



The *Kingdom of God* in Church Fathers in the 4th century¹
El *Reino de Dios* en los Padres de la Iglesia del siglo IV
O *Reino de Deus* nos Pais da Igreja do século IV

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Abstract: The *Kingdom of God* was at the very heart of Jesus' proclamation and mainly in the Lord's Prayer. For Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom, the Lord's Prayer is not so much a command as an invitation for participation in the Kingdom of God: an invitation to share in the prayer – life of Jesus himself. Ambrose of Milan connects the Kingdom of God by the grace of God. For him the prayer "Let your Kingdom come" doesn't refer to the eschatological meaning of the Kingdom of God, but in its present existence. Ambrose connects the Kingdom of Heaven with the grace that neophytes obtain after their baptism. On the other side, John Chrysostom underlines that the Kingdom of God should not be riveted to things that are seen, neither to account things present some great matter; but to hasten into our Father, and to long for the things to come. Finally, Gregory of Nyssa supports that the kingdom of God is within us. When we have purged our souls of every illusion and of every disordered affection, we will see our own beauty as an image of the divine nature.

Resumen: El *Reino de Dios* estaba en el corazón mismo de la proclamación de Jesús y principalmente en la Oración del Señor. Para Gregorio de Nisa, Ambrosio de Milán y Juan Crisóstomo, la Oración del Señor no es tanto una orden, sino más bien una invitación para participar en el Reino de Dios: una invitación a compartir la oración, es decir, la vida del mismo Jesús. Ambrosio de Milán conecta el Reino de Dios con la gracia de Dios. Para él, la oración "Venga a nosotros tu Reino" no se refiere al significado escatológico del Reino de Dios, sino a su existencia actual. Ambrosio conecta el Reino de los Cielos con la gracia que obtienen los neófitos después de su bautismo. Por otro lado, Juan Crisóstomo subraya que el Reino de Dios no debe estar clavado en las cosas que se ven, ni dar cuenta de las cosas que presentan un gran asunto; sino para apresurarnos a ir a nuestro Padre y anhelar las cosas por venir. Finalmente, Gregorio de Nisa sostiene que el reino de Dios está dentro de nosotros mismos.

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Cuando hayamos purgado nuestras almas de cada ilusión y de cada afecto desordenado, veremos nuestra propia belleza como una imagen de la naturaleza divina.

Keywords: Gregory of Nyssa – Ambrose of Milan – John Chrysostom – Kingdom of God – Lord’s Prayer – Divine Beauty – Jesus Christ.

Palabras-clave: Gregorio de Nisa – Ambrosio de Milán – Juan Crisóstomo – Reino de Dios – Oración del Señor – Belleza Divina – Jesucristo.

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Introduction

The goal of the Christian’s life on earth is salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, communion with God. The means for this communion is prayer, and through his prayer the Christian is joined in one spirit with the Lord.³ Prayer is the focal point and foundation of spiritual life and the source of salvation. Without prayer, as St. John Chrysostom says, “there is no life in the spirit”. Without prayer man is deprived of communion with God and can be compared to a dry and barren tree, which is cut down and thrown into the fire.⁴ Prayer is the opening of one's heart and soul in a conversation with God, and thus is an expression of faith in a relationship with God. Jesus himself prayed often, before his Baptism,⁵ before choosing the Twelve Apostles,⁶ after healing the sick,⁷ before the Confession of Peter⁸ and the Transfiguration,⁹ before the giving of the Lord’s Prayer,¹⁰ and to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.¹¹ Jesus teaches us to pray: “All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours.”¹²

³ I Cor. 6.17

⁴ Matt. 7.19. [*These Truths We Hold – The Holy Orthodox Church, Her Life and Teachings*](#) (comp. and ed. by a Monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery). South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1986.

⁵ Luke 3.21.

⁶ Luke 6.12.

⁷ Luke 5.16.

⁸ Luke 9.18.

⁹ Luke 9.28.

¹⁰ Luke 11.1.

¹¹ Luke 22.40-42.

¹² Mark 11:24



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Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the New Testament continues the tradition of prayer found in the Old Testament of the Bible, exemplified by the Patriarchs of Israel such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. Prayer is the way God has guided his people throughout history. Humility is the foundation of prayer, as we learn in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector¹³. Examples of prayer in the Bible include the Psalms, Matthew¹⁴ Luke¹⁵, John¹⁶, Philippians¹⁷, and James¹⁸. The ideal prayer is the one Christ Jesus taught us, the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father: Matthew 6.9-13 and a brief version in Luke 11.2-4. The Lord's Prayer is undoubtedly the most common prayer used by Christians. The event where the prayer was given to us by Christ is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 6.9–13 as a section of the Sermon on the Mount, and in the Gospel of Luke 11.2–4. Nowhere before this time did anyone dare to pray to God as their own father. It was not the custom of any rabbis or spiritual teachers to address the Almighty as “Abba,” the way a child might use when speaking to their “Daddy.” Jesus used it as an intimate form of address, and then taught His disciples to do the same. The use of the prayer is a mark of being Christian. The uniqueness of the Lord's Prayer is not only that it is a gift of Christ but also that it reflects, in spirit and content, the great themes of what Jesus taught and lived.

