

REFLECTING RELIGIOUS TRUTH FROM THE INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD: AN ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS OF PAUL RICOEUR IN LUKE 17:20-36

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Abstract:

'The Kingdom of God' reflects a hidden truth that needs to be probed, disclosed and exposed to achieve its true meaning. It portrays significant as well as controversial theme in the Gospel and triggers multi interpretations. This paper investigates how philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur can be applied on the issue of religious truth of the Kingdom of God. The significance of Ricoeur's hermeneutics lies precisely in the process when interpretation is brought 'in front of text' involving the world of interpreters and the subjectivity of the readers, namely the urgency of Kingdom as a project of faith in contemporary world or,

phenomenologically, the project that involves our being as *being-in-the-world*. The truth of the Kingdom of God is examined through the method of Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle following dynamical levels or moments of understanding: pre-critical, phenomenological-critical and existential-post-critical. The primacy of language in Ricoeur's hermeneutics places the power of linguistic re-description; it becomes crucial in correlating the Kingdom of God as text and event. Linguistic re-descriptive power helps articulate the so-called dimensions of *impossible demand* in biblical hermeneutics. It reflects the inexhaustibility and irreducibility of the Kingdom's inspirational power both in linguistics itself and its expressions as an action.

Keywords:

Truth • hermeneutics • Kingdom of God • moments of understanding • linguistic re-description • text and event • becoming in language • becoming in being

Introduction

Religious truth is a broad and elusive discourse. While considering the facts that we have epistemological questions in terms of interpreting religious truth, hermeneutic circle would be considered as the main theoretical frame to analyze this subject matter in order to have more comprehensive and extended dimensions of truth. In the context of religious truth as a hermeneutic issue, I would examine the understanding of religious truth primarily by presenting Paul Ricoeur's vision which concerns more about the terms of truth as a *wager, suspense, question, the spirit of discovery and inexhaustibility* demonstrating the dynamical position of religious truth and religious truth as a continuous search. The case study is the truth of the Kingdom of God. In this article, I investigate how philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur can be applied on the issue of religious truth, i.e., *the truth of the Kingdom of God*.

The Term and Text of the Kingdom of God

As a hermeneutic discourse, religious truth is a matter of textual interpretation. It means that the term 'the Kingdom of God' reflects a hidden truth that needs to be probed, disclosed and exposed to achieve its true meaning. It portrays significant as well as controversial theme in the Gospel and triggers multi interpretations. Theologically speaking,

theologians would agree with the idea that substantially the biblical truth of Kingdom of God does not refer to a kind of 'literal truth', i.e., any political manifesto or certain territorial power. Therefore the speech of Jesus in Biblical text needs to be interpreted within complementary understanding or direction: metaphoric language of the Kingdom compelling *imagination* as well as existential *transformation*.¹ Let us notice the following passage of Luke as a matter of religious text, specifically as described in Luke 17:20-36:

*The Coming of the Kingdom of God*²

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." 22 Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. 24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. "37 "Where, LORD?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

As a hermeneutic matter, the dynamical understanding of the Kingdom of God will be presented demonstrating the key term, i.e., the central sense *kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17: 20-21). Understanding process is fundamentally framed in the dualism of values: the transcendent and immanent, spiritual and social dimension, eschatology and existentiality of the Kingdom of God. Above all, the significance of Ricoeur's hermeneutics lies precisely in the process when interpretation is brought to 'in front of text' involving the world of interpreters and the subjectivity of the readers, namely the urgency of Kingdom as a project of faith in contemporary world

or, phenomenologically, the project that involves our being as *being-in-the-world*. In other words, what happens in front of the text becomes a hermeneutic task, namely the understanding of the Kingdom as a disclosure of truth.

To arrive at a more comprehensive understanding, the truth of the Kingdom of God is examined through the method of Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle following dynamical levels or moments of understanding: *pre-critical*, *phenomenological-critical* and *existential-post-critical*. By operating these levels, interpretation empowers the capacities of human understanding. The term and the sense of the Kingdom of God would be examined by this theoretical frame. As a hermeneutic discourse, the complex components of hermeneutics, such as the roles of reference, language, and hermeneutics of suspicion are also empowered to disclose the richness and the fruitfulness of the Kingdom.

