live against life and get away with it.

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