According to Maximos the Confessor¹⁹ the Lord's Prayer mystically sets forth seven of more general significance. These seven, which set out the aims of the prayer, are: **1)** Theology, **2)** Adoption, **3)** Equality in honor with the Angels, **4)** Sharing in Eternal Life, **5)** The Restoration of Nature to its Natural State, **6)** The Abolition of the Law of Sin, and **7)** The Overthrowing of the Tyranny of the Evil One. Very early on, liturgical usage concluded the Lord's Prayer with a doxology. In the Didache, we find, “For yours are the power and the glory forever.”²⁰ The Apostolic Constitutions add to the beginning: “the kingdom” and this is the formula retained to our day in ecumenical prayer.²¹ The Byzantine tradition adds after “the glory” the words “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The Roman Missal develops the last petition in the explicit perspective of “awaiting our blessed hope” and of the Second Coming of our Lord

¹³ Luke 18.9-14

¹⁴ Matt. 7.7; 18.20

¹⁵ Luke 1.46-55

¹⁶ John 7.11.

¹⁷ Philip. 4.6

¹⁸ James 5.14.

¹⁹ MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR. *On the Lord's Prayer*. 291, 295.

²⁰ *Didache* 8, 2, SC 248,174.

²¹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, 7, 24.1, PG 1, 1016.



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Jesus Christ.²² Then, the assembly's acclamation or the repetition of the doxology from the Apostolic Constitutions comes.

This prayer is the prayer of hope. "The Lord's Prayer" means that the prayer to our Father is taught and given to us by the Lord Jesus. Jesus presents himself as our model, and invites us to become his disciples and follow him; in humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate. The New Covenant practices alms-giving, prayer, and fasting; its prayer is the "Our Father." The Lord's Prayer is essential to the liturgy of the Church, for it is an integral part of the Mass or Divine Liturgy and the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.²³ The Lord's Prayer is truly a summary of the whole Gospel.²⁴ The Lord's Prayer is the unfailing model and rule for all prayers. The Church uses it in all the sacramental orders, and in all the Divine Services. As John Chrysostom says, "it is the crown of all prayers."

Someone could underline the unique characteristics of this Lord's Prayer: **1)** there are shortness and immunity. The reference is to the second person of singular. There are no reviews of the story of the divine economy and accumulation of the names of God; **2)** There is the simple call of God as Abba – Father! It not only refers to the House of Israel but leaves it "open" to the participation of anyone in the kingdom of God who participates in the mystery of Eucharist; **3)** There are unique requests in the first person of plural. Jesus embraces this daily material need for survival and He gives it a "mysterious-sacramental" character. As it became in Summa, God added "love your neighbor" in the same way He argues about the relationship that the members of Christianity should have a strong relationship with real love among them. At the end of this prayer, there is absence of praise.

To sum up, the text of Lord's Prayer is a model of austerity, content and gratitude. It includes: **a)** a call to God, expressed by the fall of the invocation, the clerical with which it begins: Our Father; **b)** three wishes – desires are expressed in three-term monolithic types of the predominantly tropical encroachment – hallowed, come, will be done and **c)** three requests – appeals, are expressed in the main types of imperative mood, the types of the second person: give – forgive – do not lead, but deliver.²⁵

²² Titus 2.13

²³ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Homilies on the gospel of Matthew*, 19,4, PG 57, 278.

²⁴ TERTULLIAN. *De oratione – On Prayer* 1, PL 1, 1155.

²⁵ BABINIOTIS, Georgios. "The perfectness of Lord's prayer". In: *Epiphillis of the newspaper TO VIMA*, 26.8.2001.



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The text of Lord's Prayer is a text that could be characterized as "ideal" by communicative – linguistic criteria. It is simple, because it is limited to basic information structures (invitations-wishes-requests), equally basic specialized information (nominally subject to the wishes – double names of supplements to requests) and to a few time, place and mode specifics. With an impressive economics of linguistic means - the text uses only Imperative, with the exception of the only verb declaration, the indicative mood "forgive," and a substantial, critical and genuine form of communication, without rhetoric, traditions and unnecessary verbal burden.²⁶

Generally, it could be underlined that in the words of Tertullian, a second century ecclesiastical writer, the Lord's Prayer "has embraced not only the special duties of prayer, be it veneration of God or petition for man, but almost every discourse of the Lord, every record of His Discipline; so that, in fact, in the Prayer is comprised an epitome of the whole Gospel."²⁷ In the ancient Church, as shown by the Greek title of Gregory of Nyssa's work, the Lord's Prayer was called simply "the Prayer."²⁸

I. The *Kingdom of God* in Old and New Testament

Many of the Old Testament prophets had written of this Kingdom while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Many varying definitions of the kingdom of God are given in the Old Testament. The exact phrase "kingdom of God" itself does not show up in the Old Testament, although we will see that the Old Testament is extremely important in helping us understand what the kingdom is.³⁰ The entire universe at

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ TERTULLIAN. *On Prayer* (trans. by S. Thelwall). In: ROBERTS, A.; DONALDSON, J.; CLEVELAND COXE, A (eds.). *From Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 3. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. Rev. and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

²⁸ "The relation between the Kingdom and the Church can be explained as follows. God's eschatological reign, as present in the person and work of Jesus, is in a special way related to the earthly community of Jesus in as far as it has a share in the saving graces of the present and the promises for the future. The Church is the community of those believers who are orientated to the Kingdom. Jesus has communicated the power of the present reign of God to Peter and his disciples who have the authority to teach and forgive, and have received the word and the spirit of God (Matt 19.28; Matt. 16.18 ff). The *essential presence* of God's reign in the Church is sufficiently safeguarded if the forces and graces of salvation are recognized in it, though not exclusively". Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf. *God's Rule and Kingdom*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1963; DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *The Kingdom of God and World Religions, Documenta Missionalia – 31*. Roma: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2004, p. 8.