Pre-critical Understanding of The Kingdom of God

In Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics, pre-critical understanding can be categorized as pre-figuration or "first *naïveté*", namely "an unquestioned dwelling in a world of symbol, which presumably came naturally to men and women in one-possibility cultures to which the symbols in question were indigenous..."³ At first *naïveté*, we can say, the understanding of 'Kingdom of God' is determined by an equation between symbol and fact; it could be an uncritical 'common knowledge' among believers confronted to their context. It can mean, therefore, that the symbolic sense of the 'kingdom' and fact of the Kingdom of God as a human kingdom is conceived in a model of direct relationship; penetrating each other without the distancing of understanding. In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, these knowledges represent the level of pre-critical understanding or pre-reflexive description of the revealed truth. This level of knowledge characterizes self-immediacy of understanding and shapes uncritical interpretation which means that it does not represent 'what is really said by text' of the Kingdom.

Further question is: how is the truth-content in the Kingdom reflected and expressed at this level of understanding? At least, there are some 'descriptions' which indicate a pre-critical understanding regarding the term 'the Kingdom of God' in general correlated to Luke 17:20-36, in particular, i.e. *The Heavenly King Reigns in His people on Earth*, which has its centrality in the words "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21). In the context of general idea, common cultural context or 'shared knowledge',

the familiar idea of the Kingdom of God is immediately associated with 'theocracy', i.e., a socio-political-ideological system shaped and established on the basis of divine's law and religious norms, representing a direct relationship between symbol and fact. Take one example: the Israelites all believed that the Kingdom of God referred to an earthly kingdom, which God would physically rule.⁴ This theocratic view constitutes a presuppositional standpoint⁵ that is generally grasped as an understanding and then shapes a perception and vision of God as a king or powerful leader that, in turn, penetrate human social-political order with physical effects. In one way or another, such knowledge may be not parallel with intention and imagination in the mind of the biblical author.

In grasping such presupposition, truth of the Kingdom is gained through a self-transparency of understanding and meaning, i.e., the epistemological equation of reign of God with a worldly state or the idea of divine truth in its effective connection with this human world. The sovereignty of God is directly and effectively identified with power of a 'state' where God's will and rule are manifested in divinely inspired human institutions⁶ together with existing genuine need. Here the creative power of 'interpretation' itself is still minimum or superficial. In other words, this such equation, more or less, refers to the model of literal meaning of the Kingdom of God that puts symmetrical line between God's will and human need as written in religious text as the divine words; this is also a kind of propositional truth of the Kingdom when it is elevated into dogmatic level and formula.

In other version, regarding pre-critical level of shared knowledge among Christians, the Kingdom of God is also frequently imagined as a transhistorical 'location' for the believers after death and qualitatively equated with 'heaven' or the Kingdom of Heaven. Here the theology of eternal life or other-worldliness refers to the transcendent dimension of the Kingdom. This version of the Kingdom of God tends to correlate the Kingdom with apocalyptic hope. Then the emphasis of other-worldliness had provoked the text of the religious sects that focus on misleading 'the end of the day' to welcome the coming Kingdom. In this case, interpretation could be observed, for instance, from the texts of New Age: the Kingdom of God has been associated with a kind of esoteric movement as a counter-culture towards the modern secular culture. Here, the meaning of the Kingdom is mystically interpreted as a *world-negation*, i.e., "a vision calling forth a new humanity in a view of new world order".⁷ Equation of the truth of the Divine with the mystical effectiveness in the world is one of the

spiritual obsessions.

Thus, so far we have shared knowledge, political, apocalyptic and mystical descriptions of the Kingdom. These expressions are categorized in pre-critical understanding in the sense that they demonstrate the 'surface', superficial level or first *naivete* of interpretation of the revealed truth in their dialectics with human existence and experience. Even these demonstrate 'narrow possibilities' of interpretation that are still far from deeper or true meaning of the Kingdom of God or, in Ricoeur's term, the absence of the insights of discovery or production of meanings of the Kingdom of God. Thus in this level of understanding, the hidden multiple meanings of the Kingdom do not emerge as the power of disclosure yet. The truth in the Kingdom remains 'uncritical subjective' speculation demonstrating poor understanding.

Critical Understanding of The Kingdom of God

What is crucial in our analysis with critical moment is the internal nature of text or the objectivity of the text. In order to get the objectivity of a text, we need to make a distanciation. This can be firstly expressed in the following questions: What is the genre regarding the idea of Kingdom of God in biblical world in the New Testament? Is the statement of the Kingdom of God in Luke 17: 20-21 associated phenomenologically with a kind of 'worldly political government'? How do we understand the text of the Kingdom as a phenomenological-historical discourse and testimony of meaning in New Testament, especially Luke 17:20-36? These are crucial questions to scrutinize the truth-construction of the Kingdom of God.