²⁹ 2 Peter 1.20-21

³⁰ SPROUL, R. C. "[What Is the Kingdom of God?](#)". In: *Ligonier Ministries*, 14.03.2015.



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creation is the Kingdom of God, because God is the king over all of creation.³¹ The Old Testament portrays God as king over Israel in a special way.³² God does not abandon His intention to rule over the earth through a human king. He rules his Kingdom through the history of people of Israel with the covenants that He did with Noah,³³ Abraham,³⁴ Moses³⁵ and David.³⁶

On the other side, in the New Testament the word *basileia* can be translated by “kingship” (abstract noun), ‘kingdom’ (concrete noun) or ‘reign’ (action noun). In the Lord’s Prayer, ‘thy kingdom come’ refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ’s return. But, far from distracting the Church from her mission in this present world, this desire commits her to it all the more strongly.³⁷

The Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ teaching and the foundational message of the Church founded by Him through His disciples. As Mark explains in his Gospel account, “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”³⁸ Matthew and Luke likewise record that Jesus’ message was the “gospel” or “glad tidings” of the Kingdom.³⁹ Even though Matthew referred to it as “the kingdom of heaven”⁴⁰ and Paul, the apostle of Nations once called it “the kingdom of Christ and God,”⁴¹ the predominant name in Scripture is “the kingdom of God.” Later, the prophets speak of God’s deliverance of His people in this way as the reestablishment of God’s

³¹ Psalms 93.1-2; 95.3-6; 96.10; 104; 136.1-9. As Psalm 10.16 says. “The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land.” Or as King Jehoshaphat confesses in 2 Chronicles 20.6. “O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you”. Or consider King Hezekiah’s exultation in Isaiah 37.16. “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.”

³² Gen. 1.26-30; Gen. 2.15-17; 1 Sam 12.12-13.

³³ Gen. 9.17

³⁴ Gen. 17.4-6.

³⁵ Exod 19.6.

³⁶ 2 Sam. 7.4.

³⁷ KREEF, Peter (ed.). *Lord’s Prayer, II*. New York: Service Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 2000, p. 13.

³⁸ Mark 1.14.

³⁹ Matt. 4.23; Luke 8.1.

⁴⁰ Matt. 4.17; Matt. 5.3, 10, 19-20.

⁴¹ Eph. 5.5



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kingdom.⁴² The Kingdom of God had to do with the Sheep and the Shepherd of Israel where it was each its king.

Jesus consistently taught this same message of hope – “gospel” means *good news* – of the Kingdom throughout His ministry. His parables – stories with spiritual lessons – often dealt with this Kingdom, which God the Father and His Son had prepared prior to the existence of man at “the foundation of the world.”⁴³ In the Kingdom parables, Jesus explained what we must do to enter the Kingdom and what conditions will be like in it. According to the above we could support that the Kingdom of God is the inner rule of God. The person in whom the Kingdom of God resides always does God’s will; he or she always is obedient to God. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.⁴⁴ The natural, adamic man simply cannot obey God. He must be born again if he is to enter the Kingdom of God. It is conventional to regard the new covenant as the forgiveness of our sins so we can go to Heaven when we die. Being elderly, I am looking forward with the greatest joy to going to Heaven to be with Jesus and the saints. But the Kingdom of God doesn’t have to do only with Heaven, it is within us.⁴⁵ The Kingdom of God is stern obedience to God so we may have fellowship with Him. Fellowship with God does not depend on our being in Heaven or on the earth.⁴⁶

Generally, the Kingdom of God in Bible is synonym with the presence and justice of God in the whole universe. It is the entire host and everything in the universe before the original Sin of Adam and Eve and its tarnishing because of sin and the entrance of evil in the world. Because of the sin, man doesn’t enjoy the goods of the Kingdom of God, although this exists and it will continue to exist eternally. So this Kingdom after the incarnation of the divine Word revealed again to people and Christ explained to them what they should do to become members of it. Everyone should have in his mind that the kingdom of God cannot be disappeared, because its King is the God Himself. And as the Psalter argues: “They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom And talk of Your power; To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts And

⁴² Isa. 40.9-11.

⁴³ Matt. 25.34.

⁴⁴ I John 3.9.

⁴⁵ Luke 17.21.

⁴⁶ I John 1.3.



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the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.”⁴⁷

II. Ambrose of Milan and the *Kingdom of God*

Ambrose of Milan (340-397) was largely responsible for the rise of Christianity in the West as the Roman Empire declined, and he was a courageous and untiring defender of the independence of the Church from the state. He was the point of orientation, of Christian thought and ecclesiastical action, like Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria in the East. For his whole services to the Church he was honored as a great teacher in the Western and Eastern Church.⁴⁸

Fotios Ioannidis argues that

Ambrose occupies a prominent position in the Christian Latin literature, because he retains a wise balance between the western and the eastern exegetical tradition, especially with that of Alexandria. He devotedly claims that the Scripture is the place of God's permanent presence. Moreover, through the Scripture, he sees the revelation of the Holy Trinity and God's lifesaving intervention in history. This conviction led him to pursue the light and the concealed truths in the text, so he could muster some internal strength in order to deal with various pastoral issues.⁴⁹

Most of his texts are really homilies, spoken commentaries and interpretations on the Old and New Testaments, taken down by his hearers, and afterwards reduced to their present form, though very few of these discourses have reached us exactly as they fell from the lips of the great bishop. Also, for Ambrose the prayer was a very important part of a Christian. The most important prayer was the Lord's Prayer. He includes the recitation of the Lord's Prayer as a part of the liturgy, though its position is less certain according to his writing *De sacramentis*⁵⁰ and *De mysteris*.⁵¹ The bishop of Milan advises his congregation to have courage on the prayer not on the account for them but for the Grace of God.⁵² This prayer was thought by him as the one of the most

⁴⁷ Psalm 145.11-13.

⁴⁸ PAPAPOPOULOS, Stylianos. *Patrologia, II*. Athens: [s.n.], 1990, p. 644.

⁴⁹ IOANNIDIS, Fotios. “[The Interpretation of Scriptures by Ambrose of Milan](#)”. In: *Synthesis*, v. 3, n. 1, 2014, p. 69.

⁵⁰ AMBROSE OF MILAN. *De sacramentis*, 5.4, 18-29 & 6.5.24

⁵¹ *Idem. De mysteris*, 9.54.

⁵² *Idem. De sacramentis*, 5.4, 19.



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important part for the baptism. Ambrose inverted in teaching Lord's Prayer and it's concept until after baptism.⁵³

In Lord's Prayer, there is reference to the Kingdom of God. According to Ambrose the City of God, which is synonym with the Kingdom of God, is the Church.⁵⁴ The Kingdom of God is called Kingdom of Heaven, too. The latter has received for the believers in Christ.⁵⁵ In *Sacraments*, Ambrose explains that the phrase of Lord's Prayer "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come." As if the kingdom of God was not eternal. Jesus himself says: "To this end was I born, and dost thou say to the Father, Thy kingdom come, as if it had not come? But the kingdom of God then comes, when you have obtained his grace. For He himself says: The Kingdom of God is within you."⁵⁶ The Kingdom of God will come in earth after the devil's defeat. Perhaps, Ambrose means that the defeat of devil has to do with the passion, crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ.⁵⁷

For Ambrose, the entrance for the Kingdom of God was the baptism. Only with the latter the kingdom of God will be in earth as it is in the heaven. The baptism is the only path from earth to heaven,⁵⁸ from the slavery of sin to the real free life,⁵⁹ from death to resurrection. Jesus' statement that to enter the Kingdom of God, one must be born of water and of the spirit as we could see this was also the view of Ambrose of Milan.⁶⁰ Through his texts, the Kingdom of God is not somewhere far off in time and space. The Kingdom comes every time we imitate the love and compassion that Jesus taught us. In some ways Christians should work to make the Kingdom a reality with divine peace. The Kingdom of God is synonym with the Kingdom of Son. In the end, the teaching of Ambrose for the Kingdom of God as City of God influenced the thought of Augustine of Hippo.

⁵³ SATTERLEE, Craig A. *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching*. Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict Colleville, 2002, p. 135.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ LENOX-CONYNGHAM, Andrew. "[The Church in St Ambrose of Milan](#)". In: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, v. 5, n. 3, 2005, p. 211-225, esp. 211.

⁵⁶ AMBROSE OF MILAN. *De sacramentis*, 5.4, 22.

⁵⁷ AMBROSE OF MILAN. *De sacramentis*, 5.4, 23.

⁵⁸ AMBROSE OF MILAN. *De sacramentis*, 1.4,12

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1.1,1; 6.2,7; 6.5.26.

⁶⁰ MCKINION, Steven A. (eds.). *Life and Practice in the Early Church. A Documentary Reader*. New York / London: New York University Press, 2001, p. 35.



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III. Gregory of Nyssa and the *Kingdom of God*, analysis to the Lord's Prayer

Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) the brother of Basil of Caesarea treats the Lord's Prayer in the course of five sermons on the same prayer and in Matthew's commentary, when he analysis the sermon of Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Gregory had been influenced by Origen's of Alexandria teaching and philosophical thought.⁶¹ A major difficulty faced by Gregory is how to understand the coming of the kingdom, if it is already there.⁶² Gregory explains that the kingdom of God can be the place of everyone who prays:

Through prayer we succeed in being with God. But anyone who is with God is far from the enemy. Prayer is a support and protection of charity, a brake on anger, an appeasement and the control of pride. Prayer is the custody of virginity, the protection of fidelity in marriage, the hope for those who are watching, an abundant harvest for farmers, certainty for sailors.⁶³