Historical Context of the Text of the Kingdom of God

The main concern is the objective *notion* about the Kingdom of God. To respond this concern, the critical moment of understanding starts with 'phenomenological-historical analysis' to reach the objective-historical background in understanding the genealogical notions of the Kingdom, its context and development. First of all, in the dictionary, one of the literal meaning or etymology of the term 'kingdom' refers to 'territory of the power of king'.⁸ Then a scholar of New Testament, C. H. Dodd contends that *Malkuth* constitutes 'abstract noun' that can signify *kingship, kingly rule, reign or sovereignty*.⁹ Then he simply signifies *the malkuth of God* as "God reigns as King" or the sovereignty of God as King.¹⁰ In Indonesian, both Greek word '*basileia*' and Hebrew '*malkuta*' are translated as 'kerajaan' (kingdom). Hence, in Jesus'

time, it was not surprising for the Jews to imagine and hope that God's will establish a new state and He would become the king.

Then, as known, historical background of the New Testament is the Roman Empire. In *Introduction to New Testament*, historical context of New Testament could be identified from 27 BCE (the emperor of August) to 96 (the emperor of Domitian).¹¹ The theme “the Kingdom of God” could not be separated with such political situation which influences the genre, namely the construction of discourse of the Kingdom. Historically speaking, Palestine was free from Syria's colonization from 140 BC to 63 BC. Afterward the Rome Empire started to colonize Jerusalem. Therefore the hope for a figure 'the king the liberator' was living among the Jews under the Rome administration and imperialism.¹² As a result, the discourse of the Kingdom of God was developing in a tensional interpretation: spiritual-eschatological and secular-political.

The discourse of the Kingdom in Jesus' time, for example, was raised by the rabbis. As described by John Drane in *Memahami Perjanjian Baru*, many of them believe that the administration of God was running although it took place under the Rome authority and this administration worked through inspirational sources of Torah. Whereas Jesus himself does not deny that the idea of the Kingdom of God would have influence to society *politically*.¹³ Here the existence of rabbis portrays a situation demonstrating the historical testimony of the discourse of the Kingdom, especially in a theocratic sense and tendency.

Critical understanding continues to consider the great variety of human situations in which testimony of the Kingdom has been borne. It assumes the phenomenological and objective world referred by the text. It tells us about retrospective dimensions of interpretation or historical meanings of text. In this context, some groups of interest attempt to interpret the *meaning* of the Kingdom of God 'within you' and in the midst of us in Luke 17:20-21 according to their own discourses. These groups are: *First*, Zealot community trying to use the doctrine of the Kingdom of God to get support from people for 'designing' a blue-print of Israel's nationalism.¹⁴ *Second*, Essenet trying to reinterpret the pure meanings of the Kingdom of God according to ascetic manners; it is a kind of escapism, a silent dimension of the Kingdom of God. *Third*, Herodian movement is a political organization that exercises political compromises to maintain Herod's authority.¹⁵ Herods himself was haunted by messianic syndrome that would destabilize his power.

Then *fourth*, Howard Snyder, in his analysis of the “Models of Kingdom

of God”, notices that Tertulianus (160-225) had put forward an interesting interpretation of the Kingdom of God. Dealing with a moral degradation in the early development of Christianity, Tertulianus promotes and emphasizes the 'practical sense' of the Kingdom. His views of the Kingdom of God, then, become gradually a prophetic movement: Montanism. This movement believes in the power of the Kingdom 'within us' as a living hope in the future with theological accentuation on a new prophecy and revelation through presenting-power of Holy Spirit. However, the followers of Montanism hope that such future has to be a near one and would be implemented soon in this world. In this context, Montanism could be regarded as the root of millenarianism or an apocalyptic movements or a social utopia.¹⁶

From above analysis, the historical genre of the Kingdom of God remains 'documented' data. From such analysis, we find out the truth-content in the notion of the Kingdom of God in the forms of political, mystical reductionism and literal interpretation. The Kingdom of God is substantially equated the meanings and God's will in text with secular project or even the narrow interest of the interpreters.

What Is Said by the Text or the Matter of the Text?

As a part of critical analysis, we move forward to the hermeneutic idea that interpreting a text means moving beyond understanding *what it says* to understand *what it talks about*'. In other words, we need to investigate *the matter of the text*. Theoretically, it is part of understanding that is working by distinguishing *what text says* from *what the text talks about*.¹⁷ Therefore “the force of what is said” by the text of the Kingdom is also the main concern in Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics. Here the hidden power of text of the Kingdom needs to be analyzed furthermore, especially Luke 17:20-21 and its relevance by confronting it with other parallel texts as well.

Our interpretation is firstly to “ask what the text *means* by its assertions about the testimony it bears”. What is said by this text asserts the meaning of the Kingdom by focusing the term *in the midst of you or within you*. The King James version translates verses 20 and 21 as *enthos humanon estis* in Greek preposition that could be translated 'is within you' or 'is among you'.¹⁸ Translation of LAI (*Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia*) for this word is *Kerajaan Allah ada di antara kamu*. By asserting 'in the midst of you', Drane interprets this statement substantially as a testimony about a 'new community' but not in terms of political construction. The matter of text is *talking about* a new reality with freedom and justice and the presence in the human life.¹⁹

It is worth to notice also in other parallel versions of the Kingdom,

especially the gospel of John 18: 36 (“my kingdom is not of this world”) and Rev 11:15 (“the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ”) that insist on the spiritual tendency leading to a conclusion that Jesus' kingdom is “otherworldly and insulated from the ideologies and institutions of this world”.²⁰ Nevertheless these texts do not mean that the spiritual-eschatological dimension must be seen as already 'constructed' as a revealed truth, as known in the model of revelation. Whereas WG Kummel puts forward a parallel text of this spiritual dimension through 1 Cor. 4:20 where the 'spiritual' authority of Lord 'works' within people who demonstrate their loyalty to Him. Thus following Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics, the revelatory power of testimony – in order to prevent interpretation falling merely into propositions 'revealed truth' – reveals the truth of the Kingdom of God that must be probed from its historicity. Then *what the text of Luke talks about the Kingdom* is essentially identical with the testimony coming from Jesus' life and teachings that refers to the so-called phenomena of 'historical Jesus'.

A theologian of the Kingdom of God, John Drane, arrives at the sense of the active presence of the Kingdom as 'the real manifestation' to support and enrich the text of Luke 17:20-21 'in the midst of you'. Such expressions of the 'manifestation' could also be seen, for instance, in Luke 13: 29; 22:18 and Mat 25: 34. In this case, these texts bear together a testimony of historical Jesus or Jesus' life: that the reign of God would be something that can and would be revealed to entire the world and the course of human history as a *testimony of freedom and justice*. In the perspective of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, we could see that the referents of these texts become extra-linguistic propositions, namely its existential manifestation and expressions within *being-in-the-world*.

Manifestation is not directly correlated to an inspiration of the Holy Spirit or 'disclosure' of revealed truth in history; more than that the *force of what is said* by text reflects the existential truth in the idea of Kingdom of God. In the last analysis, *what the text talks about* is understood more as recovery of *testimony of historical Jesus* and its referent to *this world* that are much closer to the fresh meanings of *testimony of freedom and justice*. In such a way, the Kingdom values challenge patterns of social life taken for granted in modern culture.²¹

Supports to the understanding of the Kingdom that could be seen are found in the following brief statements.

(1) Jurgen Moltmann, in his theology of hope, states that the relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom of God is inherent. The good news must be

seen inherently in the person of Jesus himself. “Anyone who gets involved with the Kingdom of God... This is an inescapable fact, for Jesus' own concern was, and is, God's Kingdom... That is obviously and palpably true; for who is Jesus? Simply the Kingdom of God in Person”²²

(2) Liberation theology: Jon Sobrino wrote, “The most certain historical datum about Jesus' life is that the concept which dominated his preaching, the reality which gave meaningfulness to all his activity, was ‘the Kingdom of God’”²³.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion of the Kingdom of God

Let us now examine the idea of the Kingdom of God by applying hermeneutics of suspicion to gain objective truth of text of the Kingdom of God. Brought to biblical hermeneutics, hermeneutics of suspicion suggests reading biblical text with productive 'suspicion'. It means suspicion is intended to open up new perspectives that are part of search for the authentic meaning of text. Suspicion towards self and text seem to be both valid and necessary hermeneutic process. In their own context, the three masters of suspicion had addressed sharp critics to the relationship among society, individual, and system (religion).

In terms of suspicion on a biblical text, especially the idea of “in the midst of you”, we can also put the complementary dual suspicions:

(1) *Suspicion to myself* by disclosing possible hidden agenda of my subjective interpretation: Am I imposing my own meaning upon this text of the Kingdom of God?

(2) Then *suspicion to the text*: is the text of the Kingdom really saying this? However we do not stay very long with suspicion itself.

(3) Therefore the further goal of suspicious attitude is to achieve the true truth in the Kingdom of God. It is described as following: “We must approach the text critically and suspiciously in order that its message may truly be heard, and so our own pre-understandings and certainties do not mask the truth.”²⁴

At this point, in the case of Luke 17: 20-21, *suspicion to myself* means that I am not imposing my own interpretation and view: I realize that the notion of the Kingdom 'in the midst of you' is not like what I imagine with my secular worldview, assumption and belief. In other words, Jesus' statements have deconstructed the stability of my understanding about both the basic idea and expressions of the Kingdom so that, once again, “our own pre-understandings and certainties do not mask the truth”²⁵.