The Bishop of Nyssa argues that the Christian always prays by drawing inspiration from the Lord's Prayer:

So if we want to pray for the Kingdom of God to come, we must ask him for this with the power of the Word: that I may be distanced from corruption, delivered from death, freed from the chains of error; that death may never reign over me, that the tyranny of evil may never have power over us, that the adversary may never dominate me nor make me his prisoner through sin but that your Kingdom may come to me so that the passions by which I am now ruled and governed may be distanced, or better still, blotted out.⁶⁴

Gregory of Nyssa, when he refers to the petition "Thy Kingdom come", wonders: "Is it expected that God should become King now, He who is the King of all, who is ever the same, incapable of any change and lacking nothing by which He could improve?"⁶⁵ The Kingdom of God is known by those to whom the Spirit of Truth reveals the hidden mysteries of God for the universe and people. In His Kingdom, God doesn't rule with any violence and tyrannical lordship. Nor does it enslave its subjects through fear and coercion, because it is proper for the way of virtue to be

⁶¹ MOUTSOULAS, Elias. *Gregory of Nyssa*. Athens: [s.n], 1997, p. 17.

⁶² MEREDITH, Anthony. "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on 'The Lord's Prayer'". In: *The Heythrop journal*, v. 43, n. 3, 2002, p. 344-356, esp. 344.

⁶³ GREGORY OF NYSSA. *De Oratione Dominica* 1, PG 44, 1124AB.

⁶⁴ GREGORY OF NYSSA. *De Oratione Dominica* 3, PG 44, 1156D-1157A.

⁶⁵ GREGORY OF NYSSA. [*Homily 3 on Lord's Prayer*](#) (trans. by Th. G. Stylianopoulos).



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devoid of any fear and to be free to choose what is good by voluntary consent. But the sum of all good is to submit to the authority which gives life, the Kingdom of God.⁶⁶

In the Kingdom of God, man will become free from the slavery of sin. He will obtain again the goods of his primordial situation before the original sin. The Preternatural Gifts of Integrity, Immortality,⁶⁷ Infused Knowledge, Impassibility – Don't feel pain or harm –, Freedom from concupiscence – sexual desire –, ignorance, and sin, Lordship over the earth.⁶⁸

Human nature was deceived and was led astray from the discernment of the good. The inclination of our free will was directed to slavery. The life of human beings was subjugated by every evil. Death entered nature by a myriad of ways inasmuch as every suggestion of evil turns out to be a form of death against us. Therefore, because we have been entangled in this kind of tyranny and have been enslaved by death through evil passions which assault us like enemies and executioners, it is good that we pray for God's Kingdom to come upon us. For by no other means can we put off the wicked subjugation of corruption except through the substitution of God's life-giving lordship over us.⁶⁹

Gregory like a number of Patristic writers assumed that mortality was not part of the original human life. Humans were created with the potential for immortality, but by exercising their free will to choose sin rather than to obey God, humans failed to actualize all that God was willing to share/give to them. Humans assumed that their true freedom came in rejecting the Lordship of God, but discovered that rebellion against God enslaved them to sin and death.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ “However, we must make two basic clarifications. First, the immortality of the soul was not its natural attribute; it is a gift of grace of God. Secondly, in this way the creation of the body and of its soul, which is the work of the unalloyed divine love, also demonstrates the savior of divine wisdom and the divine economy about human being. And behold why? If God created man immortal, then the man would have to be without inclination to the sin, then God would limit the freedom of man. If again God created man mortal, he would be responsible for his death.” – VASILIADES, Nikolaos P. *Mystery of Death*. Athens: Sotir, 1980, p. 59-60; Cf ARTEMI, Eirini. “[Firstborn from the dead became. The death and the resurrection of the incarnate Word in the texts of Cyril of Alexandria](#)”. In: *24grammata*, 2014, p. 1-2, ref. 4.

⁶⁸ MITSOPOULOS, Nikolaos E. *Introduction into Orthodox Dogmatic and Ethic Theology*. Athens: [s.n.], 1993, p. 118-119; ARTEMI, Eirini, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ GREGORY OF NYSSA. [Homily 3 on Lord's Prayer](#) (trans. by Th. G. Stylianopoulos).

⁷⁰ GREGORY OF NYSSA. *From Glory to Glory*, 8.8



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Gregory explains that if we ask that God's Kingdom should come upon us, we fervently entreat God to actualize in us these blessings: to be released from corruption; to be liberated from death, and to be loosed from the bonds of sin. We pray that the tyranny of wickedness cease its power against us and its war not conquer us, leading us away as captives through sin. We pray "Let Your Kingdom come upon us" in order that the evil passions which rule and lord it over us may depart from us, and indeed vanish into nothingness. For "As smoke vanishes, let them vanish; and as wax melts before the fire, so they will perish."⁷¹ When smoke dissolves into the air it leaves no trace of its own nature. Nor can wax endure the fire. Rather it evaporates into the air and its smoke disappears into total nothingness.⁷²

Likewise, if God's Kingdom comes upon us, all those things which dominate us collapse into nothingness. Darkness cannot endure the presence of light. Sickness cannot exist when health returns. The evil passions are not active when freedom from passions takes hold. When life reigns in our midst and incorruption holds sway, gone is death and vanished is corruption.⁷³ If a man wants to be in the kingdom of God, to ascend to God, he must be purified: "The path, that leads human nature to heaven, is nothing more than separation from the evils of this world. Becoming member of the Kingdom of God means to be like God just, holy and good to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!"⁷⁴ The purification can happen only if the Holy Spirit frees us from the bitter tyranny of the Devil, because human nature was voluntarily enslaved to the manslaughterer Devil. Otherwise, we will not be liberated, unless the Kingdom of God, that is to say the Holy Spirit, comes to us so as to expel from us the tyrant enemy and reign in us. It is obvious from the above that the Kingdom of God is not an external arrangement of the world, but the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This results in the transfiguration of the world through transfigured people⁷⁵. Gregory of Nyssa's association of the Kingdom "Basileia"⁷⁶ with the Holy

⁷¹ Psalm 68.2.

⁷² GREGORY OF NYSSA. [Homily 3 on Lord's Prayer](#) (trans. by Th. G. Stylianopoulos).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Matt.5.48; GREGORY OF NYSSA. *De Oratione Dominica* 2. PG 44,1145AB.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ "Basileia", the word for kingdom is the same as that for kingship in Greek. The argumentation from "Thy Kingdom come" to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit can therefore not be adequately reproduced in English, as it depends on the double sense of the one Greek term." – GRAEF, Hilda C. *St. Gregory of Nyssa. The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes*. New York: Paulist Press, 1954, Ancient Christian Writers, n. 18, p. 187, ref. 68.



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Spirit is based on a rare variant of Luke he quotes which has “May Thy Holy Spirit come upon us and purify us,”⁷⁷ in place of *Thy Kingdom come*.

The other though is that the Kingdom of God is within us⁷⁸. Gregory supports that:

So if, by love and right living, you wash off the filth that has become stuck to your heart, the divine beauty will shine forth in you. Think of iron, which at one moment is dark and tarnished and the next, once the rust has been scraped off, shines and glistens brightly in the sun. It is the same with the inner core of man, which the Lord calls the heart. It has been in damp and foul places and is covered in patches of rust: but once the rust has been scraped off, it will recover itself and once more resemble its archetype. And so it will be good, since whatever resembles the good must be good by itself.⁷⁹

Therefore, whoever looks at himself sees in himself what he desires. And whoever is pure in heart is blessed because, seeing his own purity, he sees the Archetype reflected in the image. If someone watches the sun in a mirror then he doesn't look directly at the sky, but still he sees the sun just as much as someone who looks directly at it. In the same way, the Lord is saying, although he doesn't have the strength to withstand the direct sight of the great and inaccessible Light of God, if he looks within himself once he has returned to the grace of the image that was placed in him from the beginning, he will find in himself all that he seeks. He will be able to see the Kingdom of God inside him.

This purification of man, which is synonym with his perfection, is the presupposition for the coming of Kingdom of God. This is underlined by Gregory of Nyssa and he has been influenced by Origen of Alexandria.⁸⁰ The Kingdom of God is completely

⁷⁷ Luke 11.2.

⁷⁸ Luke 17.21.

⁷⁹ GREGORY OF NYSSA. *On Beatitudes*, 28.3

⁸⁰ “Our Lord in fact dwells in all holy people who recognize God as their king and obey his spiritual laws. The Father is present in the perfect soul and Christ reigns together with the Father, according to his own actual word ‘If someone loves me... we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14.23). The kingdom will not reach its fullness in each of us until wisdom and the other virtues are perfected in us. Perfection is reached at the end of a journey, so we ought to be forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead’. (Philip. 3.13) In other words, on the one hand the believer is a tireless traveler and on the other hand the kingdom of God will reach its completion in us only when the words of the Apostle are fulfilled. ‘When he has subjected all things, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father that God may be all in all.’” (cf.1 Cor.15.24-28). Let us subdue our members to produce the fruits of the Spirit. Then the Lord will walk with us as in a spiritual paradise. He alone will reign in us, together with Christ. And we shall



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understood by Gregory of Nyssa with an eschatological optimistic and beautiful way of thinking. There will be the final triumph of good over evil. Any sin, any corruption, any injustice, any deed of Satan will have no place on us. Christ will be the one and only winner. Then there is good news. The latter shows that man is no longer an outcast nor expelled from God's Kingdom; but that he is again a son, again God's subject. Gregory of Nyssa interprets the phrase of Paul that in Christ's Kingdom will be "all and all"⁸¹ and says that God will completely fills our mind; He is everything for us, our home, our food, our drink, our light, so our face will be transformed, mirroring the glory of our Father.⁸²

IV. The *Kingdom of God* in the texts of John Chrysostom

The bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (350-408) deals with many things that refer to Christian life and also he interprets the texts of Holy Bible. It was impossible for this Father not deal with the analyses of the central prayer of Christianity, the Lord's Prayer and mainly to make some important references to the term the *Kingdom of God*. The Kingdom of God is the paradise but not only with eschatological meaning. Here Chrysostom has the influence of Origen's interpretation about the Kingdom of God. Chrysostom as Origen (185-254 AD) emphasized that we persevere in prayer because the kingdom of God is present today and also to come. For this reason we don't only pray for the future triumph of God but also for each and every day to be under the sovereign control of God now, even as it will be in that final day. The presupposition for the entrance in this Kingdom is "a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."⁸³ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Sonship and the Spirit of grace; for grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, for those who have been born by the power of God. This Sonship enables man to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Chrysostom makes one plain reference to the Church as "the Kingdom of Christ"⁸⁴ and "the Kingdom of the Heavens"⁸⁵ and two distinct references to it as "the

already possess the benefits of the new birth and of the resurrection". – ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA. "[On the Lord's Prayer](#)". In: *The Sword of the Spirit*, 2009, v. 32.