Furthermore, the response to suspicion of myself and text can be seen if

compared to Matthew 13:14. The parable of Kingdom reveals a clue for a something more or true meaning by portraying the Kingdom is 'like' and not as I want. In such context of cross-textuality, our awareness is immediately confronted by texts of the Kingdom that help us to find a disclosure of meaning. This disclosure of meaning could also be completed by the relevant text of how we must arrive at the Kingdom 'is like', i.e, and a new synthesis of the Kingdom: by finding the treasure, selling everything and buying the field.²⁶

In the textual model of interpretation, the access towards text and meaning is *language*. Therefore to disclose hidden layers of the meaning and truth 'inside' the text, suspicion towards text (no. 2) needs linguistic intervention and analysis. It starts with disclosing the linguistic structure of the metaphor 'Kingdom of God'. What needed is to scrutinize specific textual statement 'Kingdom within you' in Luke 17:20-21 that is also necessary to be compared with text John 18: 36: 'My kingdom is not of this world'. The structure of Kingdom portrayed by text of John is formulated by two linguistic expressions: both in an 'is like' element (*the Kingdom is like...*) and an 'is not' element (*The Kingdom is not...*) The former points to the literary vehicle used to convey the metaphor, while the latter indicates that the referent of the metaphor is not to be found in literal terms. This tension projects 'a world in front of the text' which is the true metaphorical referent.

By stressing on the 'is like', we enter metaphoric domain of faith, namely a second *naïvete* beyond iconoclasm. Meanwhile, the element of 'is not' is necessary to avoid "a naïve credulity and provides open system of hermeneutics".²⁷ Thus, when Jesus said, "My kingdom *is not* of this world' (John 18:36), His statement immediately interrogates my pre-understanding and reminds me to leave my narrow interest or perhaps common political notion of the kingdom as found in historical-phenomenological analysis of Luke 17:20-21.

By comparing the linguistic structure with John 18:36), the 'is not' element, suspicion has an intention to sharpen what text *talks about*; it can be seen by questioning the sense 'the Kingdom of God within you' associated frequently with any territory. Here a critical explanation confronts the readers with a new awareness of faith, a true faith. What is 'true' truth about the 'Kingdom within you' in Luke 17:20-21 comes from John Meier, a Catholic theologian. He affirms that the understanding of the Kingdom 'within you' demonstrates actually an intimate and dynamical relationship between God and Her people. Consequently, 'reigned by God as King' in such relationship is not demonstrating a territorial scope: "Hence his action

upon and his dynamic relationship to those ruled, rather than any delimited territory, is what is primary.”²⁸ Here Meier tends to be more comfortable with the terms 'reign', 'rule', 'kingship' or 'kingly power' rather than 'kingdom'. As such, text of Luke 17:20-21 discloses a new awareness, a spiritual qualification of reign.

By unmasking my self-interest, followed by operating a critical suspicion towards text itself and comparing it to other texts, it is very possible for the readers to give their creative 'response' in their own history to arrive at the true truth Kingdom of God. From there, we can see one prominent textual testimony that confronts our awareness that the Kingdom of God does not refer to any 'location', a special place with happiness like a paradise or a political program but refers to 'the heavenly King reigns in His people on earth'; the reign of God over His people and universe which, anyway, is different from and contrasted to the worldly reign. Considering what the text *talks about*, spiritual qualification of reign and creative response to meaning of the Kingdom of God, there are some possible modern expressions of the Kingdom: healing ministry, social ministry, ministry of reconciliation.²⁹

Thus, through suspicion of my subjectivity, it is a challenge for me to probe the potential meaning both *inside the text and in front of text*. Under the hermeneutics of suspicion, both texts *uproot my subjectivity* as the foundation of true knowledge and truth. Meanwhile, suspicion towards text 'in the midst of you' concerns about what is really said by text that forces us to enter a new understanding *other than* or *something more than* what I imagine on ordinary level.

Post-critical Understanding of The Kingdom of God

In the following analysis, we move to the level of post-critical understanding of the Kingdom of God to provoke the existing possibilities of truth-content in the Kingdom of God as historical expression and *more than what can be expressed*. The sense of post-critical interpretation needs to be firstly contextualized in terms of textual interpretation of the Kingdom of God with its specific character as well. The then act of text is now conceived in dynamic 'sense', i.e., text has a 'direction' or the followability of text. Theoretically interpretation of text of the Kingdom means to place ourselves in 'its sense' or interplay between ourselves and the intention of text.