⁸¹ Col. 1.17.

⁸² SMITH, Warren J. *The Lord's Prayer: Confessing the New Covenant*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015, p. 71.

⁸³ John 3.5; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *On the Gospel of John*, hom. 25. 1-2. *Idem. On the Pentecost*.

⁸⁴ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Ad Illuminandos Catechesis* I, PG 49, 224-227.

⁸⁵ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *In Principio Erat Verbum*, PG 63, 548.



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Kingdom of God”⁸⁶ In one example he also implicitly insinuates the Church as the Kingdom of the Lord. For John Chrysostom

[...] the Kingdom of Christ is none other than the Kingdom of God, because Christ is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, and He, who shares the exact same Essence with the Father and the Spirit. Since God is one Essence in Three Persons, the Church is the Kingdom of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷

Second, Chrysostom demonstrates the unique Hypostatic properties of the Father and the Son in Psalm 2:6-9. He shows that the Father grants the Kingdom to His Son as His inheritance and permits Him to subject it to Himself and rule over it as a King with “a rod of iron” for eternity.⁸⁸

Chrysostom connects the attempt of someone to be purified from sins and sinful passions with the entrance of kingdom of God⁸⁹. There is nothing that enables us to win the Kingdom of heaven more than loving Christ as he deserves, we will try to get rid of any passions⁹⁰. Furthermore, the Kingdom of God consists only of those human beings (the Christians) who have been washed, sanctified and justified by “this mystical cleansing,” or by “the Laver of Regeneration.” This Laver is Baptism, “in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ”⁹¹ and “in the Spirit of our God.”⁹² John Chrysostom teaches in his homily on the Lord’s Prayer that the Kingdom of God comes in the life of the Christian whenever he or she willing takes up the “yoke” of Jesus the Messiah as Jesus told us in Matthew⁹³: “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.”⁹⁴

⁸⁶ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Ad llluminandos Catechesis I*, PG 49, 224-227; *Idem. In Romanos*, Hom. 26, PG 60, 637-639.

⁸⁷ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Demonstratio Contra Judaeos et Gentiles Quod Christus Sit Deus*, PG 48, 821-823.

⁸⁸ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Ad llluminandos Catechesis I*, PG 49, 224-227; CHRISTOFIS, Rev. Fr. Gus George. [*The church's identity established through images according to St. John Chrysostom*](#). Durham: Durham University, 1991, p. 254.

⁸⁹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *On the Gospel of John*, hom. 45, 1-4.

⁹⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *On the inscription to the Book of the Acts of the Apostle*, 3.5

⁹¹ 1 Cor. 6.11.

⁹² 1 Cor. 6.11. CHRISTOFIS, Rev. Fr. Gus George, *op. cit.*, p. 254

⁹³ Matt. 11.28-30.

⁹⁴ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 19.7



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The Kingdom of God is connected with the Baptism⁹⁵ and the Holy Eucharist and therefore the participation in the Holy Liturgy and generally to be active member of the body of Church whose head is the incarnate Word, the Christ. The Liturgy is the revelation of the Kingdom of God. The purification from passions is implicit in Chrysostom's liturgical ethos. "Do not allow any of the slavish and viperous passions;" says Chrysostom, "to appear together with you at the place of Holy Elevation... let nothing stand in your way at that hour".⁹⁶ The path of liturgy is the path of liberation, and man is not truly free until he frees himself from passion, i.e., until he acquires the fruits of virtue. The golden mouthed Father John thrusts his address of St. Paul's words into the context of the future Kingdom:

And why do I speak of the world to come? Since here this mystery makes earth become, for you, a heaven. Open only for once the gates of heaven and look in; nay, rather not of heaven, but of the heaven of heavens; then you will behold what I have been speaking of. For what is there most precious of all, this will I show you lying upon the earth. For as in royal palaces, that which is most glorious of all is not the walls, nor golden roofs, but the person of the king sitting on the throne; so likewise in heaven it is the Body of the King. And this you are now permitted to see upon earth. For they are not angels nor archangels, nor heavens and heavens of heavens that I show you, but the very Lord and owner of these. Do you perceive how that which is more precious than all things, is seen by you on earth? And not seen only, but also touched? And not only touched, but likewise eaten – and after receiving it you go home? Make your soul clean then prepare your mind for the reception of these mysteries.⁹⁷

Chrysostom speaks for the Kingdom of God, which will embrace all the nations of the world and grant to them its abundant peace; a peace that is different from that of other kingdoms.⁹⁸ He bases on Paul's Epistle to Romans and mainly to 14:16-18⁹⁹: "Then let us not pass judgment on one another anymore, but, rather, let us decide

⁹⁵ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Ad Illuminandos Catechesis* I, PG 49, 224,225. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate persons, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ STEENBERG, M. C. *The Sermon and the Chalice*. Lecture presented in november 2007 Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire, United Kingdom, as part of a day conference on St John Chrysostom during the year commemorating the 1,600th anniversary of the saint's repose.

⁹⁸ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Demonstratio Contra Judaeos Et Gentiles Quod Christus Sit Deus*, PG 48, 821-823; CHRISTOFIS, Rev. Fr. Gus George, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁹⁹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *In Romanos*, Hom. 26, PG 60, 637-639.



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never to put a stumbling-block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it to be unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat because the ruin of one for whom Christ died". For John Chrysostom the Kingdom of God is the paradise in heaven and the Church of Christ in this earth.

Conclusions

The Kingdom of God is all around us; wherever we shall go, the kingdom of God is there. It does not put on a show; rarely does it reveal itself in great acts of power and might. It comes as it is, in the humble truth of reality. It is all around us, and we are in it even as it is already in us.¹⁰⁰ Sadly, most of us do not perceive it as it is in its pure glory due to the veil which we have put on between it and us. "To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted".¹⁰¹ Most of us see the world around us, not under the light of the kingdom of God, but in the darkness of sin; all things are covered and mired for us, defiled by our own intentions and state of being; all things appear corrupted because we are corrupted. Thus, though all things are in and of the kingdom of God, we do not recognize the kingdom of God in them.¹⁰²

The Church Fathers understood history in terms of the Christological eschatology. In this period of eschatology, the Church is central. It is "the Kingdom of God," "the City of God."¹⁰³ There, the citizens are formed into the "new men" who dwells in "the Mystery of godliness" and, therefore, the Kingdom of God has eschatological meaning, not only in this world but the Age to Come.

The Kingdom, which is to come, is already present in the Church, the beginning of a "new order" which, although in the world, belongs to the future age Church is now "the City of God," the Kingdom, albeit imperfectly. She is the icon and entelechy of "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,"¹⁰⁴ "the Jerusalem which is above, free and the mother of us all;"¹⁰⁵ indeed, "a city which has foundations whose builder

¹⁰⁰ KARLSON, H. "[To See the Kingdom of God](#)". In: *Patheos*, 13.11.2017.

¹⁰¹ Titus 1.15

¹⁰² KARLSON, H., *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Heb. 12.18-24.

¹⁰⁴ Heb. 12.22.

¹⁰⁵ Gal. 4.26.



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and maker is God”¹⁰⁶. The Scriptures of the New Testament contrast her to the world, itself a “city,” “Babylon, the mother of harlots,” the *regnum diaboli*, whose master is the devil, “the god of this age.”

Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom analyze the phrase “Kingdom of God” in their texts. For all of them the Kingdom of heaven has to do with the justice and the Renewing the World to Its Original Glory. The latter was revealed by Christ with His incarnation. Ambrose of Milan agrees with the other two Fathers that the Kingdom of God is synonym with the Christian Church. The membership in this Church can take place with the baptism on the name of the Triune God. Ambrose doesn’t make any more reference for the Kingdom of God than the things that connect this Kingdom with the Lord’s Prayer.

Gregory of Nyssa argues the connection of Kingdom of God with the Church and the Lord’s Prayer but he deepens in what the Kingdom of the Heaven includes with a way of rebuilding the beliefs of Christian morality in combination with the holy Eucharist and participation in the divine mysteries.

The same opinion is expressed by John Chrysostom. For Him, the Liturgy reveals the Kingdom of God. John as preacher speaks many times in his homilies for the Kingdom of God and gives to this term many meanings. So there are eschatological, ethical, dogmatic and patristic references for the Kingdom of God. The bishop’s of Constantinople sermons have been one of his greatest lasting legacies. The influence on church teachings is interwoven throughout the current Catechism of the Catholic Church and in every homily and commentary of Bible of John Chrysostom there is a direct or indirect reference to the Kingdom of God.

To sum up, the Kingdom and Jesus Christ are strongly connected together in the statement of the petition, “Thy kingdom come”. In praying for the Kingdom we are asking the Father to bring it about at the right time, while expressing our willingness that this time be now, if that is what the Father wishes. We ask to pass from the state in which God the Father is hidden to the state in which he manifests himself fully as the Father of all¹⁰⁷.

God’s Kingdom, which was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, was founded in Christ’s incarnation, established with his ascension, advances with the fulfilling of the

¹⁰⁶ Heb 11.10.

¹⁰⁷ HART, Kevin. “[Religious pluralism and the Lord’s Prayer](#)”. In: *ABC Religion & Ethics*, 26.06.2012.



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Great Commission, and will be completed when Christ delivers it to God the Father at the end of time¹⁰⁸. The Kingdom life of a Christian consists of living with joy, hope, and peace as a child of God, a citizen of heaven, and a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ¹⁰⁹.

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¹⁰⁸ 2 Chron. 7.1-4; Matt. 10.5-8; 28.18-20; Luke 24.1-12; Acts 1.6-11; 1 Cor. 15.19-28.

¹⁰⁹ Rom. 14.17; Eph. 4-6; Col. 1.13-14; 3.4; 1 Thess. 4.11.



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