Thus, structural method leads to 'dynamic sense', “it brings to light a progression at the level of meaning...”³⁰ As such a way, the emphasis of

understanding lies on the meaning *in front of text*. However, this level of understanding promotes distinctively the symbolic openness, inexhaustible truth of the Kingdom of God as well as imaginative power of understanding. In other words, interpretation brings the Kingdom of God as *the possible*.

The Text of the Kingdom of God in a Dialogue with Contemporary Life-World

From the above description, we need to analyze how text of the Kingdom of God makes a dialogue with *Lebenswelt* or life-world of the contemporary readers. The components of historical power of testimony, identification of the readers with text and interpretive clues for a manifestation brought by the interpretation of the Kingdom are demonstrating as a whole a fundamental intention of text to 'say more' than what has happened and been formulated. This intention reveals a dialogical character of understanding. Here dialogue power is the only condition to see *the inexhaustible characters of truth* of the Kingdom as well as possibilities of its expressions *in front of text*. And these must be a result of a long detour reflection and dialogue of text with our contemporary world.

In a hermeneutic analysis, it is worth to note that dialogue between the Kingdom of God with the world of the readers assumes that God as a King *does something*, and that something is 'to reign'. And to reign is not in ordinary ways but by invoking complex constellation of thoughts: to reign 'in the midst of you' (Luke's version) and to reign 'not of this world' (John's version). The Kingdom of God does not conform to any single subject sphere (that tends to generate a fixation of truth of the Kingdom). Conversely, in dynamic dialogue with the life-world of the readers, the Kingdom functions much more as a *symbol* and a *metaphor* to reveal the world of possibilities.

Thus as a hermeneutic discourse, dialogue with this world, is a matter of language; it is exercised by linguistic means. It means that 'the kingdom of God within you' provides extra-linguistics of the Kingdom for the world of the readers. Considering the primacy of language, Ricoeur specifically gives much attention to reference of poetic language in reading the Kingdom of God to "bring about the emergence of a depth-structure of belonging-to amid the ruins of descriptive discourse".³¹ The notion 'in the midst of you' offered by text of the Kingdom is eventually about how to *experience it* in our contemporariness and to confront the text with the deep-structure of life-world as a reservoir of 'transcendent and rich meanings'. Then intersection between the meaning of text and the world of the readers are affirmed by re-

descriptive power of language. In turn, the depth-structure emerges from that intersection reveals a project of our new being, namely, the *world of possibilities* through re-conceptualization of our life with the new moral commitments: *freedom and justice*, as Drane puts it.

The Kingdom of God Within You as a Linguistic Event

Considering the primacy of language in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, let us elaborate furthermore the truth-content in the Kingdom of God in Luke 17:20-21 briefly as a linguistic event. It means that the concept of the Kingdom *within you* will be seen as an 'embryo of manifestation' or as a metaphor and how it is a matter of *becoming* from the perspective of linguistic theory. The primacy of language demonstrates indirect character of understanding. Consequently, the truth-content in Kingdom of God is only able to be understood *through language*. Whereas language leads our understanding to the symbolic construction of the Kingdom of God.

Along with the above description and analysis, the understanding of the Kingdom reveals the centrality of the *Kingdom within you*. In the perspective of Fuellenbach, for instance, the Kingdom is but the creation of community of brothers and sisters.³² In Pieris' words, it has parallelism with the 'base community' and transformative ways of existing through 'liturgy of life'.³³ It means that the new being or appropriation as the effect of reading text of the Kingdom of God and confrontation with question – could be expressed in some ways as the possible but also 'observable answer'.

Thus, the existential task of faith for a transformation of life not merely concerns about a personal piety, but mainly *a community as the agent of change*. And a community, for Ricoeur, is a community of language. The Kingdom of God would be indeed 'in the midst of you' when it is conceived as a living Kingdom and when we have its real signs within a brotherhood and sisterhood in a living community. Through community and the liberating actions, we can see the growth of the Kingdom as 'observable' where *belief* achieves the level of *be-lived*.

In the language of Choan Seng Song, a theologian of Asian liberation, the answer is the power of ministry of transfiguration to present justice, freedom and love in terms of the construction of a new society and a new humankind.³⁴ It is a ministry of transfiguration—transfiguration of the conditions that corrupt human beings and their community, that threaten the well-being of God's creation.³⁵ If we put this liberation into the political category of transfiguration then the liberation as such makes God a political God empowered by freedom and justice in a community characterized by

'compassion':

“Song believes that the political barbarism stands against God. Yet, how does Song define the political barbarism? For Song, "oppressing the powerless and the defenseless is political barbarism" (204). Needless to say, the oppression as such stands against God. The powerless and the defenseless are the people who suffer. Accordingly, God suffers with them, yet God also has the power to overcome the power of death. In other words, God has the power to liberate the people from oppression. Thus, to be a Christian is to be a vanguard who has the courage to struggle for justice and freedom. In terms of Song's political theology, "both justice and freedom are political as well as spiritual in nature" (200-206). On the other hand, Jesus' suffering and death reveals God's redemptive love to the world. As Song puts it, this redemptive love without strings attached is called compassion. This God is a God of compassion, who loves the world without any strings attached (Song 1986, 166). Yet, for Song, compassion underlies a community. That is the reason why a community is called "community." Loving or suffering together denotes the true meaning of being a community. As Song puts it, "this togetherness makes a community a community" (141). This compassionate God heals the broken humanity of a community, helps the people to struggle for the wholeness of humanity in the community. For Song, "human community and divine communion are interdependent" (154). God's redemptive presence in Jesus Christ provides people a chance to be communion with God.”³⁶

In linguistic analysis, the text of the kingdom of God 'in the midst of you' is understood to cultivate the power of words as the means of self-actualization or 'becoming in language' in order to arrive at becoming in being in human reality. At least, as a linguistic issue, we could see the dimensions of metaphor, narrative and discourse in interpretation of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God itself is a metaphor. As a *metaphoric dimension*, it is understood through linguistic imagination that functions to state things in new ways so that language is not merely a rethoric ornaments but a 'proposal' or reservoir of indirect meanings for a manifestation of the Kingdom. The idea of the Kingdom of God is brought to linguistic imagination to “reveal a new way of seeing [its] referents”.³⁷ Therefore metaphor presents especially *possibility* rather than *actuality*.³⁸ In such a way, metaphor provides 'imaginative discourse' of the liberating presence of Kingdom of God; it encourages 'to do something more' or a potentiality of action to overcome human suffering and on possibilities is creating and conducting a liberation theology.

Theologians of liberation, through their solid theories and writings, articulate and revitalize *what really said by text* 'in the midst of you' as actual discourse in the context of Latin America. By doing that, they actualize metaphoric possibilities of the Kingdom of God (the fullness of freedom of justice) in order to become Christianity's self-image and its truth claims³⁹ in a new 'imagination' of the Kingdom with its new referent: structural poverty and oppression. However, in fact, such imaginative re-description incarnates firstly in words and propositions and elevated scientifically in the level of theorems in a social method and procedures in their correlation with textual assimilation of the Kingdom by contemporary Christian community. In this regard, language *re-describes* the words 'within you' in the idea of the Kingdom of God as 'a liberating presence' actualized in basic communities. The event of 'presence' is firstly a linguistic event or a 'becoming in language' within the reader's mind: an inner event or *peristiwa batin* in Indonesian. Linguistic event 'within you' in mind is then becoming a power to change and create a *self-image*; it shapes the critical awareness of Christians that, in turn, incorporates it into metaphoric level 'God the liberator' which is different from transcendent God.

What distinctive in linguistic perspective is that the experience of the Kingdom is not individual; language makes the meaning of liberation becoming 'public', as Ricoeur puts it: "That is why the 'experienced experience', as it is experienced, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, become public."⁴⁰ Through language, the experience of the Kingdom becomes shared knowledge, a social imagination. Not only public, language makes transcendent Kingdom becomes 'immanent', i.e, a project of liberation through religious community which is a linguistic community. According to Ricoeur, as we are in the world, "we are influenced by situations, from which we acquire understanding and feel the need to share this with others, i.e, we have the experience to bring forth language."⁴¹

We can observe that the act of text 'in the midst of you' gets a particular moment along with new *linguistic terminologies* in the sense that they have their own new understanding, 'direction' and, in some ways, such terms may be articulated in any program of action. To name some examples: the ministry of Transfiguration (Song) and liturgy of life (Pieris): liturgy takes place" outside the temple, in the midst of human life, human struggle".⁴² At least, the term 'liturgy of life' has political dimensions and cultural sensibilities:

"For Pieris, it is of prime importance that Asian theology be derived from the practice of religion. Spirituality, which should be intimately involved

with the concerns of the culture, is not then the conclusion of theology but theology's starting point. In an Asian context this requires a living involvement with Asian culture, one that creates a radical empathy with the central realities of Asian life - identified by Pieris as "overwhelming poverty" and a "multifaceted religiousness."⁴³

These are not only an objective 'model' of theology as proposed in critical moment, but also already an action, a linguistic event empowered by the term 'liturgy of life'. This, in turn, shapes the awareness of religious people and leads to doing a living liturgy in a 'community of freedom and justice' or a social movement for a better world order. And what is specific in the function of linguistic re-description is that religious people are also being 'created' by that terminology in order to be 'becoming' in the process of doing theology of liberation.

For Gutierrez, the Kingdom of God is believed to be a rich source for individual and collective 'transformation'. It offers a humanistic project of liberation from economic, social and political violence and a liberation that creates solidarity among and inter-human; also liberation from sin that reconciles human and God in authentic relationship.⁴⁴ The provoking terms used by theologians themselves are indeed a linguistic re-descriptive force to encourage "full sense of any action" and open the new meanings of 'reality' and provoke a new awareness of Christian community about ownmost situation; it *re-describes* existing reality in order to become *other than* what we face here and now.

From above description, it is clear that post-critical moment allows 'ontological sense of the truth in the Kingdom' that implicates the word of the Christian community as reflected in liberation theology. However, if the sense of the Kingdom of God 'in the midst of you' is put in the framework of 'impossible demand' of interpretation, then it prevents us to convert entirely religious discourse into socio-political one or any program of action.⁴⁵ In this case, the level of post-critical understanding transcends both self-transparency of meaning and objective-existential descriptions of the Kingdom towards utopian terms. Consequently, it is the creative imagination of the possible in an interpretation, as the result of linguistic intervention into text, which would prevent a fixation of truth of the Kingdom of God. This fixation always threatens the expressions of the Kingdom in merely socio-political program. It can mean that interpretation of Kingdom is always taking place within an oscillation leading to openness of our existence in a limited condition, as reflected in hermeneutics of finitude, *and*

inexhaustability of the Kingdom as a principle of theological truth functioning at the level of inspiring moment.

For that reason, some liberation theologians, like Sobrino and Pieris, through their reflection and the process of subjective appropriation, argue that the Kingdom of God could be implemented both historically-socially and spiritually *at the same time in our contemporary situation*. It is indirect propositions that meet 'human desire and imagination' –represented by works of theologians in their interpretation and concern – that, in turn, result in a reproduction of meanings and values of the Kingdom in order to be 'flowing forward' for a gradual fulfillment of the impossible demand.

Concluding Remarks

The primacy of language in Ricoeur's hermeneutics places the power of linguistic *re-description*; it becomes crucial in correlating the Kingdom of God as text and event. Therefore the key term the Kingdom of God *Within You* as a Linguistic Event needs to be explored. In linguistic analysis, the text of Kingdom of God 'in the midst of you' is firstly understood to cultivate the power of *words* as the means or mediation of self-actualization in which words implicate a certain human reality. It seems that linguistic re-descriptive elements penetrate the hermeneutic components in interpretation of the Kingdom of God. They become 'overlapping' each other. In linguistic level, the hermeneutic task is reflecting 'becoming in language', in the process of revitalizing the meaning of the Kingdom of God *inside* text, in order to be a 'becoming in being'. Then in the perspective of metaphoric language, God is God the liberator functioning to empower *seeing as* in understanding. It becomes key-metaphor that provokes a self-imagination of community: it is *imagination* of liberation from oppressive structures and poverty internalized by the members of community encouraged by the values of freedom and justice. In this case, before arrives at its implementation, imagination created by community is a catalyst that brings the community *in conformity with* such metaphoric imagination.

In affirming the linguistic roles, the terminologies used by theologians in their theories of liberation theology are indeed a linguistic re-descriptive force offering the alternatives of *becoming in being*; it is linguistics that encourages “full sense of any action” and opens the new perspectives in perceiving any social reality. Linguistic re-description of the meaning of the Kingdom provokes a new awareness of Christian community about ownmost situation. It is the task of language to *re-describe* the existing reality

(by elevating it to the level of disclosing terminologies and vocabularies of the Kingdom) in order to become *other than* what we face here and now.

Linguistic re-descriptive power helps articulate the so-called dimensions of *impossible demand* in biblical hermeneutics. It reflects the inexhaustibility and irreducibility of the Kingdom's inspirational power both in linguistics itself and its expressions as an action. Consequently, if the sense of the Kingdom of God 'in the midst of you' is placed in the framework of 'impossible demand' of interpretation, then it prevents to convert entirely religious discourse into socio-political one. As a whole, the aspect of impossible demand of the Kingdom of God provokes the creative work of linguistic construction. Linguistic creativity has a capacity to re-describe the impossible demand of the Kingdom on the level of actual possibilities: from awareness to action.

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